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<http://atimes.com/2015/10/taliban-claims-downing-us-army-plane-in-afghanistan/>

Taliban claim downing US army plane in Afghanistan; 11 killed

10/2/2015

The Afghan Taliban Friday claimed to have shot down a C-130 military transport plane in eastern Afghanistan, with the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization (Nato) confirming that 11 people including six United States (US) soldiers were killed in the crash.



A file photo of C-130 Hercules transport plane used by military to ship troops and heavy equipment

The US army denied the Taliban's claim adding that there were no reports of enemy fire and the crash was an accident.

Nato did not confirm the cause of the crash but it comes as Afghan forces — backed by Nato special forces and US air support — pushed into the center of the northern city of Kunduz which was captured by the Taliban Monday.

“Our mujahideen have shot down a four-engine US aircraft in Jalalabad,” Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said on Twitter.

“Based on credible information, 15 invading forces and a number of puppet troops were killed.”

The Taliban are known to make exaggerated battlefield claims, and Nato has so far not given details on the cause of the crash.

The C-130 crash, which occurred about midnight local time, left six US soldiers and five civilian contractors dead, US Army Colonel Brian Tribus said.

The contractors had been working for Resolute Support, the Nato-led training mission.

Jalalabad is situated on a key route from the Pakistani border region — where many militants are based — to Kabul, and it has been the scene of repeated attacks in recent years. Its airport is home to a major military base.

Although Nato gave no immediate indications that the plane crash was due to militant action, Jalalabad airport has come under attack on several previous occasions.

In December 2012, Taliban suicide bombers killed at least five people in an hours-long battle at the airport, the third attack on it that year.

Most Nato combat troops pulled out of Afghanistan last year but a small contingent remains, including roughly 10,000 American soldiers.

The US soldiers, along with other Nato troops and private contractors, are focusing on training Afghanistan’s national security forces.

The C-130 Hercules is a cargo plane built by Lockheed Martin. It is powered by four turboprop engines and is used extensively by the military to ship troops and heavy gear.

It can take off and land on rough, dirt strips and is widely used by the US military in hostile areas.

The crash comes with Afghan forces battling a Taliban insurgency that has blighted the country since the 2001 US-led invasion of Afghanistan.

The stunning fall of the provincial capital, even temporarily, showcased the stubborn insurgency’s potential to expand beyond its rural strongholds in the south of the country.

The Taliban’s recent advances in Kunduz and neighbouring Takhar and Baghlan provinces highlight that a large and strategic patch of northern Afghanistan is imperilled by a rapidly expanding insurgency.

It is also seen as a game-changer for the fractious militant movement that has been dogged by a leadership crisis since the announcement in July of founder Mullah Omar’s death.