



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Evaluating the Cultural and Social Impacts of the 2009 Military Operation in Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK): A Case Study of Operation Rah-e-Rast**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study seeks to explain the implications of military operation in Swat Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). In May 2009, Pakistan launched Operation Rah-e-Rast to reclaim control of the Swat Valley from Taliban insurgents challenging state authority. This extensive military campaign had both positive and negative impacts on the region. This study offers an analytical framework, by applying qualitative approach to examine the social and cultural outcomes of the Rah-e-Rast operation, focusing on the various losses experienced by civilians. Despite its success in combating militants, the kinetic nature of the operation caused significant destruction, adversely affecting the local infrastructure, education system, economy, tourism, and the cultural and psychological well-being of the residents. The resulting devastation hindered the region's development and left the threat of the Taliban lingering. This research is valuable and offers recommendations for policymakers and future researchers, helping them address the concerns of the affected population, formulate more effective policies, and adopt softer approaches for achieving long term peace.

**KEYWORDS** Post-operation, Swat Valley, Terrorism, Tourism

**Introduction**

Operation Rah-e-Rast, launched by the Pakistan Army in 2009, marked a pivotal moment in the fight against Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants in the Swat Valley. This decisive military offensive aimed to dismantle the Taliban's stronghold and restore governmental control, but its repercussions were profound, impacting the region's social, economic, educational, gender, and cultural landscapes (Yaseen & Muzaffar, 2018; Khan & Khan, 2021). The roots of Talibanization in Pakistan trace back to the 1970s, with the establishment of numerous madaris (religious schools) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Baluchistan, where mujahedeen were trained for the Soviet-Afghan War. Pakistan's support for various jihadist groups continued through the 1980s Afghan Jihad and into the 1990s with the backing of the Afghan Taliban to further national interests. The post-9/11 US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 saw terrorists cross into KPK due to the porous Pak-Afghan border, leading to attacks within Pakistan. This necessitated crackdowns by both Pakistan and the US on these militant groups, culminating in several military operations in KPK (Giustozzi, 2023).

The spread of Talibanization eventually saw a faction led by Maulana Fazlullah, aligned with Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-Mohammadi (TNSM), infiltrate the Swat Valley. This group, closely linked with the TTP, defied state authority, attacking civilians, educational institutions, businesses, and security forces (Avis, 2016). Despite a peace

accord signed with TNSM in April 2009, the Taliban's continued aggression led to the launch of Operation Rah-e-Rast in May 2009. The operation aimed to expel the TNSM from Swat and restore order, profoundly affecting the valley's societal and cultural fabric (Shah, 2018).

The research addresses a significant gap by focusing on the severe social and cultural impacts of Operation Rah-e-Rast in Swat, including its effects on education, infrastructure, tourism, economy, populace mental health and domestic security. While existing literature has broadly explored the implications of overall military operations in KPK, this study specifically assesses the consequences of Rah-e-Rast in Swat, aiming to provide valuable insights into its lasting impacts. The long-term effects on Swat's populace include pervasive fear, suppression of cultural values, and extensive destruction of infrastructure and the economy, adversely affecting local health and education. Despite initial counter-terrorism efforts bringing some recovery, the Taliban's resurgence in 2023 has reignited fears and replicated the psychological, social, and cultural outcomes experienced earlier, prompting protests from locals demanding peace and security. The strained relationship between state security forces and civilians further complicates the situation, with locals questioning the efficacy of the state's security measures (Swat jirga concerned over regrouping of terrorists, 2023).

This research aims to explore the cultural and social ramifications of Operation Rah-e-Rast in Swat Valley, offering insights to address its long-term impacts and suggesting guidelines for practical measures to restore peace, security, and harmony in the region. Potential research limitations include challenges in accessing relevant data, funding constraints, and time and resource limitations for a comprehensive study. The methodology involves qualitative methods, using published secondary data from various sources, and is descriptive in nature to provide a detailed understanding of the operation's outcomes. The study will contribute to existing literature, serving as a foundation for further research, policy makers and aiding students, particularly in International Relations.

The overall structure includes an engaging introduction, a brief contextual background, a comprehensive literature review, a detailed methodology section, data analysis, and a concluding segment that highlights the cultural and social outcomes of the operation. This research underscores the need for further studies to delve deeper into the long-term effects and implications, aiming to pave the way for sustained peace and stability in the Swat region.

The Problem Statement highlights that in December 2008, the Taliban had occupied 75% of the Swat region. By early 2009, their influence had spread to Buner and other adjacent areas. In response, Operation Rah-e-Rast was launched on May 9, 2009, resulting in the internal displacement of approximately 2.5 million people, many of whom sought refuge in camps in Mardan and other areas (A cry from the valley: Narration by the people of Malakand, 2009). The conflict severely impacted education, with 137 schools destroyed and 190 female government schools burned, leaving 8,000 female teachers without jobs and approximately 80,000 girls deprived of education (Shah, 2018). Swat Valley, once a tourism hub contributing 6.3% to Pakistan's GDP in 2006, saw its tourism industry decimated by the Taliban, dropping to 0% by 2008 due to insecurity (Ali, Ullah, & Wahab, 2020). Despite initial military success, the resurgence of the Taliban in 2023 has rekindled fear and insecurity, prompting locals to demand better security measures and straining the relationship between state security forces and civilians (Swat jirga concerned over regrouping of terrorists, 2023).

This research aims to investigate the long-term psychological impacts of fear and insecurity on the people of Swat Valley after the operation, to examine the social and cultural repercussions of the Swat operation, and to assess the educational and infrastructural challenges faced by the community of Swat Valley during the post-operation period.

Theoretical Framework employs the securitization theory presented by the Copenhagen School of security studies, which includes scholars like Ole Waever and Barry Buzan. Securitization theory posits that securitization is a process where an actor frames an issue as an existential threat to justify extraordinary measures to address it (Munster, *Securitization*, 2012). In the context of Operation Rah-e-Rast, the Pakistani government and military framed the Taliban issue as a national security threat through speeches, notifications, and actions, convincing the public that military intervention was necessary. The government used media and communication strategies, including the establishment of Radio Swat by ISPR, to shape public perception and justify the military operation (Hussain, 2019). This securitization process profoundly impacted societal norms, community relationships, and cultural expressions in Swat, with emergency measures such as school closures and curfews disrupting daily life.

## Literature Review

In "*Jihadism in Pakistan*", Antonio Giustozzi traces the origins of Talibanization to the 1970s, when madrasas were established in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Baluchistan, serving as training grounds for Mujahedeen during the Soviet-Afghan War. In the 1980s, Pakistan supported jihadist groups against the Soviet Union, and in the 1990s, it backed the Afghan Taliban to further its national interests. Following the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, terrorists entered KPK through the porous Pakistan-Afghanistan border, challenging the state's authority and launching attacks on Pakistan. This led to the intensification of Talibanization, prompting military crackdowns by Pakistan and the United States (Giustozzi, 2023).

Khurram Iqbal and Muneeb Salman, emphasize in their article "*Gap Analysis of Pakistan's Non-Kinetic Responses to Violent Extremism*," that Pakistan employs both kinetic and non-kinetic measures to combat terrorism. However, the country has predominantly relied on hard measures, such as capture, killing, and military operations in areas like South Waziristan, North Waziristan, various agencies, and the Malakand Division, including Buner, Shangla, and Swat. Despite these efforts, long-term peace and stability have not been achieved. Studies suggest that 80% of the measures used to counter insurgency were non-kinetic, while only 20% involved military operations. In addition to these strategies, the authors argue that social and economic development must also be prioritized to ensure lasting peace (Iqbal & Salman, 2023).

In her article "*Conflict in the Swat Valley of Pakistan: Pakhtun Culture and Peacebuilding Theory-Practice Application*," Saira Bano Orakzai analyzes the chaos in Swat resulting from Talibanization, examining its historical, religious, political, judicial, gender, and economic dimensions. She highlights the importance of the Pakhtunwali Jirga system for peacebuilding and suggests the role of NGOs in addressing the situation and also offering strategies for violence prevention. However, this article overlooks the impact of military operations on the local population, which is a central focus of this study (Orakzai, 2011).

The Omar Asghar Khan Foundation reported details the displacement of approximately 2 million people in Swat Valley due to military operations in 2009. The report reveals that the government forced residents to leave and live in camps with inadequate relief. While the government planned repatriation by July 25, 2009 however, the government lacked a clear resettlement policy, exacerbating local suffering. While the report covers the psychological, economic, and infrastructural challenges faced by IDPs, it does not address the long-term impacts of military operations (A cry from the valley: Narration by the people of Malakand, 2009).

In "*Talibanization and Military Operation Rah-e-Rast: The Final Knockback in Swat*," Anwar Shah analyzes the Rah-e-Haq 2007 and Rah-e-Rast 2009 military operations, detailing their phases and highlighting their negative impacts on Pakistan. The article also touches on the situation in Swat after the operations, including the planned return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in late August 2009. However, it does not fully address the post-operation consequences (Shah, 2018).

The article "*post-operation tourism in Swat Valley*" by Rahman Ali, Ihsanullah, and Abdul Wahab examines the revival of tourism in Swat Valley post-operations, comparing tourism before and after the conflict. Once a prominent tourist destination, Swat saw a significant decline in tourism due to Taliban presence and insecurity. The authors acknowledge the government's efforts to revitalize tourism but focus solely on this sector, leaving other important areas unexplored which is addressed in this study (Ali, Ullah, & Wahab, 2020).

Muhammad Fahim Khan and Dr. Muhammad Ayaz Khan, in their article "*Causes and Impacts of Terrorism in Swat Valley*," explore the drivers and consequences of terrorism in Swat. They identify causes such as economic hardship, lack of education and healthcare, social injustice, political instability, and divisions. The article also highlights the significant human and economic losses, and widespread destruction. However, it does not address the impacts of military operations in Swat (Khan & Khan, 2021).

The existing literature extensively covers the history of terrorism in the Swat region, as well as the causes and consequences of military operations. However, it overlooks a thorough analysis of the suffering experienced by the local population due to counter-terrorism operations, particularly in terms of education, economy, tourism, and infrastructure damage, which are the primary focus of this study.

### **Contextual background**

The Swat Valley was previously part of Afghanistan until the Durand Line Agreement of 1893 transferred it to the British Empire. A Jirga convened in 1915 to formally recognize Swat as a distinct state, with Mian Gul Abdul Wadud assuming leadership in 1917. He was conferred the title of Wali Swat in 1926 along with an allocated annual budget. In 1947, Swat, then a princely state, acceded to Pakistan while maintaining its internal sovereignty. In 1969, Swat was integrated into Pakistan under the provisions of the 1973 constitution, becoming part of PATA (Provincially Administered Tribal Areas), an extension of the national governance structure in the region (Orakzai, 2011). As a result, issues arose in the Swat Valley due to changes in the judicial system and religious phenomena. Historically, Swat's judicial system operated under the Jirga system, known for its quick and cost-effectiveness. Cases were typically resolved in the first or second hearing, prompting a widespread demand for swift justice among the populace (Zafar, 2011). A religious issue also emerged as a consequence of

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's socialist policies in 1970, particularly concerning the abolition of private property, which posed a threat to the Khan of Swat Valley. Consequently, people began to demand the implementation of Sharia law, citing its alignment in contrast to Islamic principles. In response to these demands, Sufi Muhammad founded the Islamic organization TNSM on June 28, 1989, adopting the motto 'Shariah or Shahadat' (Orakzai, 2011).

The TNSM gained popularity in Swat in 1994 and initiated the Tor Patki movement, advocating for the swift implementation of Islamic law. As the TNSM escalated its campaign to establish Sharia courts, Sufi Muhammad initially faced threats, prompting a violent response from the government, which deployed the paramilitary Frontier Corps. The operation concluded following negotiations between the provincial administration and the TNSM, resulting in an agreement to enforce limited Sharia law under the Nizam-e-Shariat Regulation. Following the events of September 11, 2001, Sufi Muhammad became involved in the conflict in Afghanistan and mobilized over 10,000 followers to engage in combat against the US army (Avis, 2016). The TNSM leader Sufi Muhammad was arrested in Afghanistan along with his forces during the jihad in 2001. In 2002, his son-in-law Maulana Fazlullah emerged in Imam Dehri in the Swat Valley, assuming leadership of TNSM in Sufi Muhammad's absence. Maulana Fazlullah maintained ties with TTP and shared a similar vision for the imposition of Islamic laws. Lacking formal education, he utilized 30 illegal FM radio stations to propagate his message widely (Khan & Khan, 2021).

Fazlullah sought to capitalize on public discontent with the government's delayed response to the 2005 earthquake by providing aid and engaging in reconstruction efforts for earthquake victims in Pakistan's Jammu and Kashmir region. He also propagated the idea that the disaster was a consequence of people's misconduct. The aftermath of the 2007 Lal Masjid takeover in Islamabad further exacerbated the conflict in the Swat Valley (Avis, 2016). On October 31, 2006, an American missile strike targeted a madrassah in FATA's Bajaur Agency, resulting in the deaths of 80 students, many of whom were under the age of twelve (Orakzai, 2011). These events marked the true resurgence of the organization. The Taliban intensified their violent activities through bombings, suicide attacks, and targeting state security forces, infrastructure, and schools. Consequently, owing to the unstable circumstances in 2007, the government initiated the Rah-e-Haq operation to restore peace in the region. This operation commenced in collaboration with local authorities with the objective of cleaning the Swat Valley of Taliban influence. By December, military forces had pushed militants back into the mountains. To address the escalating situation, the government also entered into agreements with militants to mitigate the threat, which the Taliban subsequently violated, continuously challenging state writ. This led to renewed tensions and worsening conditions, prompting Pakistan's military to adopt a new strategy for peace. In April 2009, the state signed the Malakand Accord with the TNSM group, allowing for the implementation of Islamic law in the Malakand Division. However, the Taliban later abandoned this accord. Consequently, Pakistani forces launched a second offensive operation named Rah-e-Rast in Swat on May 9, 2009, aimed at expelling the TNSM group from Swat and reclaiming control of the region (Abbasi, Kumar, & Hussain, 2018).

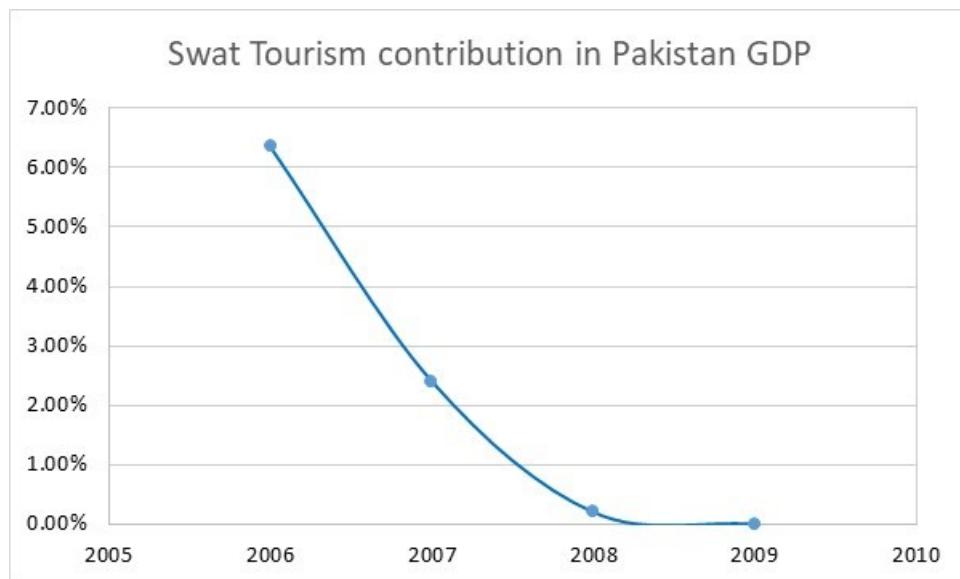
The Parliament provided full support to the army during the April 2009 Swat operation against the Taliban. The government launched a successful awareness and information program aimed at altering public perception of militants. Additionally, the government issued 64 notifications through PEMRA restricting media coverage of organizations or individuals associated with the Taliban or other terrorist groups.

Furthermore, in February 2009, two months before the military operation, the ISPR initiated Radio Swat with assistance from Pakistan's military public relations branch as part of an awareness campaign (Hussain, 2019).

On May 9, 2009, a large-scale operation against the Taliban in Swat commenced, resulting in approximately 2 million civilians fleeing their homes to camps in various cities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Children and women faced significant hardships as militants specifically targeted and destroyed school buildings, particularly girls' schools. During the conflict, 120 girls' schools and 80 other schools were demolished, leaving a lasting impact on the region, particularly on girls' education, which was heavily targeted by the Taliban (Khan Z. A., 2012). This operation Rah e Rast had far-reaching consequences, resulting in a profound impact on the social, political life, economic, security, education, gender and cultural fabric of the region (Khan & Khan, 2021). Later, a survey conducted revealed that 78% of the respondents believed the military operation was a consequence of government negligence; 85% reported experiencing harm during the military operation; and 86% perceived that the military operations had an adverse impact on the lives of innocent people (Ahmad, 2019).

### Impacts on Tourism

The tourism sector plays a crucial role globally in fostering peace and improving social conditions. Swat, known for its natural beauty, attracts tourists from around the world. Unfortunately, this picturesque valley suffered a severe setback in 2007 due to terrorism. According to a study, Swat Valley, once renowned for its tourism with a contribution of 6.3% to Pakistan's GDP in 2006, saw this figure drop to 2.4% in 2007. Subsequently, from 2008 onwards, tourism dwindled to negligible levels due to Taliban presence and prevailing insecurity, leading to a significant decline in the tourism sector. (Ali, Ullah, & Wahab, 2020).



Before the conflict, the Swat Valley had 855 hotels and 405 restaurants, supporting approximately 40,000 jobs in the tourism sector. The industry incurred losses amounting to Rs 60 billion due to the crisis (Orakzai, 2011). Undoubtedly, infrastructure serves as the cornerstone of the tourism industry, and it suffered severe damage during the Swat conflict. On one hand, militants destroyed numerous homes, buildings, hotels, bridges, shops, and roads. On the other hand, military operations in Swat also caused significant

damage to various infrastructures. According to a survey, between 8,000 and 10,500 homes were damaged during the Swat operation (Ali, Ullah, & Wahab, 2020).

It also adversely impacts Pakistan's tourism industry. According to a 2012 report from a tourism organization, Pakistan accounted for just 0.09% of global tourism, nearly negligible. In South Asia, total tourist arrivals reached 14.37 million, with Pakistan's share being 6.7%, while India's share stood at 46%. The 2015 Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index further highlighted Pakistan's challenges, ranking it poorly with an average position of 125th out of 141 countries. Specifically, in security, human resources, and tourism, Pakistan ranked 138<sup>th</sup>, and in tourism Pakistan was 141st which is pitiful despite its reputation as one of the world's most affordable tourist destinations (Ali, Ullah, & Wahab, 2020).

Following the military operation, the tourism sector of the valley partially recovered. In early July 2010, a regional festival and peace gala were organized in Swat. Additionally, in 2010, the military initiated de-radicalization and rehabilitation efforts, supported by a provincial government allocation of 4.4 billion rupees. This funding was allocated to programs such as Sabaon, Rastoon, Mishal, Sparlay, and Feast, which focused on capturing and rehabilitating radicals and Taliban followers. The military provided them education, vocational training, financial support, and assistance in repairing the damages caused by conflict (Iqbal & Salman, 2023). Furthermore, various peace festivals were organized to promote peace, and the government implemented a 50% discount at Serena and PTDC for tourists. Initiatives to improve infrastructure began in 2012 with the assistance of foreign funding, including contributions of 7.5 million USD from the Saudi ambassador, 4.3 million USD from the US government, and 13 million USD from the World Bank. The Beautification of Swat project was launched with a 1 billion rupee allocation from the KP government, supplemented by contributions such as 3.5 million USD from stakeholders like PARSA in 2012 and 14 million USD from the Japanese government in 2013. Imran Khan's government also initiated efforts to adorn historical sites with cultural depictions, plant trees, and employ local workers in the tourism sector to revive tourism. Despite these commendable efforts to restore Swat tourism after Operation Rah-e-Rast, the progress remains modest compared to the destruction caused (Ali, Ullah, & Wahab, 2020).

Furthermore, with the assistance of security forces, efforts to enhance regional security have significantly contributed to a 300% increase in annual tourism in Pakistan over the past few years, reaching 1.75 million visitors in 2017, with a notable 30% rise in domestic tourism. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, tourism contributed \$19.4 billion to Pakistan's economy in 2018, with expectations of this figure rising to \$36.1 billion over the next decade. As of the last day of 2023, the United Nations World Tourism Organization has declared Pakistan the top destination for tourism. (Pakistan declared 'best performing' in tourism, 2023). These initiatives by the security forces represent significant steps towards prosperity and stability, all of which were linked with peace and security (Hussain, 2019).

## Local Displacement

The army launched an extensive military operation in May 2009, codenamed "Rah-e-Rast," aimed at reclaiming control of the Swat region from the Taliban (Abbasi, Kumar, & Hussain, 2018). As a result, approximately 2 million people from Swat were displaced, with approximately 70,000 pregnant women among them (Orakzai, 2011). A report based on interviews conducted at the end of 2009 with Internally Displaced

Persons revealed that the majority stated they did not leave their homes due to Taliban brutalities. Rather, they were compelled to flee because of military actions that included imposed curfews and intense shelling and mortar fire. Lack of adequate food in their homes left their children scared and unhealthy due to hunger and thirst. This dire situation forced them into a situation akin to doomsday, leaving them no choice but to evacuate their homes. Moreover, before commencing the operation, the Army provided a mere 3-hour notice to vacate their homes. Heavy shelling persisted during their departure, prompting them to flee without securing their residences. Taliban positioned themselves near residential areas, fired, and then retreated, leading the Army to initiate shelling and mortar fire at those locations, resulting in numerous casualties (A cry from the valley: Narration by the people of Malakand, 2009).

During the operation, people suffered greatly as they remained confined to their homes for months under curfew conditions. They lacked essential supplies such as food, electricity, and water ( Khan & Khan, 2021). It was a lengthy and arduous journey, particularly challenging for the impoverished who lacked funds for transportation expenses. During their journey, individuals were subjected to searches by the Army without their kameez. Many left younger family members behind to safeguard their homes, with little information available regarding their well-being. Some were uncertain about the survival of those left behind. Uncertain of their destination, many migrated to places like Mardan and Swabi, where they resided in camps and government schools. People faced many difficulties because they had nothing in their hands, and governments had no policy to fulfill their basic needs. Assistance came primarily from private sources, local communities, NGOs, and social activists. Government aid totaling 25,000 and 2-months rations were distributed only to register (55,000) individuals, leaving thousands unregistered and ineligible for support. Furthermore, inadequate healthcare facilities led to health issues among the displaced, forcing them to bear their own medical expenses. Poor sanitation exacerbated an already challenging situation for the IDPs (A cry from the valley: Narration by the people of Malakand, 2009). Swat immigrants faced many problems in camps during IDPs because they had never experienced them before ( Khan & Khan, 2021).

Furthermore, the government announced to leave the government schools on the 25th of July, 2009, yet it lacked proper repatriation planning for IDPs. Citizens desired a safe return to a peaceful Swat but were unwilling to do so until the government assured complete tranquility in the region. Some areas still faced curfews, and people lacked income sources due to the destruction of their crops, fields and businesses during the conflict. Instead of providing assistance, the government mishandled both the displacement and repatriation processes, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the region. People encountered greater difficulties than before; Taliban attacks had destroyed schools, depriving them of education. Citizens demanded government focus on rebuilding educational institutions and sought compensation to reconstruct their homes and businesses. The destruction of hotels during the operation added to their woes. People yearned for peace, stability, and safety from the Taliban, as well as swift recovery of infrastructure, roads, hospitals, water, and electricity, essential for peaceful living. Many had suffered psychological distress, People wanted that military should act judicially with citizens as military forces are our brothers and our enemies are the same. These were considered basic life necessities, yet the government appeared to falter at every turn (A cry from the valley: Narration by the people of Malakand, 2009).

However, in June 2009, the military declared that Swat had been cleared of Taliban presence, and the government also announced the eradication of terrorists from

the Swat Valley. Police resumed their duties in November 2009. Despite these positive developments, a suicide attack on an ANP leader in November 2009 posed a renewed threat to local residents ( Khan & Khan, 2021). On Oct 9, 2012, there was an attack on Malala Yousafzai in Mingora city highlighted a threat for people that still Taliban exist (Ahmad, 2019). The Rah-e-Rast operation proved to be destructive for both the area and civilians, characterized by its kinetic strategy. However, the threat persists as Talibanization has not been completely eradicated from the Swat region ( Khan & Khan, 2021). Until 2018, there was a slight threat of Taliban presence, evidenced by threat letters received by some political leaders from unknown sources. However, after 2018, the terrorism threat diminished significantly due to ongoing efforts by the military and local communities.

In 2023, however, the Taliban re-emerged, posing renewed threats to the region's populace. Consequently, people are now demanding enhanced safety and security measures from the government, as they have already borne the consequences of previous turmoil.

### **Psychological impacts**

The military operations profoundly disrupted both the social and psychological structures of society, amidst a prevailing atmosphere of tension. Residents in conflict zones, as well as the broader populace of Pakistan, have been directly affected psychologically by the violence. Common symptoms observed include suicidal ideation, anxiety, depression, and nightmares, often arising subsequent to the loss of family members or homes. Children, in particular, have borne a significant burden on their mental well-being, despite pervasive feelings of insecurity, helplessness, anxiety, and stress experienced by both adults and children who had been compelled to flee. Many young individuals in Swat have been exposed to acts of brutality committed by terrorists, such as assaults on schools and the targeted killings of teachers and family members. As a result, a considerable number of individuals sought counseling due to the onset of depression and other psychological disorders (Khan Z. A., 2012).

The federal Ministry of Health reported that symptoms such as depression, acute stress, post-traumatic disorders, fear, and acute and chronic insomnia were prevalent. According to mental health programs, a significant number of displaced children, primarily aged between 3 and 11 in PATA and FATA regions, exhibited these psychological issues. Dr. Khalid Mufti, former President of the Pakistan Psychiatric Society, noted that more than 54% of the population residing in conflict zones displayed signs of acute stress, PTSD, depression, anxiety, loss of appetite, and disrupted sleep patterns. Approximately 60% of women experienced post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and fear, whereas males predominantly exhibited symptoms of depression. The actual number of psychiatric cases may be substantially higher than 54%, particularly among those living in remote areas lacking access to medical facilities. These individuals urgently require recovery assistance and a safe environment. They look towards the government for support, but there was a lack of coherent policy to facilitate rapid rebuilding of educational institutions and to provide adequate compensation for their losses (Khan Z. A., 2012).

The apprehension caused by these events also had significant implications for the Swat culture of hospitality, the Swat Jirga, and the Hujra system. Prior to the military operation and the onset of terrorism, the Swat people were known for their warm hospitality, welcoming unknown guests and tourists. They maintained Hujra systems

across villages, gathering there in the evenings for serious discussions, socializing, and even conducting funeral prayers. These customs fostered a sense of community and tranquility. However, following the military operation and the prevalence of terrorism, these cultural norms underwent profound changes. The continuous curfews and threat of terrorism eroded the traditional hospitality, as people became fearful of strangers. The Hujra system, once a cornerstone of community interaction, ceased to function due to pervasive mistrust among the populace, heightened by fears of surveillance. Consequently, open communication and the expression of emotions became rare occurrences among the Swat people.

### **Impacts on education system**

During this operation, children, both boys and girls, were deprived of their right to education. Children and women faced significant challenges as militants specifically targeted and destroyed school buildings, particularly those for girls. Approximately 120 girls' schools and 80 other educational institutions were destroyed during the conflict, primarily by Taliban forces who opposed female education and workplaces. Nearly 35% of schools sustained complete damage, with 190 schools set ablaze. As a result, 8,000 female educators abandoned their teaching positions, and 80,000 students were forced to withdraw from colleges and schools due to the relentless attacks by the Taliban on educational facilities (Orakzai, 2011).

Despite this terrorism, the military operation caused numerous damage to educational institutes due to the use of heavy land weapons and airstrikes including mortars (Khan Z. A., 2012). Prior to commencing the operation, the army imposed a curfew across the region, significantly disrupting the local educational system. Even after the influx of immigrants, educational institutions remained closed in many areas due to continuing curfews, posing considerable challenges for families attempting to educate their children. Moreover, there is a widespread demand among the populace for the government to prioritize the reconstruction of schools and colleges that were destroyed, thereby restoring the education system. This system has been adversely affected for more than two years, necessitating psychological support for children to recover from the trauma they have endured (A cry from the valley: Narration by the people of Malakand, 2009).

According to the data, 137 schools were damaged during the conflict, and there is a strong public demand for the reconstruction of these educational institutions. In April 2010, the government commenced preliminary efforts to rebuild 20 schools, which was a modest response given the scale of destruction. Additionally, the public has called for waivers on school fees due to the severe economic conditions, as well as prompt payment of overdue salaries to teachers. Furthermore, financial support for those who were close to retirement (Shah, 2018). However, these government initiatives aimed at rebuilding damaged schools and recovering educational system are perceived as minimal compared to the extensive damage caused during periods of terrorism and counter-terrorism operation.

Furthermore, various NGOs, foreign assistance programs, and developmental initiatives also operated in the region to aid in the economic recovery of those affected by terrorism and counter-terrorism operations. However, in 2010-11, a massive flood devastated the area, resulting in the complete destruction of infrastructure, including 700 educational institutions, 150 health facilities, 158 government buildings, 170 bridges, and

1250 miles of roads (Ahmad, 2019). This pushed back once again the swat region development project and ruined the improvement plans.

### **Impacts on Infrastructure**

During the operation, Taliban fired from near residential areas and subsequently retreated. In response, the army initiated shelling and mortar fire at those locations, resulting in numerous casualties and significant damage to infrastructure (A cry from the valley: Narration by the people of Malakand, 2009). Prior to the conflict, the Swat Valley had 855 hotels, including 405 restaurants (Orakzai, 2011). According to a report by the World Bank in the Malakand division, there were 500 hotels operating before the conflict. During the clashes in Swat, 60 hotels were destroyed. Additionally, the Austrian government funded an institution named PAITHOM at a cost of 140.5 million PKR in 2001 to oversee tourism activities in the Swat Valley. The Taliban looted this institution, and subsequently, the Pakistani army repurposed it as a temporary prison center. Similarly, the communication infrastructure in the area was severely impacted, with 43 bridges sustaining damage, resulting in an estimated cost of approximately 251.9 million PKR (Ali, Ullah, & Wahab, 2020). These damages setback the region significantly, prompting heightened concerns among the populace, who called upon the government for rehabilitation efforts.

Following the operation, people's grievances escalated due to their losses. The government announced inadequate compensation, offering only Rs. 160,000 for partially damaged buildings and Rs. 400,000 for completely destroyed structures, with no provision for compensation for household items lost. This left people traumatized, uncertain how to recover their losses without government assistance. Additionally, their economic condition was poor even though they do not have enough foods, water and grocery (Shah, 2018).

Subsequently, the hotels destroyed during the conflict received contributions from various sources for their rehabilitation. Saudi ambassadors contributed 7.5 million for this purpose, while the US government allocated \$4.3 million specifically for hotel reconstruction, with each hotel receiving 1.9 million for renovations. In 2012, the World Bank allocated \$13 million for hotel upgrades, with \$9 million earmarked for Swat, benefiting 350 hotels (each receiving 2.5 million). At that time, none of the bridges were operational, prompting the local populace to request security forces to either reopen these bridges or construct alternative routes that were safe. Due to the need for repairs, some bridges were reconstructed with assistance from the United States (Ali, Ullah, & Wahab, 2020). These development initiatives somewhat alleviated tensions among the populace. However, the damaged houses and residential areas still required government support, as many individuals lacked shelter and economic resources to cover the costs independently.

### **Economic Implications**

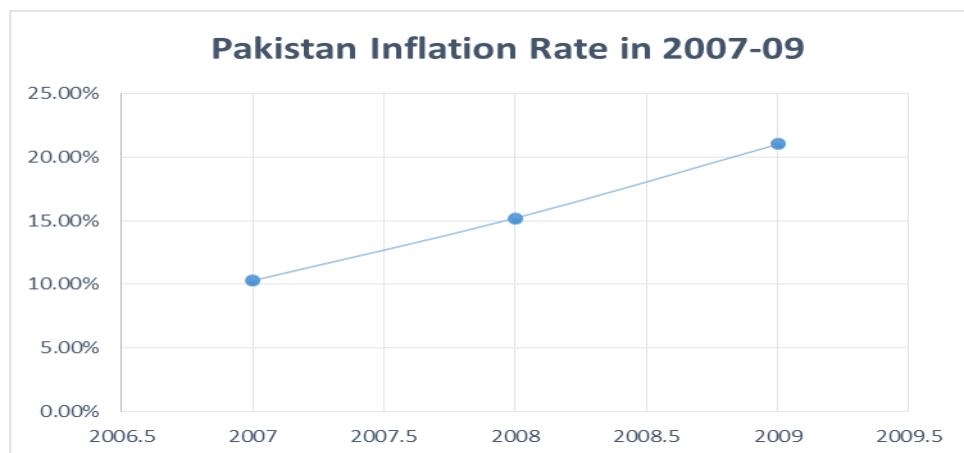
Prior to the onset of hostilities, the Swat Valley had 855 hotels, including 405 restaurants, with the tourism sector supporting approximately 40,000 jobs. Between 2007 and 2009, the sector incurred losses totaling sixty billion rupees. Apart from actions by the Taliban and TNSM that severely disrupted the region's economy, the military operation also inflicted damage on its infrastructure. The economy ground to a halt due to army-led cleanup operations and frequent curfews, resulting in substantial economic losses. Displacement of residents occurred alongside destruction of both governmental

and civilian infrastructure due to government order of directed bombardments and shelling. The conflict also adversely affected other economic sectors; notably, agriculture, which employs 80% of the country's workforce. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province contributes significantly to Pakistan's agricultural output, producing 48% of the nation's fruits and 25% of its vegetables, with Swat playing a pivotal role in both sectors. Nevertheless, the conflict led to a drastic reduction of approximately 55% to 70% in overall agricultural production within the Swat region. The government's compensation efforts for partially damaged or destroyed structures were deemed inadequate; moreover, no compensation was provided for destroyed homes and crops. (Orakzai, 2011).

A survey conducted by the Swat Youth Front regarding household incomes in Swat revealed a notable disparity in income levels before and after the military operations. Prior to the operations, 28% of households reported a monthly income exceeding Rs. 40,000, with only 8% earning below Rs. 5,000 per month. However, following the operations, only 4% of households reported a monthly income of Rs. 30,000, while 35% of households reported no monthly income at all, comprising farmers, daily wage workers, and business owners. (Hussain, 2019).

Furthermore, the ruthless removal of trees from paths and road edges, the restriction of the cultivation of some crops, like maize, in specific areas, and the abrupt imposition of frequent curfews across various parts of Swat were other contributing factors that fueled anti-government and anti-army sentiments among the populace (Shah, 2018).

Moreover, Pakistan incurred a total loss of \$45 billion due to military activities occurring between September 2001 and 2009. These events had a detrimental impact on the national economy, resulting in downturns across various sectors. Specifically, the tourism sector suffered, industrial exports declined, capital flight occurred, businesses in conflict zones shuttered, unemployment and inflation rates rose, and the agricultural sector faced losses, with inflation escalating from 10.3% in 2007-08 to 21% in 2008-09 (Khan Z. A., 2012). According to the Economic Survey of Pakistan conducted in 2010-11, the estimated potential GDP loss for the 2008-09 period due to terrorism amounted to US\$ 11.7 billion (Hussain, 2019). All these factors are interconnected with the economy, therefore, terrorism and counter-terrorism kinetic strategies not only impact the regional economy but also have significant and devastating effects on the overall economy of Pakistan.



## Re-Emergence of Taliban in Swat Valley

The resurgence of the Taliban in August 2022 in the Swat Valley occurred over a decade after the Pakistani military conducted an extensive operation against militants, transforming Swat from a haven for terrorists to a destination for tourists. Residents of Swat had been enjoying the prosperity generated by tourism, and there was a period of peace (Gillani, 2023). Now in 2022, men carrying heavy guns were observed patrolling the route, reminding the previous days of 2008 Taliban (Jan & Islam, 2022). After the Taliban's rule of Afghanistan altered the situation. The TTP has resumed its activities, which has caused unrest in the FATA and Swat regions of KPK. If this problem is not resolved, Pakistan may once again be turned from a tourism country to a terrorist hub (Lodhi, 2021). A video of an army major being questioned by a man pretending to be a TTP member with his hands bound behind his back went popular on social media. He was abducted by the militants together with a police officer and a soldier. After talks with the administration, all of these prisoners were later set free (Khaliq, 2022). A couple more attacks followed, but things worsened when a motorcyclist attacked a school van, killing the driver and injuring several students. This reminds the attack on Malala Yousafzai in 2012 once again (Shamsuddin & Khalid, 2022).

Local residents are concerned that they may jeopardize the hard-won peace achieved despite the loss of lives and property destruction. Past attempts at reconciliation have shown little effectiveness, underscoring the urgency for Pakistan's security forces to take immediate action before it becomes too late. Thousands of people in the Swat Valley, located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, participated in rallies in response to the resurgence of the Pakistani Taliban in the region. Demonstrators gathered at Mingora Nishat Chowk, Kabal, and Khwazakhela, chanting, "We want peace in our land, and we do not want terrorism on our land." (Jan & Islam, 2022).

These several events put civilians under serious concern and raised questions in their mind, as asking from government about their security and the effectiveness of state security forces in the protest because they do not want to disturb their peace once again after so much sacrifice and sufferings in the form of IDPs, economic devastation, destruction of infrastructure, impacts on education and employment, etc (Karamat, Muzaffar, & Shah, 2019).

## Material and Methods

The Research Methodology is qualitative, utilizing secondary data from various published sources, including research reports, books, articles, and public records. The study aims to provide a comprehensive description of the cultural and social outcomes of Operation Rah-e-Rast, focusing on the impacts of terrorism and counter-terrorism efforts in Swat Valley.

## Result and Discussion

Swat Valley, a major contributor to Pakistan's tourism, saw its tourism share decline from 6.3% of GDP in 2006 to 2.4% in 2007, and nearly zero by 2008 due to insecurity, resulting in a loss of Rs 60 Billion to the industry after the operation. In 2012, Pakistan's share of global tourism was just 0.09%, and within South Asia, it accounted for 6.7% of the 14.37 million tourists, while India had 46%. By 2015, Pakistan ranked 125th out of 141 countries overall and last in tourism, despite being one of the world's cheapest destinations.

As a result of Rah-e-Rast, around 2 million people from Swat were displaced, and 70,000 pregnant women were among the displaced persons. The government gave limited aid of 25,000 and 2-month ration only to (55,000) registered IDPs. There were no health facilities and cleanliness in camps and IDPs suffered badly.

Over 54% of the population in the operation zones, particularly those in remote areas without access to medical facilities, exhibited psychological impacts such as acute stress, PTSD, depression, anxiety, loss of appetite, and disturbed sleep. Notably, around 60% of women reported experiencing PTSD, anxiety, and terror, while men predominantly suffered from depression.

The ongoing conflict led to the destruction of 120 girls' schools and 80 other educational institutions, with nearly 35% of schools completely damaged and 190 set on fire. This resulted in 8,000 female teachers abandoning their profession and 80,000 students, particularly girls, being deprived of education due to attacks, curfews, and the targeting of female education by the Taliban.

A World Bank report on the Malakand division revealed that before the conflict, 500 hotels were operational, with 60 destroyed in Swat during the violence. Additionally, 43 bridges in the region were damaged, resulting in an estimated cost of PKR 251.9 million.

After the operation, public grievances increased due to insufficient compensation – Rs. 160,000 for partial damage, Rs. 400,000 for total destruction, and no compensation for household losses and crops. The conflict resulted in a 55% to 70% loss in crop production in Swat, with no restitution for agricultural damage.

Before the operation, 28% of people had more than Rs.40, 000 monthly income and households having below income of Rs.5, 000 were only 8%, but after the operation, people having Rs.30, 000 monthly income were only 4% while 35% people had no monthly income which includes farmer, daily wagers and businessmen cause unemployment.

Between 2001 and 2009, Pakistan incurred a total loss of \$45 billion due to military activities, severely impacting the economy. This included a decline in the tourism sector, reduced exports, capital flight, and business closures in conflict zones. Inflation surged from 10.3% in 2007-08 to 21% in 2008-09, and the Economic Survey of Pakistan (2010-11) estimated a potential GDP loss of \$11.7 billion for the 2008-09 period due to terrorism.

## Conclusion

Following the 9/11 incident in 2001, the United States' invasion of Afghanistan led to the infiltration of terrorists into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) through the porous Pak-Afghan border, escalating attacks within Pakistan. This resulted in the spread of Talibanization, particularly in the Swat Valley, where Maulana Fazlullah's Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-Mohammadi (TNSM) aligned with the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and gained local support by advocating for the implementation of Sharia law. After challenging the state's authority and targeting civilians, educational institutions, and businesses, a peace agreement was signed with TNSM in April 2009, but the Taliban later violated the accord. This led to the military's launch of Operation "Rah-e-Rast" to reclaim the region. The operation displaced around 2 million civilians, who faced significant hardships due to the government's inadequate response, and upon their return, they

found their infrastructure, economy, and essential services severely damaged. While the military regained control of the region, it did not fully eliminate the Taliban, resulting in a resurgence of terrorism in subsequent years. In 2022 and 2023, the re-emergence of the Taliban in the region reignited fear, prompting protests for greater security and stability.

### **Recommendations**

- Socio-economic development significantly lead to peace and stability. The people of Swat Valley prioritize peace and stability in their region, necessitating focused attention from the government on socio-economic development initiatives.
- To promote prosperity and stability, the government should prioritize education to combat extremism and address unemployment, both of which are critical issues affecting the region.
- The government should address the legal concerns of the populace, identifying gaps in governance and effectively bridge those gaps to prevent opportunistic exploitation by someone and regain public trust.
- The government and security forces should respect Pashtunwali, which is a code of customary legal norms and values of Pashtun way of life, including Nang, Melmastia, Thega, and Nanawatey etc.
- It is now time to shift the focus toward non-kinetic strategies instead of kinetic operations, as 23 years of such operations have not eradicated terrorism but have instead devastated the FATA and PATA regions.

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