

Hakimullah Mehsud Leader of the Pakistani Taliban who was killed by a US drone strike



Mehsud, centre, meets journalists in 2008; he revelled in dramatic displays of violence EPA

Hakimullah Mehsud's career as the leader of the Pakistani Taliban was bracketed by CIA drone strikes. In August 2009 his relative and mentor Baitullah Mehsud, the founder of the group, was receiving a leg massage from his wife on a rooftop in South Waziristan when the missiles came for them. Baitullah and his wife were killed, ending the burly tribesman's role as a brutal militant commander who had launched a fierce wave of suicide bombings across the country and is believed to have assassinated the former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.

After four years in charge, Hakimullah Mehsud was similarly killed in a drone attack. He was staying in an eight-room compound complete with marble floors and fruit orchards. The younger Mehsud was a trusted aide of Baitullah Mehsud, for whom he had sometimes acted as a bodyguard. In an earlier role, Hakimullah was the Pakistani Taliban's commander in the Orakzai tribal agency, where he earned a reputation for being young and hot-headed, but also smart and ruthless.

Hakimullah, whose real name was Zulfiqar, commanded militants in Orakzai tribal agency, along the Afghan border. Imposing his own brutal brand

of Islamic law in the area, he levied a tax on the local minorities, mainly Hindus and Sikhs. He also used his base to menace Shia Muslims nearby. As a product of the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, a notoriously violent anti-Shia outfit, he was inspired by hard-line sectarian tendencies.

Hakimullah Mehsud rose to notoriety for his attacks on the Pakistan army. In 2007, just as the Pakistani Taliban was establishing itself as the biggest threat to Pakistan's security, he engineered the kidnapping of some 250 Pakistani soldiers in a valley in South Waziristan. The soldiers were held hostage until a prisoner exchange was secured, but the Shias among them were brutally slain.

"Do you know what they did?" a retired army general asked incredulously, before describing Hakimullah Mehsud's trademark brutality. "They would take a sword and cut across both sides of the body. Then they ripped off the Shia soldiers' heads."

Hakimullah was born in the village of Kotkai in South Waziristan, but it is unclear when. He is thought to have been in his early to mid-thirties. He was schooled at a madrassa in Hangu district before abandoning his books for guns. In terms of his background and enthusiasm for violence, both he and his mentor, Baitullah Mehsud, recalled the late 19th and early 20th century warrior, Mullah Powindah.

Similarly sprung from the Mehsud tribe, and schooled at a local madrassa, Mullah Powindah had a fearsome reputation for attacking British troops. Lord Kitchener, enraged by the trouble he was causing, described him as "that pestilential priest". Around the same time a cavalryman, WK Fraser-Tytler, described life in frontier cantonments as "anything but secure in the days before barbed wire, when the firebrand of the Mahsud tribe, the notorious Mullah Powindah, was sending down his fanatical emissaries from across the border to murder a white man if they could get one, and so secure certain entry into Paradise."

Under Hakimullah Mehsud's command, the Pakistani Taliban adapted their strategy. The killing of Baitullah Mehsud came just as his cohorts had been chastened in successive military operations, first in the Swat Valley, and later in their base of South Waziristan. Moving forward, the Taliban would no

He ordered the kidnapping of 250 Pakistani soldiers; the Shias among them were killed

longer capture territory and impose their will on the local populations, instead unleashing a near-daily wave of bombings while slowly pushing into cities like Karachi.

Some of his displays of violence were dramatic. He would attack Nato convoys, leaving the trucks engulfed in flames. The targets were no longer merely confined to the west of the Durand line, the long, porous border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. In 2010 Hakimullah appeared in a video alongside a Jordanian triple agent who had confessed to being part of an al-Qa'ida plot that had killed seven CIA agents at a base in Afghanistan.

Another video that emerged on the internet showed Hakimullah angrily waving a pistol as an elderly hostage, with a flowing white beard, sat with his hands tied in front of him and his face covered. After Hakimullah ends his tirade, the hostage, Colonel Imam, a former Pakistani army officer who was in the CIA and had been a supporter of the Taliban in Afghanistan, is repeatedly shot in cold blood.

It was under Hakimullah Mehsud's command that Mullah Fazlullah of Swat – another militant leader who emerged from humble origins to claim importance as a Taliban leader – ordered the shooting of Malala Yousafzai, the now famous teenager who had campaigned for the right to attend school. And in Pakistan's 2013 general elections the Taliban targeted secular candidates. Asfandyar Ali Khan, leader of the secular Awami National Party, denounced the elections as having "Hakimullah Mehsud as the chief election commissioner."

The drone attack that killed Hakimullah has aroused much controversy in Pakistan. The country's Interior Minister, Nisar Ali Khan, as well as the politician and former cricketer Imran Khan, described it as a deliberate attempt by the CIA to sabotage peace talks with the militant group. There has, in fact, been more vehement condemnation of the attack that killed a murderous militant than of the violence he himself wrought across Pakistan.

But looking back on the militant leader's life, it seems doubtful that he would have been prepared for any accommodation with the Pakistani state. His death deprives the Pakistani Taliban of their most brutal leader, something that has come as a source of great relief to many Pakistanis.

Omar Waraich

Jamshed Mehsud (Zulfiqar Mehsud and Hakimullah Mehsud), Taliban leader: born Kotkai, South Waziristan, Pakistan 1970s; died North Waziristan, Pakistan 1 November 2013.

BIRTHDAYS

Bryan Adams, musician and photographer, 54; **Ryan Adams**, musician, 39; **Chris Addison**, actor and comedian, 42; **Dennis Andries**, former world light-heavyweight boxing champion, 60; **Sir John Bailey**, former director, Independent Committee for Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services, 85; **John Berger**, writer and art critic, 87; **Oleg Blokhin**, coach and former Soviet Union footballer, 61; **Alexa Chung**, television presenter, 30; **Niall Dickson**, Chief Executive and Registrar, General Medical Council, 60; **Art Garfunkel**, singer and actor, 72; **Jonny Greenwood**, guitarist, 42; **Peter Hamill**, musician, 65; **Famke Janssen**, actress, 48; Dr **Paul Knapman**, former Westminster Coroner, 69; **Bernard-Henri Lévy**, philosopher and author, 65; **Anthony McClaran**, Chief Executive, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 56; **Professor Sir David Mason**, dental surgeon, 85; **César Luis Menotti**, former Argentina footballer and manager, 75; **Jim Moir**, former controller, BBC Radio 2, 72; **Peter Noone**, singer, 66; **Tatum O'Neal**, actress, 50; **Tamzin Outhwaite**, actress, 43; **Lester Piggott**, former jockey and trainer, 78; **Kevin Rafferty**, Editor in Chief, PlainWords Media, London, Hong Kong and Osaka, 69; **Sam Rockwell**, actor, 45; **Professor Steven Schwartz**, psychologist, 67; **Mike Score**, musician, 56; **Sam Shepard**, playwright and actor, 70; **Elke Sommer**, actress, 73; **Sir William Stubbs**, former chancellor, Thames Valley University, 76; **Tilda Swinton**, actress, 53; **Rob Swire**, musician and producer, 31; **Eldred Tabachnik QC**, a former Recorder, 70; **Barbara Trapido**, novelist, 72; **Daniella Westbrook**, actress, 40; **James Watt**, Ambassador to Egypt, 62; **Christopher Wood**, screenwriter and novelist, 78.



Tilda Swinton, actress, 53 EPA