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## **Pakistan's Challenges and Response to Religious Extremism in Malakand Division: A Critical Reappraisal\***

### **Abstract**

*This research explores Pakistan's fight against religious extremism in Malakand Division. It examines initial negligence, failures, half-hearted efforts to solve the issue and then gradual successes of the State of Pakistan, in the region, against fanaticism. It seeks how the problem had been originated, how the extremist element was either ignored or supported by the State in early years? how the zealots reached to the level of no-return and became enormously violent? It further investigates when had the State realized the acuteness of the issue and decided in favour of taking action against the radical element of Malakand Division; from soft to hard action? This study finds that Pakistan's response and fight against religious extremism and terrorism in Malakand region had passed through five stages and had been proved successful only on later stage; after observing many weaknesses, failures, compromises and hardships.*

*The case of Malakand division has been opted for this study because extreme version of religious radicalism was prevailing there since 1990s after establishment of Tehrik-i-Nifaz-i-Shariat-i-Mohammadi (TNSM). The founder of TNSM was purely a fanatic cleric who had only incomplete knowledge of the religion. He was against democratic system, modern courts, lawyers and judges and considered all such elements as un-Islamic.<sup>1</sup> It is unfortunate that religious extremism, with various unrealistic ideas, was not only tolerated and ignored by the State but also was accommodated throughout 1990s. That element crossed all limits of patriotism and religious harmony gradually; starting from leading a private band of militarists to fight Afghan Jihad against USA in 2001-02 to introduction of tyrannical rule of Maulana Fazlullah's Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in between 2007-09 and then ended up on declaring Pakistan's Constitution as challengeable in 2009. It was only after the last challenge that a successful military operation was materialized.*

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## **Geographical Location and Short History**

Malakand is located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). In pre 1969 era, it consisted of three States i.e. Dir, Swat and Chitral along with Malakand agency in addition to three states. All three States formerly had their independent system of government. The people of areas except of Swat were less or not educated and orthodox in their behavior.<sup>2</sup> Wahabi trend was deep during first phase of colonial rule in India especially during first half of 19<sup>th</sup> century. The people of the region not only supported Jihad, but also participated in it. The remnants of Syed Ahmad's forces, after his martyrdom, took refuge in Swat valley.<sup>3</sup> Akhund of Swat provided conducive circumstances to accommodate freedom fighters in his territory at that time. Maulana Ahmad Shah of Fyzabad visited many areas of India to convince Muslims of various regions of India for Jihad before War of Independence 1857. The Sitana or Sithana Centre of Wahabi resistance in Swat continued its resistances most specifically till 1870.<sup>4</sup> The Jihadist tendency with full force was observed once again in the region by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century especially in 1897.<sup>5</sup> *Mullahs* continuously remained a significant segment of the States in choosing their Kings during early twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> However, last Wali of Swat was a charismatic personality and was as powerful as previous rulers were, but in addition to that, he was liberal. He introduced compulsory education for all boys and girls alike. He even opened Christian School with the help of Catholic nuns. He encouraged archaeological excavations, protected the *stupas* of Bhudha and magnificent statue of Bhudha.<sup>7</sup>

Malakand division was merged in Pakistan in 1969 and was given the status of Provincially Administered Tribal Area (PATA). It is located in the North-West of Pakistan. It has two international boundaries; with China in the North and Afghanistan in the West. Malakand Division consists of seven districts including Bunner, Chitral, Lower Dir, Upper Dir, Malakand, Shangla and Swat. Its divisional capital is Saidu Sharif. The most negative impact of the change of system was observed on the system of justice. Previously, Swat observed unique judicial system in which cases were decided in one or maximum two hearings without spending a single penny. People were accustomed to the procedure of very quick and free of cost justice.<sup>8</sup> The system of justice of the other States was also based on quick decision-making. With the introduction of Pakistan's usual court system in the region, the cases of masses were left unsolved for months and years; so people were dissatisfied. People of Swat were more resentful as Wali's just rule was shifted to bureaucracy of Pakistan. The system could not perform well. The Khans also, in big numbers, settled in big cities of Pakistan following two decades after merger. The authority of absentee landlords was then challengeable and their relationship with their tenants started breaking down.<sup>9</sup> It was that moment when clerics and religiously extremist element of latest version, especially veterans of Afghan Jihad, made space in the society of Swat and other States of Malakand Division.

## **First Stage: Accommodation vs. Negligence, 1989 to 2001**

On the first stage of rise of religious extremism in Swat, the government either ignored or accepted the existence of radical element in the Division besides its demands. It did not try to solve the problem altogether. With the departure of

Russia from Afghanistan, Jihad over there was ended, which resulted in joblessness of thousands of *Mujahedeen*. Many of them deviated towards Kashmir Jihad but still various turned to establish sectarian religious Political Parties, which started spreading intolerance in the society.

One such group was TNSM, established by a veteran of Afghan Jihad, Sufi Mohammad. He was an ex low cadre, not brilliant member of Jama'at-i-Islami (JI) and supported Hikmatyar's Hizbi Islami in Afghan Jihad. He left JI in 1989 and established TNSM on 28 June 1989. The other tradition says that TNSM was founded in 1992.<sup>10</sup> There is another opinion regarding establishment of TNSM. It says that it was established and funded by the intelligence agencies of Pakistan to check the influence of JI from the area. Deputy Commissioner, Habib ullah Khan was very active in the whole move and remained in direct contact with Sufi Mohammad.<sup>11</sup> Later, provincial or national governments also supported TNSM as a tool against JI or to make them influential in the region.<sup>12</sup>

Sufi Mohammad declared that the leaders and followers of the other Religio-Plitical Parties including JI and Jamiat-i-Ulma-i-Islam (JUI) including Qazi Hussain Ahmad, Maulana Fazlur Rehman and Samiul Haq were infidels as they were working for democratic system and that democratic system was un-Islamic. He believed that the parliament as well as casting vote by male, female, Muslims and non-Muslims with equality was again un-Islamic. He was against female education and even female participation in public life. They could not leave home for medical treatment even. Initially, its activities were restricted to Malakand division and Swat.<sup>13</sup> Its major objective was to enforce Sharia law in the country. The founder of the Party was Wahabi by faith and wanted introduction of *Wahabi Sharia* law in the country.<sup>14</sup>

In 1991 a case was filed in the Supreme court for implementation of *Sharia* law in Malakand division but the court decided against that and gave verdict in favour of usual law of the State. With that, TNSM became more violent in its demand.<sup>15</sup> The TNSM staged a mini insurgency in 1994 to materialize the objectives of the Party. The militants of TNSM occupied local airport, blocked highway between Pakistan and China and took out many demonstrations. In November 1994, one session judge along with lawyers and other judicial staff were kept as hostage in Matta, Swat; alleging the court as un-Islamic by TNSM. An MPA of the Provincial Assembly was also killed. Afghan veterans of war were prominent figures of that move.<sup>16</sup> TNSM got popularity in the region on account of different reasons including pledge of providing speedy justice and introduction of *Sharia* Law. People of Dir and Chitral besides Swat considered it a ray of hope and the land lords and Khans also supported it for their political ends.<sup>17</sup>

Frontier corps initiated a surgical operation in the region to bring the situation under control. The operation was successful but, unfortunately, Frontier government surrendered and while appeasing the culprits, introduced *Sharia* Law in the region in consultation with the Federal government with immediate effect. The PATA Regulation 1994 was also named as Nifaz-e-Nizam-e-Shariah Regulations. The new system dealt with the internal procedures of the Court and the Frontier government established *qazi* courts under it.<sup>18</sup> In later years, TNSM objected on land revenue system and claimed that it was a renegade structure.

Some culprits like advocate Muzaffar Saeed of TNSM, who was the most-wanted criminal in around twenty cases of theft, rape, robbery and murder etc. was released by the local security authorities due to involvement of provincial government.<sup>19</sup> It was a big blunder on part of the provincial government to accommodate TNSM's demands. The situation should be handled technically. The TNSM was continuously challenging the writ of the State, while using slogan of *Sharia* only. That slogan actually attracted support of the simple, uneducated masses of the region, who, had love for religion.

TNSM especially disturbed law and order situation in the months of April and May throughout 1990s, while holding processions, arranging sit-ins and blocking roads. Such activities gradually disturbed tourist industry of the region. It is alleged that Murree's tourist industrialists funded the leadership of TNSM for that cause so that Murree could attract more and more tourists.<sup>20</sup> It was responsible for destruction of tourist industry and the most famous resorts including Bahrain, Kalam and Maiden were targeted. Armed militants roamed around the hotels and streets to keep an eye that no unveiled woman should be seen on the roads. TNSM once again held various demonstrations in 1999 on being dissatisfied with Sharia regulations of 1994. The Federal and Provincial governments, once again, surrendered to TNSM's demands and *Shariah Nizam-e-Adle Regulation*, 1999 recommended for the modification in 1994 Regulations up to the satisfaction of TNSM.<sup>21</sup> The Court system did not show positive results even after second Regulations.

Besides movements for imposition of *Shariah* Law in Malakand division, TNSM emerged as a major threat for working of usual system of parliamentary democracy in the region. It kidnapped multiple members of Provincial and National Assembly and extended humiliating attitude towards them during period of hostage. One of them i.e. Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) Member of Provincial Assembly (MPA) from Swat Mr. Badiuzzaman was assassinated, while he was hostage to TNSM. Dr. Mehboobur Rehman of Swat, a Provincial Minister of PPP government, was kept as hostage at his home in Swat in 1994. Malik Muzaffar, a Member of National Assembly (MNA) from Dir was forced to wear black turban (symbol of TNSM) while being hostage and was forced to speak in a public gathering in favor of TNSM's *Shariah* Laws.<sup>22</sup>

Federal government besides Provincial government did not take the issue as a serious threat to Pakistan during the last decade of twentieth century. The episodes of kidnapping could also not be dealt successfully. In that situation, only one prominent resident of Swat, Afzal Khan, Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs, rightly judged the situation and tried to bring the matter in the cabinet meeting but he failed to do so.<sup>23</sup> He, later, stood bravely against Taliban in the region.

### **Second Stage: State of Confusion/Half-Hearted Efforts, 9/11 to 2007**

On second stage, the government of Pakistan still had not learnt from its past mistakes and was in state of confusion. In post 9/11 scenario, Musharraf government took only half-hearted measures to overcome the crisis of extremism in Malakand. It was Sufi Mohammad from among all fanatic Organizations, who came at the forefront, addressed mass-gatherings and assembled thousands of people for Jihad in Afghanistan; that time, against USA. He himself led an ill-

equipped band of ten thousand footmen and entered Afghanistan in 2001. The Pakistani security authorities and border forces turned a blind eye on that huge band of private army. The provincial governor, Iftikhar Hussain Shah, ordered the administration not to stop that big infiltration.<sup>24</sup> The State had not decided till that time to take clear-cut action against TNSM.

Almost all of the militarists were either killed or arrested by anti-Taliban factions in Afghanistan and few were imprisoned in Guantanamo prison.<sup>25</sup> Sufi Mohammad, somehow, managed to return back with only few of his followers. He was arrested on his return along with his few devotees, who could save their lives. On 12 January 2002, TNSM, along with other major Extremist Parties was banned,<sup>26</sup> as announced in a policy speech of Musharraf. He said that he wanted to eliminate sectarianism and religious extremism from Pakistani society and emphasized to make Pakistan a moderate Muslim State.<sup>27</sup>

Banning proved to be another half-hearted attempt of the State as TNSM continued its activities under cover, in Malakand Division.<sup>28</sup> Sufi Mohammad was replaced by Maulana Abdul Ghafoor, deputy of TNSM in Dir and Bajour. In addition to that, a lot of party followers or position-holders were released after getting guarantees from them.<sup>29</sup> The government of Pakistan neither disarmed them nor demobilized or rehabilitated them. The same strategy was adopted in the rest of Pakistan for other extremist groups. Sufi Mohammad was kept in jail but his son in law Maulana Fazlullah was released after seventeen months. He founded an illegal FM Radio in 2006 in his native village, Mamdheri: three km away from Saidu Sharif; headquarter of Swat and divisional headquarter of Malakad Division. For first few months, he used Radio for preaching only and remained peaceful.<sup>30</sup> He eloquently spoke to the people on religious issues and was successful to gather good number of adherents; males and females both.

TNSM was revived with full spirit after 2005 earthquake which badly hit Kashmir as well as Malakand Division. Besides re-establishment of TNSM through relief and rehabilitation efforts, Maulana Fazlullah used natural calamity to gather support of masses for his personal power. He created fear among locals and emphasized that they should be more Islamic and follow 'his style of Sharia',<sup>31</sup> to avoid natural calamities in future. People also liked his style of addressing especially females but later, he adopted brutal methods. He was highly inspired by Taliban style of government and ideology. He proved to be more aggressive and militant than the founder of the Movement.<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile, the military regime arranged for general elections 2002 in which Mutahida Mujlis e Amal (MMA) was largely successful in NWFP. The local bodies' elections of 2005 again proved to be effective for religious political parties, with the support of the military regime. Pervaiz Musharraf also visited Swat and addressed a very big gathering on 30 July 2005.<sup>33</sup> He announced for the start of many developmental projects. It was part of his election campaign for PML (Q). The people cast their vote in good number, however, women were not permitted to cast vote.

Malakand Division observed two-pronged dilemma since 2005 i.e. besides TNSM issue, Taliban also got routes in the region. In December 2007, Fazlullah was appointed as head of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Swat Chapter, which was

an extremely anti-State group. He also claimed that TNSM was component of the TTP. People of the region supported him, for the time being, socially, morally and financially due to his articulate speeches, high hopes for future and then due to Lal mosque operation in Islamabad. The operation was presented as a complete proof, to the people of Malakand division, against Pakistan government as anti-Islam.

Pakistani Taliban gradually started adopting fierce attitude. Practically they were more ruthless than Afghan Taliban. They either burnt or closed large number of Girls Schools. Opponents as well as culprits were publically beheaded and videos were circulated among masses to spread horror.<sup>34</sup> Self-created squads were developed to have check on citizens' behavior. Music, CD and other such shops were forcefully closed. Bakht Zeba, a former district council member of Swat was dragged on roads and then killed. Her dead body was hung for many hours. Her crime was only that she criticized Taliban on stopping girls to attend schools.<sup>35</sup> Names of the so called accused were repeated every night before execution.

Writ of the State was totally collapsed; many government officials and police officials had left their jobs to save their lives and dignity.<sup>36</sup> MMA's Provincial Government and Musharraf's Federal government ignored all such developments of Malakand Division in the period between 2005 and 2007. Over all, the State had not introduced definite policy to deal with the issue. Only few half-hearted and scattered steps had been taken, which further deepened the issue and enhanced power of the radicals, in the region.

### **Third Phase: From Military Operations to Peace Deals, 2007-2009**

The government of Pakistan, in that phase, had not initiated military operations in the region with full zeal to eradicate extremist element from Malakand. The two military operations had been started but ended up in peaceful truce. The State might be thinking for peaceful political settlement of the militant issue, which was not possible. The situation was moving from bad to worst. TTP included a lot of criminals and smugglers in its circles unlike the initial set up, which included madrassah students mostly. That new group totally upset KPK, PATA and FATA.<sup>37</sup> It had established a State within a State in Swat under Fazlullah. In early 2007, the Interior Minister could hardly secure himself from suicide bombing attack. He announced in early 2007 that the power of extremists had gone beyond limit. He informed the National Security Council, 'without swift and decisive action, they could destabilize the entire country.'<sup>38</sup>

The above situation led the State to initiate military operation; Operation *Rah-e-Huq (the Path of Truth)* in Swat in November. Initially 3000 troops were sent, which later on, added with 5000 more.<sup>39</sup> The militants quit Swat and left all government installation from November to December 2007,<sup>40</sup> only to return back soon. The first episode of the Operation *Rah-e-Huq* resulted in displacement of millions of inhabitants to other areas. The Operation observed temporary halt as Peace Agreement was signed between the extremist militants and the State in April/May 2008. It was signed with the help of Provincial government of MMA.<sup>41</sup> The Peace Agreement proved to be a failed policy of the State as it gave enough time to the retreated extremists' regained power<sup>42</sup> and to return back with even more force. TTP, within weeks, returned back even with more force and reaction than the previous one. They organized a lot of suicide attacks on Pakistani security

forces including police, military and even on common citizens. Important officials and government personnel were also targeted not only in Malakand Division and KPK but also throughout Pakistan.

Second phase of Operation *Rah-e-Huq* was started, finally, in July 2008 which continued until the end of the year.<sup>43</sup> The Operation was followed, unfortunately, by a peace deal without reaching at final success. It was signed on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2009 between Provincial government of Awami National Party (ANP) and PPP and TNSM.<sup>44</sup> Sufi Muhammad was instrumental in signing that Deal. He was released from jail by the provincial government for the said purpose as Fazlullah was his son in law. It was signed under pressure from public and media. Various sections of the society considered, at that time, that the deal was the only way out to lessen the difficulties of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). It was named as Malakand Accord or *Shariah Nizam-i-Adl* Agreement, which institutionalized *Sharia* Law in Malakand. The Accord meant that TNSM/TTP sovereignty was accepted in the region, which proved government's weakness and militants' strength.<sup>45</sup> The State could not unarm the militants and could not provide security to the followers of other sects than Wahabi. Sahibzada Haji Mohammad Fazal Kareem, MNA of Jamiat-i-Ulma-i-Pakistan (JUP) demanded that all other sects should be permitted safety and freedom to profess their belief in the region and that Sufi Mohammad's beliefs should not be imposed on followers of other sects by force.<sup>46</sup> Later circumstances proved that common citizens, who were not ready to accept TNSM's version of belief system were insecure and their lives were at stake.

The Federal government was also brought into scenario after signing the agreement and to develop national consensus on the policy. The Agreement was discussed and approved by the National Assembly. The special Cabinet meeting was called in which CMs of all four provinces and PM of Azad Kashmir gave their consent on the policy.<sup>47</sup> The Supreme Legislative body of the State, the National Assembly, also approved *Shariah Nizam-i-Adl* Regulations on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2009. Although NA had no right to introduce law in FATA or PATA; only President under Article 247 of the 1973 Constitution<sup>48</sup> had that right, yet politically elected government wanted to bring all parts of Pakistan on the same page through their representatives.

There are different views about failed military actions from 2007 to 2009. One view is that the Pakistan army was less or badly trained for low intensity conflict or guerrilla war-fare, so it suffered heavily in the process. Further, Pakistani forces were not equipped with modern weapons to fight guerrilla war and USA also did not provide sufficient equipment.<sup>49</sup> Another view is that Pakistani government avoided to consider TTP or extremists in Malakand division as full-fledged insurgency and tried to contain them.<sup>50</sup> In addition to that, Provincial government did not want to comprehend with the hardships and difficulties of IDPs.

The militants were bound to be peaceful under the Deal. They pledged that they would not attack on government officials, buildings, people, schools etc. and would not open training camps and check posts. Later circumstances proved that the Peace Deal was a technique, used by militants to buy time to regain power. The state and the military could not understand that. Further, the government

signed the agreement from a weak position.<sup>51</sup> The militants regained power until April 2009 and reoccupied various buildings and started establishing their rule in different parts of Malakand region including Mingora and Swat and started moving towards Shangla and Bunner. They also founded their check-points along the roads.<sup>52</sup> Swat was the most hardly-hit area in that situation.

The whole drastic situation ended up with the massive support for military action, not only from the masses of the region but also of the whole country and internationally.<sup>53</sup> Fazlullah announced that he was not bound by any Deal, signed by his father in law and adopted expansionist approach.<sup>54</sup> It was after that Deal that the extremists in Swat emerged as the most brutal in their behavior. In addition to all that, Sufi Muhammad challenged Pakistani Constitution, declared that all elected Prime Ministers and members of the Parliament were infidels and that democracy was an infidel system.<sup>55</sup> His that sermon, in the mosque, was telecasted on television channels throughout the country. Pakistani government and the military were awoken, then. Ashfaq Kiani, the then Military Chief announced that no one could be permitted 'to impose their way of life on the civil society of Pakistan.'<sup>56</sup> The parliamentarians also started reviewing the government's policy of the Peace Deal. They discussed that the purpose of Malakand Accord was restoration of peace, which unfortunately, had not been restored. Further, Sufi Mohammad's fatawas were criticized a lot. It was emphasized by the MNAs that Pakistan is a Muslim State with Islam as State religion and most of the members as Muslim and that no Sufi had right to declare members of the Parliament as non-Muslims. On the basis of Sufi Mohammad's intolerant and anti-Islam and anti-State policies, the government should review Peace Deal.<sup>57</sup> Media also changed its stance and started demanding for another military operation.

The State's strategy to initiate military operation and then take it back, while signing Peace Deals, proved to be a failed strategy during fourth phase. However, positive impact of that strategy was that fanatic and zealot approach of Sufi Muhammad made general public against him and his dogmatist followers. Now public, too, was demanding for massive military operation.<sup>58</sup>

#### **Fourth Stage: Clear-cut Policy-An All-Out Military Operation, 2009**

The fourth stage was actually the success story of Pakistan's fight against extremism in Malakand division. That time, the State decided in favour of an all-out Operation, with the support of Opposition Parties, led by Nawaz Sharif. Prime Minister, Yusuf Reza Gillani announced on Television in his address to the nation that the government had authorized the military to start 'decisive action'<sup>59</sup> against insurgents in Malakand Division. He said while addressing in the National Assembly that Constitution of the State, Courts, Parliament, writ of the provincial as well as federal government were challenged by the extremists in Malakand, 'the very existence of the state was at stake, we were left with no option,'<sup>60</sup> other than military action. It was named as operation *Rah-e-Rast* as military chief announced, 'we are conducting this operation to bring misguided people on the right path.'<sup>61</sup> It was started with 30,000 troops, backed by air force jets and helicopter gunship. Especially trained commandoes of guerrilla force were also dropped on mountains. It proved to be the bloodiest battle called as battle for



survival of Pakistan.<sup>62</sup> It was massively successful and militants were swept within few weeks. The military regained control of Mingora till the end of May: destroyed bunkers and captured ammunition in heavy quantity.<sup>63</sup> It was started in the first week of May and reached to its wrapping up stage in the first week of July 2009.<sup>64</sup> The said operation was expanded to tribal areas of Pakistan and even to South Punjab, later. Around 1700 militants had been killed including various prominent leaders only during the month of May.<sup>65</sup>

The Military Operation left around three to four million people as displaced.<sup>66</sup> IDPs took refuge in the camps of Charsada, Nowshera and Mardan. It was, since World War II, one of the largest evacuation of people.<sup>67</sup> The Federal government spared and transferred one billion rupees for IDPs. The provincial government of KPK was responsible for taking care of IDPs yet Federal government formed a Special Support Group (SSP) of Consisting of senior representatives of the Ministries of Interior, Health, Information, Broadcasting, Foreign Affairs, Finance and Cabinet. It was headed by Gen. Nadeem Ahmed as he had vast experience in Relief and rehabilitation operations.<sup>68</sup> It was made responsible for many arrangements related to IDPs including registration, camp management, medical facilities, and procurement and relief activities.

The cost of Military Operation was high in another way, too i.e loss of infrastructure and human life. Around one million houses were either fully or partially damaged, approximately five hundred schools were destroyed, 663 kilometer roads and 43 bridges were fully or partially damaged in only Swat valley.<sup>69</sup> Health and educational facilities were badly hampered besides large destruction of transportation network and hotel industry.<sup>70</sup> Main grid station was blasted by the militants, which resulted in two months total shut-down in Swat.<sup>71</sup> Water supply and sanitation facilities were also damaged a lot. Tourism industry observed major decline, which increased financial difficulties for the local inhabitants after their return to their homes.

The Operation *Rah-i-Rast* observed the military, political government, media, masses of Pakistan and even local inhabitants on the same page. Afzal Khan Lala, a Pakistani nationalist stayed in Swat and stood against Taliban during military operation. He owed great respect among military as well as public. He said, 'I will die but will not leave the ground to militants,' when his well-wishers, during military operation, asked him to leave Swat.<sup>72</sup> The major General, Ijaz Awais, Commander of Swat Operation said, 'he was a symbol of resistance against the Taliban. When all other Khans had fled, he chose to stay back and fight.'<sup>73</sup> An All Parties Conference was called and Military chief also briefed the members of Parliament on Operation.<sup>74</sup> All of them appreciated an all-out military operation so that the extremism, exercised in the name of religion, could be overcome. It was due to unanimous approach of all sectors of the society that a successful operation could be materialized.

### **Fifth Stage; Dealing with Post-Military Operation Issues, Post 2009 Era**

The post 2009 strategy of the State, to deal with the after-effects of military operation, proved to be beneficial. Civil and military establishment introduced four types of measures to overcome extremism in the area on long term basis. The four aspects included militant de- radicalization and rehabilitation program and

infrastructural development. De radicalization and emancipation program was initiated in Swat. Around 2500 militants, who had been arrested during operation *Rah-e-Rast* were psychologically treated in two prominent rehabilitation centers; Sabaoon and Rastoon. Four-tier Program was initiated there including education, vocational training, counseling and therapy. The earlier one was reserved for trained teenage suicide-bombers, whereas the former one was fixed for rehabilitation and treatment of militants of the age group between 19 and 25. The third Centre, Mashal, was opened to train families of the militants under training, so families might take good care of their children with proficiency.<sup>75</sup> The program was developed by military but materialized by Hum Pakistan foundation (HPE) under supervision of Farieha Paracha. Later vocational Centres were also opened, so to teach the ex-militants to earn their livelihood respectfully.<sup>76</sup> By July 2010, peace generally had been restored in Swat and people had returned back to their home.<sup>77</sup> Counter insurgency doctrine of Pakistan had four phase i.e. clear, hold, build and transfer till 2012. Pakistani forces reached to the second phase in Malakand Division. The follow up procedure on last two phases was slow. IDPs settlement process was also slow, but continued.<sup>78</sup>

Beside above specified measures some general counter terrorism measures had been introduced by the political government of PML (N) under Nawaz Sharif to overcome extremism. Such general measures had left a deep impact on the masses of Malakand Divisions also. Measures included revision of anti-terrorist Act 1997 for two times; one in 2014 and the second in 2015. Both amendments empowered law enforcement agencies to shoot the suspect at the spot, search without warrant, remand for an extended period and prosecute suspects on the basis of digital evidence.<sup>79</sup> It drafted National Security Policy<sup>80</sup> and constituted some specialized Institutes or Directorates to deal with extremism including National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA)<sup>81</sup>, and Anti-Terrorism Task Forces<sup>82</sup> in Punjab and KP.<sup>83</sup> Military courts were also established under 21<sup>st</sup> amendment in the constitution in 2014 which dealt with hard core terrorists on priority basis.<sup>84</sup> Pakistan judicial system was very lethargic: even dead to deal with the criminal cases. Military courts were established for two years, however, were extended for the period of another two years under 28<sup>th</sup> Amendment Bill 2017.<sup>85</sup>

Fazlullah, meanwhile, with hundreds of his followers took refuge in Afghan provinces of Kunar and Nuristan. He, from there, continued his activities of assassination of his opponents, killing of Pakistan security personnel, bombing etc. in Swat and other parts of Pakistan.<sup>86</sup> He was appointed as TTP chief after murder of Hakimullah Mehsud in drone attack of 2013.<sup>87</sup> It created various factions in TTP as many were not ready to accept him as leader.<sup>88</sup> In that same year, Taliban leadership offered Pakistani government to conduct Peace talks on condition to release two prominent TTP leaders from Swat including others. They were Haji Muslim Khan, the former TTP spokesman from Swat and Mehmud Khan, Senior Taliban commander in Swat, but the government rejected the offer.<sup>89</sup> Later, they diverted to other areas of KPK than Swat. Currently, motorway to Swat has been made operational and highly peaceful circumstances are prevailing there. Tourism industry has once again been observing period of boom.

## **Conclusion**

The detailed evaluation of Pakistan's fight against religious extremism in Malakand region is replica of the same fight in all other regions of Pakistan. The paper finds that TNSM was initially supported and used not only by the military but also by the political governments to deepen their roots in the region but gradually TNSM crossed all limits and stood against the State's policy especially after 9/11. The stages include negligence or acceptance of the phenomenon at initial level. Throughout 1990s, the governments of federal and provincial level ignored the activities of TNSM and extremism took its roots in the minds of majority of the youngsters of the region. No government tried to counter TNSM's extremist activities, so the problem gradually transformed into challenging phenomenon. Second stage was peculiar due to half hatred policies/steps, taken by the State and it was observed after 9/11. Although TNSM was banned and Sufi Mohammad was arrested, yet roots of extremism in the region remained unaddressed. The situation was widely and successfully used by Maulana Fazluallah, who not only established an illegal FM radio to project his religious radicalism but also emerged as founder of Tehrik-e-Taliban in Malakand division. The State still could not take final step. The third stage was odd again due to the State's confused policies: Military Action versus Peace Deals. Two military actions had been initiated by the State but both ended up with peace deals. Both peace deals i.e. 2008 and of 2009 proved to be disastrous for peace as at both occasions militarists emerged even with more power. Every peace agreement proved to be new mistake of the government's policy and fight against extremism. Peace deals probably had been signed to save Pakistani army from total defeat. The reason might be less or no training of Pakistani military to deal with civil or internal insurgency. It is perfectly trained to fight a conventional war, though; it gradually improved its weaknesses and finally, achieved major success in case of Malakand.

The fourth stage however, observed decisive and clear-cut policy of Pakistan state. That time an all-out military operation was started against extremist element with no option of Peace Deal. The military and the politically elected government had learnt till that time that the extremist element could be washed out with military operation only. That strategy proved to be successful. A long term and hard military operation, no doubt, had many negative implications such as displacement of local inhabitants, destruction of property and infrastructure etc., but such harmful impacts were far less than the disease of extremism and terrorism. The fifth stage was another right step in the right direction. The post-military operation issues were not left unsettled but the State took responsibilities to solve those issues. Besides initiating de radicalization and rehabilitation programs, infrastructural built up programs were also initiated. The state helped IDPs to settle back in the region. It is true that the State finally took effective decision and achieved success against militarist and extremist but still there are many challenges to be faced. Still the problem has not been rooted out. There is still fear that extremist element may get routes in the region. The challenges are less literacy rate, existence of sectarian or militarist madrassahs in the region, presence of external factor, extra involvement of military in politics, less job opportunities, less economics development etc. and such factors can be used by any extremist

mind in future, too. Further, local law enforcement force i.e. Frontier fore should be trained and equipped fully. If we want to eradicate prospect extremism in future from the region totally, all such issues should be addressed at priority level.

It is recommended that no peace deals should be signed with insurgents, extremists, and terrorists as they are against the unity of the state and a permanent danger. The only solution to this issue is carrying out a military operation against radicals, on one side and introduction of counter-terrorist measures of various kinds, on the other side.

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