

## MEDIA AND MILITANCY: CASE STUDY OF USE OF FM RADIO BY TALIBAN IN SWAT

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### Abstract

The FM radio played an important role in the rise of the Taliban in Swat. Their leader, Maulana Fazlullah, was not the first cleric to use the airwaves to reach out to the masses but he was the first who was able to win over people to his version of Islam by his broadcasts on the pirate FM radio. The timings and contents of his broadcasts were carefully chosen to reach the maximum number of people. Their influence on the people was beyond anyone's expectations. Soon, Fazlullah became known as "Mullah Radio" and his radio sermons convinced a great many people that the militants were struggling for a just cause. The broadcast became very popular and during the height of Fazlullah's control in Swat in 2007 and 2008, almost everyone listened to his radio. The listeners were influenced by the messages which slowly prepared them for an armed struggle. It can be said that he would have not been able to raise a big army of fighters without the comprehensive communication system he created using his pirate FM radio service. It was so important that the Taliban tried their best to keep it on-air when they were on the run during the army operation. The key lesson is that rebel media plays a key role during militancy to advance their agenda and state authorities should take proactive measures to stop or neutralize it to end violence.

**Key Words:** Media, Militancy, FM, Taliban, Swat.

### Introduction

Media plays an important role in moulding perceptions. With its increasing impact on day-to-day occurrences, more and more people turn to electronic and print media for their daily knowledge of news and current affairs. Radio as one of the oldest forms of media has been in the forefront in airing the latest news and views during wars and insurgencies. It has also served as a great propaganda tool of governments to

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launch psychological operations (psy-ops) to defeat an enemy. Susan Carruthers writes that during the Second World War and afterwards, radio played a major role in military psychological operations with the true source of such clandestine broadcasts frequently disguised to elude enemy listeners into assuming that the station is run by disgruntled elements from their own side. "Such radio stations are a classic form of what is known as 'black propaganda:' propaganda which wilfully mystifies its own provenance."<sup>1</sup>

On the lines of some of the successful media models, like the Allies during the first Gulf War, the modern insurgents have displayed marked skills in using radio as a tool to achieve their objectives. Former British Prime Minister Margret Thatcher told the American Bar Association in London in July 1985 that terrorist entities need the "oxygen of publicity."<sup>2</sup> Militant organizations, including Taliban fighters, in Pakistan have used modern media to highlight their activities. Though they use print, electronic and online media, FM technology has proved handy for their clandestine activities as it is easy to set up and operate.

Miniature FM transmitters have also been used as covert listening devices or so-called "bugs" for espionage and surveillance purposes. The advantage of using the FM broadcast band for such operations is that the receiving equipment is not regarded as suspicious. A lot of pirated radio activity, which is illegal and unregulated, is broadcast in the FM range, because of the band's greater clarity and listenership, as well as the smaller size and low cost of equipment.

In Pakistan, the FM radio transmission began in the mid 1990s when FM 100 music radio started its broadcasts. Since then a number of FM channels have become functional, both in private and public sectors. They are used for entertainment, news and current affairs and educational purposes. The setting up and operation of FM broadcasts is controlled by the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) which says that there are 104 commercial and 24 non-commercial FM stations in the country. "Another 60 FM radio stations are being set up as their applications have been accepted and PEMRA is in the process to issue them licenses."<sup>3</sup>

The activities of pirate FM radios became known after the United States attacked Afghanistan and pushed the Taliban into Pakistan's border areas. A number of FM channels emerged in the tribal areas and settled parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, including Swat in the Malakand division, where Maulana Fazlullah's radio broadcasts became very popular among the people. He became known as "Mullah Radio" due to his FM sermons, which

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<sup>1</sup> Susan L Carruthers, *The Media at War* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 2000), 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>3</sup> *Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority*, <http://www.pemra.gov.pk/fmradio.html> (accessed September 25, 2010).

played an important role in his rise. He fled from Swat and closed his radio broadcasts after the army operations there against the Taliban. The use of FM radio by the Taliban to spread their influence in the Malakand division and their virtual takeover of the valley of Swat challenging the state offers an interesting area of study at a time when the extremists and terrorist groups are increasingly using modern technology in support of their activities and for advancing their agendas. This paper attempts a systematic study of this phenomenon with particular reference to the use of FM radio by the Taliban to establish their rule in Swat and other areas of Malakand division.

The researcher has used both primary and secondary sources for the study. Not only various books, magazines, newspapers and online material were scanned, but a detailed survey based on three sets of questionnaires comprising 30 questions, involving 220 respondents from various areas of Swat was carried out. The respondents represented a cross section of people: businessmen, doctors, lawyers, teachers, students, workers, government employees, security officials and some unemployed individuals. The first questionnaire was titled "Composition of Taliban in Swat," the second "Role of FM Radio in Taliban Rise" and the third as "FM Radio."

The author also organized four focal group discussions at four different places — Saidu Sharif, Kanju, Kabal and Shah Sheri, with groups having between eight and 22 participants. Selective interviews with law, medicine, judiciary and education experts were also conducted to fill any gap in the questionnaires and gather information on related issues through discussions with focal groups. Sources from defence forces and police were also used for background information. Informal chats with local people during research trips was another source. Local listeners were consulted to analyse the language of radio speeches that the Taliban used to garner people's support and get public attention.

The identity of the respondents who didn't wish to be recognised has not been revealed.

### **FM Radio and Militants**

Fazlullah is known for using FM radio better than many others among the militants in Pakistan's north-western areas, but it was not him who used it for the first time, as it was Haji Namdar, leader of *Tanzim Amr bil Maroof Wa Nehi Anil Munkir* (Suppression of Vice and the Promotion of Virtue), who established a local extremist FM radio station in December 2003.<sup>4</sup> He hired services of a Deobandi Sunni cleric, Mufti Munir Shakir, who preached his particular brand of Islam which infuriated the Muslims belonging to the

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<sup>4</sup> Mukhtar Khan, "FM Mullahs Spread the Taliban's Word," *Asia Times Online*, June 4, 2009.

Barelvi Sufi order, who set up a rival FM channel headed by Pir Saif-ur-Rahman. The conflicting theological interpretations on rival radios provoked violent clashes in Bara Tehsil of Khyber tribal agency in early 2006 in which scores of people were killed and hundreds were forced to flee to safer places. Fed up with the constant fighting, the local people and government authorities expelled both broadcasters from the area. However, the situation with their expulsion as pirate radio stations cropped up in the unruly tribal areas along the Afghan border. After Mufti Munir Shakir vanished from the scene, another militant mullah, Haji Mangal Bagh, emerged to replace him, who reorganized the Mufti's religious organization, Lashkar-e-Islam, and started recruiting new fighters through his radio sermons. He started issuing Fatwas (religious decrees) against his opponents, demanding the implementation of his brand of Islam by force. He organized a parallel administration, directly challenging the state authorities.

In addition to the tribal areas, where it is easy to do any illegal activity, local religious leaders also set up radios in settled areas like Swat, Mardan and Charsada, where over 100 pirate Islamic radios were working. The PEMRA estimates the number of these FM mullahs to be around 300. Most of the radios are owned and operated by powerful mullahs with connections in religious and right wing political parties. PEMRA described Maulana Abdullah Shah's FM station in Charsadda and Maulana Tayyeb's radio station in Panj Pir as very popular.

### **Fazlullah as Mullah Radio**

Maulana Fazlullah was born as Fazal Hayat on March 1, 1975, at the house of Biladar Khan, a Pushtun of Babukarkhel clan of Yousufzai tribe at Mamdheray in Swat.<sup>5</sup> He earned a secondary school certificate from a school in his village and got admitted to Government Degree College, Saidu Sharif. After passing his higher secondary certificate examination he moved to Maidan in Lower Dir to acquire religious education in Madrassah Jamia Mazahir-ul-Uloom, run by Sufi Mohammed. Fazal soon developed close relations with his mentor who not only gave his daughter into his marriage but also gave him a new name, Fazlullah (meaning blessing of Allah). After completing his religious education, he returned to Swat and settled at Mamdheray to start his own seminary. But he was not qualified for that as according to his own admission he was not a Mufti, had no Madrassah graduation certificate and had received religious instruction only from his father in law.<sup>6</sup>

He assumed the leadership of the following of Sufi Mohammad when the latter was languishing in jail after his misadventure in Afghanistan where

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<sup>5</sup> Amir Mir, *The Fluttering Flag of Jehad* (Lahore: Mishal, 2008), 96.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

he had misled thousands of poorly armed young men in support of the Taliban against the US forces. Maulana Sufi's long absence from the scene of action gave him the time and space to build on and enlarge his mentor's support base and raise his own stature as a leader.

When Fazlullah joined the holy warriors waging "Jihad" against the state of Pakistan, he realised he could put to good use the power of the media to advance his agenda. The easiest and cheapest way to do that was to utilise the FM technology. So he set up his own pirate radio station for propagating his views. It became so popular among the listeners that it soon earned him the title of "Mullah Radio" at home and the "FM Mullah" abroad.

It is not certain when exactly the FM broadcast in Swat were started by Fazlullah's militants. *Asia Times* (Online) wrote that Fazlullah set up his pirate radio in late 2005 at Mamdheri. "It was Maulana Fazlullah, however, who excelled in the effective use of radio and ruled over the Swat Valley from his station in Mamdheri (also known as Imam Dheri). In late 2005, he started his FM service and within the short span of one year, Fazlullah was a household name throughout the Swat Valley."<sup>7</sup>

But local people, for whom it was part of daily routine to listen to radio broadcasts in the heydays of militancy, are not sure when they first knew about the radio. To a question when the FM radio was set up, 48 per cent said 2006, 14 per cent thought 2007 and two per cent said 2005, whereas 36 per cent had no idea when the radio began

**Table 1**

**When was FM Radio Established?**

S. No.	Year of setting up of radio	Number of respondent	Percentage
1	2005	01	2
2	2006	24	48
3	2007	07	14
4	Don't know	18	36
5	Total	50	100

A part of the same question was about the location of the FM radio. Out of 50 respondents, 40 per cent said it operated from Imam Dheri, 14 per cent said from Swat, two per cent each said from Shamozaï, Charbagh and Kozabanday, and 40 per cent said they did not know about its location.

<sup>7</sup> Mukhtar Khan, "FM Mullahs Spread the Taliban's Word."

**Table 2****Where was FM Radio Established?**

S. No.	Place of FM Radio	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	Imam Dheri	20	40
2	Swat	07	14
3	Shamozai	01	02
4	Charbagh	01	02
5	Kozabanday	01	02
6	Don't know	20	40
7	Total	50	100

Answering the question about the timing of the broadcast, 30 per cent respondents said it was in the morning and evening, 48 per cent said only in the evening, 10 per cent said only morning, and 12 per cent said they did not know.

**Table 3****Timings of Daily FM Broadcasts**

S. No.	Timings	Respondents	Percentage
1	Morning	05	10
2	Evening	24	48
3	Both morning and evening	15	30
4	Don't know	06	12
5	Total	50	100

These varied and conflicting responses do not lessen the importance of the FM broadcast which had become a part of the daily life of the people of Swat. They would listen to the sermons or ask their next door neighbour if they had missed any broadcast, such was Fazlullah's hold in Swat where he had become a household name. According to the participants of the Focal Group Discussion (FGD) at Shah Dheri that initially the radio was used to solicit funds for the construction of Fazlullah's madrassa but later the content of the speeches changed from religious to political and militant. A student, who was

part of this group, said: “He (Fazlullah) used it (FM) for religious and political purposes and to gain support for his grand agenda to grab power in the area.”<sup>8</sup>

In the Focal Group Discussion held at Kabal with 22 participants, it emerged that the most serious speeches were delivered soon after the Isha prayers (Night Prayer) when most of the people were at home. “A typical broadcast will start with the recitation of the Holy Book, and its translation, which will be followed by the political and militant messages and punishments announced for various people.”<sup>9</sup>

The key objectives of the broadcast were to terrorize the people and recruit supporters. Fazlullah would warn his opponents of dire consequences and announce severe punishment for the deviants. Amir Mir says about Fazlullah: “His rants are typical of those subscribing to the intellectual traditions of the Taliban. But Maulana Radio’s pronouncements have a sinister edge because he commands thousands of followers armed to teeth. His private army — Shaheen Commando Force — has literally set up a parallel administration in Swat and dispenses summary justice besides regulating traffic and patrolling villages and towns.”<sup>10</sup>

The arguments in the Focal Group Discussions involving people from different areas of Swat and opinions expressed during informal chats show that Fazlullah started as a social reformer but soon politicized his mission to gain maximum power and influence in the area. His was a deliberate strategy. He succeeded by creating an atmosphere of fear and awe, and a time came when people asked each other: “Who is to be flogged or beheaded next? Who was forgiven and who was punished today?” Thus a commoner began to be treated like a king by the masses who hailed his every word and pledged to fight for his cause without knowing and realizing that the path they were choosing will ultimately pitch them against a modern army.

Fazlullah employed various stratagems of pomp and show to hold the attention of the people: “For Friday prayer, a vast tract of land has been levelled close to the Mamdheray of the TNSM to accommodate a large number of people from almost all villages of Swat, praiseworthy to see. After Friday prayer, the Maulana, who is fond of a black steed, makes a riding show (with himself on a black horse) in the same ground, so that the people can have a glimpse of him.”<sup>11</sup> The participants of the Focal Group Discussion at Shah Dheri confirmed that he used to come riding on a horse after Friday prayers.

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<sup>8</sup> A student participant of “Focal Group Discussion” organized by the author at Shah Dheri, Swat, December 29, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> An electrician participant at “Focal Group Discussion” organized by the author at Kabal, Swat, December 29, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Amir Mir, *The Fluttering Flag of Jihad*, 98.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

## Tactics and Tools

Fazlullah, who knew the power religion exercised on the minds of the simple people used the FM radio to spread his message cloaked in religious sermons. But the use of this mass communication tool was just a first step as he needed to use it shrewdly and once again he showed that he knew the techniques to sway the people to his side. In a question about tactics used by the Taliban in their FM broadcasts to motivate the people, 49.4 per cent said religious persuasions were the main tactics used by the Taliban. Another 24.7 per cent said threat of use of force was another favourite tactic, whereas 20 per cent said creating fear and 2.3 per cent said monetary inducements were also used by Fazlullah in FM messages. Only two per cent said they did not know about the tactics used by militants.

**Table 4**

### Tactics/Tools used at FM to Motivate People

S. No.	Tactics	Respondents	Percentage
1	Religious persuasions	42	49.4
2	Fear	17	20
3	Threat of use of force	21	24.7
4	Inducement of money	02	2.3
5	Religious persuasion and threat of force	01	1
6	Don't know	02	2.3

*Asia Times Online* wrote that “Historically and culturally, Pashtuns are a radio society. Now they are an FM society. To win over the hearts and minds of Pashtuns, one would have to talk to them through the medium of FM radio. In the words of Marshall McLuhan, the medium is the message, and the Taliban have been wisely exploiting this medium.”<sup>12</sup>

Himself a Pashtun, Fazlullah knew the people enjoy radio broadcasts. His preference for FM radio was also necessitated by two reasons: First, it is easy to set up FM system of broadcast; second, it is easier and cheaper to buy FM radio, besides most mobile phone sets offer FM tuner facility. *Asia Times (Online)* said that a 10-watt FM channel equipment costing only US\$200 is good enough to broadcast clearly across an average village. Launching an FM channel takes little technical skill and the semi-literate Taliban needed only a transmitter, amplifier and a car or bike battery to carry their propaganda into

<sup>12</sup> Mukhtar Khan, “FM Mullahs Spread the Taliban’s Word.”

each village. This equipment is readily available in the local markets. Poor people in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa prefer to buy a cheap FM transistor radio for as little as a US dollar, compared to an expensive shortwave receiver. The easy availability of mobile phones with built-in radios solved the problem for the locals as they could easily listen to FM broadcasts.

The radio also offered interactive sessions in which people could ask questions that Fazlullah answered on air. Many women asked questions seeking guidance in religious and worldly matters like their share in inheritance, dowry and maintenance. The broadcast started with recitation from the Holy Quran, followed by its translation and explanation by the Mullah, which would be highly one-sided and loaded with personal biases. After the religious opening the broadcaster would shift to more urgent matters of politics and the Taliban agenda of jihad, which was the dominating theme.

While talking about politics, they would attack the US and its forces in Afghanistan and in the same breath would shoot a volley at national institutions like the Pakistan Army criticising its support for the US. They fully exploited the popular sentiment against US interference in Afghanistan and Iraq, and used it to persuade the youth to join their ranks. The radio helped Fazlullah to radicalize the society in Swat and earn legitimacy for the illegal activities of the Taliban including inciting people for jihad against Pakistan whose rulers were supporting the US forces in Afghanistan.

They also spoke against tribal elders and the local system of landowning which helped the local Khans to own large tracts of land. They not only opposed the system but murdered many Khans.

Their version of Islam was based on Wahabi traditions and they criticised the centuries-old Sufi traditions and lambasted them as deviations from the actual teachings of Islam. Later, when they occupied Buner, they stopped the devotees visiting the shrine of Pir Baba. Similarly, the FM mullahs spoke against democracy and electoral politics as a system of infidels and demanded their establishment of Islamic system and implementation of Shariah.

Besides Fazlullah, his deputy, Maulana Shah Duran, became even more “famous” for he was stricter and methodical in implementing Shariah laws and punish the transgressors. “Maulana Shah Duran is another FM mullah in Swat who is famous for his harsh and derogatory denunciations of Pakistani politicians, the United States and the coalition of nations involved in the war on terrorism. He typically parodies the Pakistani leadership and specializes in character assassination.”<sup>13</sup>

The Fazlullah-led radio broadcasts also viewed the minorities with scepticism and demanded them to pay protection tax called Jazya. It was a

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

harsh step against minority people who had been living peacefully for centuries side-by-side with the Muslims and serving the country.

Local and international non-governmental organizations working in the area for the uplift of the masses were also the target of Fazlullah's FM radio. Taliban viewed them with suspicion as agents of Western governments. They were taken to task for spreading modernity and leading women and educated youth away from the path of Islam. Local musicians and other artistes were became special targets of the Taliban's hatred. They were warned in fiery speeches to leave their "un-Islamic" professions.

The radio sermons were also critical of shopkeepers selling musical instruments and CDs and they were not only warned but also attacked to force them shut the businesses, as they were also indulging in un-Islamic activities. They even did not spare the local barbers and ordered them to stop shaving beards, driving a large number of professional barbers to starvation.

Amir Mir says that Fazlullah ran his FM radio channel to preach his version of Islam and had a big circle of listeners. "Strange to say most of his listeners are the women folk. On his FM channel, he warns the parents against sending girls to school unless they observe full Pardah (veil). Barbers in the area are understanding (sic) instructions not to shave beards, while shops proscribed from selling CDs and music cassettes. Interestingly, he is known to have ordered his followers not to administer polio drops to their children. Reason: the polio drops is part of an American-Zionist plot to render them sterile."<sup>14</sup>

### Targeted Groups

Initially, it was not clear what were the real objectives of Mullah Radio and who were his targeted groups, but things started to crystallize with the passage of time. As it transpired, Fazlullah carefully calibrated his speeches to actually target the youth, women, and poor class of the society. But the contents of the speeches were not specific to any single segment; rather there was something for everyone. He spent a lot of time to admonish the common people, asking them to mend their ways and support his mission of introducing Islam in the area. There is also enough evidence to show that he was popular among women who were ready to donate their jewellery and other valuable possessions for his cause. "He was extremely popular amongst the local women, who donated cash and jewellery for his Madrassah (seminary) in Mamdheri. The common people of the area looked to him for guidance and sought his advice for resolution of their long-standing disputes."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Amir Mir, *The Fluttering Flag of Jihad*, 97.

<sup>15</sup> Mukhtar Khan, "FM Mullahs Spread the Taliban's Word."

To a question about the targeted groups of FM broadcast, out of 85 respondents, 25.8 percent said women were the target, 17 per cent suggested youth, 10.5 per cent pointed out religious groups. The majority, 38.8 per cent, said the target was the general public.

**Table 5**

**Targeted Groups of FM Broadcast**

S. No.	Target Group of FM Radio Broadcast	Respondents	Percentage
1	General public	33	38.8
2	Women	22	25.8
3	Youth	17	20
4	Religious groups	09	10.5
5	Women and religious groups	01	1
6	Youth and religious groups	01	1
7	Don't know	02	2.3

The same question was posed to 50 different respondents who comprised the intended audience of the FM Radio. The result was not much different, as the majority 50 per cent said the general public was the intended audience of Fazlullah. It was followed by 22 per cent saying women as the prime audience; just 8 per cent said it was the youth. Among others, 12 per cent said they were not sure and eight per cent said it was directed at more than one group.

**Table 6**

**Intended Audience of FM**

S. No.	Intended Audience of FM Radio	Respondents	Percentage
1	General public	25	50
2	Women	11	22
3	Youth	4	8
4	Others/don't know	6	12
5	Mixed groups	4	8

A Focal Group Discussion held in the famous Wadudia Hall of Saidu Sharif with university students and educated young men showed that women and youth were the main targets. A young student participant of this group, who was in his mid-20s, said they targeted women because they were usually cut off from the rest of the world in the typically conservative Pashtun society and hence more vulnerable to their propaganda. They were targeted as they also wielded lot of influence in their homes and could influence their men. He said that the women turned out to be the main donors of the Taliban Islamization drive. “The second targeted group was youth which was ready to become cannon fodder in the fight for so-called implementation of Islam,” said the young student who claimed that he heard both Fazlullah and Shah Duran many times on the pirate radio. He also said that “they wanted to either neutralize the people or Talibanize them”, which was easy as they presented the wrong explanation of the religious texts and repeatedly “recited those sayings of the Prophet (PBUH) which were related to war time situation and were not relevant to peace time as was the ground reality.” He said: “I heard them inciting the youth by narrating the incident of Battle of Ohad and Badr and urged them to stand for the cause of Islam and fight.”<sup>16</sup>

Another student participant of the same age asked how could the youth can desist from supporting them when they were told that if they failed to join Taliban, they will invite the wrath of God and will be condemned to hell after death. He said how could women stay away when they were told they should encourage their sons and brothers to join the Taliban if they wanted salvation after death.

Another participants who was in his thirties, had done Masters and was working abroad with a computer firm said that the deprived segments like Gujjars, Kharkars, and tenants of big Khans were trapped by the Taliban who asked them to volunteer for labour work at the construction of the Madrassah at Imam Dheri. “Once they would go there, they were told by the Taliban that if they joined them in the fight, the land of their landlord would be given to them free of cost after implementation of Islam. So a lot of people from poor lineage and criminal backgrounds joined them for the sake of loot and booty,” he said.

The first student participant (who was in 20s) cited the example of a distant relative who joined the Taliban because they offered him help to avenge a murder. The entire group agreed that a large number of people joined the Taliban for vested interests.

The same conclusion was drawn by 18 participants of the FGD held at Kanju. “Those who joined Taliban had their own interests. They used religion

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<sup>16</sup> A student participant of “Focal Group Discussion” organized by the author at Saidu Sharif, Swat, December 28, 2010.

as a tool to exploit the masses and the radio was chief weapon to perpetrate oppression in the society.”<sup>17</sup>

Given the massive appeal of the FM radio, Fazlullah went ahead to announce that his group and their mouthpiece radio were the only representative of the people, and the audience and the government should consider FM sermons as the only and final authority on important issues. They would typically give provocative speeches to enflame the youth to rise up against the state and its institutions in the name of jihad and ask the women to provide them moral and financial support.

### Radio Preachers

Fazlullah and his FM radio are considered synonymous but research shows that he was not the only preacher on the radio, though he was the most renowned of the lot and people trusted and respected him due to his relationship with TNSM chief Sufi Mohammed. Out of 50 respondents, asked about the speakers on FM Radio, 26 per cent named Fazlullah and Shah Duran, 18 per cent said Fazlullah and eight per cent named Shah Duran: 16 per cent showed ignorance about the names of the speakers, while 16 per cent just said there were many other speakers. Interestingly, some little known names were also mentioned by the respondents as the radio speakers including Maulana Khalil, Maulana Alam, Maulana Nazhar and Maulana Ishaq. However, there was only one respondent who named Muslim Khan, the most vocal spokesman of the Taliban in Swat, as a regular speaker along with Fazlullah and Shah Duran.

**Table 7**

### Key FM Radio Speakers

S. No.	Speakers on FM Radio	Respondents	Percentage
1	Fazlullah and Shah Duran	13	26
2	Fazlullah	09	18
3	Shah Duran	04	08
4	Fazlullah, Shah Duran and Khalil	02	04
5	Fazlullah, Shah Duran, Maulan Alam and others	02	04
6	Fazlullah and Maulana Nazhar	01	01

<sup>17</sup> “Focal Group Discussion” organized by the author at Kanju, Swat, December 28, 2010.

7	Maulana Ishaq	01	01
8	Muslim and Shah Duran	01	01
9	Fazlullah, Shah Duran and Muslim Khan	01	01
10	Unnamed other speakers, don't know	16	32

It shows that a big number, 32 per cent, said they did not know the radio speakers but none said that he never listened to the speeches by the militant leaders. It also shows that Fazlullah and his deputy Shah Duran were the key speakers as only one per cent named Maulana Ishaq separately as a speaker and all others mentioned Fazlullah and Shah Duran as the sole preachers among others.

### **Message/Content of Speeches**

The content analysis of the speeches made by the militants is interesting as it helps in understanding their grand designs and objectives in the region. Three techniques were used to know the contents of the speeches, including questionnaires, focal group discussions and interviews.

Two questions in two different questionnaires were posed separately to 85 and 50 respondents in various areas of Swat to ensure accuracy. The first question gave open choice to the respondents to write “favourite messages” of militants, and the second question was a closed end one and tested the respondent’s views about the nature and contents of the speeches. The respondents were given four options: 1. Political, 2. Religious, 3. Social and 4. Any other.

The majority, 56 per cent, said the contents were religious as they always presented their views in religious terms. Eight per cent said the nature of contents was political, four per cent said it was social, 16 per cent ticked “any other” option, but did not specify it. Only one per cent said the contents were a combination of political, social and religious views and four per cent said the nature of speeches was a mixture of politics and religion. But eight per cent did not respond. Interestingly, one per cent described the sermons as “rubbish.”

The following table shows the respondents responses.

**Table 8**

**Nature/Contents of Their Speeches**

S. No.	Nature/Contents of FM Speeches	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	Religious	28	56
2	Political	04	08
3	Social	02	04
4	Other than religious, political and social	08	16
5	Combination of religious, political and social	03	06
6	Don't know/rubbish	05	10

To the question offering open choice to the respondents about the message and content of the speeches by the Fazlullah-led radio preachers, the respondents gave the following as the main message of the speeches:\*\*

1. Appeals to join the Taliban for jihad.
2. Appeals for donations for the militants.
3. Threats to deviants and opponents.
4. Explanation of issues related to Islam and Shariah.
5. Preparing people for Shahadat (martyrdom).
6. Convincing people that the Taliban were fighting for Islam.
7. Preaching jihad to the youth.
8. Inciting people to revolt against the army.
9. Asking women to stay inside their homes, stop going to the markets, stop attending educational institutions, etc.
10. Trying to convince people that their real objective should be a place in Paradise which they can ensure by supporting the Taliban.
11. Announcing punishments for the opponents, telling them to join the Taliban or face consequences.
12. Asking government employees, especially the military personnel and police officials to quit government jobs and join them.
13. Translation of the Holy Quran.

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\*\* The recordings of Fazlullah's radio speeches were not available as the locals never thought of keeping the record. So, the analysis is based on what the respondents told the interviewer.

14. Prepare and ask people to revolt against the government.
15. Spread terror and fear among the people.
16. Interpretation of Islam and its principles to use them for their vested interests.
17. Telling men to grow beards.
18. Point out their opponents by names and warning them to correct their behaviour.
19. Asking young girls to leave schools and colleges.
20. Issuing warnings to barbers to stop shaving beards of their customers.
21. Asking women to wear veils.
22. Warning people to shut businesses of videos and CDs.
23. Warning people to stop listening to music.
24. Promising to establish a system of justice based on Islam.
25. Urging people to get power by joining the Taliban.
26. Discuss political issues, offer their own explanation, and tell people that only the Taliban can solve their problems.
27. Campaign against TV and asking people to stop viewing TV.
28. Warning people to stop criminal activities.
29. Urging people to stop use of drugs, cigarettes and snuff (Naswar).
30. Using radio for communication among the Taliban.
31. Telling people that those opposing Taliban or not joining them were Kafirs (infidels).

These messages have been categorized under four headings related to appeals for jihad, appeals for donations, related to threats and those about general issues regarding Shariah and Islam.

**Table 9**

**Favourite Messages Aired by the Taliban**

<b>S. No.</b>	<b>General Content of FM radio speeches</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	Jihad related	24	28.2
2	Threats, warning etc	23	27
3	Donation related	21	24.7
4	General Shariah related	17	20

An interview with an official of Swat Qazi Court shows that the theme of jihad dominated the Taliban radio. Primarily, they addressed the general public asking them to join the Taliban as members, or supporting their cause or by giving financial support. They specially urged women to donate as they

could not take part in the fight so the only way to atone this shortcoming was to support the Taliban financially. “They mesmerised the people by reciting the Holy Quran and also playing their jihadi poems, which were also a source of entertainment and a substitute for music when people were forced to disown TVs and music,”<sup>18</sup> he added.

The participants of Focal Group Discussion held at Kabal said that a typical broadcast will start with Quranic translation and its explanation. They said the verses were carefully chosen to highlight the importance of jihad and asking people to support the cause of Islam.<sup>19</sup>

The Focal Group Discussion at Shah Dheri showed that speeches would continue for two to three hours and most of the time people were ordered to do this or that or warned them against doing something which the Taliban disliked. They said recitation of the Holy Quran was an important part of every speech.<sup>20</sup>

The Focal Group Discussion held at Kanju showed that the radio terrorised the people to join the Taliban and they used it for creating fear as most of the time they were issuing warnings and hurling threats at the people.<sup>21</sup>

The Focal Group Discussion held at Saidu Sharif said that radio was used to interact with the people as the Taliban asked them to come to do labour work at the construction site of their Madrassah and offer donation for the same purpose. “They also used it for putting forward Islam of their own choice and asking people to accept it.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Technical Support for FM Radio**

The issue of technical support is also important as successful operation of FM broadcast demands a certain level of technical knowhow, which a simple Madrassah-trained individual cannot do without expert help. But like the matter of the Taliban income, the issue of technical support for FM operations is also not clear. Though it is argued that a simple FM transmitter can be run without advanced technical knowledge, even then that simple expertise must come from somewhere before one can operate the equipment. The responses to queries about sources of technical support also did not prove very helpful

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<sup>18</sup> Interview by author with a senior official of Swat Qazi Court at Saidu Sharif, Swat, December 28, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> “Focal Group Discussion” organized by the author with 22 participants at Kabal, Swat, December 29, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> “Focal Group Discussion” organised by the author with 15 participants at Shah Dheri, Swat, December 29, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> “Focal Group Discussion” organized by the author with 18 participants at Kanju, Swat, December 28, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> “Focal Group Discussion” organized by the author with 08 participants at Saidu Sharif, Swat, December 28, 2010.

as the majority, 56 per cent, expressed ignorance about it and 24 per cent said it was the Taliban's own effort and their engineers provided support. Only 10 per cent said foreign forces including the US and RAW provided that support, whereas 10 per cent thought it was the Pakistani government which provided the support.

**Table 10**

**Who Provided Technical Support?**

S. No.	Sources of Technical Support for FM	Respondents	Percentage
1	Taliban engineers	12	24
2	Foreign forces	05	10
3	Pakistan government	05	10
4	Don't know	28	56

**Estimated Listeners**

An important tool to gauge the effectiveness of the FM radio was to know about its average listeners. Hence the residents of various areas of Swat were posed an open-ended question about the total number of listeners. The responses were coded under five categories: 1. 1,000 to 10,000; 2. 10,001 to 20,000; 3. 20,001 to 50,000; 4. 50,001 and above, and 5. Don't know. The majority, 46 per cent, ticked option 4 with some respondents also saying that everyone listened, that majority of people listened and that the entire population listened. Twelve per cent said the listenership was from 1,000 to 10,000, six per cent said it was from 10,001 to 20,000, eight per cent said it was between 20,001 and 50,000, and 28 per cent said they were not sure about it.

**Table 11**

**Estimated Number of Estimated Listeners**

S. No.	Estimated Listeners	Respondents	Percentage
1	1,000 to 10,000	06	12
2	10,001 to 20,000	03	06
3	20,001 to 50,000	04	08
4	50,001 and above	23	46
5	Don't know	14	28

A labourer, who was part of the Focal Group Discussion at Shah Dheri, said everyone listened to the radio and people will get important information through it about militant activities. “Initially they listened out of curiosity and reverence, but later most of them due to fear and to know if some of their relatives or friends were being named for some transgression by the Taliban.”<sup>23</sup>

Talking about mass audience of the radio, an official of Swat Qazi Court said: “It was like an institution and people listened to it in groups and then discussed it among themselves. People also listened to it in their *Hujras* (guest lounges) where it serve as information and entertainment in the absence of any other activity.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Policy Recommendations**

On the basis of the research, following policy recommendations are given.

First, Fazlullah's FM radio was successful as a large number of people were persuaded to either carry arms for his militant movement or support his struggle for implementation of Shariah. It was made possible due to absence of any rival media to challenge the militants. The government should have realized it and set up radio stations in the region to counter the Jihadi propaganda. The FM radio set up by the army in the area after the fall of the Taliban should have been established much earlier.

Second, the militant radio was run illegally as it was not authorised by the PEMRA which issues a license for any such broadcast. The state should have at least tried to stop the pirate radio when it was not even secret and everyone knew from where it was being run. Now, the authorities should learn a lesson and never allow any such activity anywhere in the country.

Third, the government could have used jammers to stop or disturb Fazlullah's broadcasts but no serious effort was made.

Fourth, Fazlullah was slowly preparing the listeners for an armed struggle but interestingly, no one from the government tried to present the counter narrative to mitigate the impact of the FM sermons. It is advisable that militants are outmanoeuvred at the earliest stage instead of waiting for them to become powerful.

Fifth, the Maulana was targeting the unjust policies and un-Islamic lifestyle of the rulers to malign the prevalent system of governance. He was preaching violence to stage a change. The government should have intervened to counter the argument by addressing some of the legitimate problems of the

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<sup>23</sup> “Focal Group Discussion” organized by the author with 15 participants at Shah Dheri, Swat, December 29, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Interview by author with a senior official of Swat Qazi Court, Saidu Sharif at Swat, December 28, 2010.

people. At least, some steps should have been taken against the corrupt justice system.

Sixth, the militants declared television as against the teachings of Islam and banned music and CD shops, which left the people with no alternative channel of entertainment. Their radio not only served as a source of information but also of entertainment. This could have been stopped by involving police and creating some alternative source of entertainment. If responsible authorities had challenged some of these illegal activities of the militants, the situation could have been controlled without the kind of violence which was witnessed later on.

Seventh, the militants used the radio to collect money which was not legal as they were using it for militant activities. The local officials never opposed them, which encouraged the rebels to become more violent and powerful. This activity is still going on in the country and donations are being collected in the name of charitable causes. It should be stopped.

Eighth, the rebels slowly instituted a parallel system of administration while the law enforcement agencies were sitting as silent spectators. It should never be allowed again in any part of the country, otherwise incidents like uprising in Swat will be repeated.

## **Conclusion**

Militancy and media are closely linked as a militant movement seldom succeeds without wider acceptance at the mass level. The appeal for the common people comes through media which creates a rival constituency for the new force. Few people would have used this technique better than Fazlullah did through his FM radio. He influenced the people by his live speeches and succeeded in garnering support. He had the unique opportunity to use the pulpit and power to initiate wide-ranging changes. But he committed mistakes, as, first, he was in a hurry and, second, not ready to share power with other stakeholders. He used violence to get authority and perpetuate it through force, which backfired and caused his downfall. ■