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## Taliban hold sway in most Afghan areas

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A top Obama administrations military official Tuesday told US lawmakers that security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated with the Taliban successfully running shadow governments in majority of the 34 provinces of the country.

Despite the surge of troops announced by the US President, Barack Obama, Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said at a Congressional hearing: The Afghan-Taliban have established shadow governments featuring parallel judicial, taxation and local security/intimidation systems in a clear majority of Afghanistans 34 provinces.

Both Mullen and the US Defense Secretary, Robert Gibbs, appeared before the powerful Senate Armed Services Committee seeking Congressional approval for their annual budget which was submitted by the US President, Barack Obama, to the Congress on Monday.

Mullen said attacks by the Taliban have become far more numerous and more sophisticated. We are now establishing conditions with military forces and expanded civilian agency presence to reverse the Talibans momentum, he said, adding that still the US faces both a resilient Taliban insurgency and an Afghan public skeptical of their governments good will, capacity and capability.

The Taliban have a growing influence in most of Afghanistan's provinces, and the border area between that country and Pakistan remains the epicenter of global terrorism. You no doubt followed with great interest the development of the president's strategy to deal with this threat -- a strategy that, in my view, rightly makes the Afghan people the center of gravity and the defeat of al Qaeda the primary goal, Mullen said.

We have already moved nearly 4,500 troops to Afghanistan, and expect that about 18,000 of the president's December 1st commitment will be there by late spring. The remainder of the 30,000 will arrive as rapidly as possible over the summer and early fall, making a major contribution to reversing the Taliban momentum in 2010, he said. Indeed, by the middle of this year, Afghanistan will surpass Iraq, for the first time since 2003, as the location with the most deployed American forces. Right now, the Taliban believe they're winning. Eighteen months from now, if we've executed our strategy, we'll know they aren't, and they'll know that they can't, Mullen said.

Our troops are now focused on protecting key population centers separating them from the intimidation and influence of the Taliban. Simultaneously, they are training and partnering with Afghan security forces to enable Afghans to assume lead security for their own country as soon as possible, he said.

The next 12-18 months must be the time to reverse insurgent momentum and assess partnership progress, Mullen said.