



## De-radicalization: A Case Study of Swat Valley; Its Progress, Challenges

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### Abstract

*This research analyzes the de-radicalization process of swat, its progress, and challenges in the years 2008 to 2018. Previously Swat was fallen in the hand of terrorists and it had faced extremism and terrorism. Religious intolerance and economic issues led it to the next level of conflict. Pakistan Army initiated operations against terrorists while on the other hand, they converted the terrorist's headquarters into centers for the de-radicalization program. This study primarily explored the de-radicalization progress of swat and find that the Army de-radicalized the terrorists through a systematic program that included rehabilitation, religious counseling, vocational training, reintegration into the society, and later on their monitoring were the main features of the program. The study also analyzed the possible efforts that can be put together in making a conducive working environment in Swat. This study also highlights the need for more de-radicalization programs in Pakistan targeting different ethnic, racist, religious radicalization. This study also discusses the efforts of the National action plan and Paigham-e-Pakistan in the light of de-radicalization and its effectiveness in the long run. This research also suggests that the government and private sector with combined efforts can bring more diversity and effectiveness in de-radicalization programs.*

**Key Words:** De-Radicalization, Swat Valley, Rehabilitation, Counselling, Reintegration

### Introduction

Radicalization has emerged as a major issue of Pakistan, whether it's a case of sectarianism, religion or political associations' people respond aggressively in every situation. If the intensity of the association is extremely high, it results in terrorist activities that Pakistan has faced in the past many years. On the other hand, de-radicalization is a process of normalization of a person's views and activities through rehabilitation, counseling, training, and reintegration into society. De-radicalization programs are an attempt to reduce violent extremism and terrorism. It is an effort to disengage a militant from violent and extremist tendencies from his political, religious, and

other associations. Swat from a stunning valley turned into a place for militancy so, Swat has gone through the process of radicalization to de-radicalization ([Rana, 2011](#)).

Swat was a very peaceful valley, and it had many schools and colleges. Education was the motto of this valley, and along with it, there were many health care centers as it was considered as a welfare state back in 1949 (Bath, 2006). Its location made it one of the most beautiful places in Pakistan, but unfortunately, the religious and political parties turned it into a radicalized society. Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhamadi invoked people to raise voices for the implementation of shariah. The

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leader of TNSM was Sufi Muhamad, who arranged the protest against U.S. led war in Afghanistan. He glorified the efforts of the Taliban in Afghanistan and provoked the people of the Malakand division which included Swat as well to participate in the war. People in the name of Islam and Jihad supported TNSM, and around ten thousand people with more or less no training went to Afghanistan for jihad in 2001. Not only this TNSM also launched its radio programs to gather more people for Jihad (Khan, 2010)

On the other hand, Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal got the outright majority in the former NWFP, now known as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in the elections of 2002. In contrast, overall, PML-Q won as a party in the National assembly. Mulla Fazlulah started his radio programs to preach Islam, especially in the areas of Malakand division. The schools of girls were shut down, the barbershops and the Cd's shops were burnt. All these were the signs of radicalization prevailing in Swat (Ali & Khan, 2010).

Pakistan, on the side, helped the U.S. in defeating the Afghan Taliban. Pakistan provided both tactical and logistical support and also provided its intelligence, airspace, and military bases to the United States. Pakistan captured hundreds of people linked with Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. As a result, Pakistan's security was at stake as it was threatened by Taliban fighters, under Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan. These terrorists targeted not only Public places as well as offices of different areas of Pakistan (Akhtar, 2008).

According to Abbasi, Khatwani, and Hussain (2018), Pakistan launched several operations, including Rah-e-Haq in 2007 and Rah-e-Rast against TTP and TNSM, and in 2009 Rah-e-Nijaat. At the same time, the de-radicalization program was also initiated in Swat and other areas of Pakistan. The rehabilitation programs were referred to as De-radicalization and Emancipation Program (DREPs) and were launched in 2009. The programs were named Sabaoon, which means the first Ray of dawn was for the kids between the age of 12-18, the second program was Rastoon (place of the right path) for the people between 19-25, and the other programs were Mishal and Sparlay. Sparlay was for the family

of militants and to them aware of the reintegration of rehabilitation of detainees (Basit, 2015).

These programs had four components firstly, psychological rehabilitation, secondly, religious counseling, thirdly, social and vocational training; and lastly their social reintegration. All these programs were run under the Pakistan military that has their pros and cons. So, it was a whole process of de-radicalization wherefrom children to adults and their families were included, and it was more focused on the reintegration of former militants rather than their de-radicalization. All these programs are more closely to the Saudi Arab model of de-radicalization, and the common factor is religion and method of de-radicalization (Azam & Fatima, 2017).

After all these efforts that were indulged in De-radicalization and Emancipation Program, we see in 2014 the inhumane attack on Army Public School Peshawar. This attack was a sign that after all these efforts still something was left behind that united the terrorist, and they did this brutal act. To counter these terrorists, National Action Plan was made where military courts were established, implementation of the death sentence, strict action against literature promoting hate and extremism, and many other points were included. Another main point of the NAP was to strengthen National Counter Terrorism Authority (Khan & Khan, 2018).

### Deradicalization Program in Swat

The swat de-radicalization program was launched in 2009 after the successful completion of military operations (Rah-e-Rast) in Swat. Pakistan army regained control of the area after two years of struggle. At that time, many militants were teenagers and trained as suicide bombers. Pakistan military decided to launch de-radicalization and emancipation programs in Swat for detained militants to provide them a better environment so they can start their normal life again. The objective of the de-radicalization program was to provide an environment for the restoration of the self-respect of the participants. The purpose behind this program was to remove psychological and ideological exploitation and to make them productive members of society (Basit, 2015).

Some of the other objectives of this program were to achieve long-term peace and stability in Swat through de-radicalization programs and to minimize the workload of the judicial system by separating the reformable groups from criminal terrorists. This program also reduced the possibility of exploitation through de-radicalization in the family members of the extremists. It displayed a caring element of the state and military to help the radicals in the reformation and reintegration into the society by communicating moderate ideology of Islam and by providing better socioeconomic facilities [\(Azam & Fatima, 2017\)](#).

Later on, the program was extended to Punjab, Baluchistan, and other areas of Pakistan. A total of six programs were launched in Pakistan named Sabaoon, Mishal, Sparley, Rastoon, Nava-e-sehar, and heila. The Mishal and Sabaoon were Swat-based programs, and the other programs were launched in different areas. These two programs were based on mainly four components, first was psychological counseling/rehabilitation, the second was religious counseling/education, the third was formal education and vocational training, and lastly their reintegration into society [\(Abbasi, 2014\)](#).

### **Psychological Counselling/Rehabilitation**

The first step in the de-radicalization program was the rehabilitation of the militants through psychological counseling. In this process, psychologists and psychiatrists were involved in investigating the person's emotional, intellectual, and psychological condition. They understood the narrative of the detainees and determined how they were recruited in militancy and what role they have played along with other militants. They also assessed their inclination towards militancy, their interest in leaving militancy and starting a new life [\(Rana, 2011\)](#).

According to these findings' psychologists divided the individuals into four categories: very high risk, high risk, medium risk, and low risk. The intensity of the risk was based on the period they have spent in militancy and the task they have done there. Suicide bombers

were considered as a very high risk, individuals who have used weapons were considered as at high risk, the individuals provided transport and logistics were considered as at medium risk, and lastly, low-risk persons were those involved in cleaning, cooking, fetching water. According to the risk, the duration of the rehabilitation was decided, and it was between six months to two years according to the individual's rehabilitation progress.

### **Religious Counselling**

Religious counseling was the second stage but also was one of the most important stages in the militant rehabilitation and de-radicalization program. Religious counseling helped the militants to set aside their extremist views and get authentic religious knowledge through religious scholars and clerics. To bring the change in the detainees, it was necessary to give them religious counseling for the modification in their extremist religious views [\(Azam & Fatima, 2017\)](#). Terrorists used religion to manipulate the individuals and to force them to join militancy in the name of jihad. Pakistan, as a Muslim state had faced extreme violence and terrorism due to the misconception in the religious views inculcated in the militants. Religious counseling helped to reverse the concept of extremism and radicalization and provided them with a more moderate knowledge of the Quran and hadith. These centers were not programmed as prisoners but were made as learning places for the detainees [\(Sial, 2013\)](#).

### **Formal Education/ Vocational Training**

This program offered formal education from grade 1 to 12, and also it provided vocational training to the individuals to help them in getting an education as well as to get a skill so they can be productive members of society. The curriculum and formal education helped the students to gain more religious knowledge, build tolerance and get worldly education. The focus of vocational training was to provide individuals with different skills according to their interests, so they can get employed. These skills included electronics, computing, automobile, mechanics, welding, electrician

skills, and poultry farming\_(Abbasi & Ahmad, 2014).

Vocational training serves the purpose of providing technical skills to enable the former militants to gain employment. This initiative deviated the former militants from the extremist views to the more tolerant views, and they learned more technical skills, and this provided them with the ability to generate income for themselves and also for their families.

## Reintegration

The last step of the entire de-radicalization process was the reintegration of the former militants into society. This was done through different communal activities, which included cultural festivities and debate competitions. This was carried out through incorporating curricular and extracurricular activities altogether. During this period, the detainees were assessed as if now they could fit the mainstream society or the community was accepting them. Low-risk children are integrated into society at an early stage if their family is not involved with any militant activities\_(Azam & Fatima, 2017). All the former militants, after their integration into the society, were monitored again and again so that they could not revert to any sort of militant activity. The teams also ensure that after the completion of the program, individuals may end up getting School Education or get employed, and their monitoring lasts for a minimum of 2 years after they are released from the de-radicalization program\_(Abbasi, 2014).

## Mishal

Mishal was the program launched in swat under the "Deradicalization and Emancipation program" established in 2010. This program was housed in the same building that was previously used by the Taliban as headquarters, and that was seized by Army in 2009. The participants of this program were between the age of eighteen to fifty with the same socio-economic religious, and ethnic background. This program de-radicalized almost 2300 terrorists. It was close to Saudi Arab mode in terms of the formation of the program because both used religious clerics to provide authentic

religious knowledge, both used rehabilitations, and they provided different skills.\_(Jawaid, 2020).

The first stage of this program was based on psychological rehabilitation. In the Mishal program, both civilian and military psychologists were involved in the initial assessment of the individuals to find the reasons behind their decision to join militancy (Abbasi & Ahmad, 2014). The psychologist also analyzed the ideological and religious sentiments behind terrorists. It also included the concept of jihad according to them and how they associate with it. In Mishal, program rehabilitation begins through counseling by using one on one meetings between the psychologist and the individual. The psychologist also interviewed the subjects related to family and community to understand his life story and to assess the reason behind joining militancy\_(Abbasi, 2014).

A study done by \_(Fatima & Azam, 2017) revealed that certain socio-economic, psychological, and ideological variables derived individuals towards militancy. It includes low socioeconomic status, broken family, physical abuse as a child, strict behavior of parents and teachers, and lack of education that resulted in lack of critical thinking, emotional instability, depression, and revenge-seeking behavior. The significant finding was drawn that religious intolerance was not only a factor but also a social-economic factor that played its part in pushing the individuals towards terrorism\_(Basit, 2015).

The second step in the Mishal program was religious counseling, and its objective was to provide the correct narrative of religion. It was done by a military-religious cleric called Khateeb. It delivered daily lectures to the class, but there were no individual sessions between the scholar and the detainee. The main topics included the concept of jihad, fitna, rights of citizens, right of parents. Religious clerics guided individuals about the true essence of Islam and emphasized on the rights of Muslims and non-Muslims. They guided them that Islam emphasizes on peace and restricts from use of force, especially on innocent people. They tried to change the previous notions that were developed by the extremists and terrorists. They were provided knowledge

from Quran and hadiths so they could understand the true teachings of Islam. (Basit, 2015)

The de-radicalization program offers vocational training to the beneficiaries, which focuses on giving them the opportunity to learn useful skills that, in return, help them to get a job. These skills include Electrician courses, computer skills, automobiles, appliance repair, welding, and tailoring. (Azam & Fatima, 2017) These skills are practically very beneficial as they give support to themselves and their family. The reason behind this vocational training is to offer them a job and a place where they can go and spend time so, they can avoid engagement in militant activities. Basic education was also a program of Mishal, and if someone has done at least matric, then they were provided by computer skills. The choice is given to detainees to identify their interests and learn that skill. (Abbasi, 2014).

The last part was the integration of the detainees, this process starts during the de-radicalization program as the family members of former extremists are also invited in the programs and meetings, and they are held with them to address the factors that can push towards radicalization. In these meetings, issues regarding broken family, lack of family support, and lack of supervision is discussed (Azam & Fatima, 2017). Families are highlighted as an important part of the individual's life and before releasing or integrating them into the community. The family is also trained in a way that they can become their support system, and the individuals can associate with their families (Borum, 2003).

### **Effectiveness of Mishal Program**

According to the research done by (Azam & Fatima, 2017), in which they have taken interviews from the beneficiaries of this program mentioned that they joined the militancy after listening to the sermon as it highlighted the importance of jihad and after entering into the Mishal program, he understood the true meaning of Islam. So, he changed his ideology, and after the religious counseling, he understood that those who fight with their brothers cannot be called Muslims and no one has the right to kill any other human being or call another Muslim as a non-

believer. In this research, the other respondent told them that he understood that in any problem he has to consult others before making a decision, and he has learned to respect others, and now he is a well-behaved person in society. (Azam & Fatima, 2017).

The findings showed that the engagement with the families of the participants encouraged them to be a more productive part of society; not only this, but it also helps them in resolving psychological and social issues. With the encouragement and support of the family, they were able to recover more easily, and it worked as a support system and helped them to cut off their ties with the militants and make their families a priority. (Jawaid, 2020)

Mishal program also offered vocational training that resulted in providing the beneficiaries with useful skills that helped them to get employed after their release. It helped them to get employed and also shifted their intention from militancy to more productive work. Vocational training also helped them in their financial support as the fiscal grant was given to them without forcing them to return that money. The beneficiaries were asked to choose their plan of employment before their release, and they were financially supported.

### **Challenges of Mishal Program**

The first challenge was to gather the militants and enter them into the Deradicalization program. After their integration into the program, psychologists tried to understand the philosophy behind their militancy, but they did not work on their present condition. As the duration of the program was three months, it is not possible for a psychologist to assess the views of a person. Especially after the Reintegration of a person into society, it makes it more difficult to understand the performance and the level of engagement in society. (Jawaid, 2020)

The social stigma attached to the beneficiaries made them difficult to adjust to society as well as it was important to make sure that if they were financially independent and are settled. The beneficiaries, if reported with good behavior, had not been given any relaxation or even not allowed to leave the area of residence. (Basit, 2015).

## Sabaoon

Sabayon is a Pashto word that means "The first ray of Dawn." Saban was the first program for juveniles under the age of 17. The families of the children were poor and blackmailed by the Taliban and were asked to give them 10,000 rupees; otherwise, hand over to them their child. Due to poor socio-economic factors, the family gave the child to the Taliban that later became suicide bombers and terrorists. There have been numerous events in the past to support the claim: In 2011, a 12-year-old suicide bomber killed thirty-one army cadets in Mardan. Another teenage bomber, blew himself up in a mosque during Friday prayers in Jamrud tehsil of Khyber Agency, killing 47 people. In 2010, a teenage suicide bomber killed 19 people at a bus terminal in Kohat, (Rafi, 2015).

The military initiated the program for the children so they could be deradicalized and reintegrated into society. The children brought at this program were mostly detained during invasions by the army; some were turned in by parents while others voluntarily surrendered during an army operation. They were made to spend approximately two years or more at the center, where they undergo psychological treatment, education, and vocational training (Khan, 2017).

The first step in Sabaoon program was psychological support and social assistance. The family unit is a basic need for any person, or its rejection can result in a developmental and personal crisis; for example, the absence of fathers can make young individuals choose alternate role models such as militants and terrorists. Or, within large families, a child can feel rejected or ignored, and to gain attention, he can join the militancy. This program worked on the emotional and psychological problems of the child and introduced a safe place CE for them. The children recruited in this program have not only acted violently but have also witnessed many other violent acts, so this intervention allowed them to restore a healthy mindset and allowed them to throw the baggage of violent activities. This program allowed them to grow their personality and to interact within a large group, and make bounding with the family (Khan, 2017).

The next part of the program was to provide correct religious doctrine to the children. The terrorists played with the minds of the child by manipulating them and by telling them that blowing themselves would lead them to Jannah. So, to correct all these concepts, one must be given the correct information, and it was done by the religious clerics.

The next step was to provide education and skills, and for this purpose, schools were made in Swat. The skills were provided within the institute (Sabaoon) as there were different rooms allocated for different programs. There were computer labs, sports ground and media room. This program also provided some skills, including the Electrician course, computer skills, automobiles, appliance repair, welding, and tailoring. This helped the children in the integration into the society (Azam & Fatima, 2017).

The last part of the program was the reintegration of the children into society. This purpose was served through the involvement of family members and close relatives, and other community members. To verify the individual's performance, all these sources were gathered all together to monitor the performance of the children (Abbasi, 2014). A trust-based relationship was developed between the individual and the agency to solve the communal problems. After joining the program, a confession statement was taken from the person that he is willing to change, and after their reintegration into the society, if they found any militant, they will inform the agency as it will help the agency in the betterment of the area (Khan, 2017).

## Effectiveness of the Program

The program was effective in a way that it provided a safe place for the detainees, gave them the freedom and support to start a new life. This program gave them knowledge as well as basic skills for survival and employment and also provided money for their business. This program guided them to the right path, provided them with authentic religious knowledge. This program helped the children to become productive parts of society and put their efforts into the betterment of society.

## **Challenges of the program**

The challenge was to identify the children's interests and then guide them towards the right path. If the child loses his interest, then it becomes impossible to deradicalize him. Another important thing was his monitoring after his inclusion into society. If there's a loophole in the monitoring part, there is a chance for a child to revert to the radical ideology.

## **The challenges in de-radicalization in Swat valley over the past ten years (2008-2018)?**

Rehabilitation was the first challenge in the de-radicalization process of Swat. It was difficult to assess and treat the terrorists as they had seen and done the most terrible acts. Then to understand the reason behind their involvement in terrorism was another task. The reasons were not the same as their situations, so their treatment was supposed to be done accordingly was a challenge.

Psychological and religious counseling was another challenge as their brainwashing was done based on religion, and there is no doubt that it is a sensitive topic to discuss. Hiring religious clerics that can deliver the right message without offending anyone was also a challenge. Former terrorists have their reasons to believe in jihad that was based on the wrong concept, and to correct it through authentic knowledge of the Quran and Sunnah was a difficult task.

The other challenge was to make a person skillful enough so he can earn money was also a challenge as the other main reason for joining militancy was financial problems. To provide skills for the detainees that grab their interest as well as a challenge. The other challenge was that the army decided to help the detainees in setting up their businesses, and that was difficult due to less financial resources, so less amount was given and distributed among the detainees for their business due to low monetary funds.

Society was also a challenge in the de-radicalization program of Swat as to make them understand that the detainees now can start living their own life was difficult. To make the family understand that now they have to

help the detainees in settling was another difficult task. People were unable to understand that they have to be welcoming to the former terrorist, and they don't have to blame for what they have done in the past was a challenge.

Monitoring the former terrorists after their reintegration into society was a challenge because to mentor and checking the activities of each individual was a bit difficult. It was a bit hard for the army to stay in contact with the detainee and his family to make sure that his activities were normal and he is not again falling into any terrorist activity.

## **Conclusion**

De-radicalization has played an effective role in transforming the lives of terrorists. Swat after falling into the hands of terrorists was the worst and most fearful place to live but the operations led by the Army cleared the area. Hence, the army made de-radicalization centers at the buildings that were previously used by the terrorists as their headquarters. It was a sign of victory and peace. The terrorists were captured as well as some of them voluntarily joined the de-radicalization program. The de-radicalization process includes children and adults. Most of the children were trained as suicide bombers, and the adults were mid to low-level terrorists.

The Swat de-radicalization program had four basic methods including rehabilitation, religious counseling, vocational training, and reintegration into society. The rehabilitation process was based on understanding the psychology behind the terrorists, if they are doing it in religious disguise or if they are doing it for money. Less importance was given to rehabilitation instead after knowing why they were sent to the programs. The religious counseling was done by the religious clerics and scholars, and the concept of jihad was explained in the light of the Quran and sunnah. It was taught that killing off your brother is strictly prohibited. Islam is a religion of peace, and it does not allow the killing of innocents without any reason.

The step was vocational training, and it was one of the major reasons for the success of de-radicalization in Swat. Poverty was also a reason behind the terrorists, as found by

psychologists. Learning silks gave them the ability to earn for themselves and their family. It helped them in adjusting to society after they left the de-radicalization program. Financial assistance was also provided to the needy so they could set up their small business, but due to strain resources, the amount was less than it was needed in the business. Still, it was the most efficient way to make the former terrorists independent, so they can earn their livelihood.

The last step was the reintegration of the former terrorist into society. The family was given knowledge and guidance so they can help them in adjusting and starting a new life. The monitoring after the integration was the crucial part, and the evidence shows that, to some extent, monitoring was done. However, after some time, it was difficult to check on every detainee. On the other hand, there were some incidents where some of the former

terrorists helped the army in capturing other terrorists.

As a matter of fact, after analyzing the success of the de-radicalization program of Swat, it can be concluded that it was a huge success. There is a need for more of these programs in major cities of Pakistan and the areas where different forms of radicalization are prevailing, including religious, ethnic, and cultural intolerance. De-radicalization can run side by side by banning hate speech, promoting intolerant literature, and monitoring religious seminaries and educational institutes. Implementation of laws is a key to a peaceful society as well a justice system should be fair for everyone. Lastly, private and government sectors should fill the gap by joining hands for de-radicalization so there will be no financial strain. Our youth is energetic and skillful and has unique ideas, and if they are indulged in such programs, it will bring diversity and effectiveness.

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