

The Clash of Narratives
Swat Military Operation against the Taliban

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Table of Contents

1) Introduction	1
2) Literature Review	4
a) Propaganda, State, and the Media	4
b) War on Terror: Language and Discourse	5
c) Pakistani state and the Taliban: Political Discourse	7
3) Objectives of the Study	9
a) Hypothesis	9
4) Research Design and Methodology	10
a) Sampling	11
5) Analysis	12
6) Conclusion	23
7) References	24
8) Appendices	28

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Abstract

The Pakistani state launched a major military operation against the local Taliban militants on 8th May, 2009 in Swat, which is situated in Pakistan's north-west province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that borders Afghanistan. The state simultaneously initiated an anti-Taliban propaganda campaign to create legitimacy and consensus for the operation. This study analyses the discourse in anti-Taliban narrative(s) of the Pakistani state, as mediated in the propaganda. The study analyses the anti-Taliban narrative in media texts, where it is mediated. It uses the media reports of *Dawn* and *Nawa-i-Waqt*, Pakistan's leading newspapers, and undertakes a critical discourse analysis to examine the social conditioning of the state propaganda. The study determines that the anti-Taliban narratives of the state clash with the overall state ideology, which has ironically not undergone any radical transformation in the post-9/11 era. The state ideology is 'Islamic' and it revolves around a national security discourse in which the Indian threat, both the real and perceived, plays a vital role. Even though the anti-Taliban narratives in the Swat propaganda campaign served the state's immediate objectives of demonising the militants, they are inherently ineffective in challenging the entire extremism discourse in Pakistan. The study argues that Pakistan's war on terror efforts can be best investigated in its communicative practices. The duality of the state's response to terrorism should be looked at as a discursive practice of the state rather than a tactical problem. Therefore, the Swat Military Operation, or Operation Rah-i-Raast, serves as a case study.

1. Introduction

On the 8th of May, 2009, the government of Pakistan launched a massive military offensive against the Taliban insurgents¹ in the Swat valley (Malakand Division)² of its north-west province³ that borders Afghanistan, in a bid to take back the control of the area from the militants⁴. It was the first major military action by the Pakistani government against the local Taliban post-9/11; though smaller sporadic attacks had been carried out by the state in the past,

¹ The study focuses on the Pakistani Taliban, more accurately the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), as the movement is generally known. By Taliban I do not mean here the Afghan Taliban though it is difficult to make a distinction. The Taliban, both in Afghanistan and Pakistan, are predominantly ethnic Pashtuns (they have among them other nationalities as well) living across the border, the Durand Line, dividing Pakistan's Pashtun areas and the Afghanistan's Pashtun-dominated areas. The 1,610 miles long Durand Line is a controversial porous border, established by the British in 1893.

² See appendix for the regional map.

³ Previously known as the North-West Frontier Province, the province has recently been renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

⁴ I have used the terms 'militants' and 'insurgents' to classify the Taliban fighters, and have avoided the word 'extremists' for the reason that it is a biased term, something which is used by the Pakistani state for the Taliban.

especially since the change in its Afghanistan policy following the fall of the Taliban regime in December 2001 (Rana, 2009). This study argues that the Pakistani government had employed a propaganda campaign in order to discredit the Taliban⁵, whereby the media was widely relied upon to propagate an anti-Taliban discourse⁶. The study claims that through this propaganda the state aimed to achieve three specific targets: 1) To discredit and demonise the Taliban; 2) To create legitimacy for the military operation, and, selectively, for the ‘war on terror’; and 3) To build consensus for the operation.

The study looks at this anti-Taliban propaganda as a narrative. This narrative is part of a larger discourse, which was propagated by the state and the media during the Swat conflict in the form of rhetoric, symbols, and myths. The term discourse is referred to as a narrative that “creates more or less shared understandings of membership, collectivity, and community among participants” (Garrett and Baquedano-Lopez, 2002). The propaganda, and in particular the narrative(s) in it, invoke and play upon this collective understanding.

The study takes inspiration from the Gramscian analysis of power and hegemony (Mouffe, 1979; Benedetto, 1993; Curran, 2002), and the readings in propaganda and war on terror discourse (O’Shaughnessy, 2002, 2004; Kern, Just and Norris, 2004; Chouliaraki, 2004, 2005, 2007; Gershkoff and Kushner, 2005). It analyses the issue of power and hegemony in media texts, which cannot be de-linked from the public sphere, culture and politics (Goode, 2005). Political and media discourse are thus inseparable: “political discourse is almost always mediated, and media discourse often has political effects...” (Chouliaraki, 2007, p.1).

The study argues that the state⁷ is the main instigator of propaganda, and it asserts its power, or legitimises it, not only by means of coercion but also by building consent, or the ‘passive acquiescence’ of its citizens (O’Shaughnessy, 2004). The state manages to do so through various media channels, which is a result of a ‘mediating’ process between the state and the media (Livingstone, 2009). This study, however, does not deal with the mechanisms with which the Pakistani state managed to control the media, the political economy of mass media, or the impact of propaganda on masses. It looks at the Swat war propaganda as a mediated narrative of the state, in which the media plays an equally important role.

The propaganda during the Swat military offensive is useful to analyse the narratives that were used to demonise⁸ the Taliban, who had long been ‘strategic’ allies of the Pakistani state (Akhtar, 2000; Siddiq, 2001; Rashid, 2002; Faruqi, 2003; Abbas, 2005; Hussain, 2005; Khan, 2007; Ali, 2008). It also helps understand why the once ‘children of jihad’ and ‘*Mujahideen-i-Islam*’

⁵ The study does not make any ethical claims about propaganda. Right or wrong, good or bad; propaganda is studied as a hegemonic instrument only.

⁶ The state and media are not monolithic entities, and of course there were varying trends. The focus of this study is on dominant trends as reflected in propaganda.

⁷ Manufacturing consent is considered essential in democratic states, though authoritarian states too need some kind of popular consensus (O’Shaughnessy, 2004). The term ‘state’ in this study is used to describe ‘a perceived entity that continually struggles to find its own identity and relevance in an increasingly global and transversal world’ (Campos, 2007).

⁸ The negative image-making of the Taliban is narrated through symbolism, rhetoric, and myths (O’Shaughnessy, 2004). The study examines the discourse behind this narrative.

(warriors of Islam) became an 'evil force'; according to the government of Pakistan, they were bent on challenging the writ of the state and posed a tremendous serious security risk to the country. In this propaganda campaign, the state came into conflict with the narratives it previously used in support of the Taliban. It can also be observed that the pre-9/11 state narratives did not totally vanish from the political discourse but kept emerging along with the post-9/11 anti-Taliban narratives and continued to create a paradoxical situation. More significantly, the anti-Taliban narratives clashed with the overall Islamic ideology, which the country had been following since its independence, and which remained largely unchanged even after 11th September terrorist attacks (Rashid, 2002). It must not be ignored that propaganda itself 'feeds off ideology'; hence it is not possible to separate the ideological and propagandist discourses (O'Shaughnessy, 2004). I have chosen the Swat military operation to analyse this contradiction in the Pakistani state's anti-Taliban stance. This has by far been one of the because it is one of the important events that have taken place during the international war on terror campaign, and in particular, Pakistan's own fight against Islamic militancy on its soil.

While examining the propaganda narratives, the study not only looks at the use of language, semiotics, and textuality, but goes further in critically analysing the whole discourse in terms of its social conditioning and historical make-up (Fairclough, 2001; Chouliaraki, Fairclough, 1999; Dijk, 2001; Hall, 2001; Wetherell, 2001). In Norman Fairclough's words, we are exploring the narrative as a social practice, which does not only involve the analysis of the texts but the analysis of their "processes of production and interpretations", and also the analysis of "the relationship between texts, processes, and their social conditions, both the immediate conditions of the situational context and the more remote conditions of institutional and social structures" (Fairclough, 2001, p.21) In doing so, we are taking language as a medium, which is essentially involved in 'power' and 'struggles of power' (Fairclough, 2001).

The anti-Taliban narrative, as we investigate in the Swat conflict, is fundamentally a power narrative. This narrative was not construed in a vacuum; various sociological and economic factors played a role in its formulation. By employing this narrative, the state wanted to achieve an aim, an objective. This objective was to (re)establish its power and hegemony in a rapidly changing local, regional, and global scenario, particularly in relation to the post-9/11 events. As Donald Matheson (2005, p.6) puts it, "Hegemony is about meaning, about struggles over whose ways of making sense of things dominate within an area of social life. Therefore, language and other symbolic systems are central to power".

This study examines the policy shift of the Pakistani state vis-à-vis the Taliban and undertakes a discourse analysis of the anti-Taliban propaganda by analysing various media texts published during the Swat military operation. The study looks at the narratives used by the government against the Taliban, and how these narratives, in terms of discourse analysis, collide with state's Islamic ideology and national security discourse.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Propaganda, State, and the Media*

It is almost impossible to agree on any one definition of propaganda. E. L. Bernays' analysis and evaluation of the phenomenon of propaganda are one of the earliest scholarly works on this subject (Bernays, 1928). For him, manipulation of public opinion is necessary for the mass production of ideas, which is essential for the progress of society. On the other hand, Marxist scholars such as Gramsci (1971), Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) acknowledge the power of propaganda but criticise it for being a tool in the hands of the capitalist class. Much of this examination of propaganda in the 20th century was a result of the wars, where different belligerent states used propaganda extensively. No wonder Pratkanis (1991 cited in O'Shaughnessy, 2004, p.14) traces the historical roots of the term 'propaganda' in the Counter-Reformation movement.

One of the most discussed scholarly works on the issue of propaganda, in particular its relation to state, consent-making, and persuasion is Herman and Chomsky's 'Manufacturing Consent' (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Though Herman and Chomsky talk about the relation between the state and the media through the lens of a political economy, and their focus being mainly the US media, the fundamental thrust of their analysis of the propaganda is that the mass media depicts events in favor of the 'wealthy and powerful elites' (*ibid*). According to them, it is not necessary that the state must force the media to carry forward the state narrative; the economic interests of the state and the media (which in capitalist societies are in the hand of a powerful wealthy class) often coincide (*ibid*). Therefore, censorship and coercion are not the only tools in modern times to control the media. Hence, it can be ascertained that propaganda is a complex phenomenon. It is not as simple as the notion of state control of the media or other means of communication.

Propaganda, like all other spheres of statecraft and society, is 'mediated', or 'mediatised'. As Silverstone (2005 cited in Livingstone, 2009, p.2) claims "politics, like experience, can no longer even be thought outside a media frame". Issues of mediation, mediatisation, and mediasation are vital to understand the state propaganda and the discourse behind it, as it is the overlapping and intersected relationship between the state and the media that determine the actual discourse (Thompson, 1995). "Mediation involves the movement of meaning from one text to another, from one discourse to another, from one even to another" (Silverstone, 1999, p.13).

There is a serious dearth of literature dealing with Pakistan's post-9/11 anti-Taliban propaganda and its media depiction. There is some material on the negative image-making of the Taliban in Pakistani newspapers, but it does not deal with the overall state discourse (Malik and Iqbal, n.d.). It only deals with the depiction of the Taliban in the Pakistani press. These researches usually ignore the fact that the 'negative' image-making of the Taliban in Pakistani media is not primarily a media initiative. The media depiction of Islamists in the pre 9/11 era, was in complete contrasts to that in the post 9/11 era; primarily due to adjustments in the changing discourse of the state. Therefore, the examination of the media depiction of the Taliban is in

reality an examination of the state discourse about terrorism. Keeping these limitations in mind, the study draws parallels from the studies on the US-led Afghan War and Iraq War (O'Shaughnessy, 2004; Chouliaraki, 2004, 2005).

For O'Shaughnessy, the propagandist media campaign during the Iraq War was a state initiative. "The British and US governments recognised that the propaganda war would be as critical as the physical war. International public opinion had to be at least neutralised if it could not be persuaded" (O'Shaughnessy, 2004, p.211). We find a striking resemblance between the US propaganda during the Iraq War and the Pakistani state's Swat operation propaganda. O'Shaughnessy opines that the propaganda in the case for the Iraq War was much more difficult for the US than that for Afghanistan; Iraq was not directly involved in the 9/11 attacks, therefore the state had to construe certain myths and propagate them through the media vigorously. On the other hand, the construction of an anti-Taliban narrative was an extremely difficult task for Pakistan because the Pakistani state and the Taliban were close allies prior to 9/11.

O'Shaughnessy discusses two 'foundation myths' and various secondary myths that shaped the Iraq War propaganda. One of the two primary myths was the alliance between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden, while the other was Iraq's possession of WMDs (Weapons of Mass Destruction). According to O'Shaughnessy, as part of the secondary myths the American state told its citizens was the precision of air strikes during the war, and that the Iraqi people would revolt against their rulers and welcome the US marines as liberators. Creation of so-called enemies, fabrication, distortion of facts, duplicity and deceit were the tools with which the Iraq War propaganda was carried out (O'Shaughnessy, 2004).

Therefore, the fundamental aim of state propaganda is to exert power, and influence the public sphere via media, or in other words by mediating its power. This state power can be coercive, or it can be exerted through consent-building exercises. In contrast to liberal pluralist theories (Curran, 2002), radical theoretical frameworks consider media as a 'site of struggle' where different social groups are engaged in a conflict of narratives (Benedetto, 1993; Curran 2002). The Gramscian theory of power vis-à-vis the media does not discard the value of counter narratives in the struggle for power. It doesn't look at media products as 'monolithic expressions of ruling class values, which ignores any diversity of values within the ruling class and within the media, and the possibility of oppositional readings by media audiences' (Chandler, n.d.). This study analyses the media as a 'contested space', therefore it emphasises on examining various discourses (Gramsci, 1971). It looks at the state propaganda and its discourse as the state's 'contest' with other narratives (also with its own varying narratives).

2.2. *War on Terror: Language and Discourse*

In peace and war alike, the state needs an enemy.. It sketches the portrait of the 'other', the villain, with the help of symbols and myths. Power, thus, is not simply a physical phenomenon; it is also semiotic. As Hall (2001, p.338) describes it: "Power, it seems, has to be understood here, not in terms of economic exploitation and physical coercion, but also in broader cultural or symbolic terms, including the power to represent someone or something in a certain way—

within a certain *regime of representation*... Stereotyping is a key element in this exercise of symbolic violence”.

Since the ruling elite of the state has the resources and physical power, it also controls this ‘regime of representation’, with which it delineates the contours of an enemy. It has got the most power to unleash this ‘symbolic violence’. That does not imply that other social groups do not indulge in the same activity of ‘othering’. For the Taliban, for example, the West is the ‘other’, the enemy, and they represent the West according to their ideology in order to compete in this symbolic power struggle.

Bourdieu (1992, p.45) traces this symbolic power in the use of official language, which he believes is “bound up with the state, both in its genesis and its social uses”. Therefore, it is important to analyse the official language and the political domination attached to it, which is reproduced by state institutions and opinion-makers, and how the whole discourse represents certain people and groups by construing the image of the other (Said, 1985; Mohanty, 1990; Hall, 1997). The war on terror discourse, thus, significantly deals with this symbolic power, the making of the ‘other’, and is rooted in the language and vocabulary of dominance. It is the power of a dominant group over narratives, their meanings, their interpretations, and their distribution that to some extent relegate the Taliban as the ‘other’ run up to the Swat operation.

On the level of discourse, war on terror itself is propaganda. As Höijer, Nohrstedt and Ottosen (2004, p.7) assert, it is the “device for establishing power over meanings”. And not only meanings, it aims at establishing power over the language. Since language, according to Fairclough, is a social process, which is conditioned by other non-linguistic factors, the war on terror aims to dominate and influence social conditions and those non-linguistic factors (Fairclough, 2001). Hence, any study of the war on terror cannot afford to ignore the ‘discourse’—both linguistic and non-linguistic as they are interconnected and cannot be separated.

The discourse deals as much with the linguistic elements as with the non-linguistic structures. However, language is the primary instrument used to communicate and exert power on a discourse. . On the other hand, language itself is a site of struggle for power. Fairclough believes that language performs this function primarily through its ‘ideological properties’. “Ideology is pervasively present in language,” he opines (Fairclough, 2001, p.2). Ideological discourse, thus, is essentially involved in manufacturing consent. “Ideology is the key mechanism of rule by consent, and because it is the favoured vehicle of ideology, discourse is of considerable social significance in this connection” (Fairclough, 2001, p.28). Thus, war on terror discourse should be studied in relation to its ideological framework.

Most of the literature that commented on the US war on terror and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq by allied forces discuss terrorism as a discourse which the American state deliberately linked with the idea of national security (Campos, 2007). According to Campos, the state, in order to legitimise power relations and its set of objectives, gives terrorism meanings and virtually promotes it as a commodity (*ibid*). This study argues that the state gives meanings to

terrorism through a narrative, which carries a unique and peculiar discourse and is a product of social relations and conditions. As much as the social conditions influence this discourse, the discourse too influences social conditions (Fairclough, 2001). “Within these practices of national security discourse, a knowledgebase is constituted, legitimised, produced and reproduced within the exercise of power to ensure that certain modes of responses are pre-conditioned and employed” (Campos, 2007, p.119).

We encounter that in George W. Bush’s post-9/11 speeches, where he declared war on ‘terrorism’ on the premise of national security threat, hence creating a narrative which would justify the state’s future actions. In these speeches, George W. Bush not only talks about the 9/11 terrorist attacks; he carves a narrative for a broader, bigger and a longer war, on possible and perceived threats from the terrorists. The term ‘terrorist’ is not used for a specific organization or group; it is a loose category for anyone whom the American state considers a terrorist (Campos, 2007). The only choice left for other nations and peoples is to decide whether they are with the US or with the ‘terrorists’. Impartiality and neutrality in this war on terror is not permitted (*ibid*).

Bush defines the discourse on terror clearly and explicitly in his post-9/11 speeches by keeping in mind the economic and militaristic interests of the state, domestic and foreign policy, and strategic interests of the US in various parts of the world (Rees, 2006). However, he uses a narrative of terror to conceal these motives. This terror narrative is about us versus them—peaceful nations and people versus terrorists; civilisation versus barbarism and primitivism; freedom versus fear; and hope versus terror. ‘In doing so, not only was another ‘new war’ proclaimed, with unseen political, economic and legal consequences, but a new global ‘discursive order’ was also initiated that aimed at control of representations and communications’ (Höijer, Nohrstedt and Ottosen, 2004, p.7). The war on terror discourse, thus, allows the states to control means of communications and representations. It becomes the prerogative of the state to represent terrorism and its consequences, which may be “as hypothetical, as justified, as minimised, or as dramatised as the dominant class wishes” (Erajvec, 2004, p.93).

2.3. Pakistani State and the Taliban: Political Discourse

Known Pakistani scholar Hamza Alavi argues in his paper ‘Ethnicity, Muslim Society, and the Pakistan Ideology’ that contrary to the common belief that Pakistan was founded on a religious (Islamic) ideology, it was the need of Pakistan’s ruling elite in the post-colonial period to carve a religious identity for the state (Alavi, 1986). Alavi opines that the concept of a Muslim nationhood, which was prevalent before the partition of British India, was replaced with the idea of Islamic ideology to suit the interests of the rulers. The post-independence rulers of Pakistan, therefore, perceived the state not just a ‘physical/legal entity’ but an ‘extraordinary state’, an “ideological and political leader of the Islamic world” (Cohen, 2010).

The objectives decided by the state for itself were not a result of some religious zeal. They were carefully drafted by the dominant class, which needed a ‘unifying’ discourse for the various institutions and groups of the country. The Islamic ideology of the state also suited the

international scenario. The post-World War II world was clearly divided between the capitalist and communist camps, represented by the United States of America and Soviet Union respectively. Pakistan had opted to join the America bloc.

One of the biggest reasons behind Pakistan's decision to go into the American camp was India's support for the then Soviet Union (Khan, 2007). Apart from the Islamic discourse that the state had adopted in the post-colonial period, the other main discourse dealt with national security. Pakistan framed its domestic and foreign policies mainly on this national security discourse, which Ijaz Khan calls a 'strategic culture' (Khan, 2007). Just like the Islamic ideology, the national security discourse was exploited by the ruling class to keep the country unified, and to legitimise the state and its rule. Since Pakistan already had an armed conflict with India over Kashmir right after the partition, this 'Indian threat' was played upon by the country's rulers in the years to come (Siddiqi, 2001). Therefore, Pakistan's foreign policy, in particular its policy for Afghanistan, was also based on this real and imagined Indian threat. At the time of the partition, Afghanistan had a pro-Indian regime, and Pakistan considered it a strategic disaster in case of a serious conflict with India on its eastern borders (Rashid, 2002).

Contrary to the popular perception that Pakistan started supporting religious forces during the tenure of General Ziaul Haq in the 1980s, scholars such as Ahmed Rashid and Ijaz Khan argue that the alliance between the Pakistani state and religious extremists was much older (Rashid, 2002; Khan, 2007). "Pakistani decision makers have found religious extremists a natural choice for alliance/usage as tools of foreign policy due to, a) its own religious identity basis; b) perception of India as a Hindu state which has not accepted Pakistan as an independent state; c) United States also considered Islamic forces as good allies during the Cold War against the Soviets; and d) the centrist, post-colonial state dominated by the military has always considered secular, nationalist and democratic forces a challenge to its hold on power" (Khan, 2007, p.19).

However, it is true that Pakistan openly started supporting the *jihadi* militant organisations, ideologically and logistically, during the 1980s. The state, with the overt and covert support of the US and other western countries, declared war on Soviet forces in Afghanistan with the help of the *Mujahideen* (Rashid, 2002). The Pakistani state found it very natural and a logical outcome of its long-held policies to support the Islamic warriors on both sides of the Durand Line. The meta-narrative of the state (the state ideology) was totally in congruence with the narratives with which it supported the Afghan *jihad*. The narratives of that era are so powerful, and so much in conformity with the whole make-up of the state that they still can't be wiped out from the country's social horizon.

Most Afghanistan experts are of the view that in Taliban, Pakistan found a natural ally and a 'strategic asset' (Rashid, 2002; Faruqi, 2003; Hussain, 2005; Khan, 2007; Ali, 2008). Pakistan had long supported Hikmetyar in a hope to install its client government in Kabul⁹. Pakistan's dream was fulfilled when the Taliban started to conquer southern Afghan states one after another. The camaraderie flourished with time and continued until the deadly 11th of September attacks.

⁹ Gulbuddin Hikmetyar, an Afghan warlord and founder of Hizb-e-Islami party, who fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan.

Khan (2007) is of the view that post 9/11 Pakistan tried its best to save the Taliban government even after announcing support for the international war on terror. According to him, Pakistan wanted to convince the Taliban officials in Kabul that they could save the regime by handing over Osama bin Laden to America. The state, even after committing to fight terrorism, was not ready to relinquish its policies. It didn't want to abandon its most trusted allies.

3. Objectives of the Study

It is repeatedly said by the West that Pakistan is not doing enough to fight terrorism on its soil, and that it should 'do more'¹⁰. Western officials, policy makers, researchers, and think-tanks have often hinted at the links between some Pakistani state officials, particularly from the ISI, and the Taliban (Jones, 2007; Waldman, 2010). The recent 'WikiLeaks' revelations, concerning the alleged ISI-Taliban partnership, is just another example of this duplicity.¹¹ However, this criticism of Pakistan is mostly focused on the operational and the logistical side of the war on terror. This study argues that more than the logistics, the fundamental problem with Pakistan's response to war on terror is that of narrative and discourse. For the Pakistani state, the main battle after 9/11 was not merely tactical but also a battle of narratives. The narrative was going to decide not only the foreign and domestic policies of the state, but the very legitimacy and existence of the state (Höijer, Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2004).

The study claims that there is a fundamental conflict, a clash between the post-9/11 anti-terrorism narrative(s) of the state (which it was forced to adopt) and the sustained meta-narrative (the state ideology) that is supportive of Islamism and militancy. To investigate this claim, the study analyses the Pakistani state's anti-Taliban narratives in the government propaganda and the media portrayal during the Swat Military Operation 2009, and compares¹² that narrative with the ideological discourse of the state with which it legitimises its existence and runs its affairs.

Hypothesis

The state of Pakistan employed an anti-Taliban narrative in its propaganda campaign during the Swat Military Operation (2009) to build consensus and legitimise the offensive, however, this anti-Taliban narrative tends to clash with the overall state ideology (the meta-narrative).

The research contributes to, and takes inspiration from the already existing studies on propaganda and the war on terror discourse (O'Shaughnessy, 2002, 2004; Kern, Just and Norris, 2004; Chouliaraki, 2004, 2005, 2007; Gershkoff and Kushner, 2005). It does so by focusing on a relatively recent conflict, which has not been adequately researched. Also, the 'othering' aspect

¹⁰ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-10797847>; 'David Cameron Defends "Frank" Comments About Pakistan', July 29, 2010, accessed on August 10, 2010

¹¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/26/world/asia/26isi.html>; 'Pakistan Aids Insurgency in Afghanistan, Reports Assert', by Mark Mazzetti, Jane Perlez, Eric Schmitt and Andrew W. Lehren, published: July 25, 2010, accessed on August 10, 2010

¹² The comparison is researched as a discursive practice of the state, as reflected in the Swat war propaganda narratives, and not as a comparison of old and new media texts.

of the Taliban in Pakistani media has not been studied sufficiently, and not as much in terms of communication studies. It is often considered right and totally justifiable to demonize and portray the Taliban militants as evil not only in Pakistan but also internationally; the issue is usually not analysed objectively, and is often not seen in terms of discursive practices. This research attempts to expose the contradictions that Pakistan faces and deals with in its handling of the war on terror, particularly the Taliban. It is hoped that this study will help researchers to focus on the issue of narratives and discourse with regards to Pakistan's battle against terrorism, and not merely the tactical side.

4. Research Design and Methodology

The research method used in this study to investigate the hypothesis is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In this study, I am essentially looking at the narratives, which are aimed at exerting hegemony and power. These narratives deal with the use of language but they are not solely a linguistic phenomenon. These narratives go beyond the language and the text and look at other social factors that are responsible for their construction. As Fairclough comments on his analysis of language and power, "...language is a part of society, and not somehow external to it. Secondly, that language is a social process. And thirdly, that language is a socially conditioned process, conditioned that is by other (non-linguistic) parts of society" (Fairclough, 2001, pp.18-19).

The study does not only look at the jargon and linguistic aspects of the Swat war propaganda; it analyses it as a social discourse: what were the social factors that shaped the narratives; what is their relation with the state ideology, foreign and domestic policies; and why were they constructed in a particular manner. Therefore, a simple content analysis is not enough to study this discourse. Content analysis might be useful to research the use of language itself, which of course is not ignored in critical discourse analysis, but as Fairclough (2001, p.19) puts it, "...there is no external relationship 'between' language and society, but an internal and dialectical relationship. Language is a part of society; linguistic phenomena are social phenomena of a special sort, and social phenomena are (in part) linguistic phenomena". This approach perfectly suits to analyse the hypothetical framework of this study.

The main objective of this study is to analyse the government propaganda, its narrative, but it is not restricted to just analysing the text and its production mechanisms and processes; I am here studying various texts and narratives and examining their relations in different historical and social conditions. These social conditions are also not considered as static objects or phenomena. My approach in this analysis is to consider social conditions as ongoing and evolving processes, which deal as much with the present state of affairs as with the past events. Also, as Fairclough interprets it in his commentary on discourse analysis, the relationship between discourse and social structures is not just one-way; as much as social structures and conditions influence and have an impact on discourse, discourse too influence and impact social structures and social conditions (Fairclough, 2001). Hence, the state narrative against the Taliban is a discourse which has been inspired and influenced by social structures but at the same time these social structures are affected by this discourse. Of course, the shift in Pakistani state discourse against the Taliban

was largely a reaction to global and geo-political situations, which evolved with time, and almost radically after 9/11. The domestic scenario in Pakistan, its political milieu, and the social structures had to adapt to a different discourse, which happened to be the dominant discourse now. We find this discourse reflected in the narratives of Swat propaganda. In this way, both the discourse and social conditions are inter-linked and cannot be studied separately. Critical Discourse Analysis deals with this relationship.

Critical Discourse Analysis has its limitations and flaws (Antaki, et al., 2003). It has been criticised for being partial and over-simplistic. I am fully aware of the limitations, yet I am not apolitical in my analysis. As Dijk (1993 cited in Wetherell, 2001, p.383) says, “critical discourse analysts (should) take an explicit socio-political stance: they spell out their point of view, perspective, principles and aims, both within their discipline and within society at large”. Hence, I take a political stance. However, I differ with Dijk on the point where he claims that one of the criteria of the work of critical discourse analysts is ‘solidarity’ with the dominated/suppressed group or class (*ibid*). The study makes no moral claims; it analyses the discourse objectively. It is not a case in favour of the Taliban, or against the Pakistani state. Issues of power and hegemony are not ethical matters. The study analyses the state narrative and its discourse as a social phenomenon. It, however, claims that the Taliban phenomenon is a product of the state and its discourse¹³, so any criticism against them should not neglect this aspect.

4.1. Sampling

A number of media texts have been selected for research in this study. They are newspaper reports, interviews and key speeches of government officials (in the form of reports) published¹⁴ in Pakistan’s two leading dailies, *Daily Dawn* and *Nawa-i-Waqt*¹⁵, covering a period of two months, April-May 2009. The Swat military operation kicked off on 8th May, 2009. Also, there are visual materials related to the Taliban and the Swat operation that are discussed by the state and the media as written narratives. Those too are analysed in this study.¹⁶

The reason I have chosen media reports from one month prior to the operation is to analyse the buildup of the propaganda campaign by the government so that it could create an environment where the military offensive could be justified. It has also allowed me to examine the narratives as the operation draws closer, and as it unfolds. Since *Nawa-i-Waqt* is an Urdu newspaper, sections of reports and texts that are analysed in this study have been translated into English in the analysis section.¹⁷

¹³ External factors such as global politics, globalisation, and geo politics are studied as a ‘state discourse’. These factors get internalised in state-making, state-building, and state-governing processes, and cannot be separated from the state discourse.

¹⁴ These are online versions of *Dawn* and *Nawa-i-Waqt*. The reports and articles published in these online newspapers are similar to their print version, almost their replica.

¹⁵ *Dawn* was founded in 1941 by Muhammad Ali Jinnah. It is one of the Pakistan’s two biggest English dailies, and arguably the most respected liberal English newspaper. *Nawa-i-Waqt* (Call of the Times) is one of the Pakistan’s most read Urdu newspapers, and is considered the vanguard of Pakistan ideology. While *Dawn* is known for its critical stance, *Nawa-i-Waqt* usually toes the line of the state, and caters/appeals to the right-wing.

¹⁶ For instance, the flogging video (discussed in the analysis section).

¹⁷ Full-length original texts are annexed with analysed sections highlighted.

Following are the reasons for selecting this sample of media texts:

- 1) The government's statements (whether in the form of a press release or a press conference) are reported by the media (both print and electronic), or they come out verbatim in the form of interviews and speeches of government officials. In newspaper reports, for example, these are quoted as statements and as the government's point of view.
- 2) There may be no coherence in the policy of the government. Various ministers, keeping in the mind the overall government strategy and 'policy' on war on terror, give their statements to the press. They are well-documented and well-reflected in newspaper reports.
- 3) The anti-Taliban state discourse is a mediated exercise; hence media present it in a particular manner, frame and propagate the state narrative according to their own policy about the Swat military operation.
- 4) Since I am not analyzing the impact of these statements on Pakistani people, my purpose in this study is not to gauge the impact, or how the framing of certain events and statements influence different audiences of the newspapers. Therefore, audience reactions to these reports are not selected for an examination.
- 5) *Dawn* and *Nawa-i-Waqt* are chosen for an analysis because of two factors: a) they cater to two different categories of audiences—the English speaking elite and educated middle-class; and the lower-middle class, semi-educated, working class Pakistanis; b) it is assumed that because of their specific audience, the state officials (for example in an interview) frame their narrative differently. Also, the newspapers too address their audiences specifically. The selection of these two different newspapers is done not to indulge into an audience analysis but to look at the differences and similarities of the state's narratives when they are propagated by different media. The two newspapers are not state-owned. They are private enterprises with commercial and corporate interests.

The study is limited in its scale and scope. The sample is small, and the state's pro-Taliban narratives prior to 9/11 have not been included. The contradictions are simply investigated and studied in discursive practices of the state in relation to the Swat war propaganda. Future researches on this subject should take into account a more diversified sample, including Pakistan's pro-Taliban narratives of the 1990s, and also the texts dealing with the state ideology. An interesting off-shoot of this study could be the analysis of the Taliban narratives and their connection with the ideology of Pakistan.

5. Analysis

The Pakistani state portrayed the Taliban in its narratives in a particular way to achieve immediate political targets. It painted a picture which was aimed at showing the Taliban as ruthless terrorists, barbaric extremists, anti-Islam, anti-human rights fascists, and anti-progress. This image of the Taliban is not totally disconnected from the reality, but during the Swat conflict it was hyped up by the government to achieve military objectives (Gershkoff and Kushner, 2005). The clear depiction of the 'enemy' was essential because without it the state would just be fighting against mysterious terrorists at the behest of the US. This depiction was also needed to be local and supported by certain events. These events, thus, needed to be

depicted and interpreted to fit in the anti-Taliban narrative. Therefore, this Taliban-image was construed not only in relation to the events that preceded the military offensive, but was also constructed along the operation. It was constructed along the themes and issues which deal with the common knowledge and understanding of the general population, on which there already existed some sort of consensus. This image was not thrust on the media by the state, but was a mediated exercise between the state and certain sections of the media, or in other words between the powerful groups of the ruling elite.

‘Extremists’, not ‘Islamists’

There was no peace in the Malakand Division prior to the operation, and there had been numerous skirmishes between the Taliban fighters and security forces, and at time bigger battles. The main military action against the Taliban in Swat actually began on the 8th May, 2009 after the ‘peace deal’ between TNSM and the provincial government collapsed. The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Yusuf Raza Gilani announced the launch of the operation in his address to the nation. It was a televised address to the nation, which shows the significance and gravity of the issue. The head of the state in Pakistan usually chooses to ‘address the nation’ via television on high priority matters. In this way the state also exhibits its power to its citizens.

The PM’s address was reported in all national and international media. Both *Dawn* and *Nawa-i-Waqt* reported the PM’s address as their lead story, almost verbatim. This speech is almost a summary of the main narratives the government of Pakistan employed in its propaganda against the Taliban.

Dawn carried this headline for its report on PM’s speech, dated 8th May, 2009:

“Army told to crush Swat militants • Militants mistook govt’s sincerity for weakness • Women subjected to discrimination • PML-N, ANP, JUP back operation¹⁸ • Rs 1bn allocated for displaced people”

The headline encompasses the main narratives that are central in the speech of the PM. The headline emphasizes government’s ‘sincerity’ with respect to its ‘peace agreement’ with TNSM, which is mistaken by the ‘militants’ as its ‘weakness’. ‘Discrimination’ against ‘women’ is another theme which is highlighted in the headline, followed by the main political parties’ support for the operation, and the government’s allocation of funds for the people getting displaced because of the operation.

The themes appearing in the headline of *Dawn* are reported in detail in the main text of the story. According to the PM, the military operation against the militants became ‘inevitable’ because the ‘nefarious’ activities of the militants had reached a ‘decisive’ stage. This inevitability and

¹⁸ PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz Sharif Group); ANP (Awami National Party); JUP (Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Pakistan). PML-N is Pakistan’s second largest party, governing the Punjab province; ANP is the ruling party in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa along with PPP, and also a coalition partner in the centre; JUP is a right-wing Bareilvi party with roots in all parts of Pakistan.

decisiveness has been constructed throughout the narrative. The PM mentioned the ‘sincerity’ of the government, and talked about the Swat Peace Deal to assert that the military operation was not the ‘first choice’ of the government. He stressed that the government’s ‘sincerity’ should not be ‘misconstrued’ as its ‘weakness’, and the government would not allow anyone to challenge the ‘writ of the state’. He claimed that the extremists were a hindrance to Pakistan’s ‘national security’ and ‘economic growth’ and wanted to ‘take Pakistan hostage at gunpoint’.

“We tried our best to resolve the issue peacefully. What else could be the proof of government’s sincerity and love for Islam other than the fact that it did everything to implement ‘Nizam-i-Adl’? We took the issue to the parliament which approved the peace agreement unanimously, and the president signed the bill without any delay”. (Nawa-i-Waqt, 8th May, 2009)

Unlike *Dawn*, the *Nawa-i-Waqt* report focused more on the issue of Islam and national sovereignty. Interestingly, the women’s rights issue is missing from the *Nawa-i-Waqt* report, which finds a central position in *Dawn*’s story.

“He (the PM) said girls were being stopped from going to schools, public and private properties were occupied and damaged, women subjected to shameless treatment and to add insult to injury, all these steps were taken in the name of Islam”. (Dawn, 8th May, 2009)

The PM speech encompasses the main narratives of the state with respect to the Taliban militants in particular, and the other ‘extremists’ in general. Islam is central in this propaganda narrative. Be it the issue of ‘peace deal’, ‘suppression of women’, or ‘security’; the narrative is tied with an over-arching Islamic discourse. It is interesting to note that the government usually avoids the word ‘Taliban’ when it talks about the militants. The recurring words in the government narrative, as in the case of the PM speech, are ‘militants’ and ‘extremists’. These militants can be anyone, and not necessarily the Taliban. All Taliban are not militants, and all militants are not Taliban. So there are certain Taliban the government is after, and we must keep that in mind. These are the Taliban who have turned against the government, and who have decided to take up arms against the state and challenge its writ, therefore they should be ‘crushed’ to protect the lives of people and to secure ‘national interests’. This in turn means that the state is tolerant towards the Taliban who are ‘cooperating’ with it. More importantly, these militants are not ‘Islamists’. The term ‘Islamist’ is absent from the state narrative. On the contrary, the militants are portrayed as ‘anti-Islam’—people who are committing ‘shameful’ acts ‘in the name of Islam’. The state continues to define Islam. It defines it, it interprets it, and it propagates it.

The main ideological premise of the state (the Islamic discourse) remains unchanged even in this war against terror. The state is not killing these militants because they are ‘Islamists’; it is ‘crushing’ them because they are ‘anti-Islam’, or advocate a different version of Islam. Before 11th September attacks, Taliban’s version of Islam perfectly suited the state (Rashid, 2002).

National Security

The other main discourse in the PM speech deals with national security, which, according to PM Gilani, is challenged by the militants. He links the issue of national security with ‘economic and industrial progress.’ Without ‘peace and security’, economic progress is not possible, the PM states. National security is a very important discourse in the Swat propaganda war. State officials view and portray Taliban as ‘anti-state’ elements, supported by ‘foreign forces’. By foreign forces the Pakistani state usually means India. The ruling classes of the country, particularly the armed forces, legitimise their position and rule on a perceived threat of India (Haqqani, 2010). The government can act against any group in the name of national interest, which it perceives a threat to its rule. For example, the Communist Party of Pakistan was banned in 1954, as it was considered an anti-Pakistan organisation¹⁹. Secular and liberal forces in favour of peaceful ties with India are often labelled as elements working against Pakistan’s national interests.

Pakistan supported the Taliban in the 1990s in the name of securing its ‘national interests’. Post-9/11, the same Taliban are considered a threat to Pakistan’s ‘national interests’ because the Pakistani state decided to join the US-led war on terror. Interestingly, the India-centric national security framework is still at work as the Pakistani state decided to fight the Taliban on its north-west borders. It is not surprising, therefore, that on 19th September, 2001, the then army chief and president of Pakistan General Pervez Musharraf, while announcing Pakistan’s support to the US on war against terror, cited the Indian threat to be the central reason behind Pakistan’s decision²⁰. Musharraf makes it clear in his address that the major reason to support the US was not Pakistan’s aversion for terrorism, or the Taliban, but the perceived Indian threat, and its ‘strategic interests’. Pakistan feared that if it did not support the US logistically, India would do it. In fact, India had already offered its airspace to allied forces, and it was willing to go to any extent in its support (Rashid, 2002).

‘Humanitarian Intervention’

A very crucial point in the buildup for the military operation against the Taliban and the start of the propaganda campaign was the circulation of an amateur mobile phone video on Pakistani TV channels in which three bearded men are flogging a teenage girl in public²¹. In this video, two men are holding down the girl, while the other man is whipping the girl mercilessly. The girl is screaming and crying for help. According to the media reports, the girl was punished for interacting with a man who was not related to her²². The video was distributed to the media by an Islamabad-based civil society activist, social worker, and filmmaker Samar Minallah. It was first picked up by the BBC but later on, several private TV channels of Pakistan telecasted the video. The video was then repeatedly telecasted on Pakistani news channels and endlessly discussed by analysts, journalists and experts. Though the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) denied any involvement in the flogging incident, they took the responsibility later on. The government was

¹⁹ <http://www.cppak.org/> This is Communist Party of Pakistan’s official website, accessed on 5 August, 2010

²⁰ Cited in the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad publication

²¹ The video is available on ‘Youtube’: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hT8b4yTwjJE>

²² <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/04/world/asia/04swat.html>, ‘Video of Taliban Flogging Rattles Pakistan’, By Salman Masood, Published: April 3, 2009, accessed on 15 August 2010

divided in their reaction to this incident. The provincial government's initial reaction to the video was that it was a 'conspiracy' to sabotage the peace deal between the Swat Taliban and the government that took place on 16th February, 2009. On the other hand, the PM condemned the incident calling it 'a shameful happening which had tarnished the image of the country' (*Dawn*, 4th April, 2009). However, the central government too was unclear.

Prime Minister's reaction:

"Islam teaches us to treat women politely," the prime minister said in a statement. He said the government would take every possible measure to protect women's rights.

President's reaction:

"The president was shocked over this act of barbarism and asked for a report from the government and local administration," his spokesman Farhatullah Babar said.

Interior Minister's reaction:

Interior Affairs Adviser Rehman Malik told reporters in Sukkur: "We are investigating the matter. But sometimes anti-state elements make fake or artificial footage or images to bring disrepute to Pakistan."

(*Dawn*, 4 April 2009)

The Information Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Mian Iftikhar Hussein, insisted that the flogging incident was not fresh and had taken place prior to the 'peace deal' (reported in *Dawn* on 4th April 2009), implying that such an incident was acceptable before the deal. Later on, Hussein went to an extent of calling a press conference and telling the journalists that the girl shown in the video, Chand Bibi, had denied the flogging incident.

"Speaking at a press conference in Swat, provincial Minister Iftikhar Hussein said the incident had taken place on Jan 3, 45 days before the signing of the peace agreement. He alleged that an NGO activist, Samar Minallah, had released the video as part of a conspiracy. He said her brother had been a provincial minister in the government of Gen Pervez Musharraf. 'Where were these people when innocents were being slaughtered and bodies were pulled out of graves'". (*Dawn*, 4th April, 2009)

This was, however, the initial stance of the provincial government. It changed its stance rapidly after the Pakistani media, civil society, and the international community condemned the brutality. This incident was later on used by both provincial and central governments to prove the brutal and barbaric nature of the Taliban, their abuse of human rights (in particular women's rights), and their primitive mindset, something similar to the post-9/11 US narrative regarding the 'terrorists' (Kamalipour and Snow, 2004).

Irrespective of the authenticity of the video, the entire narrative of the Pakistani government was aimed at depicting the Taliban as some kind of monsters who would not have any mercy and sympathy for even a seventeen-year-old girl. Through the video, the government also tried to create the fear of Taliban in the masses. The narrative implied that if the Taliban were primitive, the government was modern; if the Taliban were illegal, the Pakistani state was legal and just; if the Taliban were un-Islamic, the government was Islamic; and if the Taliban did not care for human rights, the government was the protector of human rights. The Taliban were an anti-thesis of the government, which was legitimate and democratic. They deserved severe punishment, and needed to be crushed at all costs. The ‘barbarians’ did not deserve any mercy, and any brutality against them was justified.

While using all ‘negative’ adjectives for the militants, the state officials attempted to create a ‘positive’ image for themselves and the state. The Taliban militants are the ‘other’—an evil force, whereas the state is the force of good. All militants are a homogenous group, incapable of any good deed. On the other side, the state is a monolith, protecting people, and intervening for humanitarian reasons. This is a good example of what Noam Chomsky calls great power hegemonism in the name of ‘humanitarian intervention’ (Chomsky, 1999).

Dawn’s framing of this report is also in absolute harmony with the state propaganda. The headline reads: “*Flogging in Swat outrages nation: Video captures girl’s agony*”. The headline is biased and it presumes that the entire ‘nation’ is ‘outraged’ by the flogging incident, thus undermining other conflicting narratives, and giving an impression of a unified narrative. The report also presents the views of political leaders and civil society that are mainly in condemnation of the incident. Except the views of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Minister, there are no counter-narratives in the report.

Nawa-i-Waqt, on the other hand, gives more space to TNSM’s point of view. However, while doing so, *Nawa-i-Waqt* brings in the ‘Indian element’ and the ‘conspiracy against Islam’ themes:

“TNSM’s chief Maulana Sufi Muhammad said that the outrageous flogging video was a conspiracy to sabotage the peace deal. He said that Taliban were not involved in this incident, and India, or some third party, could be involved in it”. (Nawa-i-Waqt, 4th April, 2009)

Unlike *Dawn*, the *Nawa-i-Waqt* report doesn’t talk about any ‘national outrage’ on the incident. On the contrary, it highlights the issue of ‘conspiracy’ in its headline.

In other instances too, the government cited similar ‘humanitarian’ reasons to build consensus for its operation. For example, the army released a press statement, reported in *Dawn* on the 5th May, 2009, three days prior to the launch of a full-scale military operation, that the militants were using ‘2000 innocent people as human shields’ fearing the imminent operation. Army’s Inter-Services Public Relations statement talks about the ‘high headedness’ of the militants, who despite the peace agreement with the government were “threatening innocent people and the civil administration”. The ISPR statement also claims that the military was showing ‘maximum restraint’ and was trying to avoid ‘bloodshed’.

Myths about the Taliban²³

The government officials propagated several myths about the Taliban before the launch of the Swat operation. One of these myths dealt with the possibility of Taliban's progression towards Islamabad. Though this myth was propagated more by the international media and Western governments; Pakistani officials and politicians too expressed it intermittently. If some officials expressed this fear, some rejected the possibility of an imminent Taliban march towards the capital. Anyhow, this fear was kept alive by the Pakistani state. This fear was complemented by the myth that the Taliban were so strong that they could capture the capital, which happens to be only 250 kilometers away from Swat. The audience of this fear story was not just the people of Pakistan but also western countries, who were closely watching the situation. Taliban's capture of Islamabad meant disaster. No one could imagine the possibility of Pakistan's nuclear arms falling in the hands of the Islamic militants. Of course, no one would underestimate the might of Pakistan's armed forces, but the West was worried about the Taliban sympathisers within the ranks of Pakistan Army and the civil-military establishment.

Maulana Fazlur Rehman, chief of Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam (Fazlur Rehman Group), a right-wing Islamist party²⁴, and also a partner in Pakistan's central government, warned the members of the national assembly of Pakistan that the Taliban were knocking at the doors of Islamabad:

"Taliban are reaching Tarbela Dam via Hazarah: Fazlur Rehman; We won't let anyone capture the state: Khwaja Asif"

Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam (F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman told the National Assembly that after Swat, Buner too had been captured by the Taliban. Taliban are about to reach Tarbela Dam, and once they capture Tarbela Dam, they will only have to cross Margalla Hills to enter Islamabad. The country's situation is very grim but we are not taking the Taliban seriously". (Nawa-i-Waqt, 23rd April, 2009)

Tarbela Dam is important for various factors: it is not only one of the biggest dams of the country that provide energy to the rest of the country; there are many nuclear sites in the surrounding area²⁵. Taliban's drawing close to Tarbela was a nightmarish scenario, skillfully painted by the JUI-F chief. The members of the national assembly, irrespective of their party affiliation, reacted to this and demanded that the government must review the 'peace deal' with the militants. Of course, the Taliban felt empowered by this deal, and instead of throwing away their arms, were marching down south to areas adjacent to Swat like Buner. It was clear that they had no strength to capture a strategically significant place like Tarbela, which is the heart of military's activities. Their mythical power was part of the state's two-pronged narrative, whose aim was to portray the Taliban militants as a force of evil and at the same time potent enough to

²³ By myth-making I do not mean symbols and images with no connection to reality or real events, but something used by different parties in a conflict to legitimise their positions (O'Shaughnessy, 2004).

²⁴ An offshoot of Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Hind (a pre-partition religious party), JUI-F is an Islamist party with Deoband inclinations.

²⁵ Tarbela is close to Haripur and Attock, where two major nuclear sites, Wah Cantonment and Kamra Airbase are situated. http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/04/taliban_advance_east.php

overrun the government. On a macro level, this narrative has a striking resemblance with the post-9/11 US narrative against al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda was not only delineated as an evil organization by Bush administration, but also powerful enough to harm the US (O’Shaughnessy, 2004; Campos, 2007).

The threateningly powerful Taliban could not sustain the military operation in Swat and within days were forced out of the town. On May 12th, four days after the start of the operation, the country’s national assembly backed the military operation almost unanimously, and loathed the Taliban militants (*Dawn*, 13th May, 2009). Most of the members of the parliament held the militants responsible for the military operation. Because the militants did not stick to the peace agreement, the government had to launch an operation against them, which resulted in the displacement of thousands of people. The government narrative held the militants responsible even for the displacement of the people.

“Pakistan Muslim League-Q member Marvi Memon, a usual critic of the present PPP-led ruling coalition, seemed a changed person on Tuesday when she said it was time to support the government and the military in the fight against extremism and re-establish the writ of the state in the troubled region.

*She said the militants would not be able to stand up if they realised the whole nation was one against them, and called for a “simultaneous blitz” against extremist cells in whatever province they might be”. (*Dawn*, 13th May, 2009)*

The ministers in the national assembly session state that the government had no ‘option’ other than the military offensive. The Taliban were called ‘malignant cancer’ and ‘enemies of Pakistan and Islam’ by the members. A member of the ruling Pakistan People’s Party Palwasha Khan went to an extent of calling that the Taliban “are not our own people” and the ones who had ‘declared war against Pakistan at the instance of aliens’. (*Dawn*, 13th May, 2009)

The involvement of ‘foreign hands’ was another myth that the government used in its anti-Taliban propaganda. The ‘foreign hand’ implies Indian involvement in the ideological and security discourse of Pakistan. It is interesting to note that the Swat war propaganda also revolved around the same ‘Indian threat’, on the basis of which the state supported the Taliban in the 90s (Rashid, 2002; Siddiq, 2001; Khan, 2007). The Pakistani state, in the name of war on terror and national security, was not fighting against the Islamist militants but perceived agents of India, or other ‘anti-Islam’ forces.

Change all to Rashid 2002; Rashid 2002 is the only reference. By mistake I put Rashid 2001 in the main text.

Nawa-i-Waqt, on 16th May, 2009, quoted a statement by General (Rtd) Hameed Gul²⁶, the ex-Director General of Pakistan’s spy agency, the ISI, in which he alleged the ‘explicit’ involvement of India in creating turmoil in Swat. Since *Nawa-i-Waqt* is known for its anti-Indian stand, it published Gul’s statement on its main page:

²⁶ Hameed Gul was the Director General of the ISI during 1987-88.

“India is destabilising Pakistan with the support of US: Government and politicians must expose the real enemy: Hameed Gul

He (Hameed Gul) said the Indian spy agency was supporting the terrorists in Swat and other tribal areas. The world knew about the role of Indian consulates near Afghanistan borders, he said. These were actually terrorist centers where terrorism against Pakistan was planned, alleged Gul. Gul said that without exposing the real face of India, Pakistan would not be able to protect its military interest”. (Nawa-i-Waqt, 16th May, 2009)

Though Hameed Gul is not an official spokesman of Pakistan, he is known for his unwavering ‘faith’ in Pakistan’s ideology and the ‘strategic’ and military interests’ of the country. His views are usually not challenged by the ISI, the armed forces, or the civilian government. Gul is a strong supporter of the Taliban, and he believes that the only way out for NATO in Afghanistan is an agreement with the Taliban²⁷. Less jingoistic in their rhetoric, other Pakistani officials often express the same views²⁸. To them also, negotiating with ‘moderate’ Taliban is the only workable option for the allied forces.

The ‘Peace Deal’²⁹

‘Nizam-i-Adl’ or Swat Peace Deal was not the only peace agreement between the Pakistani state and the militants. Pervez Musharraf signed several agreements with the Taliban during the period of 2004 to 2007³⁰. The PPP’s democratic government too continued with the state policy. This contradiction is reflected in the propaganda narratives of the Swat operation.

Nawa-i-Waqt’s 2nd May, 2009 report exposes this contradiction of the state narrative quite effectively:

“Talks between NWFP government and TNSM revived: 60 militants including foreigners killed in Buner: ISPR

At the press-conference, the Minister for Information Mian Iftikhar Hussein and Maulana Sufi Muhammad’s spokesman Amir Izzat Khan said there had been significant progress in TNSM and government talks. Iftikhar Hussein said the broken contacts between TNSM and government had been revived after the talks and those who thought the dialogue between the two parties would never revive had been proven wrong. He said the peace agreement was intact and with the establishment of ‘Dar-ul-Qaza’ (the Shariah courts), the first part of the peace deal had been

²⁷ <http://www.hindustantimes.com/Mulla-Omar-not-Karzai-can-guarantee-no-threat-to-US-Gul/Article1-584176.aspx>

²⁸ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/8485077.stm, ‘Pakistan advises Taliban role in Afghan government’, published 28 January 2010, accessed on 20 August 2010

²⁹ For details of the Swat Peace Accord, see: <http://ipripak.org/factfiles/ff109.pdf>, ‘Swat Peace Accord’; edited by Dr. Noor ul Haq, accessed on 20 August, 2010

³⁰ http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2006/09/the_weekly_standard.php, Pakistan Surrenders by Bill Rogio, September 23, 2006, accessed on 20 August, 2010

completed. He said the second round of talks would start soon and there would be peace in Malakand Division. There would be no operation...

TTP's spokesman Muslim Khan alleged that the government was not respecting the Swat deal and there was a contradiction in Information Minister's words and deeds. On the one hand, the government was talking about negotiation, on the other the jet planes are pounding bombs...". (Nawa-i-Waqt, 2nd May, 2009)

The Swat 'peace agreement' or Nizam-i-Adl allowed TNSM and the Taliban to set up Islamic courts in Swat. It literally gave away the control of the region to the militants (Sheikh, 2009). The agreement saw the ups and downs, as both parties kept criticising each other for breaching it. The mistrust is evident in the *Nawa-i-Waqt* report. The state institutions (the provincial government, the central government, the army) were also divided on dealing with the militants. On top of it, there was a huge international pressure on the government, particularly from the US government, not to make pacts with the Taliban. While some state officials spoke against the deal, some supported it. The army operated against certain groups of militants selectively, whereas the process of negotiating with the militants also carried along. This was before the start of the full-fledged Swat operation on 8th May, 2009. The deal was later approved unanimously by the parliament, and signed into a law by the president. Conflicting narratives of different state officials kept emerging throughout the Swat war propaganda campaign. It was after the open criticism of US officials and the pressure from the civil society, the government decided to wage a war against the Swat Taliban. However, in the past too, 'selective' military operations had been carried out against the Taliban to dilute international pressure.

National Consensus

All these developments were taking place in the background of government's 'consensus-building' efforts. The government officials constantly harped about the consensus taking place against the Taliban among political parties, the civil society, as well as the public at large. Of course, this was not as simplistic and straightforward as the government tried to portray in its narrative. There are political parties and groups of all colours and hues in the country, and there was no unanimous view on the Taliban.

The 4th of May statement by the then Foreign Minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, is highly significant in this regard. The minister was speaking at a religious conference of the Sunni Tehrik, a Barelvi organization which opposes the Saudi, Wahhabi brand of Islam, hence the Taliban³¹. In the conference, the minister spoke about the 'national consensus' against the Taliban. He also played the same Islamic card which previous governments had already used, and which happened to be the main narrative of the state. "We will not surrender to the forces which are harming the interests of the country and distorting the image of Islam," the minister was quoted by Dawn on 4th May, 2009.

³¹ Barelvi Islam was founded by Ahmed Raza Khan Barelvi in 1880 in the Indian city of Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh. Barelvi Islam draws inspiration from the Sufi (mystic) traditions of Islam, contrary to the more rigid and puritan Wahhabi sect.

Ironically, the state sought support of the Ulema (the religious scholars) to legitimise the Swat offensive. For instance, the ministry of religious affairs organised a religious seminar inviting the religious leaders of the country to speak against ‘terrorism’ and endorse the military operation. The PM, in his speech at the seminar, “urged Ulema and Mashaikh to project the true image of Islam to prepare the nation to confront extremism and terrorism. Ulema, he said, had played an important role in the movement for creation of Pakistan and they should work again to unite the nation” (*Dawn*, 20th May, 2009). The PM’s statement is historically incorrect because the Pakistan movement was denounced by most of the religious parties in India (Hussain, 1986). The religious right considered Jinnah a ‘secular’ person, and the founder of Jamat-i-Islami’s (JI) Maulana Maududi declared him *Kafir-i-Azam* (the biggest infidel). However, the PM only invoked the post-independence Islamic ideology of the state, in which Islam and clergy are pivotal. The state propaganda against the Taliban, thus, took inspiration from the very Islamic ideology of the state, which had resulted in the creation of the Taliban.

Despite the fact that the ulema hailing from the ‘Deoband’³² school of thought boycotted this government-sponsored seminar, *Dawn*’s headline somehow constructed the image of a unanimous endorsement. It reads: “*Malakand operation endorsed by Ulema*”. The main body of the report, instead of citing statements of the Ulema, quoted remarks of the PM and the Minister of Religious Affairs.

State propaganda in *Dawn* and *Nawa-i-Waqt*

The state propaganda is covered extensively by both *Dawn* and *Nawa-i-Waqt*; however, they picked certain themes from the state narrative to suit their agenda and policies. *Dawn* has a more ‘liberal’ and urban-based audience, therefore it focused more on human rights and women’s rights themes in state’s anti-Taliban propaganda. *Dawn* is more open and straightforward in its opposition to the Taliban, as they are an anti-thesis of what the paper stands for. Therefore, *Dawn* highlighted the significance of ‘modernity’ and ‘enlightenment’ in relation to Islamic discourse. For example, its report on the PM’s 7th May speech emphasised more on the narratives about Islam that appealed to the liberal section of Pakistan, and parts that were meant for an international audience. On the other hand, *Nawa-i-Waqt*’s readership is conservative. The paper downplayed the ‘modern Islam’ narratives and emphasized on Islam only. It gave more coverage to the Islamic discourse as a whole (both in the state narrative as well as the Taliban narrative). However, both papers framed the state’s anti-Taliban narrative with respect to national security discourse. While *Dawn* did not conjoin the Islamic discourse and the national security paradigm explicitly, in *Nawa-i-Waqt*, both discourses were inseparable. Unlike *Dawn*, *Nawa-i-Waqt* played on the national security discourse more and it linked the Taliban issue with India more often.

³² Deoband Islam is one of the several revivalist Islamic movements that sprang in colonial India. It was originated in Deoband, a north-Indian town, in 1886.

6. Conclusion

The anti-Taliban discourse during the Swat military operation, as mediated by the Pakistani state in its propaganda campaign, was aimed at maligning the Taliban militants in order to build support and legitimacy for the military offensive. The dominant trends in the analysis of state's propaganda narratives in Pakistan's two mainstream newspapers reveal that the main ideological discourse (Islam and national security) of the state remained unchanged during the conflict. In fact, the state tried to build its anti-Taliban narrative on the same ideological discourse. Since the meta-narrative of the state did not undergo any transformation, the post-9/11 anti-terrorism narrative of the state remains a superficial discourse. The discourse analysis of Pakistani state's anti-Taliban narratives reveals this temporality and superficiality.

The state, through its propaganda campaign, portrayed the Taliban as evil, as anti-state actors, who needed to be eliminated in the interests of the country. However, the state ideology supports a pro-Taliban narrative. The only conflict is operational and temporary. Thus, the state propaganda is not directed towards all Taliban, and it is event-specific and time-specific. The state has not abandoned the Islamic ideology and its so-called strategic discourse. The Islamic ideology and the national security discourse, on the basis of which Pakistan supported the Taliban in the 90s, suit more a pro-Taliban discourse. That is why the state's anti-Taliban propaganda kept clashing with the ideology of the state. The pro-Islamist security discourse is so potent that the state officials kept on propagating it in their anti-Taliban statements during the Swat conflict. This is also evident from the state officials' reactions to various incidents, as analysed in this study. This, however, does not imply that the state narratives were absolutely homogenous and coherent. The study only reflects dominant trends.

The Pakistani state might have achieved the immediate objectives it set for itself during the Swat operation by means of its propaganda campaign. The propaganda helped the state to assert its hegemony, and build consensus in favor of the operation. Without an effective propaganda campaign it would have been difficult for the state. However, the state policies, in general, are supportive of a pro-Taliban, and more specifically a pro-Islamist discourse. The state ideology does not complement anti-extremism narratives; on the contrary they favour extremism. That is why the anti-Taliban narratives during the Swat operation remained contradictory, and any such campaign will always suffer from duality until the Pakistani state radically transforms its ideology, or is forced to do so.

The discourse analysis of the Swat war propaganda campaign shows that the state is not willing to relinquish its ideology, or its ideological and strategic interests have not been changed. It shows that during the operation, the state fought extremism with the narratives that only reproduced extremism. That is why Pakistan's anti-Taliban claims need to be scrutinised. This study asserts that the best practice for this investigation is discursive because it is essentially a study in communications. The paradox can be researched more effectively in state's mediated exercises.

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Appendices

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