

## SWAT. A GATEWAY FOR TALIBAN ?

**Swat valley** in the NW Frontier Province of Pakistan, the place where Pakistan authorities recently offered to allow Islamic law if Taliban militants lay down their arms.

Swat was once a romantic destination for many Western tourists. The sheer beauty of its lakes, green valleys and mountainous backdrop attracted both backpackers and blue bloods alike. Some even affectionately referred to it as "The Switzerland of Pakistan."

But there are no more tourists in Swat these days because for the past two years, the Taliban has been gaining control of the area.

The Pakistani military has been fighting back, but in January of this year it was obvious that the Taliban had seized pretty much complete control of a province whose southern tip is only a few hundred kilometres from the Pakistan capital Islamabad.

Many people of Swat have fled their homes looking for refuge and many have been murdered, often by public beheadings, a measure the Taliban has employed to keep the locals in line.

The military wasn't winning and something had to be done. That something is the controversial peace proposal by implementing Taliban's wanted tribal style Sharia Law.

But at this point, it is not clear whether the Swat Taliban will really disarm or even allow for girls to receive an education. Up until last week the Taliban was bombing girl schools.

Asma Jahangir, the head of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, says the deal has "given a taste of victory to the militants". This will leave the door open for more radicalism to grow, she says. "This is like the United Nations of militants running Swat."

There is a growing fear in some circles in Pakistan now that the Taliban area of control will only spread if this deal goes through.

Many fear that this deal will lead to destabilization, if not the end of Pakistan as we know it today.



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*MQM leader Altaf Hussain addressing protest rally against Taliban in Karachi*



"This agreement between the Government of Pakistan and Taliban will leave the door open for more radicalism to grow. This is like the United Nations of militants running Swat." HRCP