

Taliban “Ferocity” Stuns UK Troops

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British soldiers say the ferocity of the fighting and privations they face are far worse than generally known. (Reuters)

HELMAND PROVINCE — British troops deployed in southern Afghanistan were stunned by the ferocity shown by die-hard Taliban fighters, while top NATO officers on Wednesday, September 13, struggled to find reinforcements.

“We did not expect the ferocity of the engagements,” a British officer who has served in the southern province of Helmand, told The Independent.

“We also expected the Taliban to carry out hit and run raids. Instead we have often been fighting toe to toe, endless close-quarters combat. It has been exhausting.”

Some 4,000 British troops make up the majority of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force deployed in the southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar.

Captain Leo Docherty, the former aide-de-camp to the commander of the British taskforce in southern Afghanistan, has resigned in protest at the “grotesquely clumsy” and “pointless” campaign against Taliban.

The criticism, the first from an officer who has served in Afghanistan, came during the worst time so far for British troops in the country. In total, 22 British troops have been killed so far in September.

More than 90 foreign troops have been killed in Afghanistan this year, and the casualties in the south have raised questions about NATO’s ability to successfully complete its mission.

Coming Back

The British troops complain that no matter how many Taliban fighters they kill, they keep coming back.

“We are flattening places we have already flattened, but the attacks have kept coming,” one soldier told the British daily.

“We have killed them by the dozens, but more keep coming, either locally or from across the border,” he added.

The soldier asserted that they have used almost all their available military cards including B1 bombers, Harriers, F16s and Mirage 2000s.

“We have dropped 500lb, 1,000lb and even 2,000lb bombs. At one point our Apaches ran out of missiles they have fired so many,” he said, noting this has not prevented ambushes.

“Almost any movement on the ground gets ambushed.”

Lt Gen David Richards, ISAF commander, admitted that British forces have been involved in some of the fiercest fighting since the Korean war in 1951.

Even Afghan civilians are complaining.

“We are not safe now; it is more dangerous than it was just a few months ago,” one man said in the market town of Lashkar Gar.

Reinforcements

In Brussels, top NATO officers struggled to find 2,500 extra reinforcements for the stumbling Afghan mission.

“No formal offers were made at the table,” said James Appathurai, a spokesman for the 26-member alliance.

However, he said there were “positive indications” that some allies might consider providing additional forces.

It could take until a meeting of NATO defense ministers on September 28-29 in Slovenia to finalize offers.

“You can’t get major reinforcements in a week, things take longer than that at NATO,” said one NATO diplomat.

NATO military commander General James Jones urged the allies last week to find up to 2,500 extra personnel, to help the alliance deal with Taliban.

As NATO struggles to generate forces, officials also fear that international donors could renege on financial pledges made early this year and undermine the progress in confidence-building that has been made.

“The lack of security means hardly any reconstruction is taking place now, so we are not exactly winning hearts and minds,” said one British officer.

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