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Afghan Taliban leader injured in internal firefight

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Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour was seriously injured in a firefight following a heated argument at a meeting of militant commanders, exposing deepening divisions within the fractious militant movement.

It was unclear if he survived the clash, which occurred just four months after Mansour was appointed Taliban supremo in a deeply acrimonious leadership succession.

Five other Taliban members were killed in the gunfight triggered by a bitter verbal duel at the meeting near the Pakistani town of Quetta, said Sultan Faizi, the spokesman for the Afghan first vice president.

“Mansour was seriously injured. He was rushed to hospital and we are not sure if he survived his wounds,” Mr Faizi said.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid denied that any such firefight took place but an Afghan intelligence source confirmed Mr Faizi’s account, and insurgent sources also said Mansour had been injured.

The development comes amid a renewed push in Afghanistan and Pakistan to jumpstart peace talks with the Taliban, which stalled after the militants, confirmed the death of longtime leader Mullah Omar.

A Taliban source close to Mansour's group said a number of insurgent members were injured and killed in the firefight.

"Akhtar Mansour is among the injured but the extent of his injuries is not clear," he said, a claim that was corroborated by another insurgent source.

There was conflicting information on the location of the confrontation, with some sources claiming that it took place near Kandahar, the main city of southern Afghanistan and the birthplace of the Taliban.

But they all agreed the meeting was at the home of Abdullah Sarhadi, a commander in Mansour's group.

Sarhadi was a former Guantanamo Bay prisoner, according to Taliban sources and a Western official.

"There were differences on some points which later turned into harsh words, then Sarhadi opened fire and the others returned fire," the Taliban source said.

Mansour was appointed Taliban leader on July 31 soon after the insurgents confirmed the death of Omar, who led the extremist movement for some two decades.

But splits immediately emerged following his appointment, with some top leaders refusing to pledge allegiance to him, saying the process to select him was rushed and even biased.

Many were also unhappy that Omar's death had been kept secret for two years – during which time annual Eid statements.