

A Post-Mortem Analysis of Mullah Nazir: The “Good Taliban” Killed in a CIA Drone Strike

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A CIA Predator or Reaper drone killed the powerful South Waziristani Taliban leader Mullah Nazir and five to seven of his top deputies on the night of January 2 near Angor Adda, South Waziristan. The incident is a contentious start to the 2013 drone campaign in Pakistan’s FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Agencies) region. As is increasingly the case to avoid civilian casualties, the drone strike took place while Nazir was traveling in an SUV. [1]

While seemingly a strategic victory, the strike could cause tension with Pakistan because Nazir’s South Waziristan based Taliban faction had declared a truce with the Pakistani government. Like his Taliban allies Gul Hafez Bahadur and Jalaladin Haqqani, this made him a “good Taliban” in the eyes of the Pakistanis. By contrast, the Pakistanis have been engaged in a bloody war with the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, Pakistani Taliban) faction based in North Waziristan and led by Baitullah Mahsud—who was killed by a drone on August 5, 2009—and his successor Hakimullah Mahsud. The Pakistanis have worked hard to bring leaders like Nazir to the negotiating table and have used them to create a complex web of truces that have brought a modicum of stability to this war-torn, tribal region.

The Rise of a “Good Taliban”

Mullah Nazir (often known by the higher religious title of Maulvi) was born in 1975 in the village of Angor Adda, which straddles the border between the Pakistani province of South Waziristan and the Afghan province of Paktika. Nazir’s father, Abdul Salam, fought in the anti-Soviet jihad of the 1980s while Nazir attended *madrassa-s* in Birmal, Paktika and Wana, South Waziristan. Nazir joined the Taliban when they swept to power in the border region in 1996. After the Taliban regime was overthrown in Afghanistan during 2001’s Operation Enduring Freedom, Nazir fled to South Waziristan. He became involved in providing *melmastia* (sanctuary) for wealthy al-Qaeda members and allied Uzbekistani jihadis who fled to the region to escape the U.S.-led Coalition forces. When the Pakistanis invaded South Waziristan in the following year to hunt down al-Qaeda foreigners at the behest of the Americans, Nazir joined with Pakistani Taliban leader Nek Muhammad in fighting them off.