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Refugees are fleeing the war and drought

By Kate Clark in Kabul

There have been confusing statements by the Taliban in Afghanistan after the opposition said they had regained the disputed district of Yakawlang.

Some senior Taliban officials have confirmed the defeat - others have denied it.

Yakawlang has already changed hands twice in the last month and the UN has alleged that Taliban forces have killed at least 100 civilians there.

Opposition spokesmen have said fighting began in the late afternoon on Sunday.

One of the leaders of the Hizb-e Wahdat faction said they captured Yakawlang at 0030 on Monday morning (local time).

Some of the Taliban deny that there has been any fighting at all.

They say Yakawlang remains under their control.

Ethnic difference

Others have confirmed that the district has indeed fallen.

The local population of Yakawlang are mainly Hazaras, belonging to the same ethnic group as Hizb-e Wahdat, whereas



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the Taleban are mainly Pashtun.

When I visited the area in the autumn, most people said they didn't much like the Taleban, but they didn't want the return of Hizb-e Wahdat.

At times of acute drought and food shortages, more fighting was the last thing they needed.

Yakawlang civilians have now suffered two, possibly three, bouts of fighting in less than a month.



According to the UN, they were also targeted for summary execution by the Taleban in early January. Some have denied there was any fighting at all

Reports say people have fled the area in their thousands, setting out despite the snow and bitter cold and preferring to make a perilous journey through the mountains in mid-winter rather than stay at home in Yakawlang.

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