

The Political Economy of Taliban Terror in Swat Valley

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Fury amongst Pakistan's citizens erupted after a human rights' group surfaced a [video](#) April 3 showing the flogging of a 17-year-old girl in Swat Valley.

The vile display was carried out by thugs allied with Baitullah Mehsud's Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Dawn [reports](#) that the video, apparently shot by a mobile phone "shows the girl, wearing a blue burqa, lying on the ground face down. Her legs, hands and head are held by two men and a third, bearded man wearing a turban is shown whipping her repeatedly."

The hideous scene continues for several minutes until the girl, allegedly "guilty" of the "crime" of adultery is dragged off by armed fighters. *Dawn* avers:

After the first couple of lashes, the girl starts to scream loudly, but no one moves to help her. "Please, please," she shouts in Pushto. "Stop it, please. For God's sake, stop it, I am dying."

A man off-camera is giving orders to his companions. "Hold her feet tightly. Lift her burqa a bit." ("Flogging in Swat outrages nation," *Dawn*, April 4, 2009)

In February, the "secular" Awami National Party (ANP) that controls the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) government, signed a peace deal pledging to impose Sharia law on Swat residents.

The pact, which halted murderous and largely ineffective artillery barrages on residents by the Army, was negotiated by ANP leaders and Maulana Sufi Mohammed, the leader of the Tehrik-Nifaz-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Law, TNSM) in NWFP's Malakand district where Swat is located.

The Guardian [reported](#) April 3 Sufi Mohammed, "In a rare interview with any media outlet, domestic or foreign...told the *Guardian* that the new courts would formalise penalties including flogging, chopping off hands and stoning to death."

TTP "emir" Maulana Fazlullah, the sociopathic son-in-law of Sufi Mohammed has promised to expand the Taliban's writ throughout Pakistan. Indeed Muslim Khan, a key commander and spokesperson for the group told *The Guardian* by telephone that sharia would be implemented "whether the government likes it or not."

Aftab Alam, president of the Swat Lawyers Association, said that the creaking colonial-era legal system needed to be speeded up, not replaced.

"They [the Taliban] want to establish a complete autonomous state, that's the real agenda," said Alam. "A utopian empire, a Taliban empire. Sometimes utopias become real." ...

*Khan added: "Swat is a test case. After this, it [sharia] should be brought in in the whole of Pakistan. How can we have British law here? It is the task of the Taliban to make them agree. It is our right, 95% of the population is Muslim." (Saeed Shah, "Pakistan region in grip of fear as leader begins to implement sharia law," *The Guardian*, April 3, 2009)*

And if the Taliban's pornographic display in Swat is any indication of the future direction affairs might take, the prospects for tackling Pakistan's overwhelming poverty, endemic corruption by capitalist elites and military repressors are indeed grim.

As if to drive home the point, *Reuters* [reported](#) that "two female Pakistani teachers, a female aid worker and their driver were found shot dead on Monday, police and a doctor said, in an area where Islamists have attacked aid groups."

The attack took place about 40 miles north of the capital, Islamabad. The bodies had been dumped in a heavily forested area.

When the agreement was signed in mid-February, it was condemned by human rights' and left-wing groups as a capitulation by the state to jihadi terrorists and their friends in the Army and Pakistan's shadowy Inter Services Intelligence agency (ISI).

As outrage over the girls' flogging spread, human rights' and leftist groups staged protests Sunday. In Lahore, a coalition of women's organizations, socialist parties and trade unions organized a 2,000 strong march denouncing the state's sell-out to the Taliban. The Labour Party Pakistan reported on their [website](#) Monday that,

Speakers condemned the flogging of women in Swat and acts of terrorism by religious fundamentalists. They also condemned the Drone attacks by Americans as well. They announced the launch of a national movement against Talibanisation of the society. Taliban are not anti-imperialist, they are neo-fascist and forces of suppression, we have to fight them. Terrorism can not be defeated by more terrorism. "We have to mobilize people to fight them both" was the main theme of the speakers. ("Lahore Rally Against Talibanisation and Terrorism," Labour Party Pakistan, April 6, 2009)

In a further sign that strains between America and Pakistan threaten to derail the Obama administration's plan to expand CIA drone attacks, *The New York Times* [reported](#) that "two senior American officials came under withering public criticism from Pakistan on Tuesday, with the Pakistani foreign minister saying that 'trust' between the countries was in question, particularly over the issue of American missile attacks in Pakistan's tribal areas."

During meetings in Islamabad, the Foreign Minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi told the *Times* he informed Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Admiral Mike Mullen and Obama's regional envoy Richard Holbrooke, "there is a gap between us" regarding the issue of drone attacks.

There are indications that gap has widened into a chasm. ISI director, Lt. General Ahmed Shuja Pasha, refused to meet separately with Holbrooke and Mullen who had requested a private meeting. Pasha is apparently miffed over reports that elements within ISI continue to

provide logistical and material aid to the Taliban even as the imperialists shower “carpets of bombs” as well as a “carpet of gold” on the Army.

Meanwhile, *Daily Times* [reported](#) in Thursday’s edition that “Al Qaeda, Taliban and other militants have been relocating from the Tribal Areas to Pakistan’s overcrowded and impoverished cities, which is likely to make it harder to find and stop them from staging terrorist attacks, officials say.”

Cynically, an unnamed “senior U.S. defence official” told the Lahore-based newspaper, “putting these guys on the run forces a lot of good things to happen. It gives you more targeting opportunities.”

“Opportunities” in the form of dead civilians caught in the cross hairs of a Hellfire missile blast. “The downside,” the official continues, “is that you get a much more dispersed target set and they go to places where we are not operating.” As the *World Socialist Web Site* [reported](#) April 8,

Since 2004, the Pakistani military has repeatedly mounted anti-insurgency operations in the historically autonomous Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), suffering some 1,500 fatalities, provoking widespread popular anger over its wanton indifference to civilian casualties, and triggering a growing humanitarian crisis. More than half a million FATA residents have been rendered refugees. (Keith Jones, “U.S. expands war into Pakistan,” World Socialist Web Site, April 8, 2009)

Even as the TTP and their allies threaten to mount two suicide bombings a week until the Americans cease their drone attacks, the U.S. response—other than rank indifference to the suffering of the Pakistani people—is to demand more, in the form of total capitulation to the Global Godfather by Pakistan’s mercenary elite.

Flogging Video: “It’s all a Conspiracy”

In the wake of the incident for which TTP spokesperson Muslim Khan claimed responsibility, *The News* [reports](#) that NWFP’s Minister for Information, Mian Iftikhar Hussain, called the video release by electronic and print media “a conspiracy against the peace deal in Malakand.”

While Hussain insisted that the outrage occurred before the Taliban’s deal with the provincial government, the man who actually shot the video [told](#) *Dawn* that the girls’ humiliating torture took place two weeks ago, and not in January as ANP and TTP leaders allege.

Rejecting the mendacious fairy-tale concocted by the Taliban and NWFP’s “secular” government, the girl was mercilessly beaten not for some presumed “immoral” breach, but because she had rejected the marriage proposal made by a local Taliban thug, allegedly the son of none other than Muslim Khan himself!

Implying the monstrous punishment was actually “merciful,” Khan told *Dawn* “the girl should have been stoned to death, but the Taliban had only flogged her because qazi courts had not been set up at the time.”

Asma Jahangir, chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, denounced the

incident and accused the federal and provincial governments of giving the neofascists “a free hand to attack people and disgrace women.” Jahangir told *Dawn*,

“The government has handed over Swat to those who have played with the lives of people. If they are really popular, why this was not reflected in the last general elections?” she wondered.

*Ms Jahangir criticised the leaders who were claiming that peace had been restored in Swat. “Why don’t they take their families there and stay just for one week?” In reply to a question about recent terrorist attacks, she said cricket players and police had nothing to with drone attacks. (“Flogging in Swat outrages nation,” *Dawn*, April 4, 2009)*

On Monday, Pakistan’s Supreme Court Chief Justice, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, assailed the government for “not taking up the case until it became a national scandal” *The New York Times* [reports](#).

The head of the Peshawar Bar Association, Abdul Latif Afridi, told the High Court, “the most fundamental rights are violated every second of every day. People are being ejected from their houses, courts are closed, 300 schools have been demolished.”

After listening to Afridi’s grim assessment, Chaudhry demanded to know what the attorney general was doing about it. Apparently, not much.

And when a Musharraf-appointed secretary of the Interior Ministry, Kemal Shah, refused to answer the chief justice when he demanded to know why the official had not been to Swat, Chaudhry ordered: “You go to Swat yourself. You must be very bright. You go yourself. We command you do it and report to us what is happening.”

While embarrassing the pack of thieves who rule the roost is well and good as far as it goes, might there be other, less seemly motives, behind the reign of terror in Swat Valley? Let’s take a look.

Looting Swat’s Resources

As is so often the case, religion serves as the handmaid of organized crime. This observation is no different in Pakistan than it is the U.S. *heimat*, or for that matter, aboard America’s stationary aircraft carrier in the Middle East, Israel, where the dispossession of the Palestinian people by a coterie of settler loons similarly, is backed-up by the armed fist of the capitalist state.

While proclaiming the purest motives for their crimes, TTP “emirs” are enriching themselves on various illegal schemes to loot the region’s natural resources.

Toss in narcotrafficking, kidnapping and extortion and these self-proclaimed “saviors of the Nation” bear a striking resemblance to their erstwhile “adversaries,” America’s own gang of murderous Tony Sopranos. In this context, the Abu Dhabi-based newspaper, *The National*, [revealed](#) April 3 that,

Militants are funding a campaign of violence with profits made from the illegal mining of emeralds and felling of timber in the volatile valley of Swat in northern Pakistan.

Swat, which holds one of Asia’s two largest known deposits of high-quality emeralds, has

been brought under the control of militants following a peace deal struck between the Pakistani Taliban and the government last month. (Ashfaq Yusufzai and Isambard Wilkinson, "Militants stripping Swat of resources," The National, April 3, 2009)

According to investigative reporters on the ground in Mingora, Swat's largest city, "the gemstones are sold as quickly as possible at rates sometimes as low as US\$50 (Dh184) per carat, far below their market price."

Citing anonymous officials too terrified to speak publicly, after looting the collective wealth of Swat's citizens, the gems "are then smuggled to Jaipur, India, before being transported to Bangkok, Switzerland and Israel."

As we have seen, Muslim Khan, who believes that flogging a 17-year-old girl is "merciful" told *The National*, "We know that all the minerals have been created by Allah, the Mighty, and the Merciful for the benefit of his creatures. We should avail the opportunity."

While the newspaper claims that the government has not challenged "the Taliban's control of the valuable emerald mines," more likely bigwigs in Peshawar and Islamabad are sharing the "opportunity" afforded by their so-called "peace" by profiting handsomely from the cosy arrangement to despoil Swat of its mineral wealth.

But wait, there's more!

Another lucrative source of income for the bandits are "Swat's once thick forests, which are already on the verge of extinction."

Abdul Jamil, a local timber trader who can expect swift punishment for spilling the beans, told *The National*: "The Taliban are mercilessly cutting the forest, applying the same [primitive] mechanisms as they do in the case of emeralds."

One government official speaking anonymously said that "the losses suffered by forests in the last one year were more than the losses of the last two decades."

Who, pray tell, would have the "means, motive and opportunity" to assist the TTP's smuggling precious gems to India and Israel? Why, none other than ISI asset and organized crime kingpin, Dawood Ibrahim that's who!

The mafia don, whose D-Company reportedly assisted Lashkar-e-Toiba's terrorist siege in Mumbai last November, has for decades run sophisticated smuggling operations that traffic in everything from gold, nuclear materials, arms and drugs. As investigative journalist Misha Glenny points out, Ibrahim,

took the obvious plunge and started trafficking in drugs, chiefly in heroin bound for the European market and mandrax for South Africa. And in Dawood's part of the world, if you want to guarantee the success of a narcotics business, there is only one organization you need to cozy up to-the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Pakistan's secret service. (McMafia: A Journey Through the Global Criminal Underworld, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008, p. 135)

With extensive smuggling networks operating across South Asia and into the Gulf states, D-Company operatives would be the perfect facilitators for the illicit and very profitable trade in blood emeralds. Needless to say, the illegal trade in gemstones would prove a boon not only for unscrupulous local officials and gangsters but as an additional source of black funds

for enterprising intelligence agencies and their terrorist proxies.

Is this one reason why, as *Daily Times* [reported](#) April 5, that despite the flogging outrage and murder of citizens “the government freed three more Taliban from Mingora on Saturday, as part of its peace accord with Tehreek Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi. The total number of released Taliban has reached 47.”

While the United States plans new atrocities in Central and South Asia, and as the imperialists search for “moderate Taliban” with whom they can share the spoils, it would do us well to heed the [impassioned words](#) of Pakistani writer Shandana Minhas:

*From an extremist movement behind heinous attacks and punishments against anyone and everyone—suicide bombings, burning music and books, banning education, impeding access to healthcare, flogging women for leaving their homes, throwing acid on girls faces, public executions without trial, archive footage of most of which exists in digital libraries across the country—an effort has been made to market it as a romanticized movement of idealistic men with guns who fight injustice when the state doesn't and really just want to bring the world closer to God you know? (“Lashes to lashes, dust to dust,” *The News*, April 5, 2009)*

As is so often the case, the “enemy of my enemy” more often than not is still an enemy.

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