

Scenario 55

Pak Army in Swat (2007-09):

In the beginning of July 2007, the security forces and the police had to face retaliation in Swat. The writ of the government remained under challenge for months. Hundreds of the police and Frontier Constabulary (FC) personnel were taken in custody by the militant groups of Maulana Fazlullah, a local cleric of 32 years and son-in-law of Maulana Sufi Muhammad of *Tehreek e Nifaze Shariat e Muhammadi* (TNSM) fame. It would remain a fact that a series of suicide bombings targeting security forces had followed the Red Mosque Operation of July 2007 in Islamabad. Maulana Sufi was one of the few people who publicly reacted against the said military operation and had announced to wage jihad against the government of Pakistan.

*[It is worth mentioning here that Sufi Muhammad had given a **Fatwa** (a religious decree) in which he regarded military training as compulsory for every Muslim. After this decree, hundreds of TNSM workers were reportedly sent in for military training to Afghanistan and other parts of the country. Maulana Masood Azhar, after his release from prison in India, came to Swat and formed a militant organization Jaish e Muhammad (JeM), which later imparted jihadi training to the TNSM activists.]*

Interestingly, Maulana Sufi Muhammad had expelled both Maulana Fazlullah and Maulana Faqir Muhammad, the militant commanders in Swat & Bajaur, from TNSM on charges of turning his peaceful movement into a violent one.]

During Gen Musharraf's rule, first time in the history of the Swat valley, the gruesome public beheadings of army soldiers were witnessed, and military gunship helicopters and artilleries seen blitzing the suspected hideouts of what the government regarded as miscreants. The people in the turbulent valley of Swat and around were openly accusing the clergy-led MMA government and military regime of showing criminal negligence.

A script of the facts given in 'Swat Analysis' by *Mushtaq Yusufzai* appeared in '**the News International**' dated **4th November 2007**:

'It was for the first time in Pakistan's major tourist centre that private properties, audio & video shops and barbers shops were blown up in the district by hidden forces. Threats were issued to women's educational institutions and nursing schools, asking the girls to stay back indoors and pushing the administration to close the institutions.

The government -- in the name of restoring the writ -- launched an operation through police and paramilitary security forces. Though, this led to another episode of violence in the valley, killing more than 150 people over the past one week. The militants, besides killing scores of security forces in one suicidal blast and numerous clashes, also beheaded 10 security forces personnel, policemen and government officials.'

Next day, a truck carrying the Frontier Constabulary (FC) personnel was blown up in Mingora town killing 34 people including 30 soldiers and four civilians whereas 25 FC men and ten civilians had sustained injuries. During the same days an attack on the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Mazharul Haq left him badly injured and four of his cops dead. A large number of junior officers were also killed or injured in different incidents of bomb blasts and suicide attacks.

Interestingly the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Sharif Virk could not face the media due to his known spinelessness nor had he the acumen and capacity to lead his force in such turmoil. The force had felt that the Police suffered due to cowardice, lack of courage and cold attitude of their IGP who had hardly visited Swat Police offices during those days of chaos and confusion; even he didn't take phone calls.

Swat has a population of 1.5 million. As per statistics provided by the Home Secretary [in July 2007], most of the 45 people who were killed and 106 others who were injured in 43 different terrorist attacks in Swat since January 2007 were law enforcing personnel. Another 20 people, including 17 FC personnel, were killed and 31 others injured on the day when the forces took positions in the valley. The Home Secretary NWFP had himself told that:

'Maulana Fazlullah has a fighting strength of 4600, with an added 400-member Shaheen Commando Force that patrol the streets of Swat with guns placed on their vehicles. The Maulana's stronghold reins the 59 villages of Matta sub division.'

Another extract from an article 'Inside Fazlullah's HQ' by *Rahimullah Yusufzai* appeared in **'The News' dated 4th November 2007** is placed here:

'The people laughed whenever the young Maulana made fun of the 'corrupt and inefficient' police or lambasted the government for its inability to provide security to the Swatis. He drew applause when he explained how he was forced to send his Shaheen Commando Force to fight crime, patrol villages and towns and bring killers, criminals and car-snatchers to book in the absence of the police and other law-enforcing agencies. The Maulana claimed that the crime graph had come down since the cops gave up their duty after coming under attacks by unknown people.'

It may not be out of place to mention that the dependence of more than 60 per cent of the region's inhabitants rest upon the tourism industry which, sadly enough, had come to a complete halt in the wake of the then clashes between the militants and the security forces, leaving thousands of innocent people without their only source of income. The subsistence of more than 15 per cent of the locals rested with the business of hotels alone. There were more than 1200 hotels and resorts in the valley that were functional in serving their guests. However, in 2007 alone, they suffered a huge financial setback as the tourists avoided Swat and preferred to go somewhere else.

WAR WITHIN STATE? NO:

The world media tried to label the situation in Swat as '*khana jangi*' (war within the state) as per eastern vocabulary but it was not. The death toll had not even reached hundreds in Swat whereas:

[Referring to the daily 'Jang' of 27th May 2009, about 213 global territories were reportedly dragged into such deadly internal friction between years 1816 to 1997; out of which 90 events could be counted after the World War II. In Algeziere about 0.2 million people were killed during 1991-2002. In Rwanda, one million people were killed in just three months of 1994 during an armed scuffle between the central government and rebels which had actually taken start in 1990. In Sri Lanka, about 80,000 human beings were killed during 25 years' brawl between the government and Tamal Tigers. In Somalia, about 0.4 million people had been killed since 1991 and in Darfur the death toll was touching 0.5 million figure during the internal friction in the last six years. During the Iraq War the death figure since America's first attack in 2003 {as per ORB Polls of the UK} had reached 1.1 million till August 2007 {including 4296 American soldiers}. Still there is no guarantee of peace in any of the said areas despite best efforts by many global agencies.]

TALIBANIZATION OF SWAT? NO

Like the earlier mentioned episodes of Swat, the whole Pakistan had suffered a lot during the last ten years on this account. The western media called it '*Talibanization process*' whereas there in Swat it was altogether a different phenomenon. One could differentiate between the two; see the details.

Pondering upon the history of Taliban's making, it may be note worthy that Mullah Omer had started his Taliban movement with less than 50 *madressah* (religious school) students after the fall of *Kandahar* in November 1994. Then thousands from Pakistani *madressahs* had rushed to join the new force and by December 1994, just within one month of seizing control, he had a force of 12000 youth with him. A new phenomenon developed in Pashtun society; that of *madressah* students and mullahs with guns in their hands, ruling the Pashtun tribes and all others around in minority.

These Afghani and Pakistani mixed *Taliban* ruled over Afghanistan till 9/11 when the Americans ousted them from government and Gen Musharraf helped America in doing so. The *Taliban* were forced to leave Kabul first, then many major cities and finally pushed towards mountains of Southern Afghanistan. Soon the Pakistani *madressah* students started coming back to Pakistan and joined back their schools. In Pakistan these students developed their own religious groups and factions and started their armed activities which were alleged by the West as more criminal and less religious.

Killings, bombings and coercions became order of the day and attacks on each other's mosques and gatherings created another wave of terror in Pakistan. Tall and known religious leaders came on their back and then the dollars pipeline from various countries kept them active till today so that the nuclear country should go weaker. The process is still on. The fact remains that certain criminal gangs joined some Pakistani religious sects to take shelter and protection for their criminal activities and started using the name and banners of Pakistani *Taliban*.

The geography played a pivotal role in the scenario. The Durand line between Pakistan and Afghanistan had divided many tribes and the situation prevails as after sixty years; out of the seven tribal agencies, six have tribes on either side of the Durand line. In the words of Asad Munir (ref: '***the News***' dated 17th February 2009):

'..... the religious leaders (in tribal belt) wanted a greater role for themselves in decision-making and that is why the area often saw uprisings led by religious personalities. The later had hold of the leadership as long as the war and jihad were on but once the conflict was over, it reverted to the Maliks and Khans.

'The present Talibanisation is not just a movement for Shariah and its enforcement; the mullahs want power, authority and a defined role in decision making in the social system of Pashtun society.'

The Americans have been raising alarms since a decade that Osama Bin Laden was hiding in border areas inside Pakistan. Sometimes, their secret service announced that he had moved in the Quetta's settled areas where he also held regular meetings of his '*Shoora*'. No concrete proof. No solid evidence in this context [*and subsequent claims of 2nd May 2011 also proved these estimations wrong*]. America's whole philosophy was relying upon working of a research team led by a geographer Thomas Gillespie of the University of California, Los Angeles who used to develop geographic analytical tools that had been successful in locating urban criminals and endangered species.

Relying on their night-time satellite images and other techniques, their scientists had once suggested that Osama was in Parachinar, a town 12 miles from the Pak-Afghan border and hiding there since his escape from the Tora Bora region of Afghanistan in 2001.

But at the same time Gillespie did not believe in 'sitting in a cave theory'. All US military techniques had apparently failed to locate Osama. They forgot the fact that these *Taliban*, were once part and focus of the US policies, on US dictates, who were driven into quagmire after

the Russians had left Afghanistan and then they were at the point where they had to fight back and negotiate their terms. As a result the Afghan and Pakistani agencies went helpless.

Some people seriously thought that there was no way out except to go for 'negotiations'. Quoting instance from contemporary history, the British had negotiated with the IRA in Ireland in the 1990s taking shelter of a ceasefire. They had to give in to some of their demands on give-and-take principle to earn peace and development which is still there.

Taliban leadership had once decided to send their fighters to Islamabad as a reaction of Army operation in Swat valley. Some of their under-ground associates had already started wall-chalking in Islamabad and kept the Capital administration busy in quickly white washing the chalking in different sectors of the Capital city. Many religious scholars in Islamabad were sent messages from Taliban that they must support Taliban or leave the Capital otherwise they would be considered partners of the 'Pro-American Zardari government'; not very different from the military regime of Gen Musharraf.

Astonishingly the Taliban of Swat & Bajaur had included the names of some *Jehadi* leaders in their hit lists who were not willing to fight inside Pakistan against their own countrymen. Their hit lists had incorporated some leaders of banned *Lashkar e Tayyaba* (LeT), *Harkatul Mujahideen* and *Hizbul Mujahideen* which were trying to stop youngsters to fight against Pakistani forces. Taliban had declared all these 'Pro-Pakistan' *Jehadis* as their enemies.

As per report of '***the Daily Star***' dated **12th February 2009**:

'Names of Maulvi Nazir from South Waziristan, Hafiz Gul Buhadar from North Waziristan, Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, Maulana Farooq Kashmiri and Syed Salahudin were also included in the hit list of Taliban.'

'Another Taliban leader in Mohmand agency Maulvi Omar Khalid had threatened student force of LeT to leave the tribal agency otherwise they would be killed. It was accused that these boys were only interested in fighting against foreign troops in Afghanistan meaning thereby that they did not want Islamic government in Pakistan.'

Another development surfaced those days that the Taliban had killed a Polish engineer as a reaction of big army operation in the Northern Areas. Initially Pakistan was ready to release some arrested Taliban fighters in exchange for Polish and another Chinese engineers but due to objections raised by the US Command the deal between Taliban and Pakistani authorities could not be finalized. Pakistan had successfully negotiated the release of kidnapped Pakistani diplomat Tariq Azizudin in those days and got free the kidnapped Army personnel in 2007 by liberating some Taliban fighters. This time US pressure complicated the situation.

Pakistan Army was facing another East Pakistan like situation after 38 years from Darra Ademkhel to the mountains of Swat. Negotiations could not take place so the kidnapped Polish engineer Piotr Stannczak was killed by Taliban. For another kidnapped Chinese engineer, one Afghan Ambassador in Islamabad Abdul Khaliq Farahi, one Iranian diplomat Heshmatollah Attarzadeh and one kidnapped UN diplomat in Quetta, the civilian and Army leadership had decided not to negotiate any exchange. For each kidnapped envoy the Taliban had normally demanded the release of their two dozen arrested fighters.

The Army intensified its operation in Swat as half a million people out of the estimated population of 1.5 million had left Swat in one month. The ground reality of Swat was different from of 1971's East Bengal because this time army was fighting with Taliban who were apparently demanding the enforcement of Islamic law in Swat and the local political leaders were supporting this demand under public pressure.

ANP's Chief Minister of Khyber PK province Ameer Haider Hoti, Governor Awais Ghani and Army high command had once recommended to enforce long pending *Sharaia* regulation; called '*Nafaz e Adal Regulations*' but then the army was finally asked to restore peace first. Ultimately, Taliban had to quit Swat and the inhabitants repatriated to their homes at last.

During the army operation in Swat, Maulana Sufi Muhammad of *Tehrik e Nafaze Shariat Muhammadi* (TNSM) had assured the ANP leadership [once *Nizam e Adl Regulations* promulgated] to launch a long march from Dir to Swat valley after the imposition of *Sharia* law and would also appeal his son in law Maulana Fazalullah and other Taliban leaders to surrender arms. Assurance was also given that he would try his best to open all girls' schools in Swat.

[It may not be out of place to mention that Lt Gen Masood Alam was the Commander of Swat Operation, though was sent by Gen Musharraf but was subsequently retained by Gen Ashfaq Kayani to complete the Operation. He (Lt Gen Masood Alam) was going to retire on 18th October 2009 but asked to continue his service; was afterwards sent to the Waziristan Agency to handle the FATA Operation there as the Corps Commander.]

The government had not made an immediate commitment at that moment but there were negotiations between Government and Maulana Soofi Mohammad's team and it brought some success though army had to control that area afterwards. Taliban had virtually occupied about 80% of the Swat valley during the previous two years. That demand of the reinstatement of their old *Nizam e Adl* in Swat was appealing as it has been successfully running with them since 1849 till 1969. When Swat was made a part of Pakistan in 1969, the general laws of courts and justice were implemented there like in other parts of Pakistan.

Swat is neither a tribal area nor does it borders with Afghanistan then why has it become a stronghold of extremists. Since 1926, Swat had developed its own central administrative system with two types of courts functioning in the State. Courts headed by the religious scholars, known as Qazi courts, and judicial courts headed by the 'Area Tehsildars'. The Qazi courts dealt with cases of divorce, inheritance and some other minor cases involving Shariah while all other disputes were referred to the Tehsildar's court. The appellate forum was that of a 'Haakim', and a final appeal could be made to the 'Waali'. The whole process of complaint till decision used to take only one month at the maximum so the people accepted the system.

In 1975, ZA Bhutto declared Dir, Chitral and Swat as normal administrative units like other districts of NWFP. In the initial years of implementation of Pakistani Laws in Swat, the people did not retaliate because it was a new set of laws for them considering that the western system would be better. With the passage of time their illusions got clear and they started murmuring to bring back their old system of justice based on Islamic Shariah. During the two regimes of Benazir Bhutto their joint voices went on a high pitch which had originally emerged as a '*Tehreek*' in 1988 demanding Shariah system of Justice again. Soofi Mohammad was the founder leader of that *Tehreek* then and remained so in all subsequent activities.

In 1992, on collective suggestions of lawyers, the PATA (Provincially Administered Tribal Areas) Regulations were abolished by the courts. However, surprisingly no alternative system was advised and this created a judicial vacuum creating unrest amongst the general populace. It was this vacuum that provided fertility to the seeds for November 1994 uprising by the TNSM. This led to violence and the TNSM took control of six districts and there was a law and order situation all around. An MPA of the PPP, the then ruling party, was also killed. The situation was controlled by the Police after a month's hectic efforts.

When Nawaz Sharif came into power in 1997 he had felt the heat of the local demand. The then Chief Minister Mehtab Abbasi opened negotiations with Soofi Mohammad and Islami Shariah was implemented in Swat again after a suspension of 29 years. When Gen Musharraf came into power in 1999 he once more ordered to remove that Islami Shariah system of justice from record and forced the people to pass through grinding of Pakistan Penal Code and Pakistan Criminal Procedure Code, both acts coming from since 1868 with no major change. The *Tehreek* again went alive and TNSM members declared themselves as Swati Taliban.

The Talibanization process in Swat continued throughout Gen Musharraf's rule in the garb of demands for Islami Shariah system. The incumbent PPP government of 2008 remained ignorant of the people's unrest in Swat and our so-called intelligence agencies could not brief the new government on this aspect. So much so that the political governments in the province

and Federation both ordered their security forces and then army to confront and open fire on the general populace just in the name of 'writ of the state' trumpeted high by the Federal Interior Ministry.

Contrarily, instead of consulting their departments and trying to look into the root causes of Taliban's increasing influence coupled with expanding occupancy, all the federal and provincial ministers remained busy in displaying photo sessions on TVs and media pronouncing almost daily that 'writ of the government' would be maintained at all cost.

What happened then! About four hundred thousand inhabitants lost their homes and businesses and migrated in their own country. Refugee Camps were erected mostly in Mardan district. The fact remains that the ministers raising writ slogans were actually the residents of Karachi or London who had never visited Swat. In that uprising for Islami Shariah Justice System the lawyer's community, who were the most affected class in the absence of Pakistani routine rotten system of justice, also stood for *Shariah* in Swat.

Ultimately when negotiations started, except *Jamaat e Islami* (JI), all other political and religious parties and public representatives from Malakand Division participated in the consultative meeting (*jirga*) held at Chief Minister's House to re-implement *Nizam e Adl* Regulations and appreciated the move as a step towards peace in the volatile Swat valley.

Local leaders and representatives of JUI(F), PML(N), JUI(S), PPP (Sherpao Group), *Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami* Party, Pakistan *Tehrik e Insaaf* (PTI) and PML(Q) attended the hours-long consultative meeting, in which the ANP-led provincial coalition government announced implementation of *Nizam e Adl* Regulations with certain amendments for the erstwhile Malakand Division after receiving a go-ahead signal from the supreme leader of defunct *Tanzim Nifaz Shariat e Muhammadi* (TNSM). A 29-member TNSM delegation, led by Maulana Muhammad Alam, had attended this meeting. This agreed *Nizam e Adl* regulation was the same or similar to TNSM's earlier code of November 1994.

The JI did not attend the *jirga* saying that the ANP-led government was responsible for all the bloodshed and destruction in Swat and elsewhere in the province. Elaborating their stand the JI maintained that:

'The ANP wants to save its skin by involving all political parties for the wrongdoing it committed in the province.'

JUI(S)'s Senator Maulana Samiul Haq, who also addressed the *Jirga* meeting, said that:

'The implementation of Nizam e Adl Regulation was neither a violation of the constitution nor against the country's judicial system, and warned that if the move was sabotaged, then it would not only be harmful for Swat but also for the entire country.'

PPP (Sherpao)'s Chief Aftab Sherpao was one of the participant of that *jirga* meeting but it may be noted here with interest that the same Sherpao was the Federal Interior Minister in Gen Musharraf's cabinet (and remained on seat for more than five years) when the unrest in Swat started raising head in his militarized regime but he never advised his military boss that the Islamic *Nizam e Adl* be reinstated in Malakand division nor he ever bothered to keep this unrest on record.

It may be cited as an acute 'professional dishonesty' and speaks adverse of our leadership's patriotism for Pakistan that the job which he could do at the initial stage without loss of lives and property, he kept it for next government to do causing it too late.

In those days there were demonstrations by the women and girls in various parts of the country with placards carrying picture of a girl with a line saying, **"Save me, save Swat, Save Pakistan"** because their schools were being burnt. If TNSM were after Islami Shariah system, which they got then who were burning schools particularly of girls in all areas which come under their control including Swat. If they were true Muslims then they should not impose any restriction on women getting education.

There was no one to tell the Taliban that Hazrat Ayesha (RA) got education; they should have known that the Holy Prophet (PBUH), after conquering Makkah, did not close down schools of the Jews and the Christians but here in Pakistan, these girls' schools were being burnt by Taliban or by 'someone or some group' in the name of Taliban.

For this reason majority of Pakistanis considered Talibanization as a conspiracy against Muslims and especially Pakistan. That is why over the last decade, the image of Pakistan as a safe and civilized country has tumbled dramatically. It is now ranked as one of the most dangerous places on earth. This has affected investment, tourism, mutual cooperation among neighbouring states and our foreign policies to a great extent.

In early months of 2009, the Federal Interior Minister, Rehman Malik, announced in the Senate that the schools in Swat would be re-opened within seven days and the Pakistani people would see complete eradication of militants in the area. ***Immediate confirmation was seen by the media because the Pakistani Taliban insurgents had destroyed four schools [two for boys and two for girls] on the very next day to pay an honourable tribute to the Federal Minister's hollow statement.***

It has been the normal way of working for Taliban; to terrorize the residents they always preferred to attack government buildings showing their power and strength. Thank God, had the schools been not closed, big casualties would have been there. They used to see police stations and schools as symbols of government authority and they believed that army camps were based there. Till the end of first quarter of 2009, the militants had destroyed 170 schools in the valley where about 55,000 girls and boys were enrolled therein.

The then Federal Information Minister Miss Sherry Rehman had also announced that schools in Swat would reopen on 1st March [2009] after the winter break but most of the population had fled to the nearby cities of Peshawar and Mardan while many police officers had either deserted or simply refused to serve. The teachers had also refused to work because the government was unable to provide them protection. Thus even if the authorities had announced for reopening of schools, nobody was there to mark their presence.

The PPP government, after holding reigns of power in 2008, believed that many of the militants in Swat had infiltrated from Al-Qaeda and Taliban hideouts in ethnic Pashtun areas on the Afghan border. They had fled from there in late 2007 when the military launched a big offensive to clear them out. Despite stern efforts, the government was not able to trace out that FM radio, or if traced they could not block its transmissions, on which the names of the persons beheaded on the main squares of Mingora city that day were read over and the Swat Taliban used to announce their policies. The state intelligence infrastructure had totally failed. The ISI and IB had completely stumbled down.

ARMY'S OPERATION RAH E HAQ:

Brutal attacks on schools in Swat, destroying the structures of buildings, beating up the teaching staff, the action against those opposing the Taliban and the expanding control of the militants was hardly a secret then. Gen Kayani, the COAS visited Mingora and announced his decision to retaliate the militants with full power. In this respect, the military's declaration of a new resolve was welcome. Big operation was launched to gain back the control of Swat and it succeeded.

Referring to the ***BBC News dated 6-8th December 2007***, the Pak army started 'Operation Rah-e-Haq' against the extremists in the valley on 25th October 2007 with the following details:

'On 24th October 2007, about 3,000 infantry troops of the Pakistan Army were sent to Swat and deployed to the hill-tops of the rugged terrain to confront Taliban forces. Next day, heavy fighting started with a suicide bomber attacking a paramilitary truck and killing 17 soldiers and 13 civilians. Fighting erupted in the hills with Taliban forces attacking military posts and the military attacking Taliban's mountain hideouts. By

31st October, reportedly 130 militant fighters were killed. However the next day about 700 militants overran a military position on a hill in Khwazakhela and 48 military men were captured and paraded through the streets. Also, police forces in Matta were completely surrounded by the end of the day.

On 3rd November 2007, 120 police and paramilitary troops in Matta surrendered and then the Taliban also overran the nearby town of Khwazakhela, thus taking two police stations and took a large arsenal of weapons that was in them. There was no major fighting until 7th November 2007, when the Taliban continued their advance and took the town of Madyan. The police there also gave up their weapons, vehicles and control of local police stations. In short, the insurgents had occupied the flood-plain side of Swat River while the army troops held the road alongside the river and surrounding forested hills. This left the Taliban in control of most of the Swat district and by then they had already set up their own local 'governors' in Tehsil Kabal, Matta and Khawazkhela.

On 12th November 2007, soldiers belonging to 12th Regular Army were deployed to Swat to reinforce the already 15000 men from military and police and mounted a number of operations to counter the militants. However, on 15th November, the militants advanced from Swat, which was now under their control, into the next district named Shangla and Alpuri [the district HQ of Shangla] fell to the Taliban insurgents. An alarming situation it was and the army had to strike back with force which they did.

By 17th November 2007, about 100 militants were killed in the fighting and ultimately on 25th November, Taliban forces decided to leave Alpuri to avoid further loss of their men. The Taliban evacuated Alpuri and took up positions on the mountain-tops around the town.

On 26th November 2007, in Swat, Pakistan artillery resulted in the death of two top Taliban commanders. With artillery fire and ground forces, the Pakistani Army re-captured many strategic hilltops from the Taliban and managed to drive the Taliban back to the Swat district.

By 27th November 2007, the army troops had retaken the Swat & Shangla back but certain pockets of Swat like Matta, Khwazakhela, Charbagh were still held by the insurgents. The security forces concentrated on Imam Dehri, the native village of Maulana Fazlullah, and nearby Kuza Banda, Bara Banda and Nigwalai. Once fighting commenced, most insurgents retreated to nearby areas and the highest peak in Kabal district was retaken.

On 28th November 2007, after suffering colossal losses, the militants in Swat vacated all seized police stations and other government buildings suddenly and decided to go underground after closing down their famous FM radio channel. On the same day, the Pakistan Army had cleared Imam Dehri, Maulana Fazlullah's seminary & HQ; police resumed their normal duty in Alpuri and around in Shangla. Till then about 50 more militants were killed in four days of fighting and they vacated Matta, Khwazakhela, Charbagh and Madyan police stations also.

Till 5th December 2007, the Pakistan army had got full control of Swat valley again and the Operation Rah e Haq was declared successfully concluded.'

The Operation was wrapped up in mid-January 2008; Pakistan's army confirmed that they had taken control of the Swat Valley after a three month operation against pro-Taliban Islamic fighters. 'The Pakistan Army's troops have pushed out the miscreants from the Swat Valley to an adjoining isolated area in the mountains', Major Gen Ahmed Shuja Pasha, the DG Military Operations wing of the GHQ had told the media.

As per GHQ report, thirty-six (36) soldiers and nine civilians were killed during the offensives [during Dec 2007-January 2008] without saying how many militants died. More than 615

people were arrested, 100 of whom were detained for further interrogations. The Swat operation continued targeting supporters of Maulana Fazlullah till late. At least 10 of Fazlullah's close allies were killed but Fazlullah himself fled to Afghanistan. As many as 230 militants were killed in a two-week operation, the army told in another media briefing.

However, the army had to come back again with Operation Rah e Haq II which was launched in July 2008. This time the military operation was led by both Air Force and Army because the militants, who had gone underground six months back, had surfaced again with the same old agenda of killings and harassment.

After elections of 18th February 2008, the ANP assumed government in Peshawar, and one of their key electoral planks was to talk peace with Swat's militants. However, this otherwise sensible approach was not responded in kind by the Swat's local Taliban who in fact opted targeting the local ANP leadership soon after the party had assumed power in that northern province.

Gen Pasha had urged that any possible resurgence of the militants would be prevented if people withdraw their support and stop donating money to the fighters. At the same time it was noted that the US government, which was otherwise declaring the Taliban as their first enemy, started raising cries at the world forum accusing the Pakistan Army for their alleged brutalities and killing of 'innocent citizens' in the name of humanity and declaring the problem as a big human rights issue. The British government, however, had a contrary viewpoint.

The above scenario proved only one phase of the Swat Operation. The poor and comparatively untrained 'miscreants' were killed and the supervisors fled to the Pak Afghan border areas. They came back again after six months with more training and better weapons to attack the army troops again. Despite the victory by the Pakistani army, Taliban militants slowly re-entered Swat over the following months and started engaging security forces in battles that lasted throughout 2008. By early 2009, the Taliban had managed to regain control of most of the Swat and at least 80 percent of the district was under their control.

Then the Pakistan Army had to launch Operation Rah e Haq III in January & February 2009 to secure the main supply lines and consolidate Swat District. Frontier Corps infantry troops provided help to four army infantry brigades. The forces regained Mingora and were poised to push the Taliban out when Sufi Muhammad was released and Shariah Law was introduced in Swat and Malakand. The provincial government was confident of the outcome of the peace deal. However, the TTP betrayed the government again by regrouping and capturing Swat, Buner, Mingora, Shangla and its surrounding areas.

[On 16th February 2009, the Pakistani government announced that it would allow the Shariah law under the government's supervision with shariah courts setup by the Government of Pakistan under the Shariat appellate bench of the Supreme Court in the Malakand region. In return, Fazlullah's followers agreed to observe a ceasefire negotiated by Sufi Muhammad.]

Tracing out the root causes; in 2001, when the conflict between Al Qaeda and the US began in earnest, the Pakistani *jihadi* organisations started targeting the state in well-planned moves. Swat was chosen as one of the core areas [along with Waziristan and Bajaur] by them for this purpose due to the presence of a large youth pool. An analysis proved that 75% people believed that unemployment forced the youth to join the militants.

With failing public finances the education system almost collapsed; the poor started sending their offspring to *madressahs* due to unemployment and rising inflation. After graduating from such schools these youth wanted employment but unfortunately such opportunities were few, except when the militants offered them jobs for fighting the state in the name of religion and all of them were paid from 'clandestine aids' in dollars.

An examination of the factors in Swat shows a close link between poverty and militancy. Poverty in Swat is attributable mainly to lack of assets and skills. The district development indica-

tors showed [in early 2011] a decline when Swat dropped in its ranking from 15th to 17th position out of 24 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (PK) districts.

Referring to the '**Dawn**' dated **18th March 2011** wherein Khalid Aziz, Chairman of the Regional Institute of Policy Research in Peshawar had opined that:

'Swat has a population growth rate of 2.6% a year, a little above the rest of the country. In Pakistan, there were 51 million employable youth in 2006 but projected to increase to 90 million in 2017. Pakistan otherwise would be unable to meet this challenge and Swat like places would thus be confronted with more risky situations.

[Thus] a nexus between lack of resources, inequality and militancy was visibly seen; almost overnight increases in the wealth of some jihadi leaders like Nek Muhammad and Baitullah Mehsud from Waziristan, Faqir Muhammad from Bajaur and Mullah Fazlullah from Swat were living examples.'

Reportedly, Maulana Fazlullah was once summoned to North Waziristan to participate in co-ordination amongst the different groups. The chief of those operations was one Ibn-i-Amin who had been placed in Mohmand Agency areas to direct operations in Mohmand, Bajaur and the Swat Valley. Then new recruits were sent to Tirah in Khyber Agency for training to undertake terrorist strikes in the urban areas which ultimately brought humiliation for the security forces.

To conclude: **on 12th May 2009**, the last phase of Swat Operation was launched and till the ending June 2009, the military action in Swat and adjoining districts like Dir & Boner was 'complete'. Various areas of Malakand Division were taken back from the Taliban, but the army stayed on in the valley to conduct 'search and destroy' operations, as per briefing by Major Gen Athar Abbas in the first week of July 2009 at a press conference. The same operation was reassigned the priority of creating conditions for safe return of the dislocated population of Malakand Division including Swat. The Taliban's command & control structures, logistics and training infrastructure were destroyed and a large number of Taliban leaders were either killed or arrested.

UN Refugee Agency had told that over two million people were displaced as the result of fighting between the Taliban militants and the security forces in and around districts of Swat {only Swat has population of 1.5 million}; only 10% of them could be accommodated in camps by the UN and state departments collectively. The media had witnessed the disastrous living conditions of those forced to crouch in the roadside makeshift camps in all areas around till late June. The World Health Organization (WHO) remained the most concerned about the increased risk of those IDPs (Internally Displaced People / Persons).

The IDPs lying in open were more disturbed from possible assaults from the Pakistani Taliban and from American Drone attacks at the same time. A day earlier then, two separate drone attacks had killed 48 persons in Waziristan tribal agency and were the fifth US drone strikes there in less than one month.

The world media told that about 1600 terrorists were killed and another 700 apprehended since Pak Army launched the said military operation against Taliban in late April [2009] after militants [in early April] had entered the Buner district from the adjacent Swat and refused to vacate the area despite their pledge to do so.

The statistics available from the **GHQ in November 2011** told that during Army's eight years' stay in Swat valley against extremism, 1900 Pakistani army troops were martyred and 5000 injured whereas 4000 miscreants were killed and 3000 arrested. While during the Swat / Malakand operation of 2007-09 only, 340 Pakistani army troops including officers had been martyred; 1800 miscreants were killed and 2000 were arrested.

Let the world hope that the American drama of intrigue and bloodshed comes to an end earlier.

(Part of this essay was published at www.criticalppp.com on 14th May 2011)