

PROFILE Mullah Abdul Salam: The man behind the Kunduz assault

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Kabul (dpa) - The main force behind the siege of Kunduz is Mullah Abdul Salam, the Taliban shadow governor who was the most wanted individual in Kunduz when the NATO-led coalition was still fighting.

Salam, a shrewd and effective military operator, is from Dasht-i-Archi district that was overrun by the Taliban in June.

"Mullah Salam is leading all the operations in Kunduz province. He is the main commander responsible for the mujahideen victory in Kunduz city," said Mullah Usman, a local Taliban commander.

It is not clear when he was formally announced the shadow governor of Kunduz, but he has been leading the battlefield since 2005.

"During the Taliban regime he was studying...but after the US-led invasion in 2002 he started his jihad in Kunduz," said Taliban spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid.

"After being recognized for his talents he was given responsibility and became a district commander (in 2005)."

This year Salam announced his plan to overrun the city, which was leaked to the local media by tribal elders.

Salam was detained in Pakistan in February 2010, and remained behind bars for more than two years. He was arrested just two weeks after the capture of Mullah Ghani Baradar, the Taliban operational commander and deputy to Mullah Omar.

Salam was close to Baradar, according to sources, and took orders directly from him, according to Taliban sources.

He was later released in late 2012 after a delegation from the Afghan High Peace Council urged Pakistan to free the captured Taliban leaders from its prisons.

Salam reportedly returned to Kunduz in 2013, resuming his previous role as the head of Taliban for Kunduz province.

He was also one of the first Taliban shadow governors to announce his allegiance to the organisation's new leader Mullah Akhtar Mansoor, after the death of Mullah Omar was announced.

Salam has been declared dead at least twice, but each time he emerged from the ashes to taunt the NATO and Afghan security forces.