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Senior Taliban figures killed for holding talks with US

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Pakistan's spy service has allegedly killed Taliban military council's deputy head Maulvi Ismail along with 25 key figures for holding clandestine peace talks with the United States, an Afghan government official claimed on Monday.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the source told Pajhwok Afghan News that the prominent insurgent leaders had previously been detained in Pakistan's southwestern city of Quetta on charges of holding secret parleys with the US and Afghan government.

Ismail, Maulvi Shahid, the rebel-designated governor for eastern Laghman province, Qari Ahmadullah Oror, intelligence director during Taliban's rule, and several other senior members were killed on Saturday.

The official said Interior Services Intelligence (*ISI*) operatives had told the top militant figures that they were being killed in compliance with Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar's decree. However, the claim is yet to be confirmed independently.

A whole litany of allegations brought against Ismail, who was detained two months ago, range from irresponsibly negotiating with the US and Afghan officials to the embezzlement of funds collected from *NATO* supply trucks.

Hailing from the Andar district of southern Ghazni province, Ismail was in charge of border affairs during Taliban rule. He took part in many battles in northern Afghanistan.

During a clash, Ismail was arrested by Ahmad Shah Masood's fighters but later released as part of prisoner swap deal between Taliban and Masood, defence minister in the Burhanuddin Rabbani's administration.

Ismail had extensive international links to muster financial support for the militant movement -- from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Dubai and several Arabic countries.