

The Valley of Swat, long considered one of the most scenic, idyllic places in the world, endured a human rights nightmare beginning in the mid-2000s that is not, necessarily, concluded. Following the devastating 2005 earthquake, the following year saw the initial stages of Maulana Fazlullah and his followers' terrorist incursions in Swat, commencing with attacks on police stations buttressed by his peripatetic FM radio sermons. What then followed, with the formation of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Fazlullah bringing his own branch to Swat ('the Swat Taliban'), resulted in unprecedented societal chaos and human rights abuses. While Swat has endured many challenges and transformations in its storied history, none may have the lasting impact on space and society as the occupation of the area by the Swat Taliban between 2007-09 and the subsequent invasion by the Pakistan military to root them out in May 2009.

This paper provides a backdrop to the human rights crisis in Swat, reviewing various events that culminated in the Pakistan army onslaught on Swat in May 2009. Based on field research conducted in both Swat and Islamabad, it then explores the kinds of resiliency being shown in Swat today through the lens of local NGO efforts to move beyond the crisis and human rights abuses in Swat while also analyzes the very real possibility of a return to chaos in the area.