

Briefing Note – 11 October 2016

AFGHANISTAN

Conflict in Kunduz province



	Not required	Low	Moderate	Significant	Major
Need for international assistance			X		
Expected impact	Very low	Low	Moderate	Significant	Major

Crisis overview

On 3 October, the Taliban launched an offensive on Kunduz city, the capital of Kunduz province. Fighting has persisted since then, with Afghan government forces retaking some areas. Government troops backed by Afghan special forces and US airstrikes are still conducting 'clearing operations' and have yet to recapture the city.

At least three civilians had been killed and more than 290 wounded by 6 October. As of 10 October, approximately 33,000 people have reportedly fled Kunduz to neighbouring provinces. On 6 October, 10,000 IDPs have reportedly arrived in Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif (Balkh province), Taloqan (Takhar province), and in Baghlan province.

Key findings

Anticipated scope and scale

Sporadic fighting between the Taliban and Afghan government forces is likely to continue in Kunduz city, creating additional displacement and increasing humanitarian needs. The number of those forced to flee the city could reportedly reach 100,000. The fast approaching winter is likely to heighten the suffering of crisis-affected IDPs, as well as civilians who remain trapped in Kunduz city.

Priorities for humanitarian intervention

- **Protection:** With the roads leading out of Kunduz city controlled by the Taliban, many families have been forced to leave on foot, and face the risk of being caught in crossfire or fighting.
- **Food:** Those who have left Kunduz city have very few food supplies. Civilians trapped in the city are facing severe food shortages, and are finding it difficult to source food and fuel.
- **Health:** Many hospital staff have fled the fighting, jeopardising medical care for hundreds of people.

Humanitarian constraints

- Since 3 October, international agencies have been evacuating foreign staff from Kunduz city.
- Roads leading out of Kunduz city are reportedly controlled by the Taliban, hindering the ability of humanitarian workers to deliver humanitarian assistance to crisis-affected populations, and to conduct assessments.
- Road infrastructure in most areas of Afghanistan is poor or non-existent.

Limitations

Due to constrained humanitarian access, there is a lack of information on the sectoral needs of IDPs who have fled to neighbouring provinces.

There is no information on the international response, and whether humanitarian assistance has been provided to the displaced.

Crisis impact

Thousands of civilians have fled Kunduz city since clashes between government forces and Taliban militants resumed on 3 October (AFP 06/10/2016). At least three civilians have been killed and more than 290 wounded (Voice of America 06/10/2016).

As of 10 October, approximately 33,000 people, of a population of 268,900, have reportedly fled to neighbouring provinces in northern Afghanistan (Radio Free Europe 10/10/2016). The number of displaced is expected to rise rapidly as fighting continues (AFP 06/10/2016). Dozens are arriving daily in Kabul, 400km away: on 6 October, 10,000 IDPs reportedly arrived in Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif (Balkh province), Taloqan (Takhar province), and Baghlan province, requiring urgent humanitarian assistance (ECHO 07/10/2016). The number of IDPs could reach 100,000, while thousands of civilians remain trapped in the city (Radio Free Europe 07/10/2016).

Protection: With the roads leading out of Kunduz city controlled by Taliban, many families have been forced to flee on foot (AFP 06/10/2016). They risk being caught in crossfire or fighting (ECHO 07/10/2016). Others have taken overcrowded taxis to Kabul, on dangerous roads (Radio Free Europe 07/10/2016). Civilians trapped in Kunduz have been forced to sleep outside to escape shelling (Radio Free Europe 07/10/2016).

Food: Those who have fled Kunduz city have very few food supplies (Radio Free Europe 07/10/2016). Civilians trapped in Kunduz city are facing severe food shortages, and are finding it difficult to source food and fuel (Voice of America 06/10/2016). Since the outbreak of violence, the majority of food shops in Kunduz city have closed (Radio Free Europe 07/10/2016). Restricted movement is preventing many residents from accessing food sources (Voice of America 06/10/2016).

Prices of bread, available in some parts of the city, are reportedly four to five times higher than usual (Radio Free Europe 07/10/2016). Food prices have increased since 2015 due to rising insecurity in many parts of the country, particularly the siege of Kunduz city in September 2015 (Tolnews 29/09/2015).

Health: The only health facility functioning in the city is the regional hospital, which has run out of medical supplies (ECHO 07/10/2016). As of 6 October, the hospital has received at least 210 patients, many of them injured civilians (Radio Free Europe 07/10/2016). Many hospital staff have fled, jeopardising medical care for hundreds of people (Al Jazeera 06/10/2016).

WASH: Since 3 October, water supplies have been cut off in Kunduz city, limiting access to potable water. While specific WASH needs have not yet been indicated, it is likely that those who have fled will require WASH support. (Radio Free Europe 07/10/2016).

Shelter and NFIs: People who have fled their homes are reportedly living in poor conditions with host families already living in poverty (First Post 10/10/2016). Lack of available shelters has forced some people to sleep in graveyards (Radio Free Europe 07/10/2016). The Taliban have reportedly set fire to houses and government buildings in Kunduz city (AFP 05/10/2016).

Due to their hasty departure, the displaced were forced to flee without belongings (AFP 06/10/2016). Since 3 October, Kunduz city is facing significant electricity shortages (AFP 06/10/2016).

Vulnerable groups affected

The majority of those who have been displaced are families, with children (Radio Free Europe 07/10/2016).

Humanitarian constraints

Fighting between the Taliban and government forces in Kunduz city is severely constraining humanitarian access.

Roads leading out of Kunduz city are controlled by the Taliban, hindering the ability of humanitarian workers to deliver assistance and to conduct assessments (AFP 06/10/2016). Road infrastructure in most areas of Afghanistan is poor or non-existent.

Since 3 October, international agencies have been evacuating foreign staff from Kunduz. MSF has evacuated its foreign staff (The Guardian 03/10/2016). In October 2015, US forces bombed Kunduz hospital, run by MSF, killing at least 42, including 24 patients, 14 staff, and four caretakers. MSF subsequently pulled out of Kunduz, returning earlier this year (MSF 29/04/2016). As of 20 July, 107 incidents targeting humanitarian workers had been recorded across Afghanistan in 2016, resulting in the deaths of ten aid workers and injuries to 13 others (ECHO 20/07/2016).

Aggravating factors

Winter

The fast-approaching winter is likely to increase the suffering of crisis-affected IDPs, and civilians trapped in Kunduz city. Health risks for IDPs living in vulnerable conditions will increase as temperatures fall to approximately 5°C from mid-October (IDMC 07/2015).

As temperatures fall, shelter needs for IDPs is likely to increase. The electricity shortages are likely to limit access to adequate heating (AFP 06/10/2016).

Insecurity in IDP arrival locations

In recent months, insecurity has increased in Balkh province, where many IDPs have fled. On 9 August, a bomb exploded in a crowded market in Mazar-i-Sharif city that killed at least two and wounded 15 (Reuters 09/08/2016). Insecurity has also increased in Takhar province. On 3 October, six people were injured in an attack on mosque by Afghan forces in the north of the province (Pajhowk 03/10/2016).

Contextual information

Drivers of the current conflict

Since 2015, the Taliban have expanded activity to the north of the country. They have been active in Kunduz province, in support of Russian's interest in keeping the province as a buffer zone to prevent Islamic State (IS) infiltration into Tajikistan (Radio Free Europe 08/10/2016). Russia's interest in preventing Islamic State infiltration reportedly coincides with those of the Taliban, and although Russia has not engaged militarily in Afghanistan since the start of the US-led invasion of the country in 2001, it has recently become active and expanded its role, providing logistical support for reconstruction. (DW 02/03/2016). Russia has reportedly been turning to the Taliban for intelligence sharing against Islamic State (IS) (Foreign Affairs 31/01/2016). Taliban forces have also reportedly received military support from Pakistani armed forces (The New York Times 03/10/2016).

Kunduz city was also a key Taliban stronghold in 2001. The city is strategically important as it is a crucial transportation hub for the north of the country, linking the capital with the roads to Tajikistan in the north, and to Mazar-e-Sharif in the west (The Guardian 29/09/2015). Since 2015, the Taliban have begun targeting provincial capitals, instead of limiting its activity to isolated suicide, bomb, or armed attacks. The Taliban briefly captured Kunduz city last September. This was the first time the Taliban had seized a provincial capital since it had been driven from power by the US-led invasion in 2001 (Al Jazeera 04/10/2016). The Taliban's overarching objective is to topple the Western-backed government in Kabul (Al Jazeera 06/10/2016).

Past displacement

Last September, the Taliban were driven out of Kunduz city in just a few days. Between 100,000 and 140,000 people were displaced by the surge in violence in the region, mainly from Kunduz province, but also from Balakh, Baghlan, Takhar, and Badakhshan (OCHA 30/09/2016). 90% had returned home by the end of October (OCHA 30/11/2015).

From 1 January to 20 July, almost 160,000 people were displaced by conflict in 29 of the country's 34 provinces. A total of 1.2 million are internally displaced as a result of conflict (ECHO 20/07/2016).

Stakeholders

Taliban: The Taliban is a conservative Islamic group that emerged during the Afghan civil war in the early 1990s. They took control of Afghanistan in 1996 and ruled the country until 2001, when they were overthrown by the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), on the grounds of harbouring of Al Qaeda (Council on Foreign Relations 04/07/2015). The Taliban have grown in strength since the withdrawal of ISAF in 2014. As of 23 September, 10% of Afghan territory is controlled by the Taliban and allied jihadist groups (Long War Journal 23/09/2016).

Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF): The ANSF are composed of approximately 350,000 personnel, including troops and police. As of October, approximately 18,000 ANSF troops are present in Kunduz province (Radio Free Europe 07/10/2016). Since the beginning of the year, defections have increased, weakening the ANSF.

International and neighbouring countries' relationship to the conflict

NATO's combat mission in Afghanistan ended on 31 December 2014, leaving just 13,000 troops in the country. The focus of the current mission is on supporting Afghan forces' fight against the Taliban along with US counter-terrorism operations (NATO 14/06/2016). NATO forces are reportedly backing Afghan forces with air raids (Al Jazeera 04/10/2016).

Response capacity

Local and national response capacity

The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations (MORR) is responsible for supporting conflict-induced IDPs. The objective of the MORR is to provide resettlement and reintegration support to IDPs and returnees (Government 2016). Citizens of Taloqan have also been providing assistance to the latest arrivals from Kunduz, by providing shelter and food supplies (Reuters 08/10/2016).

International response capacity

Several agencies specialising in displacement are present in-country, including UNHCR and IOM. The cluster system was established in 2008, with six clusters. An Inter-Cluster Coordination team, headed by OCHA, comprises all clusters, sub-clusters and NGO co-lead representatives, in addition UNHCR and Gender in Humanitarian Action Task Force (UNICEF 03/10/2016). As of 11 October, reports on whether international agencies are responding to this crisis have not been released.

Information gaps and needs

- Sectoral needs of IDPs who have fled to neighbouring Balakh, Takhar, and Baghlan provinces is limited.
- No information on the international response to the crisis.
- There is a lack of information on the response provided by the government to those who have been recently displaced.
- Information on the profile of IDPs who are fleeing Kunduz city is lacking.

Lessons learned

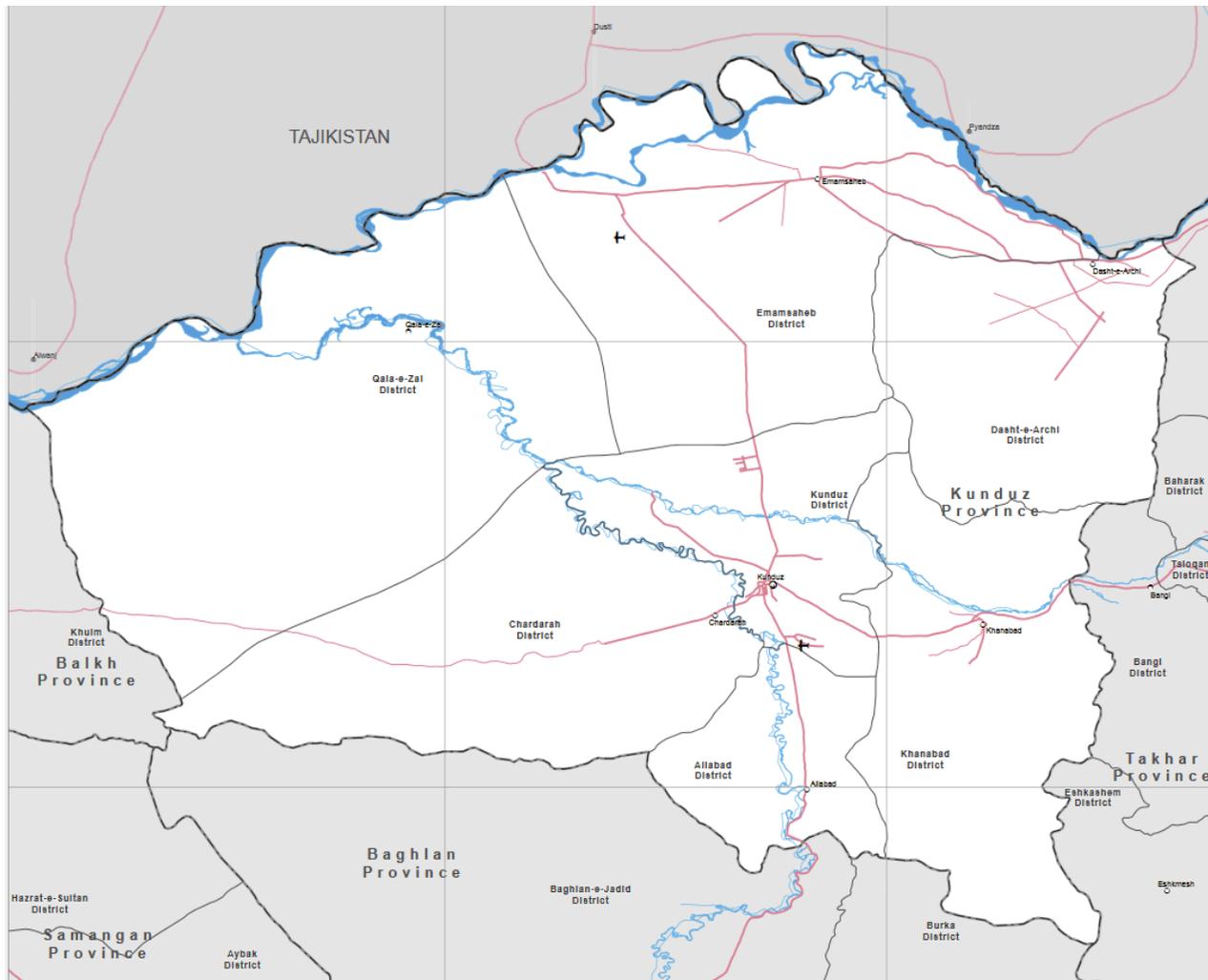
Supporting host communities is crucial. Most IDPs fleeing displacement in the region prefer to integrate in host communities, rather than return to their original locations (IDMC 16/07/2015).

Key characteristics of host population and area

Key indicators	Afghanistan	Kunduz	Baghlan	Takhar	Balkh
Total population		1,029,473	926,969	1,000,336	1,353,626
% population in rural areas		765,127	725,793	853,119	834,878
Gender and age distribution of population		49 % female 51% male	49% female 51% male	49% female 51% male	49% female 51% male
Capital	Kabul	Kunduz city	Pul-i-Khumri	Taluqan	Mazar-e-Sharif
WASH	1.8 million in need of WASH				
Health	U5MR: 101 per 1,000 (2015); IMR: 73 per 1,000 (2015); NMR: 36 per 1,000 (2015)				
Food security: population in IPC Phases 3 and 4		373,714	227,696	295,001	225,362
Literacy rates	38.2% (2015 estimates) 52% male 24.2% female				

Sources: Government of Afghanistan, UNOCHA, Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, CIA World Factbook, UNICEF

Map of Kunduz province



Source: OCHA 04/2014