



**Center for
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Security
Studies**

Pakistan Focused. Independent Questions. Independent Answers.

SWAT DEAL
and
Implication
for
The Rest
of
Pakistan

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Introduction:

Swat has now been in the news for all the wrong reasons for a long time. It had become imperative to establish peace there or at least bring about a situation that could, eventually, establish a durable peace in what was once the most tranquil valley on earth. Many thousands of people have been displaced from their homes due to the intense fighting and are



now living in pathetic conditions elsewhere in the North-western Frontier Province (NWFP). It was the responsibility of the government of NWFP to rise to the occasion and somehow bring about a situation that could raise the hopes of the people of Swat, in particular, and those of Pakistan, in general, that peace, after all, was a possibility.

In fact, the situation had aggravated to an extent that a break up point had almost been reached meaning that the circumstances were such that the people of Swat and indeed the people of Pakistan had begun to believe that the relationship between the State and the people had come to a position where it was about to snap. The writ of the State was so thoroughly eroded that despite the presence of a large number of troops in Swat, the local militants ruled effectively. The locals had started taking their litigations to the Taliban instead of the regular law courts. We all know how bad it was. This is why the peace deal was inescapable.

But the Swat Peace Deal (SPD) is not going to be a standalone event in the political existence of Pakistan and it would certainly have implications for the rest of the country. Before proceeding to discuss the implications, it is pivotal to understand both the area, its importance in the region and the options that government could have tried.

The Composition of Malakand Division:

The Malakand Division consists of the Districts of Chitral, Dir, Swat, Shangla and Buner and the Malakand Agency.

Swat District: Till 1969 it was a princely state ruled by the Wali-e-Swat (Responsible (king) of Swat). It is bordered by Malakand Agency, Dir, Chitral, Kohistan, Shangla and Buner. Buddhism was the earliest religion that prevailed in Swat around the second century AD. Buddhism gave way to Hinduism and finally Mahmud of Ghaznavi captured Swat in 1023 and it is thereafter that Islam took roots in the area.



Mullah Fazlullah

The 1998 census shows Swat to have a population of 1,257,602 with Pashto as the main language of the region. It is only in the 2002 general elections that the religious political parties' alliance MMA won all the 7 Provincial Assembly seats and the two National Assembly seats but then in 2002 MMA's victory was an all-over provincial phenomenon in the NWFP. This time around and as recently as 2008 the ANP won most of the seats in Swat. This was despite the near-omnipresence of the Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM) of Mullah Sufi Muhammad and the Maulana Fazlullah's Tehrik-e-Tailban Swat. This is indicative of the general trend of the people i.e. while they regulate their life on religious teachings they are politically progressive and open.

Dir District: From the subject point of view it shall suffice to say that when the Taliban tried to commence operations in some parts of Dir they faced stiff resistance and were banished from the area without allowing them any foothold. It is now divided into two districts i.e. the lower and upper Dir districts. Dir has been the strong point of Pakistan People's Party (PPP), a liberal federalist political party.

Malakand Agency: Largely a tribal area but it does not fall within Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Malakand Agency is administratively managed by the provincial government and the area is called Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA).

Chitral, Shangla and Buner: Peaceful districts bordering Swat which have never had the tendency to vote outrightly for religious political parties.

Quick Rundown on the Swat Situation since 1994:

Swat assumed prominence in the year 1994 when the TNSM led by Mullah Sufi Muhammad revolted and took over many governmental offices in Swat as well as the Saidu Sharif airport and other prominent places in their bid to make Swat their fiefdom with laws that were their interpretation of the Shariat. That rebellion, during the second government of late Benazir Bhutto was put down by the Frontier Corps NWFP. However, the end result was an agreement which entailed the promulgation of a new set of laws in consonance with the Shariat. In fact the present Nizam-e-Adal is only a revised and amended version of that 1994 agreement.



Mullah Sufi Muhammad

It was for many reasons that the 1994 agreement could not be practically implemented. One of the reasons was disagreement on the people who were to be appointed to the Qazi (Sharia Judges) Courts in order to implement the agreed judicial system. Therefore, while an agreement was reached it was never really put into practice. That agreement was once again amended in 1999 to make it workable but the exercise went in vain because of the military intervention of General Musharraf in October 1999. Thus, in actual effect, while an agreement for a new judicial system was reached in 1994 it had gone unimplemented all the way to 2007 bringing about sporadic disturbances at different points of times that finally led to the recent high intensity

violence that erupted in Swat in the second half of 2007. As we now know the guns have been silent since the 16th of February, 2009, after the NWFP government reached a fresh accord, which strictly speaking is an amended version of the 1999 agreement, with Mullah Sufi Muhammad. The accord is in the shape of the promulgation of the Nizam e Adal Regulations 2009. A day before the actual signing of the accord between Mullah Sufi Muhammad and the NWFP government the TTP Swat led by Maulana Fazlullah declared a unilateral ceasefire for a ten day period. This was responded to by the Army by going into a reactive mode i.e. that it will only act if attacked anywhere. The uneasy truce has been closely watched by us all.

Hopes of a long lasting peace are indeed bright and at the same time it must be said that the situation can go out of hand easily if sparked by any incident or by any violation of the new accord by either party.

Situation of Swat in the Regional Context:

The Swat situation would never have aggravated to the point it actually did had we not had a grave regional situation of disorder. Neighboring Afghanistan is occupied by the US and NATO forces which are constantly engaged by the Taliban under Mullah Umar and in return military operations are launched against them by the NATO and US forces. Since most of these



A Northern Alliance guerilla dragging a body of a Taliban soldier after Qila-e-Jangi operation.

operations in Afghanistan are close to the Pakistani borders in the Afghanistan Pakhtun belt Pakistan gets the attention because of the allegations that the insurgents in Afghanistan operate from the Pakistani tribal areas. As a consequence we witness the drone attacks that take place with impunity and further raise the level of conflict. A tricky situation, as it is in Afghanistan, it has emboldened the Taliban in Pakistan to an extent that the many groups formed initially and

operating in isolation in different parts of NWFP got together under one banner called TTP (Tehreek e Taliban e Pakistan) and chose Baitullah Mahsud as their leader who in turn has Mullah Umar as his leader. In short, the Taliban have grown more organized and now function under a strategy that is coordinated in a manner as if NWFP as a whole was one single theatre of war from the TTP point of view.

This obviously becomes a more difficult situation to handle than a disjointed effort by militant groups in different areas independent of each other. Therefore, Undoubtedly Swat had to be tamed and the Swat Nizam e Adal peace deal of Feb 2009 is a correct step in the right direction. How it is executed and implemented will determine how lasting peace really will be in the long run. Now that the Peace Deal has been arrived at the Government in NWFP must ensure its smooth implementation and take control of the District because if now Swat witnesses a relapse into violence once again it will be of a magnitude that no one will be able to control.

What the Government could have done Different?

In over one year of extreme violence in Swat that began in September-October 2007, we witnessed how helpless the government of Pakistan and that of the NWFP were in handling the violence in this beautiful valley. It looked as if the State of Pakistan was a punching bag not able to protect itself against the punches thrown at it and allowing its population to gradually slip away into the jurisdiction and control of the Taliban.

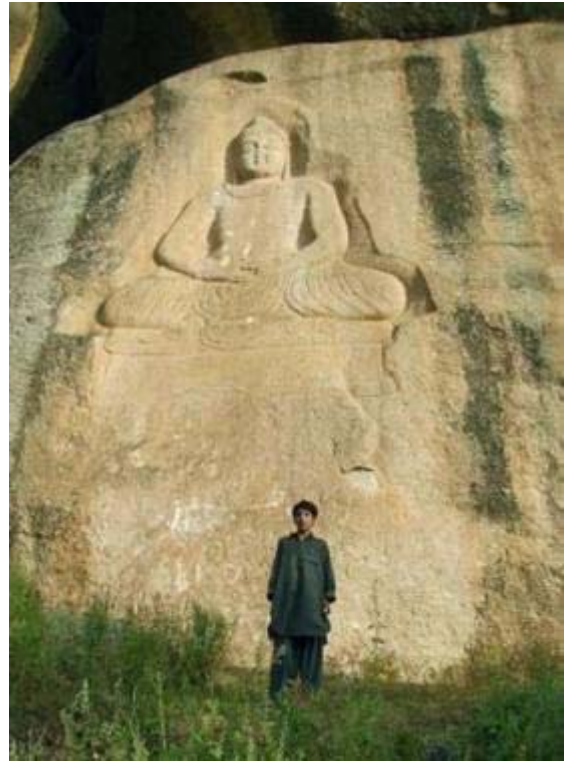


A Taliban militiaman celebrating the peace deal in his own way

The general public started to believe what they saw as reality closer to their homes. No one can blame the poor souls who have undergone months of neglect by the State and agony of sorts due to the fighting. Why would individuals want to risk life and property to resist a militant group

when the State was ready to abdicate its own authority? Rightly so, the government has now struck the now well known peace deal with Mullah Sufi Muhammad.

But, was there something that they could have done differently? To my mind yes there was. Ever since this government in NWFP took over it developed a bunker mentality. This bunker mentality gradually took it away from the ground situation and it became more and more incapable of assessing what actually was happening, leave alone their doing anything about it at all. The government of NWFP abandoned the people of Swat entirely and left them to fend for themselves.



Swat – as it once was

Yes, I do understand that there existed a real threat to the functionaries of the government at the higher level but then if that higher echelon of the government expects the ordinary policeman and the soldier of the FC (Frontier Corps) to fight for the writ of the State while totally exposed then it is also an obligation on the higher echelons not to allow the bondage between them and the masses to break. Yes, risks existed but they should have been taken and the contact between the government and the masses in Swat ought not to have broken. For instance, had the government maintained contact with the people then they could have announced the same Nizam-e-Adal Regulations of 2009 on its own and started a peace march like the one Mullah Sufi Muhammad did through Swat.

The government should have done it in its own way and taken the initiative instead of surrendering it to Mullah Sufi Muhammad and making him a larger than life hero of the moment. The peace then would have been firmer still. But now that it has happened the way it has happened it must be ensured that peace and the accord are not broken so that return to violence is avoided.

coming back to the implications that this peace deal can have on the rest of Pakistan let us see what they can be:-

For the World: It is for certain that the rest of the world is watching while we charter our course through the murky waters of the peace deal. The US and some other western powers are of the perception that the peace deal in Swat may just be an exercise by the Taleban to gain time in order to regroup or relocate for operations in another part of Pakistan or even in Afghanistan. While it is important for Pakistan to keep alive and abreast with the thinking and actions of powerful world capitals it must also ensure that these fears are addressed and that the peace arrangements proceed according to the pact agreed between the warring parties. While Pakistan cannot afford to be oblivious to world opinion it must also keep in mind that it cannot afford to have the Pakistan Army engaged in perpetual battle on its own soil. Because of the immense 'collateral damage' in inland operations the image of the Pakistan Army is heavily damaged by such operations and thus such endless military operations become counter productive. Pakistan certainly cannot afford to have its Army and people fall apart from each other. Thus, in order to avoid further military operations the peace accord reached must now succeed.

Who would Run Swat Now

Onward: It is clear that the government of NWFP had abdicated from governance of Swat in the face of the Taliban onslaught. The government could not stop police defections and other governmental functionaries from taking a bunkered position when the Taliban were effective and that too despite the



Mediators between the government and Taliban praying during the break in talks

large military presence in the valley. This fact is not going to be lost on the Taliban who are likely to assert themselves in having some political share in running the affairs of Swat on a day to day basis. If one personality, in this case Mullah Sufi Muhammad is

expected to march through the whole valley, all by himself, with the oppressed people of Swat following him in their quest for peace after months of horrific violence then that personality must also be expected to want a hand in the subsequent handling of affairs in the valley. In my opinion all this requires a very deft handling and somehow Mullah Sufi Muhammad will have to be kept onboard by the authorities.

This certainly is not the most ideal manner in which a government must function but then what is the alternative now that the accord has been arrived at? There are those who argue that today if the government has, under duress, signed an agreement in Swat similar things can happen elsewhere in the country too. What options do we now have on this aspect? The best and only option for the government is to make an honest effort to make this agreement work so that Swat does not slip back into violence and NOT repeat NOT allow such a situation to occur anywhere else in the country.

The Worst Implication Giving Birth to Many More Serious Implications: I am well aware of the fact just like most people that many serious questions are being raised around the country and by foreign powers regarding a negative overall impact of the Swat Peace Deal. My argument is that Pakistan is now in no position to go back on what was decided upon that brought about the promulgation of the Nizam-e-Adal Regulations of 2009.

The agreement brought about has to be put into operation with all sincerity so that a relapse into the same spiraling violence does not take place. Along with that the government should implement a speedy development program that should very quickly overshadow everything else so much so that the people of Swat get employment and a good source of income which then improves the general quality of life in Swat. The possibility to revert back into the vicious circle of violence will then automatically recede. In fact the possibility will then be removed totally and then, at some stage, the government will be able to wrest back the initiative it has presently surrendered.

Conclusion:

In Conclusion I shall say that for governments it is essential to foresee what might happen months and years from now due to the events that are taking place in the country/province today. Governments should be able to see what the situation is likely to be in a few years from now. People at the helm of affairs in 2001 should have been able to foresee the present situation. Unfortunately, they did not prove to be anywhere near being equal to the task. At the time that 9/11 had happened and the USA was shaping its responses that were getting clearer with each passing day I had written an article that was published in an English language daily. Pakistan was then shaping up to give unflinching support to the USA for the then obvious invasion of Afghanistan.

I had written:-

“Pakistan’s support can only be time oriented and not indefinite because an indefinite deployment of US forces in Pakistan or the indefinite use of its airspace can only rekindle the fundamentalists in Pakistan into staging a very sharp and violent reaction. These fundamentalists who are stronger, richer and better equipped than those in Afghanistan will then certainly retaliate and no regime, military or non military, will be able to stop them. The world will then have two Taliban countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan.”

This was written when the existence of the Taliban was not even heard of in Pakistan.