

WHO IS DISRUPTING PAKISTAN'S PEACE TALKS WITH TALIBAN THIS TIME?

Back in May, the CIA chose to take out Wali Ur Rehman in a drone strike that appeared to be follow-through on their vow to take revenge for his role in the bombing of the CIA outpost in Khost. As I pointed out on the day of the strike, the revenge killing came at a particularly sensitive moment, as Nawaz Sharif had been elected to head Pakistan's new government but had not yet even taken office. Sharif had run on a platform that included a promise to enter into peace negotiations with Pakistan's Taliban group known as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan or the TTP. As could well have been expected, the TTP announced the next day that they were withdrawing their offer to take part in talks.

An AP article picked up by the Washington Post this morning informs us that Sharif has extended his offer of talks once again and that the TTP has shown interest in participating:

A senior Pakistani Taliban commander has welcomed the government's recent offer to hold peace talks.

Asmatullah Muawiya said in a statement Thursday that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif demonstrated political maturity by reiterating his offer to hold peace negotiations in a speech over the weekend.

Muawiya said militants in Pakistan should respond positively if the government is serious about resolving the conflict.

With prospects for peace talks back on track,

today's news from Pakistan's tribal region is all the more maddening:

A Pakistani Taliban commander believed to be harbouring foreign militants was killed along with four others in a roadside bomb explosion in South Waziristan tribal agency, officials said Thursday.

Ghulam Jan, believed to be a key commander of the outlawed Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), was killed along with four accomplices when the improvised explosive device targeted his vehicle on Wednesday evening in Birmal tehsil, located about 27 kilometres from Wana, the main town in South Waziristan.

Assistant Political Agent Shahid Ali Khan confirmed that five people were killed in the blast which completely destroyed the vehicle.

Okay, this time it was an IED and not a drone, so we can't immediately put blame on the CIA. Also, the Dawn article goes on to note that a pro-government faction has been fighting the TTP in that region for five years or so. Even with those caveats, we are left to wonder whether the CIA and/or ISI had a role in choosing both the target and the timing for this particular attack, since those two groups have shown in the past that they prefer violence over peace talks and are not afraid to take steps to disrupt talks. At any rate, it will be very interesting to see if today's bomb manages to block the current move toward negotiations.