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Taliban Expands Hold in Northern Afghanistan Amid Heavy Fighting

By Jason Ditz
July 20, 2016



While the early accounts of the Taliban launching a new offensive in northern Afghanistan's Kunduz Province earlier this week were very unclear about what was happening, the fighting has continued for several days, and the Taliban's gains have mounted.

Now, officials are saying that the Taliban control 65-70 percent of the Qala-e Zal District, and that heavy fighting is still ongoing. The Taliban said they control materially the entire province, though they too confirmed that the fighting was not over.

The situation is looking grim for Afghan forces in the area, with the local police commander complaining that very little support was being provided from outside the district. District Governor Mahbubullah Saeddi, who downplayed the offensive when it began, claimed that only one soldier was killed, and insisted he was confident the fighting would end in “the next few days.”

This has been a recurring problem for Afghan security forces in resisting Taliban offensives, as the national government has shown little inclination to send support, and would rather let the district fall and retake it later in a counterattack. This is in keeping with US pressure on the Afghan government to defend less and attack more, but results in the Taliban gaining more and more territory.