

madrasa on a hill near the main town of Khar, killing eighty-two people, many of them young boys. The Americans said it was the al-Qaeda training camp which had featured in the group's videos and that the hill was riddled with tunnels and gun emplacements. Within a few hours of the attack, an influential local cleric called Faqir Mohammad, who had run the madrasa, announced that the deaths would be avenged by suicide bombings against Pakistani soldiers.

My father and his friends were worried and called together local elders and leaders for a peace conference. It was a bitterly cold night in January but 150 people gathered.

‘It's coming here,’ my father warned. ‘The fire is reaching the valley. Let's put out the flames of militancy before they reach here.’

But no one would listen. Some people even laughed, including a local political leader sitting in the front row.

‘Mr Khan,’ my father said to him, ‘you know what happened to the people of Afghanistan. They are now refugees and they're living with us. The same is happening with Bajaur. The same will happen to us, mark my words, and we will have no shelter, no place to migrate to.’

But the expression on the man's face was mocking. ‘Look at this man,’ he seemed to be saying of my father. ‘I am a khan. Who would dare kick me out of this area?’

My father came home frustrated. ‘I have a school, but I am neither a khan nor a political leader. I have no platform,’ he said. ‘I am only one small man.’