On November 1, 2013, the leader of the Pakistani Taliban (TTP), Hakimullah Mehsud, was killed in a U.S. airstrike by unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in Pakistan's North Waziristan, which borders Afghanistan. This event took place the day after a statement was made by Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan on starting peace talks with the Taliban.

Mehsud was one of the most wanted terrorists in the United States, with a reward on his head of $5 million. The Pentagon suspected him of attacking a NATO base in Afghanistan, of a car bombing in New York's Times Square, and of terrorist attacks against Americans in Pakistan, etc.

The elimination of Mehsud has attracted more than just the attention of the TTP. In the context of the current political reality in Pakistan, when the irreconcilable warring parties agreed to hear each other out, the breakdown of peace talks with the rebels can signify lost time and opportunities, and therefore, more terrorist attacks, victims, and instability in Pakistan and in the region as a whole. And all this on the threshold of a predicted wave of terror by Afghan militants in the northern regions of Pakistan following withdrawal of the forces of the international coalition from Afghanistan in 2014.

Remember that Islamist extremism is an aspect of everyday life in the country. In 2010, the federal army, for the first time in the years of its existence, radically revised its military doctrine, stating that "...the main threats to the country come from domestic terrorism, and not from external aggression."

Hakimullah Mehsud was the third leader of the TTP since its formation in 2002. The founder and first commander of the detachment of militants was Nek Mohammad of the Mehsud tribe in South Waziristan. He died in 2004. He was replaced by fellow tribesman Baitullah Mehsud, who was killed in August 2009 in South Waziristan. Other warlords of the TTP were also killed as a result of drone strikes, including Mullah Nazir and Wali-ur-Rehman in 2013.

In the hands of the Pentagon, drones have become an effective weapon against militants. Several mass demonstrations have been held in Pakistan, demanding an end to the uncontrolled use of these weapons, because of which many of the country's civilians have been killed.

Mehsud was elected to the Shura (council) as leader of the TTP in September 2009, and the local media have since then repeatedly reported on his alleged elimination. But this time, his death was confirmed by an Islamist representative. Mehsud had significant influence within the TTP and commanded operations to disrupt truck convoys with cargo destined for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan. He led the Taliban groups in Khyber, Kurram and Orakzai Agencies within the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). In 2007, as a result of one of the operations, his unit captured around 300 Pakistani soldiers. This added to his prestige in the eyes of the militants.

The Pakistani press remarked that he was able to consolidate rebel groups scattered over a vast territory into an organized movement with unified control. In 2013, Mehsud already controlled more than 30 militant groups operating in the north-western parts of the country. And this was all put to his credit.
The death of Mehsud immediately led to the procedure for electing a new leader of the TTP. And on November 2, 2013, representatives of the various factions of the TTP met in North Waziristan to discuss Mehsud’s successor to the Shura.

Until the appointment of a new leader of the movement, Asmatullah Shaheen Bhittani, a native of the Tank region bordering Afghanistan, was unanimously approved emir of the central Shura.

Shura members met several times to consider candidates for the leader of the Pakistani Taliban. Five names were originally submitted. It was then narrowed down to three senior commanders of the movement: Maulana Fazlullah, Hafiz Saeed Khan and Maulana Gul Zaman.

Maulana Fazlullah is the leader of the Swat Taliban. He is known for the mass killing of local residents of Swat Valley in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan (known as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa since April 2010) in the spring and summer of 2009, as well as the organization of resistance fighters against the federal army. He is currently based in the Afghan province of Kunar.

Hafiz Saeed Khan is the leader of the TTP in Orakzai Agency. Better known by his alias Sajna, he belongs to the Orakzai tribe and is native to the Mamozai area of Orakzai Agency. Among militants, he is considered one of the most uncompromising commanders. The Pakistani press reported that under his command, numerous attacks were organized on federal army and civilian centers in major cities throughout the country, including the U.S. Consulate in Peshawar, the Peshawar airport, peaceful Shiite marches and Ahmadi worship places.

The third candidate, Maulana Gul Zaman, also hails from Orakzai Agency and is the emir of the TTP in Khyber.

Majlis-e-Shura decided to appoint Hafiz Saeed Khan as the new head of the militant organization of the TTP. At first glance, this is the natural process of changing the face of the movement. But on the other hand, this is a fundamental break with the tradition of appointing Taliban leaders from the Mehsud tribes of South Waziristan, the home of the TTP. Tribal ties in the area of the Pashtun tribes of FATA have significant meaning in military, political, and administrative agency government. Appointment of an “outsider” (not only from another tribe in the southeast, but from another agency) to command the militant factions could lead to unpredictable consequences: the fragmentation of the movement, randomness of its actions, changing priorities, etc.

TTP leaders characterized Mehsud’s death as a rejection of the February 18, 2008 agreements reached between militants and the federal government regarding North Waziristan. On November 2, 2013, militants announced their rejection of peace talks with the Pakistani government, accusing it of treason, collusion with the U.S., and double dealing with the rebels. In recent years, the TTP has asserted itself as a social force in Pakistan, capable of exerting influence and pressure on the federal government. This explains precisely why Islamabad heeded and responded to the movement’s statement.

The issue of negotiations between the federal government and the TTP was discussed back in 2012 during the reign of President Asif Ali Zardari and his Pakistan Peoples Party. This was further encouraged by Islamabad's position, as well as the events in neighboring Afghanistan: attempts to establish contact with the Afghan Taliban movement. The repercussions of these events had some effect on the TTP. In 2012 and 2013, all-party conferences were held in Islamabad, during which the issue of negotiations was submitted to the meeting of the National Assembly (the lower house of parliament). Each party put forward its demands. Right up until September 2013, general officials did not support the idea of talks with the militants, insisting only on the use of force against them.

For its part, the United States continued its air strikes tactic around militant bases in North Waziristan. As a result, in January and then in May 2013, two of the militants from the list of top ten most prominent leaders were eliminated: Maullana Nazir and Wali-ur-Rehman. After this, the TTP once again rejected the idea of peace talks.

The TTP banned by President Musharraf back in 2004 was interested in the public recognition and legalization of its existence. The only way the Taliban saw to achieve that was in negotiations with federal authorities. The movement pinned its hopes on the flexibility and compliance of the new federal government. In previous years, Nawaz Sharif did not openly criticized the TTP, but only condemned the terrorist attacks and expressed his condolences to the families of the victims. The Pakistani Taliban has not added the names of his party's members to its blacklist of targets, unlike, for example, those of the Pakistan Peoples Party and the Popular National Party. When he came to power in June 2013, Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif declared a path of reconciliation with the militants, but announced the need for disarmament as well as recognition of the Constitution on their part. He proposed to open the first round of negotiations in the local media. The Taliban refused.
The TTP had placed some hope on the negotiation process, especially in light of the prime minister's assurances to terminate air strikes on FATA territory after a visit to the U.S. in October 2013. U.S. drone strikes, the introduction of Sharia law to legal use in the area of the Pashtun tribes, and the repeal of the actions of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan were and remain the TTP's basic demands for starting negotiations with the federal government. In the past few weeks, the TTP has slightly relaxed its stance.

Mehsud's death complicates the Pakistani government's attempts to conclude a peace agreement with the militants. The Taliban announced a revision of its relations with the federal government and the ruling Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) (PML-N). And the PML-N itself will become a goal of TTP attacks.

Security forces in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (administratively controlled by Pashtun tribal agencies) were put on high alert the day after Mehsud's death. Additional units were gathered in order to prevent potential terrorist retaliation by Taliban fighters.

The Pakistani Parliament has expressed concerns about the situation that has taken shape after the assassination of the leader of the TTP. Political parties have characterized U.S. drone attacks as "a conspiracy to sabotage the peace talks with the militants." The leader of the parliamentary opposition, Khursheed Shah, expressly stated that the Americans are not interested in peace talks.

The ruling party in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Pakistan Movement for Justice (Tehreek-e-Insaf) called for the cessation of delivery of ISAF goods through the territory of the province. This decision was welcomed by the militants.

On November 3, 2013, the TTP warned the federal government that from now on, members of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) would be blacklisted as targets. The Pakistani Parliament announced its review of relations with the U.S. due to the breakdown of negotiations with the Taliban.

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