

Tourism to terrorism: mapping the wounded landscape of the Swat valley in Pakistan

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Abstract:

Swat valley is an administrative district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in Pakistan where Pashtuns live. Their ethnic and cultural heritage and Islamic values are mixed with the Pashtunwali, a traditional Pashtun code of conduct. The strong warrior history of Pashtuns made them vulnerable, and especially foreign terrorists tried to use this land for their interests. The Taliban insurgency in Swat started in 2007, due to which every sector of life was affected. Hence, Pakistan's government, Pakistan's military, and different national and international NGOs put their utmost efforts until now to re-establish the lost peace at the hands of the Taliban in the beautiful valley of Swat. The central argument of this article is shaped by the study of the Pashtun's heritage, culture, demographic history, the Taliban's insurgency, the major destructions and the reconstruction by the government of Pakistan, and the revival of tourist sustainability in Swat. The research methodology is characterised by mixed-method research, making it a descriptive, exploratory, and observational study. However, the paper's significance is contributed by analysing the role of influential factors in the rise of militancy and providing recommendations for the future security of the Swat region.

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1. Introduction

Swat Valley is one of the most beautiful sceneries of Pakistan, it is the major tourist attraction for the locals and tourists around the world in Northwestern Pakistan. In the past years since 2007, the Swat District was once a militant group's stronghold that has affected the scenic valley terribly. The following section of the paper provides background and overview of the study to understand the broader context of the research paper. Pakistan is the most important strategic country in the world, a meeting point in the significant regions of Asia, South Asia, China, and Central Asia. Presently, the Swat region is part of the Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA) of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province, having a rich history of Gandhara Civilization through which many advances took place. Because of such a violent and important history, the region of Swat remains a significant spot for the government of Pakistan. Renowned for its serene beauty, rich fertile lands with agriculture and minerals and emeralds, and plenty of historical and archaeological sites with a complete packet of cultural heritage, the Swat region attracted tourists from all over the world. During the 1990s, the Swat region came under the lens of international media for the introduction of Islamic laws and the use of arms for the enforcement of this act. This made a base for the militancy here, which was not new in the history of Pathans. Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM) since the 1990s and other violent acts of the militant groups against the government of Pakistan made the Swat a red highlighted spot on the Globe once again (Luras, 2010).

The history of Swat depicted the influence of *Mullahs* and religious influencers on the locals of the region they started to follow their Muamilaat (daily affairs) according to the sayings of the said sect of the society. The leaders were using the slogans of Islam for their own sake, and the people were continuously exploited at their hands to serve their ends. All this was favoured by the code of Pashtunwali, which was also the result of the imposition of the elites. There were judicial and constitutional issues in the Swat because of the policies and the constructed norms by the leaders of Swat. The role of the local police also contributed to creating the tense situation; they behaved indifferently and repressively in dealing with the locals, which made them a separate entity of the society, and not their safeguards. Police arrested the members of the Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM) during the uprising of 1994-95, and this made them a more bitter and hated group in the society (Rome, 2009).

The intelligence agencies of Pakistan and foreign countries have played an immense role time to time in the affairs of the Swat because of its strategic importance in the political arena for the Global politics. In the past, we witnessed the support the Pakistani and American agencies have given to the Taliban for their own interests but ended up in strong militancy in the Swat; these militant groups were installed from time to time against the Soviet Union and India in Afghanistan and in Kashmir. According to many valid sources, it was believed that the Taliban were installed intentionally to benefit the government of Pervaiz Musharraf but the fact that whatever the truth was it had deeply wounded the cultures, tourist spots, sentiments of the

locals, educational institutions, health centres, businesses and all fields of life (Rana & Rohan, 2007).

In the late 1990s the failure in the mainstreaming and integration of the Swat district into Pakistan fully deteriorated the peace and caused turbulence. Secondly, militants knocked down the magistracy system after the enforcement of Local Government reforms in Swat, which paved the way for the militant groups to intervene in governmental affairs. In the start, the locals were supporting these militants because they were providing them justice at their doorstep, but manipulating the whole situation and controlling the different parts of the district of Swat made the people realize what a big mistake they had made, which were now irreversible (Rome, 2009).

Swat valley is the real paradise on earth due to its antiquities, heritage, *and tourism*. The Swat valley is one of the high-altitude destinations for tourists, located in the northwest mountainous regions of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. The scenic view of the Swat district is famous for its spectacular natural beauty. It is situated on the Swat River and is about 153 miles (247 Km) distance from Islamabad (the Capital city of Pakistan). This beautiful valley remained a self-governing independent state known as “Yusafzai Swat” until 1969, but later merged into Pakistan. It is also called Switzerland of the East because of its splendid scenery. The natural beauty is characterized by dense, deep forests, snow-clad gigantic mountains, swirling waterfalls, freshwater and lakes. These mesmerizing scenic views are so captivating for tourists around the world. Hence, the natural wonders in the Swat valley make it heaven on earth for tourism in Pakistan. Tourism activities mostly take place in the summer, but the splendid views are also a tourist spot in winter as well to enjoy skiing, sliding, ice hockey, and other sports activities (Khan, 2005). Swat valley's trifecta of antiquities, cultural heritage, and tourism creates a harmonious blend that appeals to those seeking a multifaceted travel experience. The region's commitment to sustainable tourism ensures the preservation of its unique identity for generations to come.

The former director of Department of Archaeology and Museums for the government of KP, Professor Shah Nazar Khan says that Uddiyana (old name of Swat which means “the garden”) is believed to be the part of Gandhara Civilization, which was brought by the Central Asian nomads namely Kushana in the 1st century C.E. He further added that the valley is featured by historical stupas, castles, huts, temples, residential buildings and with enormous number of carved stones. Notably the Butkara Stupa and Udegram, ancient Buddhist sites that date back centuries. However, the region's amusing cultural and religious history is characterized by these artifacts. In addition, the Museum of Swat further enriches the region's ancient times due to the collection of various and diverse antiquities, providing a glimpse into the evolution and development of Swat's civilization.

In addition to this, the cultural heritage of Buddhism in the region is a testament to the oldest Buddhist civilization that dates to the era from 7th century C.E. Hence, people around Tibet,

China and other areas of the world consider the land of this beautiful valley as a sacred land and often visit this place for religious observance. Luca Maria Olivieri, a member of the Italian Archaeological mission for almost twenty-seven years in the Swat valley, is the fourth renowned archaeologist that has been honoured by the Pakistani government for his work on the Swat valley. Although he is not from the Swat natives, he possesses more knowledge and history than the locals. He argues that Swat valley is one of the most eminent heritages on the map of the world. Olivieri has explored the region to dig deep into the rich cultural heritage of Swat, where he has made prominent research regarding the ancient Uddiyana Kingdom, and origin of the Vajrayana Buddhism, and so on. His research on the Swat Valley, containing 106 research reports and 6 books, is witness to the fact that this beautiful land holds great significance in the eyes of orientalists and archaeologists (Zafar, 2011).

Moreover, the amusing Swat valley has been under new advancements and developments, i.e. being built with new infrastructure for easy means of communication and transportation routes. This new infrastructure will help tourists around the world to come and often visit and explore the rich heritage of the valley. In this connection, the Swat motorway plays a vital role that has made conveyance safe and fast, connecting Peshawar and Islamabad. For tourism, the sports activities, festivals, and vacations in summer bring charm and full zeal to the region. The locals and people from around the world often visit to explore the heritage and enjoy the natural wonders that trace back to the period of Great Alexander. According to the report by Pakistan's Provincial Tourism Department, approximately one million people, both from locals and overseas, visited in 2018 for tourism in Swat. The tourism sector has flourished by attracting visitors due to its amusing sceneries, lush green valleys, snow-capped peaks, and fresh, clean rivers. The largest city, Mingora of Swat, however, offers a blend of tradition and sophistication, whereas the hospitality of the locals invites tourists to taste Pashtoon cuisine. This flourishing sector of the tourism industry showcases both the natural beauty of the valley and provides various opportunities for the locals in terms of economic development (Elahi et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, this piece of paradise boasts the Swat's antiquities, cultural heritage, and a flourishing tourism sector. The region is renowned for its vital artifacts and is also home to old sites of Buddhism, including the Stupas of Udegram and Butkara. These diverse collections of artifacts and ancient sites enhance the rich tapestry of the valley, offering insights concerning the evolution of Swat. Further, the tradition, culture, and ancient remains are deeply rooted in the historical landmarks of Swat, such as the valley of Miandam and Malam Jabba, which is a popular destination for skiing. As far as the religious history of Swat Valley is concerned, the Udegram Buddhist Monastery stands out as a testament that dates back to the 7th century C.E. Summing up, the growing development in the Swat Valley is a commitment to promoting sustainable and safe tourism and preserving its heritage to make the valley as a cultural gem. Thus, the mixture of natural beauty, rich history, warm hospitality of locals, and their welcoming attitude make the Swat Valley a captivating tourist destination for those seeking the distinctive experiences of traveling and tourism (Wazir, et al, 2013).

In short, Swat valley's evolution from a beautiful tourist site of Pakistan to a region scarred by terrorist activities and militancy underscores the resilience of its locals and spirits of hope for peace and prosperity. As the region strives to subdue the shadows of its past, the period from tourism to terrorism serves as a poignant recall of the fragile peace and the significance of preserving its heritage.

2. Research methodology

This research paper is based on the qualitative research approach and is contributed by exploratory and descriptive methods. It involves a detailed approach to comprehending the transition and transformation from tourism to terrorism in Swat Valley that provides valuable insights for residents, former tourists, government officials, various stakeholders, and experts in tourism and security.

2.1. Research design

In the qualitative and Descriptive research study the research design usually centres on employing direct observations as the primary data collection tools. This study is based on a non-participant observational approach and conducted through secondary sources, i.e., detailed field notes, research articles, internet sources, and previous literature. In contrast, one of the primary sources, i.e., observations, has also been one of the sources for collecting the data.

2.2. Mixed methodology

The Data for this research paper has been informed through both secondary and primary sources, including literature reviews, scholarly articles, internet sources, and other relevant studies that provide context to the research topic. However, the information derived from the primary sources includes observations made by the researcher itself.

2.3. Non-participant observational approach

The research has not actively participated in situations throughout the period from tourism to terrorism; rather, it observes situations and scenarios while remaining detached from the activities and the participants. This methodology helps the researcher allow for unbiased observations in the natural setting and take the role of an observer while focusing on analysing the data that has been observed without being influenced by the participants.

2.4. Data analysis procedure

While analysing the data collected for this research paper, a mixed-method approach was taken to delve into the transition of the Swat region from a destination for tourism to an area badly affected by terrorism. However, through careful understanding and categorization of the data

collected, major insights were obtained to comprehend the evolving dynamics in the context of the socio-political landscape of the region. By triangulating the secondary sources with insights from the non-participant observational approach, a comprehensive picture of the entire scenario has emerged, revealing the intricate link between tourism and terrorism in the Swat Valley.

2.5. Limitations

The limitations of the study “Tourism to Terrorism: Mapping the Wounded Landscape of Swat Valley” include one of the challenges while conducting the research was obtaining unbiased and accurate data due to the sensitive nature of the research topic. In addition, the study encountered difficulties in ensuring the generalizability and reliability of findings, specifically when dealing with complex issues such as terrorism, militancy, and terrorist activities in the Swat region.

3. Conflict theory and tourism area life cycle model

This research paper is characterized by a complex theoretical framework by applying “Conflict Theory” and “Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC)” theory to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research paper. The researcher has used these two theories as they better fit the topic. Before understanding the study through the lens of the theories, it is significant to highlight the main idea of the theories respectively. The Conflict Theory mainly focuses on the idea that competition between and among the groups within the society occurs naturally as they struggle for power and resources. Whereas TALC theory focuses on the thought that the tourism sector is one of the biggest industries in the world, due to its dynamic nature, it changes constantly. This model suggests that the evolution of the tourism industry is comprised of six predictable different stages includes exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation and decline.

However, this research paper in the context of terrorism reflects the idea how power dynamics, competition for resources, and inequality contributes to the transformation of the Swat’s region landscape from a tourist site to a region affected by terrorism. The Swat Valley, once known for its scenic beauty and tourist destination, has experienced a major shift due to terrorism and conflicts. One of the main ideas of this theory is that when the competition between the groups rises to a certain point, thus conflict between the entire nation and governments can occur. These conflicts can either provide ways to form new social groups or unite societies. In a nutshell, this theory mainly argues that individuals and groups within the society interact based on conflict rather to interact based on agreement while also emphasizing power dynamics and their roles in creating power (Prayogi, 2023). However, conflict theory suggests that the underlying causes of transformation stem from the struggle for power, societal inequalities, and competition for resources in the region. The development of tourism infrastructure and the influx of visitors have disrupted the power dynamics and traditional lifestyle of the locals, leading to conflicts within the region.

As tourism declined, it is due to security concerns; the Swat's landscape was wounded socially and physically. The vibrant tourist site became the battleground due to which the local economy suffered. In addition, the conflicts between the groups over issues like professions, cultures, political groups, religions, genders, races, social classes, etc., revolve around this theory. It has been discussed in the latter part of the paper that terrorist groups mainly had an issue with the government over the implementation of Sharia law, which is one of the postulates of conflict theory where groups also confront each other on the issues of religion. This confrontation between and among the groups often leads to wars (Hayes, 2024). If we see the terrorism that occurred in the Swat valley resulted in military operations, conflicts between the political and religious groups, control over Swat by the militants, cultural shift, i.e., implementation of strict Pashtoon culture, removal of female professions, and a society dominated by male. In summary, conflict theory reveals a complex interplay of competition, power, a shift in culture, etc. that has reshaped the region's landscape.

The next theory is the Tourism Area Life Cycle, which focuses on the thought that the tourism sector is one of the biggest industries in the world and due to its dynamic nature, it changes constantly. This model suggests that the evolution of the tourism industry is comprised of six predictable stages that include exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and decline (Rahman, 2023). In the case of Swat valley, the region initially experienced exploration where a limited number of tourists visited the area. The area may have attracted non-local tourists due to its scenic beauty and rich cultural heritage. In the second stage, i.e. Involvement, the number of tourists and visitors increases in the area, the locals now see economic gains in providing facilities to the tourists such as accommodation, food, tourist guides and, transport, etc. As this stage progressed in the Swat valley, it led to the marketing, and somehow, tourist season was realized. Ultimately, the involvement stage puts pressure on both the national and the local authorities to contribute to the development of such sites by improving infrastructure and other facilities. The region became one of the most visited sites in Pakistan.

Following this stage, development occurred slowly and gradually, where many people recognized a place as a tourist destination. The attraction became popular with people, tourists, companies, and investors who found opportunities for financial benefits. But the huge influx of tourists where the numbers of tourists are higher than the residents, led to social disruptions and environmental degradation, marking the stage of consolidation in the region. The onset of security threats and terrorist activities caused a stagnation phase where various aspects of scenic sites cannot grow further, and species can no longer survive. Tourist facilities disappear and the number of visitors becomes less and causing a rapid decline. Therefore, it is significant to repeat visitation and keep the business going, it is needed to initiate recovery efforts and rejuvenation where Swat valley needs a complete change; this change can happen in two ways the first one is to introduce new man-made attractions, and the second the tourist attraction can take advantage of the previously untapped natural resources (Singh, 2011). Thus, the restoration of the tourism potential in Swat can be contributed by the support of local and

national authorities. In conclusion, TALC theory in the context of the topic pinpoints the cyclical nature of the development of tourist destinations and the challenges posed by external factors. However, the TALC model is a useful tool to comprehend the stages involved in a tourist attraction and help tourism companies examine how tourist regions can change over time. It can help stakeholders to mitigate the impacts of terrorism on the tourism landscape of a particular region.

4. Early signs of instability in the region: a quick look at influential factors and figures in the rise of militancy

The early signs of instability in the region provide an exact perspective of the multifaceted factors that have contributed to the instability in the Swat region. Therefore, it is crucial to address these root causes for peace-building efforts and sustainability. Firstly, the notable gap between the marginalized and affluent communities is the Socio-Economic disparities. The inadequate distribution of opportunities and resources has contributed to much discontent among the locals of Swat. Secondly, the political instability in the region is also one of the factors that have marked the issues of good governance and the absence of effective administration. Orgeret and Tayeebwa (2016), the upset political mechanism has created a power vacuum, empowering the local leaders with incompatible agendas, ultimately resulting in political chaos. Thirdly, Militant factors such as the contiguity to the Afghan border amidst the 1980s Soviet Afghan conflict exposed Swat Valley to militant spillovers. Moreover, the huge influx of Afghan refugees and Mujahedeen activities in the region contributed to the militant sentiments. The Swat's tribal structure played a crucial role in maintaining order in the region but has also fostered tensions. The tribal dynamics were characterized mainly by disputes over power, land, and resources, which created an unpleasant environment. However, the fourth factor, i.e., the rise of religious extremist sentiments and radical ideologies, gained enough impetus. The spread of the fundamentalist interpretations of Islam and the setting up of unregulated religious schools (Madrastas) has contributed to the radicalization of some segments of the population.

Lastly, the incompetent initiatives concerning development have led to challenges mainly in education, infrastructure, and healthcare. Deficiency in effective dynamism left many segments of the population feeling deprived, fostering grievances, and neglected, that fuelled instability in many ways. In addition, the uprising of the local militant groups, such as Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM), signalled an escalation of instability. These groups sought to enforce their interpretation of Islamic law, mainly in the Malakand Division, while challenging the status quo. The TNSM considers the established governance mechanism against Islamic principles. This militant group is also famous for its Jihad against US forces in Afghanistan. In short, they are totally against Democracy and Pluralism. The militant group Leader, Maulana Sufi Muhammad, belonged to the Malakand division from the Lower Dir district. Thus, it can be said that his affiliation and belongingness to the region became one of the reasons for his religious campaigns there (Avis, 2016).

4.1. Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) emergence

Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi was a radical Islamic group founded by Maulana Sufi Mohammad in the late 1990s. The major aim was to enforce Sharia Law and Islamic provisions in the region. Initially, the TNSM's activities were limited to the Malakand division (comprising of districts, i.e., Buner, Upper Dir, Lower Dir, Shangla, Swat, Malakand, Bajaur, and Chitral). After gaining much support, He consequently demanded the implementation of Sharia in these areas. His movement for Sharia gained momentum when he got confidence and support from the local people, and the Khan's, Malik's. Further, in November 1994, the imposition of Sharia Law by TNSM started an armed campaign by taking control of many government installations in the Swat region. As Sufi Mohammad was not satisfied with the legislation, He then launched demonstrations and various campaigns amid imposition of Islamic Law.

Thus, He launched an invasion of Afghanistan post-9/11 to topple the Taliban government. In addition, the anti-US Jihadist activities were also significant initiatives by TNSM. However, all these campaigns, protests, and armed activities led to continuous violence in the valley that led to killings, the arrest of many Jihadists, and their imprisonment in Guantanamo prison. After returning to Pakistan with some of his followers, Sufi faced the official ban of TNSM by General Pervaiz Musharraf in 2001. Although the militant group was banned legally unofficially, it remained active and engaged in the Malakand division. Thus, the role of TNSM in implementing Sharia Law in the region is characterized by various unpleasant activities that have disrupted the peace of Swat Valley and led to political turmoil and constant violent activities in the region (Khan & Ali, 2010).

4.2. Militant leader Mullah Fazlullah

Mullah Fazlullah was the Islamic militant leader of the TNSM, a radical Islamist organization. He took his leadership due to the enforcement of a ban by the then President of Pakistan General Pervaiz Musharraf. This legal ban on the militant group led to the arrest of the Sufi Muhammad, the founder of the TNSM, and consequently placed Mullah Fazlullah into the leadership. Later, in 2008, Sufi Muhammad was freed after he repudiated the violence in Swat. Thus, Fazlullah managed to restore the militant organization. However, Fazlullah's political forces were actively engaged in militancy in Swat, and resultantly, by late October 2007, with the support of around more than 4,500 militants, Fazlullah managed to establish a parallel government in the fifty-nine villages of Swat, also with the creation of Islamic Courts to implement Sharia Law. His radical policies concerning enforcing Islamic Law led to tensions and armed conflict in the region (Shah, 2018).

4.3. Operation Rah-e-Haq 2007

The war-torn Swat region always remained a place for militant groups to run their campaigns

to implement Shariah Law. The reason behind it may be their affiliation or belongingness to the region as their birthplace or hometown. Thus, to counter militant activities, the Pakistani military launched the Operation Rah-e-Haq in 2007 against the influence of the militants and their local supporters. The main objective was to end Talibanization and was mainly against Mullah Fazlullah and his armed group from Swat. This military operation was conducted in three stages; however, in the first stage, the Pakistan military forces assured the locals of Swat valley that there would not be extremist activities. The locals however were against the militant group and supported the operation Rah-e-Haq. The military operations were continuous till December 2007 and again resumed between the Taliban's and military forces in November 2009 (Hyat, 2009).

However, after two months, the second phase of Operation Rah-e-Haq started, and the militant leader Mullah Fazlullah demanded that the government withdraw from the operation, or else he would command his army to initiate armed conflict. In contrast, the Pakistani government was not ready to accept such demands. In response, Fazlullah directed his militant forces to assault the security forces, out of which two junior police officers were assassinated. This is how, in response, on June 29, 2008, the army initiated its second stage of operation, Rah-e-Haq. Ali Bakht and Tor Mullah, two prominent leaders of the Taliban group, were assassinated during the operation. However, the Taliban continued their violent activities, including attacks on military personnel, bombing, and destroying government buildings, schools, colleges, bridges, and police stations. Hence, almost the entire infrastructure of the region was destroyed. Taliban also had an attack on Pakistan's only ski resort, namely PTDC Motel in Malam Jaba, Swat (Shah, 2018).

Shah (2018) mentioned that Operation Rah-e-Haq was conducted in three stages. Thus, the third stage took place in January 2009. Until this phase, Swat was almost under full control of militant groups; despite the fact that there were 20,000 Pakistani military troops, the region was effectively under the control of militants. Five Schools were bombed in Mingora by the Taliban. Hence, they banned female education in Swat. Militant leader Mullah Fazlullah summoned a full-fledged Shoora, including notable lawmakers, MNAs and MPA (Members of National and Provincial Assemblies), and Cabinet Ministers. The then Chief of Army Staff General Pervaiz Kiyani arrived in Swat by the end of January 2009 and has decided to combat insurgency until peace is restored. However, following several meetings, the Swat Peace Accord was signed by the ANP's Provincial government with the Taliban's prominent leadership.

4.4. The influence and role of TTP in Swat

The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is a Jihadist network alliance and is also known as Pakistani Taliban. This alliance has fought with the Pakistani state since 2007. The Jihadists are regrouping in the KP Province on the Afghan border and have emerged as a crucial player in the Swat, transforming its social and political landscape. TTP is an umbrella alliance

established in 2007 uniting various militant networks under a common banner. Their main objective is to implement their interpretation of Islamic law across the country, particularly in Swat, challenging the status quo. Mullah Fazlullah, also known by the people as “Radio Mullah,” assumed TTP leadership in Swat. Due to his radical ideology and charismatic leadership, it was easy to mobilize his followers and promote the TTP’s agenda. The aggressive agenda of the Jihadist group sought to go against the western legal system of the state by imposing strict rules on the locals, i.e., enforcing a specific dress code and restricting entertainment, etc. Although, Swat valley has been under armed attacks, tensions in the valley increased rapidly when the militant group engaged in violent activities and confrontations with the security forces of Pakistan.

The militant group targeted security personnel, civilians, and government officials, which led to a tense security situation in the region. The TTP had sieged significant portions of Swat, forming parallel governmental structures by creating their version of Justice, challenging the authority of the Pakistani government (Jadoon & Sayed, 2022). Moreover, the TTP’s violent escalation was also contributed by major militant events such as the siege of Lal Masjid that began several years of bloodshed in Pakistan, the attack on Malala Yousafzai (known as an advocate for female education) in Swat on October 09, 2012. However, these events got international attention and thus highlighted the severity of the insecurity caused by militant ideologies. Furthermore, this also indicated that TTP attempted to make their presence felt in the Swat and elsewhere in the province. Following this incident, TTP intensified its attacks by target killings and conducting Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attacks. They killed two Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) officers and also captured several Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) officers (Khan, 2022).

However, the subsequent military operations, such as Zarb-e-Azb, have weakened the militant network in FATA and pushed them into Afghanistan. Due to the Pakistani military operations, the TTP lost its potential strength somehow, and thus, the number of attacks was reduced. In August 2021, when the Afghan-Taliban took over Kabul, the TTP began to regroup their militants. This has upset the Pakistani policymakers, who had assumed that the Afghan-Taliban would cooperate with the Pakistani government as an ally. TTP, under the leadership of Mullah Fazlullah, challenged the Pakistani state while controlling the Swat valley in early 2007. In addition, the TTP has also been using the Afghan territory to carry out militant attacks inside the country and against the Pakistani military and security forces on the Pak-Afghan border (Ullah et al, 2022).

This has resulted in a severe backlash from the locals and civilians around the country. Hundreds of locals throughout the KP province are taking to the streets to protest against TTP’s militant activities, amid the situation the Pakistani state was pressuring the Afghan-Taliban to bring TTP for peaceful negotiation. However, the Afghan-Taliban played their role and TTP militants were brought to the table for negotiation but remained unsuccessful. The militant group did not agree to concur with the civil and military leadership of Pakistan to abandon their

take on Jihadist activities, nor did the Pakistani delegation agree with TTP's requirements. Consequently, this has become the source of hostility between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Apart from that, Pakistani security forces have executed attacks against TTP inside Afghanistan that led to the protests in Kabul (Elahi, 2015).

Unsurprisingly, the TTP-led violence contributed to the massive humanitarian crisis and displacement of the local people. Several residents fled their hometowns seeking refuge in the safer regions intensifying the socio-economic condition in the region. On the contrary, the Pakistani military feared the TTP might try to siege the capital, Islamabad; therefore, the operation Rah-e-Rast was launched to drive out the militants from Swat and dismantle their strongholds. These efforts were made to restore government control in Swat and curtail TTP's influence. The key priorities of the Pakistani government and military forces included the rehabilitation of Swat, ensuring security, and fostering Social and economic development. However, these counter-terrorism efforts were aimed at mitigating the challenges caused by violent extremism (Zahid, 2022).

5. The present landscape of Swat valley: post-terrorism challenges and evolving dynamics

The Swat valley, known for its beauty, captivating cultural heritage, and attractive tourism site, endured a traumatizing period of violent extremism and conflict. The aftermath of this dark period contributes to the significant challenges for the nation's community to strive for rehabilitation. This section of the study focuses on the multifaceted post-terrorism challenges confronted by Swat Valley, concentrating on humanitarian, economic, social, and security aspects while emphasizing the significance of the efforts to overcome these impediments. The humanitarian crisis amid terrorism in Swat has been intense, with several families losing their loved ones, confronting displacements, and enduring mental trauma. The reintegration of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) into their communities, providing psychological assistance for trauma survivors, and ensuring access to basic needs, including healthcare, clean water, shelter, clothing, and education, were critical humanitarian imperatives. However, it was elusive to address these urgent needs and foster resilience among the affected locals without the support of government agencies and NGOs (Nawaz, 2023).

Furthermore, fostering social cohesion and rebuilding trust remained an arduous task in the Swat's post-terrorism recovery. The war-torn valley remained under violence, displacement, and distrust for years. Thus, the initiatives concerning the promotion of inter-religious and inter-ethnic dialogue were a big challenge for the Pakistani government. As, the reconciliation efforts could have helped overcome the challenges. In addition, community-driven projects were one of the crucial initiatives to rebuild the sense of belongingness and unity among individuals and communities. As discussed earlier, the militant group, while imposing strict Shariah law, has also banned female education; therefore, the restoration of education for females was again one of the major challenges. However, education plays a significant role in

promoting tolerance and achieving long-term peace and stability, therefore, it was crucial to revive female education.

In addition, the economy of the Swat valley was severely disrupted by terrorist activities with widespread damaged infrastructure, unemployment, and a particular decline in tourism, which was once known as a major source of revenue for the Swat (Nawaz, 2016). Therefore, it was imperative to revitalize the economic sector, invest in the reconstruction of infrastructure, organize job creation programs, provide vocational training, and support small businesses. Efforts were being made to diversify the economy beyond tourism, yet it was a challenging task, such as the promotion of agriculture, industries, handicrafts, etc., to bring resilience and create viable livelihood opportunities for locals. Besides these challenges, the utmost objective was to restore security in Swat valley. Therefore, notable progress was being made to restore the security and eliminate the lingering threat of militancy and extremism from the hearts of the residents through robust law enforcement measures regarding counterterrorism (Khan & Khan, 2021).

The above-mentioned challenges in the aftermath of terrorism in Swat valley are daunting but not insurmountable. By prioritizing community engagement, humanitarian assistance, and fostering social reconciliation, the Swat valley can embark on a path towards development, sustainability and peace. Moreover, the initiative concerning to revitalize the economic sector, and ensuring rule of law and security, the region can be the major measures to overcome the challenges. Apart from that, international support alongside local participation is crucial to realize the vision of enabling Swat valley to emerge stronger enough from its turbulent past (Javed et al., 2019).

However, the present landscape of Swat valley is marked by evolving dynamics that mirrors the region's journey ranging from conflicts and discords to stability. The Swat region has shown significant stability and progress after confronting terrorism in the past from 2007-2010. The scenic valley has made great strides concerning development and security, while experiencing a transformation in various aspects. The region which is locally known as Pakistan's Switzerland due to its lush green landscapes and snow-capped mountains is coming back to life. The sectors such as trade, education, healthcare, and tourism etc. suffered a lot during the Pakistani Taliban's reign of terror. Those were difficult times however, after successful military efforts peace has been restored now. Traders who had left the area amidst the Taliban period have returned to Swat and once again its city of Mingora has become a business hub (Sajid, 2019).

Tourists across the country and abroad have also made a steady comeback revisiting the valley and escaping the scorching summer heat of the big cities. Besides this, still Pakistani government needs to focus on infrastructure for tourism. Moreover, the Swat's hotel industry which bore the brunt of terrorist attacks and militancy is also recovering. As per the provincial tourism department, almost one million people including tourists around the world visited the

valley in 2018. The authorities expect that this figure will surpass one million this year. Thus, security improvements such as checkpoints and military presence remain contributing to a secure environment. The local economy is also boosted due to the tourism revival; the return of tourists has revitalized the businesses in Swat. Schools have been rebuilt focusing on providing quality education and empowering women. In addition, efforts are being made to revive cultural heritage, including the Buddhist archaeological sites, which are gaining the attention of tourists and scholars alike (Fleischner, 2011). The evolving dynamics of the Swat region reflect the recovery of the valley that was time and again plagued by conflicts and militancy. It is now balancing between its past challenges and a hopeful, secure future. Hence, continued focus on social progress, economic development, and security will be crucial in shaping its trajectory.

6. Key strategies for ensuring security in Swat valley

With the aim to pursue stability and security, several policy recommendations can help combat terrorism in Swat and are characterized in a way that is practical enough to implement and could be considered.

6.1. Robust law enforcement

Robust law enforcement requires strengthening law enforcement agencies such as parliamentary forces and police to improve surveillance, response capabilities, and intelligence gathering. This can help identify and prevent extremist activities in Swat and contribute to enhanced security measures.

6.2. The role of central government

A clearer vision and a decision-making process by the central government of Pakistan concerning anti-militancy and anti-terrorism efforts, such as devoting more resources to the country's security institutions and organizing better links with its provinces, can help in countering terrorism.

6.3. The emerging role of NACTA

National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) is a focal national institution functioning under the authority of the NACTA Act 2013 for unifying the country's response to countering terrorism in Pakistan. This institution might play a vital role and help coordinate the civil-military actions against militancy and terrorism. This institution has a significant place in combating terrorism at the national and regional levels because its role is not just to provide security alerts but also to craft policies, conduct research, and garner support for police work among the public through constructive use of media. NACTA plans to form deeper links with national and international think tanks working on countering terrorism, violent extremism,

conflict resolution, stabilization and de-radicalization. However, NACTA can become an active participant in the implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) for countering extremism and terrorism.

6.4. Counter-narratives

Promoting actual religious teachings to counter extremist propaganda can help build counternarratives concerning terrorism. This can be done through positive social media campaigns, the involvement of religious leaders, and reforms in educational curricula to delegitimize terrorist sentiments and radical ideologies.

6.6. Strategic border control policies

This involves a holistic approach comprising the specialized training for security forces. This also includes both military and police forces, fortified infrastructure, high-level surveillance methods, and cross-border collaboration to effectively secure and manage the region's borders from infiltration of the militants. By adopting these measures, Swat valley can deter threats. However, to control and overcome the challenges made by Terrorism in Swat, it is necessary to strengthen border.

6.7. Socio-economic development

Controls to prevent the influx of terrorists, illicit goods, drugs, and weapons. Specialized training should be given to the security forces and equip them with the much-needed skills, intelligence analysis, and counter-terrorism tactics to combat terrorism effectively across the border. Addressing socio-economic disparities such as investment in infrastructure, healthcare, employment opportunities, and educational platforms can help alleviate the poverty rate and reduce the vulnerabilities in Swat and exploitations made by terrorists.

6.8. Judicial reforms

The judiciary can play a greater role in combating terrorism by ensuring swift and fair trials for cases related to terrorist activities in Swat. Moreover, it strengthens legal frameworks to prosecute terrorists strictly while upholding the standard of human rights.

6.9. International cooperation and diplomatic efforts

Pakistan can collaborate with the international partners for joint military operations to counter the transnational networks of terrorism operating in Swat valley. Thus, collaborating with international organizations, neighbouring countries, and intelligence agencies of allied and friendly countries to share resources and information can contribute to diplomatic efforts and eliminate terrorism.

6.10. Civic and community engagement

Fostering cooperation and trust between security forces and local communities via community engagement, including initiatives like dialogue forums and outreach programs to address the grievances of the locals and prevent extremist ideologies and radicalization, is necessary.

6.11. Psychological support

To address the trauma and prevent further radicalization in Swat, it is of utmost significance to facilitate the affected people, including victims and their families, with psychological counselling. This will help rebuild a community transitioning from violent extremism into a non-violent peaceful society. Campaigns related to it can help rebuild healthy and more resilient communities in the region.

6.12. Targeted military operations

Targeted Military operations can be one of the drastic solutions, after all, amicable means to combat violent extremism and terrorism. Conducting military operations against terrorist networks and targeting their safe havens in the region could be a direct action and warning against such groups to avoid future violence in the region.

In a nutshell, implementing a comprehensive strategy that combines the above-mentioned policy recommendations while involving the stakeholders at all levels and considering the local context is crucial to combating terrorism in Swat and transitioning again towards its beautiful valley and captivating tourism sector.

7. Conclusion

While mapping the wounded landscape of Swat's region, it exhibits a complex portrayal from tourism to terrorism. The tourism industry of Swat valley was once vibrant but has suffered a lot due to the severe blows of insurgent activities of the militant groups. These activities had altered the socio-cultural and economic framework and had left scars on its people. Therefore, it's imperative to initiate effective policy recommendations to address the complex scenarios. However, the initiatives must be focused on revitalizing the tourism industry by developing infrastructure, promoting culture exchange programs among people, and enhancing security measures to restore the lost confidence of the tourists. In addition, for long-term reconciliation and stability, it is crucial to foster civic and community engagement, investment in the education sector and vocational training, and promote interfaith dialogue. Thus, by embracing a multifaceted approach, wounded valley can embark on a way toward resilience, healing, and sustainable peace.

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