

## Scenario 115

### **DRONE ATTACKS DILEMMA-II**

#### **WIKILEAKS PLAYED AGAIN:**

In 2010, the controversial whistle blowing site **Wikileaks** released numerous documents relating to Pakistan which showed the Pakistani military and other arms of the government had "*quietly acquiesced*" with drone strikes even though they had publicly condemned them. In August 2008 the then PM Yousuf Raza Gilani reportedly said: "*I don't care if they do it as long as they get the right people. We'll protest in the National Assembly and then ignore it.*"

That latest cache included documents which appeared to refer to a direct Pakistani role in the selection of targets, with the newspaper referring to one 2010 entry describing hitting a location "*at the request of your government*". There was also a reference to a "*network of locations associated with a joint CIA-ISI targeting effort*".

With Bob Woodward's name in the byline, it was assumed that it was a case of an official leak in exchange for services rendered - in the form of the headline: "**Secret memos reveal explicit nature of US - Pakistan agreement on drones.**"

This leak of files was deliberately done to '**the Washington Post**' by the CIA in those particular days to push back PM Nawaz Sharif's demand that '*the US needs to respect Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity and end drone strikes.*' The purpose of the CIA in leaking those memos was to show that drone strikes were being conducted with the Pakistani government's cooperation. But.....that *cooperation* was more like '**a mafia earns through a protection racket**'.

One could recall a CIA's note sent to Pakistani envoy Hussain Haqqani in Washington before the notorious memo-gate originated in May 2011, signed by an official listed as the country's Director General for America with forwarding note that:

***"Kindly find enclosed a list of 36 US citizens who are [believed] to be CIA special agents and would be visiting Pakistan for some special task - Kindly do not repeat – visas not issued."***

The said CIA's report made no mention of January 2011's event that seriously ruptured US-Pakistani relations, revealing the threat the CIA posed far beyond North Waziristan. Raymond Davis, a 36 year old former '*special forces soldier*' employed by the CIA, was arrested after he shot two youngsters labeling them '*suspected armed robbers*' in Lahore. Shortly after the killings, **the guardian** had reported:

*'Pakistani prosecutors accuse the spy of excessive force, saying he fired 10 shots and got out of his car to shoot one man twice in the back as he fled. The man's body was found 30 feet from his motorbike.....by what explanation it was a self defense – [only Rehman Malik knew the background knowledge].'*

The Pakistani government was aware of Davis's CIA status yet kept quiet in the face of immense American pressure to free him under the Vienna Convention. President Obama described Davis as "our diplomat" – a blatant lie it was, and dispatched his chief diplomat,

Senator John Kerry, to Islamabad. Kerry returned home empty handed; though CIA's installed agent in Pakistan, the then Interior Minister Rehman Malik got him rescued later.

Most Pakistanis were outraged at an armed American rampaging through their docile population called *Lahorites*.

**SIGNATURE STRIKES** - CIA's another blunder: The documents also revealed a major shift in the CIA's strategy in Pakistan as it broadened the campaign beyond "*high-value*" targets and started firing missiles at gatherings of low-level fighters. CIA's that practice was known as "***signature strikes***" approving targets based on patterns of suspicious behavior detected from drone surveillance cameras and ordering strikes even when the identities of those to be killed were not known. At times, the evidence seemed circumstantial.

**On 14<sup>th</sup> January 2010**, a gathering of 17 people at a suspected Taliban training camp was struck after the men were observed conducting "*assassination training, sparring, push-ups and running*." The compound was termed as linked to an al Qaeda facility hit three years earlier.

**On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2010**, the CIA launched missiles at a "person of interest" in a suspected al Qaeda compound. The man caught the agency's attention after he had "*held two in-car meetings, and swapped vehicles three times along the way*."

**On 11<sup>th</sup> May 2010**, 12 men were targeted and killed who were "***probably***" ***involved in cross border attacks*** against the US military in Afghanistan.

Although often uncertain about the identities of its targets, the CIA expressed remarkable confidence in its accuracy, repeatedly ruling out the possibility that any civilians were killed. One table estimated that as many as 152 "combatants" were killed and 26 were injured during the first six months of 2011. No details that who were they – and columns for 'civilian deaths or injuries' contained mention of NIL.

The CIA targeting 'someone' by a missile strike could be described as a "person of interest" was strange for even Americans who knew that a *person of interest* should be someone that authorities were investigating — someone who might end up being arrested. Here 'persons of interest' turned out to be those who caught the CIA's attention on their Radar drones machine in Nevada - they formed an impression that a person was of military aged height and stature so killed him — just to be safe.

### **US CHANGED DRONE POLICY 2013:**

Referring to the '*New York Times*' dated **22<sup>nd</sup> May 2013**; when President Obama had embraced drone strikes with open arms in his first term; the targeted killing of suspected terrorists were defined well his presidency.

*'..... But lost in the contentious debate over the legality, morality and effectiveness of a novel weapon is the fact that the number of strikes has actually been in decline. Strikes in Pakistan peaked in 2010 and have fallen sharply since then; their pace in Yemen has slowed to half of last year's rate; and no strike has been reported in Somalia for more than a year.'*

The statistics then available had shown that decline as the number of drone attacks on Pakistan and Yemen were: in 2008 – 35; 2009 – 53; 2010 – 117; 2011 – 64; 2012 – 46 and in 2013 – 13 [*source: NYT dated 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2013*].

The reasons of the said decline were the reports of innocent civilians killed by drones — whether real or, as American officials often asserted, exaggerated — had shaken the claims of precise targeting. The strikes had become a staple of Al Qaeda propaganda, citing that the US was at war with Islam - described by convicted terrorists as a motivation for their crimes, including the failed attack on a Detroit-bound airliner in 2009 and the attempted car bombing at Times Square in 2010.

Notably, a growing list of former senior Bush and Obama administration security officials had also expressed concern over the US drone policy; amongst them Michael V. Hayden - CIA Director in 2008, Gen Stanley A McChrystal - who commanded American forces in Afghanistan; James E. Cartwright - the former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Dennis C. Blair, the former Director of National Intelligence were found as very vocal voices.

One of Mr Obama's ambitions on assuming presidency in 2008 was to build more positive American image in the Muslim world - but the drone strikes pushed the US to be more negative. As per **NYT** cited above:

*'.....In Pakistan, for instance, 19 percent of those surveyed by the Pew Research Centre had a positive view of the United States in the last year of George W. Bush's presidency. By last year, the approval rating had fallen to 12 percent.'*

Globally these operations were hated; it was the face of American foreign policy, and it was an ugly face. This decline could also be correlated with shifting political conditions in Pakistan. For instance, the CIA had cut back on strikes as relations had grown strained after the arrest of the CIA contractor, Raymond Davis, in January 2011 Lahore; the incursion of a US SEAL team to kill Osama B L alone in May 2011 in Abbotabad and finally due to **Salala event** of November 2011 in which NATO bombing killed 24 Pak-Army soldiers. The major factor was the *'growing awareness of the cost of drone strikes in US - Pakistan relations'*.

Within Pakistan, the problem stood multiplied. The Al Qaeda or Taliban – the alleged target of those attacks – being unable to shoot-down or stop the drones, had taken out their frustration and vengeance through a series of terrorist attacks in the heart of Karachi, Lahore, Quetta and Peshawar, targeting civilian and state personnel alike. Neither the drone-attacks stopped nor had the retaliatory aggression and violence subsided. And this spiral of violence, in addition to weakening the State and making Pakistan one of the most precarious nations in the world, had resulted in the loss of thousands of innocent lives over the past decade. The statistics are abundantly available.

As the vicious cycle of violence continued, the American President, while addressing the National Defence University, **on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2013**, acknowledged that:

*'Drone attacks cannot be used as a long-term and effective weapon to counter terrorism in porous border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan'.*

During that remorseful address, President Obama opened a new phase in the terrorism linked struggle by **restricting the use of drone strikes and shifting control of them away from the CIA to the military; might not be in a formal way.**

The US administration that day had formally acknowledged for the first time that it had killed four American citizens in drone strikes outside the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq. The new shift virtually ended the **"signature strikes"** - attacks on groups of unknown men based only on their presumed status as members of Al Qaeda. Pentagon had suggested them last week that the current conflict in Pak-Afghan region could continue for 10 to 20 years. Thus Obama had to admit that:

*".....for me, and those in my chain of command, these deaths will haunt us as long as we live.....there must be near-certainty that no civilians will be killed or injured".*

The salient features of a new policy, in terms of the drone attacks, stipulated that:

- *'A drone strike will not be ordered if a target can be captured, either by the US or by a foreign government.*
- *A strike can be launched only against a target posing an "imminent" threat.*
- *Preference shall be given to the military to control the drone program, **although the CIA will continue to control the attacks in Pakistan and Yemen.**'*

Those were those days when the PML[N] had swept the general elections in Pakistan. Across Pakistan, a party that had long-standing ties with many religious organizations and religious political parties, had surfaced. There was little hope of a push towards negating the *madrassa* culture during the next parliamentary term - the talks of entering into 'peaceful negotiations' with the Taliban were already on their finger tips.

The strategy of winning the 'hearts and minds' of people was being trumpeted but at the same time seemed lost because the drone attacks were still on. Khyber PK was being targeted the most.

Negotiations with Taliban were not at all the correct choice but, in the circumstances, the PML[N] had decided in its favour just to keep their streets safe and children alive. Pushed against the wall, they had chosen to open dialogue with the beast, and sent a message to the whole world that the US drone attacks had forced Pakistan to go by that way.

### **LATIFULLAH MEHSUD CAPTURED [?]:**

**On 11<sup>th</sup> October 2013**, the Afghan government revealed that TTP's 2<sup>nd</sup> in-command Latifullah Mehsud was in the custody of US troops, who was apprehended a week earlier. It was be a major blow to the TTP, which had waged a decade-long insurgency from sanctuaries along the Afghan border; also helped the Afghan Taliban in their war against US-led NATO troops in Afghanistan.

**Latifullah Mehsud** [*believed to be around 30 years-old, once served as Hakimullah Mehsud's driver but eventually worked his way up the ranks to become a trusted deputy*] was arrested by American forces as he was driving along a main highway through the eastern Logar province; Logar's Governor Arsallah Jamal told the media. Mehsud served as a senior deputy to Pakistani Taliban leader Hakimullah Mehsud too.

Governor Jamal said Latifullah Mehsud was in a car with two or three other men when the US military arrested him. However, the much trumpeted hue & cry by the Karzai government moved the analysts to conclude that **'the Americans had in fact snatched Latifullah from the Afghan Intelligence through coercion; while in eastern Afghanistan and taken to the Bagram base near Kabul'**.

TTP had confirmed Latifullah Mehsud's capture amidst claims that he was actually seized by the Afghan army at the Ghulam Khan border crossing in the Khost province **on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2013** while returning from a meeting to discuss swapping Afghan prisoners for money.

A spokesman for President Hamid Karzai, Aimal Faizi, told **the 'Washington Post'**:

*"The Americans forcibly removed him and took him to Bagram; he had only agreed to meet Afghan operatives after months of negotiations. Mr Karzai, who was then holding talks with visiting US Secretary of State John Kerry, was furious about that US operation."*

As per **BBC dated 12<sup>th</sup> October 2013**, Latifullah Mehsud was also named for the attempted bombing of Times Square in New York in 2010, as well as attacks on US diplomats in Pakistan and many Pakistani civilians. In retaliation, TTP had vowed to attack the US homeland again. However, there were strong indications that the Afghans were trying to recruit him as a go-between for peace talks. He had recently become the right-hand man of Hakimullah Mehsud, acting as a negotiator for him in talks with other militia leaders.

Though the Pentagon said Latifullah Mehsud was captured in a US military operation in Afghanistan, but the Washington Post newspaper reported correctly that he was forcibly snatched from an Afghan government convoy in Logar province several weeks ago as Afghan officials were trying to recruit him to launch peace talks.

Referring to **Al-Jazeera's Jane Ferguson**, reporting from Baghlan province, [**12<sup>th</sup> October 2013's** report is referred];

*"It is believed that [Latifullah] Mehsud was in the custody of Afghan intelligence officials because they were hoping to be able to use him to help negotiate peace talks between the Afghan government, the Taliban and the Pakistani government."*

*Afghan authorities were not happy about the Mehsud being snatched from the custody of Afghan intelligence officials and that it directly affected the sovereignty of the government on its own soil."*

The US Foreign Office had declared that the US would like to capture people alive for interrogation purposes; **"Capturing them alive means avoiding civilian casualties."** President Obama preferred to focus on targeted strikes and increased the use of drones but with the amount of casualties, he pulled him back, planned to use special forces, and capturing [suspects] alive so they could be interrogated.

### **N SHARIF'S AGENDA ON DRONES:**

As per world media reports of mid October 2013, a United Nations investigation had till then identified 33 drone strikes around the world that had resulted in civilian casualties; thus violated international humanitarian law.

The 22-page report by the UN's special reporter on human rights and counter-terrorism, Ben Emmerson QC, called on the US to declassify information about operations co-ordinated by the CIA in Afghanistan, Yemen, Iraq, Libya, Somalia & Pakistan and to clarify its position on the legality of drone strikes. QC Emmerson had travelled to Islamabad for his investigation and procured records of as many as 330 drone strikes in Pak-Afghan border regions since 2004 in which up to 2,200 people were reportedly killed – of whom at least 400 were civilians.

*[Astonishingly, the UK had reported only one civilian casualty incident, in which four civilians were killed and two civilians injured in a drone strike by its Royal Air Force in Afghanistan on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2011.]*

However, QC Emmerson criticised the CIA's involvement in US drone strikes for creating **"an almost insurmountable obstacle to transparency"**. It failed to reveal its own data on the level of civilian casualties inflicted through the drone attacks in Pakistan and elsewhere in the world.

Thus when the Pakistani PM Nawaz Sharif went to see the American President Obama [scheduled on **23<sup>rd</sup> October 2013**], there was a lot of pressure on him from the vibrant media of Pakistan and his coalition parties in the Parliament to press upon the US government to shun its policy of drone attacks in Pakistan's tribal areas.

Referring to the ***Guardian dated 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2013***; Pakistan's PM Nawaz Sharif did mention of drone problem but could not convince or pressurize President Obama to even minimize the number of attacks or civilian killings because the US drone policy was directly related with the American security concerns. So much the humiliation for Pakistan's visiting leadership was that the 2500-word joint statement issued by the White House after their one-on-one meeting in Washington did not even mention drone attacks.

Contrarily Pakistan was **"directed to do more to ensure respect for mutual sovereignty and territorial integrity by curbing cross-border terrorism"** from within Pakistan – should have been responded adequately.

Pakistani criticism of the US drone program cogently irritated many in US defence circles, who knew that many of the attacks were secretly sanctioned or even assisted by Pakistan's military and civil elite; thus declared Pakistani leaders' public condemnation as hypocritical. There prevailed a general understanding that there was no likelihood of any changes in American drones program until the superpower's own wish prevailed. Karl Inderfurth, a former Assistant US Secretary of State openly opined that:

*"There are always overlapping thoughts on drones policy behind the closed doors. The real question is whether there is some private understanding about the need to curb the attacks. The numbers have come down since Obama's speech to the National Defense University in May [2013], but not to zero."*

Speaking after his meeting with Obama, PM Nawaz Sharif said that *'let there be no doubt about our commitment for a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. This result remains unwavering.'* The US acknowledged Pakistan's efforts to support an inclusive reconciliation process in which Afghans were to determine the future of their country; both Leaders called on the Taliban to join the political process and enter into dialogue with the Afghan government.

Indian media, at the same time, left no stone unturned to make the world believe that Pakistan and US were not able to survive as successful partners because Pakistan had no solution for the global terrorism; as Pakistan's civil leadership would not like to stand by the US in Afghanistan any more because of their military restraints.

From India's viewpoint the interests and objectives of Pakistan and US in Afghanistan were diametrically opposed to each other and often conflicting. The Indian apprehensions could only be bought had the analysts talked about the circumstances of some years earlier but not in 2013. No doubt that a decade and half before Pak-Army used to perform seeing the Afghan Taliban in power but then the situation on ground changed drastically.

At last Pakistan's military and civil elite both reached the conclusion that Afghanistan should be left to Afghans with no interference or sponsorship from outer world – neither from Pakistan nor from India-US coalition. The gambling time was over for all in Afghanistan. Pakistan's army chief Gen Kayani had already surrendered his ambition of staying in; he was retiring in ending November that year [2013]. Though Indian media lobbies were constantly propagating that:

*'.....then there will be another chief running the Pak-Army.... they are all chips of the same old block. Ayub, Yahya, Tikka, Niazi, Zia, Musharraf, Kayani – in what way was any of them different from the usual pattern - all were prepared to gamble everything on the chance.'*

BUT there were bitter replies from Pakistani opinion makers too; published on the same media pages saying that:

*'Pakistan in fact is being destroyed by the Taliban who are actually the CIA agents – they get weapons and dollars from CIA & India.... They are not 'Muslims', they are not followers of 'Islam', they use name of Islam to fulfil their ulterior motives of bloodshed and chaos; and they are the relics of anti-soviet CIA agents left behind since Russia's withdrawal from Afghanistan.'*

One contributor opined: the laughable claim that the Taliban had anything to do with Islam only worked on those who had no clue about the religion and culture.

How come 'terrorists' started to 'originate' in Pakistan only after 2001? Was there any instance before then? The reason the terrorists were planted in Pakistan was to destroy its economy and to extend the American influence into the region. The US was not able to attack Pakistan directly because it was a nuclear power - it was not Saddam Hussain's Iraq.

Amnesty International had released a report that week based on investigations of nine drone strikes in Pakistan between May 2012 and July 2013. After interviewing survivors and assembling other evidence, AI concluded that at least 30 civilians were killed in the attacks.

Amnesty had mounted a major effort to investigate those nine of the many attacks, including one that killed 18 labourers in North Waziristan [detailed earlier] as they waited to eat dinner in an area of heavy Taliban influence in July 2012. All those interviewed by Amnesty strongly denied any of the men had been involved in militancy. Even if they were members of a banned group, that would not be enough to justify killing them.

**On 21<sup>st</sup> October 2013**, Amnesty International [AI] Report highlighted the case of a grandmother who was killed while she was picking vegetables in from her fields North Waziristan; details given earlier. Some other incidents which could have broken international laws designed to protect civilians were also mentioned with details. AI demanded that the US officials responsible for the secret CIA drone campaign against suspected terrorists in Pakistan had committed war crimes and should stand trial.

PM Nawaz Sharif had urged the US President Obama in open and in the meeting that drone attacks on Pakistan be ended. When the PM was there, all the western press, especially the BBC, Washington Post and the Telegraph made it a point to repeat the old stories that the drone attacks had the tacit approval of the successive army and political elite in the past. They cited the CIA's 'discretely' leaked reports, Hilary Clinton's meeting accounts, Pakistan's Foreign Office notes for issuance of visas to the CIA workers etc.

Nawaz Sharif did not feel embarrassed over those press clippings while there in US rather boldly told them that: **"Whatever understandings there may or may not have been in the past, the present government has been very clear regarding its policy on the issue."** The Pakistani Foreign Ministry had also a press statement in that regard. Conveying a clear message that: **".....we regard such strikes as violation of our sovereignty as well as international law - they were also counterproductive."**

The stories repeated in the Washington Post told nothing; the subject experts already knew about the American drone programme and Pakistani complicity - but the gun was seen spreading smoke at that belated stage. Significantly, the details came out when PM Nawaz

Sharif was making a populist appeal for an end to the programme, which many believed was the centrepiece of American counter - terrorism strategy. The revelation had no doubt taken some of the wind out of Nawaz Sharif's sails but he boldly prevailed.

Earlier **in April 2013**, Pakistan's former military ruler, Gen Musharraf, admitted in an interview that his government had signed off on drone strikes, albeit **"only on a few occasions"**.

In the Pakistani tribal areas, details of casualties in drone strikes were invariably provided to the media by intelligence agents posted there. They often displayed considerable knowledge about the targeted buildings, and gave precise numbers and identities of some of the people killed. In the early days of the drone programme, when such strikes were practically unheard of, these agents actively prevented local journalists from publicising evidence about the attacks or the casualties or about the nature of the people killed or wounded.

But who could ask America and especially its CIA.

Then the American and Western media tried to knock down PM Nawaz Sharif. An article titled **WAR in CONTEXT** dated **24<sup>th</sup> October 2013** appeared in the **'Washington Post'**:

*'.....despite repeatedly denouncing the CIA's drone campaign, top officials in Pakistan's government have for years secretly endorsed the program and routinely received classified briefings on strikes and casualty counts, according to top-secret CIA documents and Pakistani diplomatic memos obtained by The Washington Post.'*

The files described dozens of drone attacks in Pakistan's tribal region and included maps as well as 'before and after' aerial photos of targeted compounds over a four year stretch from late 2007 to late 2011 in which the campaign had intensified dramatically. Markings on the documents indicated that many of them were prepared by the CIA's Counter-Terrorism Center specifically to be shared with Pakistan's government. They hyped the success of strikes that killed dozens of alleged al Qaeda operatives and asserted repeatedly that no civilians were harmed.

The documents obtained by that **'Washington Post'** focussed on at least 65 drone strikes in Pakistan over the last few years and were labelled as "talking points" for regular CIA briefings. Although they were marked "top secret" but they were cleared for release to Pakistan. The newspaper said the documents provided a detailed timeline of the CIA drone programme:

*".....tracing its evolution from a campaign aimed at a relatively short list of senior al-Qaeda operatives into a broader aerial assault against militant groups with no connection to the 11 September 2001 attacks".*

The report told that the files exposed the explicit nature of the arrangement between the two countries in the period when neither any drone programme even existed nor acknowledged.

**On 30<sup>th</sup> October 2013**, Pakistan's Ministry of Defence sent an official reply to a question to be placed before the Senate first time divulging that the number of civilian fatalities in drone strikes amounted to just 3% of the total number of people killed; [only] 67 civilians were killed in 317 US drone strikes since 2008 till ending 2013. The said figure of 3% was strikingly lower than tallies compiled by organisations that tracked drone attacks through media reports, which claimed hundreds of civilians were killed.

Referring to a live TV show **'AAJ' dated 30<sup>th</sup> October 2013**, the US House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee member & Congressman Alan Grayson said during a media talk that **drone strikes in Pakistan could stop in a day had Pakistan seriously wanted it**. BBC Urdu quoted Alan Grayson as saying that:



*'Had Pakistan wanted and stopped facilitating the US drone attacks on its territory it "could end tomorrow." Pakistan's armed forces were capable of tackling militants and that in such a situation, the US should not have blood on its hands. He had received no evidence from the Obama administration to suggest that there would be a drop in drone strikes carried out in Pakistan by the end of this year.*

*Pakistan has a strong air force which has the power to impose a restriction on its borders whenever it chooses to; such attacks were not possible without the consent of the country struck. Take the example of Iraq - the war in the Middle Eastern country ended only after the host government had asked the US troops to leave its soil.*

*There were only a handful of militants in Pakistan, whose numbers hardly run into hundreds, whereas the strength of Pakistan's military was more than a million; if the Pak - Army wanted, they could control the situation and ease the lives of thousands of citizens.'*

Referring to UK's '**Telegraph**' daily of **31<sup>st</sup> October 2013**:

*'The US president, Barack Obama, held a White House meeting with Pakistani PM Nawaz Sharif, last week. Despite Sharif's claim that he would raise the drone issue, there was no mention of it in the two leaders' joint statement. Senior officials, however, hinted that an understanding has been reached with the US which will see drone strikes come to an end in the near future.'*

### **HAKIMULLAH MEHSUD KILLED:**

Referring to Reuters report of the day, the head of the Pakistani Taliban [TTP] Hakimullah Mehsud was killed by a US drone strike **on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2013**; he was believed to be in his mid-30s and had been reported dead several times before. Later several intelligence, army and militant sources across Pakistan confirmed he had [actually] been killed in the drone strike in North Waziristan region on that day.

Hakimullah Mehsud's TTP had been considered an umbrella for militant groups allied to the Afghan Taliban. Among the dead were Hakimullah's personal bodyguard Tariq Mehsud and his driver Abdullah Mehsud. One intelligence source added that at least 25 people were killed in the strike because TTP's commanders conference was being convened at Hakimullah's residence under attack.

Hakimullah Mehsud had taken over the TTP in August 2009 after a drone strike killed its former leader Baitullah Mehsud. The regional sources had confirmed that drones had fired four missiles at a compound in Danda Darpa Khel, a village about 5 km from the regional capital of North Waziristan, Miran Shah.

Earlier, the US had placed \$5 million reward for Mehsud's capture after he appeared in a farewell video with the Jordanian suicide bomber [named Khalil Abu Malal Al Bilavi] who killed seven CIA employees at a base in Afghanistan in 2009. US prosecutors had charged him with involvement in the attack. Hakimullah Mehsud was also found linked and on the back of one Faisal Shahzad who was responsible for a failed car bomb blast in Time Square of New York on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2010.

Very few people knew that the Chief of Lashkar e Jhangvi [LeJ] named Qari Hussain was also a cousin of Hakeemullah Mehsud. LeJ was responsible, as per their own claims, for numerous known massacres of Hazara Town Quetta in which hundreds of Shia sect Muslims

were killed in suicide bomb blasts. Similar episodes of Karachi and Gilgit were also bravely claimed by that faction of LeJ.

A similar drone strike in May 2013 had killed Mehsud's number two and one of his most trusted lieutenants was captured in Afghanistan four weeks earlier. This drone strike and Hakimullah's death followed months of debate over potential peace talks between the TTP and the new government of Pakistani PM Nawaz Sharif. The Federal Interior Minister had termed this drone strike a *'purposeful effort'* to frustrate and thwart the peace negotiations between the TTP and the ruling regime.

A 3 member's Pakistani government delegation, which was going for negotiations with the TTP **on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2013**, was stopped after reports that their chief Hakimullah Mehsud had been killed in a US drone attack.

Blaming the Pakistan government for the killing of Hakimullah Mehsud in the US drone attack, the TTP **on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2013** announced they would not hold any peace talks with the government and threatened to avenge the killing of their leader. It had been unanimously decided by all factions of the Taliban declaring that **"it's a puppet government of the US and it deceived us in the name of peace talks."**

The TTP's spokesman Shahidullah held that the PML[N] government was neither sincere nor serious in peace negotiations; he termed it playing a double game with the TTP.

**On 7<sup>th</sup> November 2013;** the TTP finally and formally rejected dialogue with the Pakistan government following the appointment of their new chief Mullah Fazlullah; Taliban spokesman Shahidullah Shahid added that Mullah Fazlullah had always voted against negotiations with the Pakistani government.

The decision to appoint Mullah Fazlullah as the new TTP Chief and Sheikh Khalid Haqqani its deputy chief was taken by the TTP Shura on the same day [7<sup>th</sup> Nov 2013]. Though the Interior Minister Ch Nisar Ali Khan had trumpeted that the drone strike was **"not just the killing of one person, it's the death of all peace efforts"** but even then the new commander of TTP refused to continue with the talk drama of Pakistani politicians.

During mutual discussions, three names of senior Taliban commanders were presented at the TTP's Shura meeting. They were Maulana Fazlullah, Hafiz Said Khan and Maulana Gul Zaman.

Hafiz Said Khan was the TTP leader in Orakzai Agency belonging to the Orakzai tribe hailing from the Mamozai area. Among the militant circles, he was known as one of the most hard-line and dangerous militant commanders. Besides his native Orakzai Agency, he had organised dozens of deadly attacks on key installations in major cities of the country, including the US Consulate in Peshawar through four suicide bombers, the Peshawar airport, military checkpoints, mourning processions of the Shiite community and worship places of Ahmadis.

It was Said Khan who had organised a suicide car blast on the tribal *jirga* in Orakzai Agency **on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2008** killing over 50 people. He proudly claimed the recent suicide car attack on the compound of Mulla Nabi Hanafi in Orakzai Agency. Like Maulana Fazlullah, he too had two wives and was father of three children.

The third militant commander was Maulana Gul Zaman, belonging to the same Orakzai Agency but was the TTP Ameer in the Khyber Agency.

After a week's thread-bare discussions in TTP's ruling council to reach a decision, the announcement of the new leader was made by the TTP's caretaker leader Asmatullah Shaheen [amidst heavy cerebral gunfire] at a news conference at an undisclosed location near Miran-

shah. **"Peace talks with the government are not possible as Pakistan is not an authority and is under US slavery,"** added Asmatullah Shaheen.

**Mullah Fazlullah** was a hard-line commander, who had ordered to fire at Malala Yousafzai in October 2012; had resisted the Pak-Army Operation of 2008-09 in Swat and had pioneered a violent campaign against polio vaccination. The Taliban immediately announced on Fazalullah's selection that TTP wanted revenge for the killing of Hakimullah Mehsud.

Since his eviction from Swat in the said army operation, Mullah Fazlullah moved to the *ve-lyat* of Nooristan in Kunar province of Afghanistan, from where he launched several attacks against the Pakistani military, including one in September 2013 that killed Maj Gen Niazi.

Mullah Fazlullah is known for enforcing hard-line Islamic law, burning the girls' schools, public floggings and beheadings. The analysts viewed Fazalullah's selection as the new Chief with two major disadvantages - he was not based in Pakistan and he was not a native of the Waziristan tribal region, the main militant sanctuary. First time the militant's command had moved into non-Mehsud people from Waziristan.

Mullah Fazlullah was known for his radio broadcasts calling for strict Islamic laws and earning him the nickname **"Mullah Radio"**. He imposed strict Islamic law on the residents and tasked his men to burn down music shops and prevent barbers from cutting beards. On his radio, he used to announce the names of men ordered to be beheaded for breaking the Taliban's strict rules.

**'The guardian'** dated **7<sup>th</sup> November 2013** observed that:

*'.....Perhaps most alarming for Pakistan is Fazlullah's success in setting up a base of operations in Kunar and Nuristan, provinces in eastern Afghanistan where the Kabul government has minimal control. If he stays in Afghanistan he will remain even further out of the reach of the Pakistani military than [Hakimullah] Mehsud, who ran the TTP from North Waziristan.'*

The decision to appoint Fazlullah surprised some analysts who assumed the leadership would remain in the hands of members from the Mehsud tribe, which had controlled the loose alliance of militant groups since it was created in 2007. Authentic source told that 46 out of 60 senior TTP figures who met on 2<sup>nd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> November 2013 voted for Khan Said Sajna, a member of the Mehsud tribe **"but Fazlullah ultimately won because other commanders opposed Sajna's soft corner for the [Pakistani] government"**.

Khan Said Sajna was considered more inclined to consider peace talks with the Pakistani government but perhaps was killed in another drone attack during November 2015.

Two reasons for Mullah Fazlullah selection; One, he was considered very hard-line and secondly for his expected non-interference with operations of the multiple groups in the TTP franchise; one can go through the details of the two military operations in Swat: in 2007 and, the more decisive one, in 2009.

Mulla Fazlullah, a Gujjar from Swat, was not a Pakhtun by blood; thus replacing a Mehsud, especially when the TTP core comprised mainly of Mehsud tribe highlanders, was unusual. While Fazalullah headed his own faction of the Taliban, he was not close to the former TTP Chief Hakimullah Mehsud – yes Khan Said Sajna was but he could not succeed.

Tribal affiliations should have been on play though the TTP claimed to control the Punjabi Taliban and fighters from Chechnya, Uzbekistan, China, Middle East and what else. Mehsuds were known highlanders - considering themselves martially superior since old British times. The analysts wondered how the FATA northerners accepted someone from the Lower Swat

Valley as their leader; more so that Fazalullah was not operating from Waziristan. How could he manage central control over TTP operations, given the difficulty of communication, especially electronic communication?

Mulla Fazlullah was close to some of the Punjabi Taliban groups that also provided fighting cadres to him during the second military operation in 2009. This included **Jundallah**, the group responsible for the attack on the All Saints Church in Peshawar in October 2013.

Then the main question; why Hakeemullah Mehsud agreed on talks with Pakistan government. Simple answer - the objective for which they played had already been achieved. They wanted to ensure that the Pakistan Army stayed away from North Waziristan for some weeks or months at least. Winter of 2013 had already started and during cold seasons the guerrilla warfare normally slows down.

The fighting season was almost over and the next spill was expected in March or April 2014. **On 5<sup>th</sup> April 2014**, Afghanistan was to hold the first round of its presidential elections amidst the withdrawal of NATO forces from the region. TTP wanted to keep the Pak-army away from North Waziristan till then at least.

After spring 2014, even if the Pak-Army went into North Waziristan, the TTP could have gained strategic depth in the *Loya Paktia* region of Afghanistan. The Afghan Intelligence was already providing funds and sanctuaries to Mulla Fazlullah and his men. The scenario in the region was much changed with Obama's 2<sup>nd</sup> stint in the White House to see continuity with his 1<sup>st</sup> December 2009's speech in New York's military school - the TTP groups were clandestinely siding with the Afghan army and police in their fight against the Afghan Taliban.

Mulla Fazlullah, while in Nuristan, was also linked to the **Salafi Taliban** who operated independently of the mainstream TTP. His wounded men were being treated in Jalalabad; Afghan Taliban were not able to operate against him. Like other TTP groups, Fazlullah's was also close to the remaining Al Qaeda elements while a number of alliances were also continuing in between because of local politics there.

The political elite in Islamabad were helpless except to wait for the TTP's fresh attacks in the wake of false slogans of talks and negotiations – what else they could do to betray the innocent Pakistani populace.

A widely quoted fact remained that:

***"If you look at the history of successive heads of the TTP, each time they elected a more hardliner leader."***