CONFLICT IN THE SWAT VALLEY OF PAKISTAN: PAKHTUN CULTURE AND PEACEBUILDING THEORY-PRACTICE APPLICATION

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Abstract

The resurgence of the Taliban movement and its affiliate organisations in the Swat Valley of Pakistan since 2004, combined with military operations in 2009 and the displacement of residents created a humanitarian crisis in the area. The devastating floods of July 2010 again created opportunities for militant organisations to regain their lost position by filling the vacuum in relief efforts left by the government and international organisations. This paper suggests a framework for peacebuilding and conflict prevention in the region. The framework draws on the work of two scholar-practitioners – John-Paul Lederach and Mohammed Abu-Nimer – and practices from traditional Pakhtun, or Pashtun, culture to suggest ways in which the root cause of the conflict might be addressed to bring about peace and sustainable development. Finally, the paper suggests a number of peacebuilding strategies that need to be considered by governmental and non-governmental organisations for peacebuilding in this conflict zone.

Introduction

Conflict in the Swat Valley of northwest Pakistan is a product of historical, religious and social phenomena that have resulted in the emergence of militancy and terrorism in the entire region in the post-9/11 era. This conflict can be categorised as an intractable one because of its complexity, long history of violence and socio-economic factors, and is threatening the political and economic stability of the entire South Asian region. The definition of conflict in this paper is derived from Edward Azar's definition of protracted conflict, which 'takes place between communal groups but quickly transcends national boundaries ... it is usually linked to some intangible needs [e.g. identity, recognition and dignity], and it tends to generate or reinforce a high level of violence' (Aall et al 2007: 100-101).

The military operation in the Swat Valley by government forces has led to the displacement of thousands of people from the region. Since the end of the military operation in 2009 the government has promised development programmes in the area, but they do not address women's rights and political and economic issues. There is a need for a peacebuilding framework to enhance peacebuilding efforts leading to sustainable development. This paper offers such a framework. It draws on the peacebuilding approaches of John Paul Lederach, Mohammed Abu-Nimer and Pakhtunwali, or Pakhtun tribal code. The basic objective of conflict analysis in a peacebuilding framework is to understand the root causes, actors and dynamics of a conflict. The creation of a framework for peacebuilding requires the use of social analysis.
tools for an in-depth understanding of history, politics, economics and social and cultural elements within a particular conflict zone. The components of the framework are to:

1) **Conduct a conflict and context assessment:** A conflict assessment is an examination of the root causes, proximate causes, triggers and dynamics of the conflict. The historical, political/judicial, economic, and transnational dimensions need to be analysed with special attention given to the gender and religious dimensions. Secondly, **analysing the current context in which peace and development issues can be undertaken** will (along with other assessments) help to discern what the prospects are for further interventions, maximising opportunities for peacebuilding.

2) **Develop a peacebuilding process:** A peacebuilding process is a multi-staged and multi-domained strategy for intervening in a conflict context with the goal of achieving sustainable peace and development. The suggested process addresses both immediate and long-term preventive measures for social reconstruction and reconciliation. Furthermore, it suggests how to achieve political and economic empowerment and justice while incorporating gender sensitivity and an understanding of the cultural, social, and religious context.

This paper develops a cogent analysis of the Swat conflict with a view to enhancing the peacebuilding and sustainable development prospects in the region. It is hoped that the analysis in this paper can provide insights for the development of processes in similarly fragile settings. The development and peacebuilding initiatives in the region may include government, international and local development partners in both the governmental and non-governmental sector and civil society. The proposed framework will enable the actors to adopt policies that will ensure a conflict-sensitive approach so that they do not lead to future conflict but to sustainable peace and development.

**Theoretical Perspective: Existing Approaches to Peacebuilding**

Many peacebuilding theories assume that the people in a given society should value diversity and be tolerant of differences whether they are based on religion, ethnicity or race. Tolerance suggests that a society accommodates divergent views with respect to these concepts. Furthermore, tolerance involves the notion of collaboration for the solution of problems rather than solving problems through individual efforts based on competition.

Most peacebuilding strategies that include non-violent mobilisation methods, conflict analysis, negotiation, mediation and reconciliation aim for constructive social change by considering the needs and interests of individuals and communities. They also stress the need to address structural issues and long-term relationships that are the root of the problem between conflicting parties so as to overcome the structural, relational and cultural contradictions (Mail et al. 1999). In this case study I have drawn on the peacebuilding approaches put forward by J.P. Lederach and Mohammed Abu-Nimer and indigenous Pakhtun approaches based on their ‘code of honour’ and the world view that informs their practices, called Pakhtunwali, which is described in greater depth below.

Lederach maintains that violent conflicts are mostly followed by negotiation and violence in a cyclical process leading to a humanitarian crisis that obscures the long-term view of conflict while focusing solely on complex disaster management processes (1997: 74-75). This cyclical process (and humanitarian crisis) often forecloses efforts to sustain the peace process between conflict parties. In place of this method of peacebuilding, which he believes...
to be ineffectual, Lederach supports a framework that not only includes complex disaster management, but also a transformative peacebuilding model that focuses on building sustainable relationships. In responding to conflict, he suggests three levels of responses: short term for crisis prevention and complex disaster management; long range for ‘visioning the common future’; and middle range for connecting short-term and long-term responses when designing social change process of intervention. The integrated framework that he suggests has five steps, each one vital to peacebuilding in war-torn societies. It consists of: 1) structural analysis of root causes; 2) crisis management; 3) crisis prevention; 4) long-term vision or generational perspective; and finally 5) transformation (ibid. 76-77). The core of his approach is a process of transformative social change through the development of an infrastructure for peacebuilding as ‘process structure’ to transform a war system into a ‘peace system’: the main emphasis is not on ending conflict, but ‘building relationships with new patterns, processes and structures’ (ibid. 84).

On the other hand, Abu-Nimer (2003: 74) suggests that the application of peacebuilding approaches should not only include approaches developed by Western theory, but should also involve indigenous approaches. To achieve this he suggests an Islamic peacebuilding approach based on structural transformation using Islamic values and principles for the development of a framework for Muslim societies by utilising their own cultural/religious resources (ibid.). Moreover, this approach maintains that the primary motivation for peacebuilding activism in Muslim communities is to change the current reality by fostering socio-economic development and fulfilling basic human needs and rights of groups and individuals (security, self-determination, identity, growth and development etc.). He maintains that the changes need to be facilitated through self-examination and an in-depth critique of internal social and cultural realities of a given society as peacebuilding strategies presuppose such processes of self-examination and analysis. This will often lead to the realisation that an individual has the ability and responsibility to act in his or her own interests (ibid. 113).

The peacebuilding approaches in Pakhtun culture are based on *Pakhtunwali*, as are all the structures and processes that underpin social, political and economic life in Pakhtun society. *Pakhtunwali*, ‘the way of the Pakhtuns’, is integral to Pakhtun identity (Kakar 2007). It is considered as an ‘alternative form of social organisation with an advanced conflict resolution mechanism’ (Johnson & Mason 2008: 61). By adhering to *Pakhtunwali*, a Pakhtun possesses honour (*izzat*); without honour, she or he is no longer considered a Pakhtun and is not given the rights, protection, or support of the Pakhtun community. *Pakhtunwali*’s honour-based society is governed by the concepts of chivalry or bravery (*ghayrat* or *nang*), hospitality (melhastia), gender boundaries (*purdah* or *namus*), council (*jirga*), the right of a fugitive to seek refuge and acceptance of his offer of peace (*nanawati*), the right of revenge (*badal*), bravery (*tureh*), steadfastness (*sabat*), righteousness (*imandari*) and persistence, or *isteqamat* (Kakar 2007; Joshua Project 1999).

The institution of *jirga* (tribal council of elders) is responsible for the resolution of all kinds of conflict within Phakton society and has social, political, religious and judicial functions. According to Ali Wardak, ‘*jirga* has over the centuries operated as an important mechanism of conflict resolution among the Pakhtuns, and has contributed to the maintenance of social order in the rest of the Pakhtun society both in direct and indirect ways’ (Wardak 2003). Kakar observes that for a Pakhtun there is no contradiction between being a Muslim and Pakhtun, although religious scholars would make a distinction (2007).
In this regard, the philosophy of peace and non-violence of Abdul Ghaffar Khan (1890-1988), a Pakhtun from the northwest of Pakistan and a follower of Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence and peace, is important. It was considered an insult not to avenge killings or as harm to honour because badal forms the core of the code of honour, but Ghaffar Khan campaigned for the adoption of non-violent strategies and believed in using ‘patience, righteousness and forgiveness as weapons to fight against any enemy’ (Johansen 1997: 57). He built his ‘force of peace’, known as ‘Khudai Khadmatgar’ (servant of God), which enshrines the values of peace, non-violence and forgiveness. His followers worked for social welfare, propagation of education and women’s empowerment, which were new concepts in pre-partition India. Any peacebuilding and development strategy in the Swat Valley should take account of the philosophy of Abdul Gaffar Kan and Pakhtunwali.

**Dimensions of Conflict in the Swat Valley**

**Historical dimension**

The Swat Valley is primarily inhabited by different tribes of Pakhtuns, an ethnic group with a common language who live along the eastern and southern border of Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan and are divided into tribes, sub-tribes and clans. Among all Pakhtun tribes the codes and practices are based on a central underlying belief in the ‘segmentary solidarity against invaders’ (Lindholm 1979: 487). The area of the Swat Valley is about 3798 square kilometres. It is a part of the Malakand division, which comprises Malakand, Buner, Swat, Shangla, Upper Dir, Lower Dir and Chitral and comes under the Provincial Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan (PATA).

Historically, the Swat Valley was a part of Afghanistan, but the 1893 Durand line agreement made Swat a part of British Empire. In 1915, a jirga (tribal council of elders) was held that declared Swat a state and in 1917 MianGul Abdul Wadud became its first ruler. In 1926 he was granted the title of wali (ruler) of Swat and was provided an annual subsidy. At the time of the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, Swat, then a princely state, acceded to Pakistan while maintaining internal autonomy. This status continued until 1969 when the states of Dir, Chitral and Amb were incorporated within Pakistan and according to Article 246 of the Constitution of Pakistan 1973, these states became part of Pakistan as the PATA.

In 1970 a new phase of popular politics started under Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, the leader of Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), which won the 1970 elections and whose manifesto called for Islamic socialism resting on the abolishment of large-scale holding of private property, thus threatening the power base of landlords across the country. This pattern was also visible in the Swat Valley in which local khans were facing the dilemma of a decline in their traditional power due to economic transformation and market reforms. The secular regime of Bhutto gave his opponents ample ground to appeal to Islam as a political alternative. This was mostly favourable to the landlords, who in order to save their property from being nationalised made an alliance with imams (prayer leaders) and traditional mullahs (religious leaders) to issue a fatwa (religious decree) and argued that the abolishment of private property was against shariah (Islamic law) and therefore damned socialist policies as a threat to Islam leading to the call for a jihad (holy war) against it. They supported the Nizam-e-Mustafa (System of Mohammad) campaign against Bhutto’s regime, which ultimately led to his fall and his subsequent hanging by the military leader, General Zia ul Haq, who promised to enforce shariah in the country. This call for shariah in Swat did not occur during General Zia’s tenure as it was said to decree a ‘half-baked’ shariah for Swat (Masood 2009) and therefore this did not threaten the interests of the stakeholders in the region.
Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979 was another crisis, which emerged during Zia’s era and made a lasting impact on areas bordering Afghanistan. During this era, material and physical support rendered by the United States, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia led to the eviction of Soviets from Afghanistan. The training of Afghan people combined two religious concepts, i.e., mujahedeen (holy warriors) and muhajareen (a migration for religious sake). The opening of madrassas (religious seminaries) through Saudi funding brought the teaching of the traditional Salafi/Wahabi version of Islam in order to inculcate the spirit of jihad, while the United States and its allies provided arms and funding and collaboration with the intelligence agencies of Pakistan. It was during this time that religious parties like Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamaat-e-Ulama-e-Islam joined the Afghan jihad and developed networks with mujahedeen who came from all over the world to fight in Afghanistan.

**Religious dimension**

Historical and archaeological evidence makes it clear that Swat was one of the areas where Buddhism flourished during the time of King Asoka, which later gave way to its conversion to Islam in 1100 AD. The system that emerged in the aftermath was a blend of riqaj (customary practices) and Islam with the influence of Sufi thoughts, which had prevailed in the entire South Asian region. The religious leadership that emerged in Swat in the centuries following the emergence of Islam played an important role in politics. This dynamic is important to consider for an understanding of the Swat crisis. This religious leadership had two tiers: stanadars (descendents of holy men, but not preachers) and pirs (Sufi religious leaders, mystics and preachers). Stanadars were not allowed to play any role except as mediators in land disputes. On the other hand, pirs had great influence due to their spirituality and relationship with God, as Pakhtun people usually never accept a call during the time of a crisis other than the one that demands loyalty to God rather than to a person. Mullahs and imams of local-level mosques never enjoyed the same privilege (Lindholm 1979: 489).

These religious leaders play an important role in times of crisis involving religious and tribal conflicts. During the battle of Ambela in 1863 the religious leadership of a great Sufi pir, Saidu Baba, or Akhund (holy man) of Swat, forced British forces to retreat. In 1897 a mystic ‘who claimed miraculous power’ combated the British forces, though he was not able to stop the British inroads in the regions (Lindholm 1979: 489). MianGul Abdul Wadud, the first ruler of Swat state in 1915, abolished the powers of stanadars and sufis concerning religious interpretation and decision making while appropriating all powers. The legal system he established was a combination of the decisions of wali, riqaj and shariah (Masood 2009), which was evident in the law of inheritance. Under Islamic law women share in the inheritance, but in the local riqaj of Swat, women are not entitled to any inheritance except occasionally the share from the produce of the lands, which thus made shariah subservient to riqaj (Rome 2008: 120). When the 1973 constitution of Pakistan made Swat a part of PATA, this institution was upheld. The religious factor became more important with the rise of socialist politics of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1970s when religious leaders were used to give cover to the interests of private land owners. This issue again became important during the PPP’s second term under Bhutto’s daughter, Benazir, in 1989, when private land ownership and women in leadership were declared un-Islamic. Before 1979 religion as a political tool was used in domestic politics, but after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan an international dimension of religion appeared that gained momentum with the events of 11 September 2001, when Islam as a transnational factor became predominant in the region.
Political/judicial dimension

The political/judicial dimension can be viewed as the proximate cause of the conflict as these issues are the underlying factors for this recent insurgency and the basis for the demands made by the leaders of TNSM, which resulted in their alliance with the Taliban in-order to achieve their objectives.

The judicial system in the state of Swat before its incorporation within Pakistan in 1969 has been viewed with nostalgia as it was seen to be effective: ‘the trials were quick and cheap, the judgments/verdicts were properly executed and the cases were decided on the first or second hearing’ (Rome 2011: 57). After the region’s incorporation into Pakistan in 1969, the national judicial system was extended to the Swat Valley, which, with factors such as complications under the PATA regulations and misuse of *riwaj*, resulted in an increasing demand for Islamic laws and the growing appeal of organisations like TNSM. Sufi Muhammad, the leader of the banned TNSM, was a member of *Jamat-e-Islami* in 1960s and preached a hardline version of Islam. On 28 June 1989, he founded TNSM with a slogan of ‘*shariah or shahadat*’ (‘Islamic law or martyrdom’) (Yusafzai 2009). During that period, the Soviet Union had withdrawn from Afghanistan and Pakistan was under a democratic government headed by a woman prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, which was considered un-Islamic.

On 12 February 1994 the Supreme Court of Pakistan declared the PATA regulation unconstitutional, which left Swat and the PATA area without any effective judicial system (Mir 2009). This led Sufi Muhammad to launch a resistance campaign that demanded enforcement of *shariah* in the region, resulting in a military operation to curb the movement.

The government of Benazir Bhutto passed the *Nifaz-e-Nizam-e-Sahariat* Regulation 1994 (NWFP Regulation for Enforcement of Islamic Law I, 1994) in PATA, Kohistan district followed by the *Shari Nizam-e-Adl* Regulation (Regulation for Justice Based on Islamic Law). In 1999 Benazir Bhutto’s government passed a series of regulations in the Malakand region as a compensatory measure for the military’s onslaught (Yusafzai 2009). These laws were ineffective as no groundwork had been prepared for their implementation.

This political/judicial issue acquired another dimension after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, giving it another platform to raise its demands. Sufi Muhammad led ten thousand of his supporters in a *jihad* in Afghanistan, which resulted in failure. His organisation was banned on 12 January 2002 and he was sentenced to 10 years’ imprisonment on 24 April 2002 for incitement and violating state restrictions (Ali 2009). After his arrest his organisation lost its popularity until 8 October 2005 when it started relief work for earthquake victims in the Jammu and Kashmir region of Pakistan, and it propagated the idea that the people’s bad deeds had brought about the catastrophe. However, a real revival of the organisation took place after 31 October 2006 when a *madrassah* (religious seminary) in Bajur Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan (FATA) was attacked by U.S. missiles, killing 80 students, with many victims under the age of 12. Due to the volatile situation in 2007, the government restored the peace under the Rah-e-Haq (path of truth) operation. On 16 May 2008 Sufi Muhammad was released as a part of a six-point deal with the newly installed coalition government of the Awami National Party in the Northwest Frontier Province.

The deal called on TNSM to give up militancy and suicide attacks, stop opposing female education and immunisation of children and halt attacks on Pakistan army installations and officers. However, his son-in-law, Maulana Fazlullah, refused to accept this accord with the government. He enjoyed vast power over the Swat Valley through terror and fear
due to his transnational connection with the Taliban and Al Qaeda. While the members of TNSM mostly belonged to a class that historically had limited access to power and high positions, through their militancy they exploited new opportunities to accumulate money, power and social status, which they are reluctant to give up. The majority of these militants are perceived to be hard-core criminals who are involved in robberies, beheadings and kidnappings (Hilali 2009).

Differences emerged soon that led to the failure of the first peace accord and the resumption of second phase of the Rah-e-Rast operation by Pakistan armed forces. A second peace accord was signed between the government and TNSM on 21 May 21 that dealt with Maulana Fazlullah independently. TNSM and the government agreed on an end to militancy, suicide bombings and enforcement of shariah, the army withdrew and an amnesty was declared for TNSM leadership. However, Maulana Fazlullah failed to abide by the agreement. A third agreement was signed between the government and TNSM on 15 February 2009 (Hilali 2009) leading to the promulgation of an ordinance in Malakand division that established religious courts under a qazi (judge) and the implementation of shariah law in Swat.

However, soon after the promulgation of this ordinance and peace agreement, in the first week of April 2009, a video surfaced from Taliban sources showing the public lashing of a 17-year-old girl by the Taliban in Swat (BBC 2009). This brought pressure on the government to revise its decision. Although the video was declared as fake by government agencies a year later, it jeopardised peace in the region (Rome 2011: 71). In May 2009 the army launched a full-scale military operation code-named ‘Rah-e-Rast’ (straight path). An important factor in the operation was the brutal policies adopted by TNSM against all individuals suspected of non-Islamic behaviour to an extent that Green Square Mingora, the largest city in Swat, had become known as Khoni Chawk (bloody intersection) due to the beheadings and killings. Moreover, the militants had captured the Buner area, which is about 160 kilometres from the capital, Islamabad, and had thus caused alarm locally and internationally. This resulted in the displacement of more than 2.5 million people from Swat, Buner and Dir areas (Hilali 2009). Among the displaced were 70,000 pregnant women, which aggravated the situation.

Transnational dimension

The triggers that brought these issues to the centre stage were the events of 11 September 2001 and the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. After the U.S. invasion, the flight of Taliban leaders to the tribal areas of Pakistan gave TNSM a new ally and a cause. TNSM was able to capture the entire Swat Valley with the help of the Taliban. The Taliban’s interest in this region was its strategic importance. Though Swat does not share a border with Afghanistan, controlling Malakand is important as through it passes the Peshawar-Swat and Peshawar-Chitral highway, and if it is severed at the Malakand pass the whole Malakand division would be cut off from the rest of the country and thus a chain of Talibam control would be established by connecting Taliban’s pockets of resistance from South Waziristan to Swat (Ali 2009). Thus the control over this entire belt could create problems for U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan and disrupt the supply route, which is mostly through Pakistan and can conveniently be severed by Taliban from its stronghold. The Taliban’s transnational connection with the Eastern Turkistan movement in Xinxiang province of China, the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan and freedom fighters in Kashmir could seriously jeopardise Pakistan’s interest in the region.
Moreover, the complete control of Swat by Taliban, which also connects with the northern areas of Pakistan bordering Kashmir, could be of great concern for both India and Pakistan as it would derail the peace process started through the 1999 Lahore declaration.

Gender dimension

Gender can also be viewed as one of the important triggers for the eruption of violence in the conflict. Although the gender issue was initially not as central to the conflict as was the demand for Islamic law, at a later stage the focal point of the conflict became the destruction of girls’ schools and the killing of working women. Yasmeen Hassan (2009) has termed this a ‘war on Pakistani schoolgirls’. Initially the target was female education, which later led to the ban on all types of education for both girls and boys as the Taliban leaders considered it un-Islamic. The first victims of the conflict were women and girls, especially those working in a school. Since the 1990s there has been a gradual acceptance of female education in Swat as the government was inclined to improve the female literacy rate in the rural areas, notably under the ‘enlightened moderation’ policy of President Musharaf, which called for women’s empowerment and education (Musharaf 2004). Women were encouraged to do jobs in the government and non-governmental sectors. However, having women go out to work and study was resented locally as it was considered an affront to Pakhtun culture. The reaction to female education, especially in the post 9/11 era, included the bombing of girl’s schools and colleges, killing and ill-treatment of working women and threatening them with dire consequences. Almost 35% of schools were affected and 190 government schools for girls were burnt in this crisis, while 8,000 women teachers were left without jobs (Ali 2010:12).

These unprecedented attacks against girls and women of the area were ultimately an attack on Western symbols because the concept of women’s liberation is considered to be a Western concept in traditional Pakhtun society. Education, jobs and the pursuit of a career by women were considered efforts by the government to westernise the society and therefore termed a ‘Western conspiracy’ (Manzoor 2008). This is evidenced by the fact that women working in Western-sponsored NGOs and education that was not based on Islamic principles were the main target of the Taliban.

Economic dimension

An important aspect of the rule of MianGul Abdul Wadud was a developmental plan for the Swat state, which after 1969 became a major issue as the state of Pakistan was unable to maintain a consistent level of development in the region. Under his rule schools...
and hospitals were established, possession of arms was controlled and efforts were made to remove social vices to make the Swat a region of peace and progress. This was based on a development model that was a mix of traditional values, Islamic laws and modern developmental trends of that era.

These policies continued in the reign of Mian Gul Jahanzeb after he became the ruler in 1949. He also tried to westernise the society while also maintaining the traditional power structure, bringing changes in education, communication and healthcare (Rome 2011: 54). After the incorporation of Swat state into Pakistan in 1969, these development policies continued, but could not match the pace of development of the pre-1969 era. This had a powerful impact on the political dynamics of the region as Sufi Muhammad, the leader of Tehreek-e-Nifaz-Shariat-Muhammadi (TNSM), or Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Law, when asked by the grandson of the ruler of Swat about the kind of shariah he was demanding, replied ‘my tehreek [movement] wants what your grandfather Mian Gul Abdul Wadud practised’ (Masood 2009), which meant a model of cultural and religious laws and development of the area.

It was after the October 2005 earthquake that affected Kashmir and other regions of Pakistan that the Taliban made its presence felt. When the Taliban and the TNSM took part in the relief and rehabilitation after the earthquake they successfully convinced masses that the disaster was due to their involvement in un-Islamic activities. They insinuated that tourism involved activities which are not allowed under Islam, and that it was indulgence in these activities that had led to such disasters. Before the conflict there were 855 hotels, including 405 restaurants, in the Swat Valley and around 40,000 people were employed in the tourism industry. Between 2007 and 2009 the industry suffered a loss of Rs 60 billion (Weekly Pager 2009). Along with TNSM and Taliban activities, which severely set back the economy, the military operation caused damage to the infrastructure in the region. The army’s cleanup operation and frequent curfews brought the economy to a complete halt, causing great losses. The bombardment and shelling by government forces resulted in the destruction of civilian and governmental infrastructure along with the displacement of people. Although the government gave a uniform amount of compensation for partly damaged or wrecked buildings, no compensation was given for the destruction of houses and crops (Rome 2011: 75).

After the military operation the local tourism industry returned to normal levels, and in early July 2010 a Swat regional festival and peace gala were organised in order to further revive the tourism industry. These efforts at reconstruction and rehabilitation were interrupted on 29 July 2010 when the Swat region faced heavy floods that destroyed hotels, houses, crops and almost everything in the area, including basic communication infrastructure, thus rendering the area inaccessible for relief work. The Pakistan Army’s attempt at a rescue and relief operation was ultimately ineffective due to the scale of the disaster. The failure of the government and relief agencies to provide emergency relief to the affected population again left them to the mercy of the Taliban militants. The conflict inflicted heavy damage on other parts of the economy. Eighty percent of the population is engaged in agriculture. One-fourth of Pakistan’s vegetables and 48% of its fruit are grown in Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa Province, with Swat being a major contributor (Weekly Pager 2009). Due to the conflict, however, almost 55% to 70% of total produce has been lost or depleted (ibid.). There is a clear need for the rebuilding of the region’s socio-economic resources, which Lederach considers

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a process of creating ways of thinking about categories of action, responsibilities and strategic commitment of funds to maximise prospects for the transformation of conflict towards sustainable peace … In crises caused by natural disasters, the foremost need is to launch an immediate and effective response to alleviate suffering and stabilisation of the situation and population, with a subsequent move towards rehabilitation and reconstruction. These are the intended functions of the relief activity (1997: 88, 91).

Infrastructure for Peacebuilding as Process Structure

Based on the conflict assessment that has employed the peacebuilding framework outlined above, this section suggests a peacebuilding process and some recommendations for its implementation in the light of this analysis and my own knowledge and experience as both an insider and outsider.² Lederach observes that structures suggest the need to think comprehensively about the affected population and systematically about the issue. Process underscores the necessity of thinking creatively about the progression of conflict and sustainability of its transformation by linking roles, functions and activities in an integrated manner. Together, the two sets of lenses suggest an integrated approach to peacebuilding (1997: 79).

Abu-Nimer suggests the adoption of structural transformation as Islam as a religion brought about transformation and change concerning its impact on pre-Islamic civilisation. He believes that a peacebuilding initiative, while taking account of indigenous approaches, can lead to the preservation of a community’s structure and identity. This kind of social change through structural transformation requires planning, implementation and follow-up stages based on collective and collaborative efforts. The main aim is to address the needs and interests of the parties for building future bonds and relationships resulting in agreements for peace between the parties.

While the militancy and 'Talibanisation' in Pakistan started as a violent conflict in Swat, it had spill-over effects over the Pakhtun tribal areas (to which I belong) as well as the rest of Pakistan. Although the conflict in the Swat has visibly diminished as a result of the military operation, the underlying causes of the conflict remain. The emphasis of the government and the international community is on conflict management and rehabilitation of internally displaced people and not on peacebuilding efforts and sustainable development, which can result in renewed violence. Peacebuilding in the Swat Valley is rather what is needed to produce a durable result. This requires not only an analysis of structural and relational causes, but also effective remedies to address the root causes of the conflict. The government should develop a timeframe for socio-economic development by promoting tourism, agriculture and the handicraft industry, and fulfilling basic human needs. An effective judicial system for speedy justice, while taking into account the local cultural/religious demands, and effective enforcement should be guaranteed. Though the government had enforced many ordinances, it is important to have a legal system in place that addresses the realities on the ground, and it should be properly implemented. It also requires building structures for peace while respecting the local code of honour of Pakhtunwali for building effective relationships between the parties involved in the conflict. Connecting
short-term goals of crisis prevention and management with the longer-term goal of socio-economic development for social change and giving it a generational perspective for sustainable socio-economic development will help in transformation in the long term. The ‘visioning of the future’ together by all parties, as suggested by Elise Boulding (quoted in Lederach 1997), will encourage actors in the conflict to make joint efforts to restore peace.

An important aspect of peacebuilding concerning the immediate issues is to prevent the recurrence of violence while identifying causative factors and helping the society prepare to handle such situations in the future (Lederach 1997: 81). This principle is relevant to the Swat context, especially given that the issue of gender discrimination is an important part of the conflict. Addressing the issue of female education and women’s employment in the peacebuilding process will help to understand why this issue became a central point in triggering violence. This will help to generate a conflict-sensitive approach in future peacebuilding and development processes to prevent the recurrence of violence.

The situation in the Swat area requires a process and structure for building sustainable peace and development that rests on a framework for reconciliation based on Pakhtunwali. The process must include a time frame for short-term and long-term goals for conceptualising the peacebuilding and development plan. Drawing on Lederach, Abu-Nimer and Pakhtunwali, the following steps are suggested for the peacebuilding framework to guide peacebuilding process in Swat:

1) Middle-range actors must be central in building infrastructures for peacebuilding. These should include ethnic and religious leaders, academics/intellectuals and humanitarian leaders. In the Swat conflict, religious and humanitarian NGO leaders are in conflict with each other due to different approaches towards peace and development in the region. Religious leaders stress Islamic law and cultural/religious approaches to guide strategies, while NGO leaders call for education, women’s empowerment and development. There is a need to reconcile these opposing views, which can be done by inviting the actors to the jirgas on the basis of Pakhtunwali approach, which is based on melmastia, or respecting hospitality, which can pave the way for listening to and respecting each other’s views.

2) The sub-system strategy proposed by Lederach could open new avenues for peace. This strategy is based on ‘linking immediate issues with system issues’ (Lederach 1997: 151). As violence in Swat conflict emerged in the wake of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and the ‘war against terror’, it is important to consider these developments while devising peacebuilding strategies. Peacebuilders need to hold strategic dialogue on Muslim-West relations while emphasising reconciliation and peace. This should be done by holding group meetings with the youth and religious leaders for discussing the positive aspects in historical relations between two civilisation for dispelling negativity and misperceptions. In this regard, Abdul Ghaffar Khan’s non-violent approach can play an effective role; as a Pakhtun himself, his espousal of forgiveness instead of revenge can offer a significant contribution to the dialogue.

3) One of the important issues within the Swat conflict is that of governance. As Lederach observes, ‘conflict is also fuelled by governance issues’ (1997: 165). The lack of judicial reforms and development opportunities has fuelled this conflict. The region needs relief for displaced persons (who the government claims have been resettled), development
opportunities, employment and facilities for learning different vocations. The *jirga* system needs to be transformed from a decision-making institution to a social forum for interaction and reconciliation that is free from political and religious exploitation by both government and religious leaders. The *jirga* system in Swat is not a political or judicial institution, because state institutions are in place, unlike the case in Federally Administered Tribal areas of Pakistan.

4) Addressing the issue of governance, development and peacebuilding in the light of indigenous approaches to peace and values enshrined in Islam, as suggested by the framework of Abu-Nimer. This includes the pursuit of justice, social empowerment and the sacredness of human life, collaborative action and solidarity, and inclusive and participatory process (Abu-Nimer 2003).

5) The issue of female education and employment opportunities for women could be addressed by creating awareness of Islamic principles of education and the rights of women as TNSM claims that there is no place for the education or employment of women in Islamic/Pakhtun society. Awareness and education for women and their rights in Islamic and Pakhtun culture could be undertaken through workshops that open up the education system to new concepts that address the changing realities of the society.

**Conclusion**

This paper has examined the conflict in the Swat Valley and prospects for future peacebuilding according to approaches outlined by Lederach and Abu-Nimer and the indigenous Pakhtun code. The sensitivity to cultural and religious identity and codes in the Pakhtun culture (especially the code of honour and its association with Islamic faith) can be a rich and effective resource for peace and reconciliation instead of exploiting them as sources of conflict. In this context, Abu-Nimer’s framework for Islamic peacebuilding lists different values in Islam that can form the basis for an effective peacebuilding framework. To create an effective process, short-term interventions must be given proper emphasis along with long-term initiatives for peace and development. Engaging religious leaders in the negotiation process is an equally important factor in reducing tension. Although the government ended the military operation in 2009 and internally displaced persons returned, it is crucial to constructively engage the militants in a dialogue to achieve lasting peace. There is equally a need for developing localised infrastructures for peace and development, including the transformation of the *jirgas* from political/judicial forums to a place for social interaction and reconciliation, and implementing judicial reforms to respond to the people’s demands for speedy justice. Such processes should take place in tandem with rebuilding the economic infrastructure and taking a generational approach to peacebuilding.

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Endnote

1 My special thanks to Mary Hope Schwoebel for helping me in editing the document.

2 As a Pakhtun woman I have faced issues of gender discrimination, selective Islamic interpretation for women and militancy in tribal areas to which I belong in Khyber Pukhtunkhawa. I am also an outsider; though not from the Swat Valley, I can understand the problems as they are similar to those faced in other areas.

References


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