

TIME TO START RETHINKING HOW WE DEFINE “INSURGENT”

I was struck by this passage in the WSJ's description of the three green on blue killings yesterday.

Since the year began, more coalition service members have been gunned down by Afghan troops than by insurgents. A total of 16 members of the U.S.-led coalition were killed this year in nine such “green on blue” incidents, representing nearly one-third of the 50 coalition fatalities caused by hostile action.

After all, at the point when the biggest danger to ISAF troops Afghan security forces, can we so easily define who is and who is not an insurgent? If Afghan security forces are increasingly using their proximity to attack coalition forces, how do we distinguish them from insurgents except in who buys their guns?

Particularly given this news, from Murdoch's less respectable rag.

Afghan intelligence officials arrested 16 people after an apparent mass suicide bombing attack was foiled in Kabul, according to reports out Tuesday.

Some 11 suicide bombing vests were also seized from inside Afghanistan's defense ministry, according to security officials, cited by news website Khaama Press.

A number of the suspects were members of the Afghan National Army, the security sources added.

It is believed the suspects planned to detonate the bombing vests on buses

transporting more than 1,000 staff from one compound to the next, Sky News said.

Whether these recent attacks are simply a response to a series of US insults—like pissing on corpses, burning Qurans, and killing women and children. Or whether a significant number of Afghan security forces have decided it's only a matter of time until the Taliban return and it's better to prove fealty now, while there's still time, it seems we may have passed the point where even the myths about training will be successful anymore.

Several weeks ago, TomDispatch published Ann Jones's explanation why she's always opposed training a big Afghan army. The whole thing is worth reading, but particularly what she says about how the history of Afghan security forces switching sides.

Second, take just a moment to do something Washington has long been adverse to — review a little basic Afghan history as it applies to Plan A.

Start with the simplest of all facts: in the country's modern history, no Afghan national army has ever saved a government, or even tried. More often, such an army has either sat on its hands during a *coup d'état* or actually helped to overthrow the incumbent ruler.

[snip]

In short, for their own safety and advancement, Afghans back a winner, and if he goes into decline, they ditch him for a rising star. To spot that winner is the mark of the intelligent survivor. To stick loyally to a losing cause, as any patriotic American would do, seems to an Afghan downright stupid.

Now, apply this to the ANA as American and NATO troops draw down in 2014. Any army intended to defend a nation must be loyal to the political leaders governing

the country. Estimates among Afghan experts of how long the ANA would be loyal to Afghan President Hamid Karzai start at two weeks, and remember, 2014 is a presidential election year, with Karzai barred by the constitution from seeking another term. In other words, Obama's Plan A calls for urgently building up a national army to defend a government that will not exist before our own combat troops leave the country.

Now the plot to use suicide bombers to attack thousands may well be a matter of Taliban infiltration. But it appears increasingly likely that we've passed the time where Afghans have recalculated the long-time winners of this war, and have started to act accordingly. Hell, I bet even Hamid Karzai is doing the same.

And across the border, Pakistanis are demanding a return to the Reagan rules of engagement.

Pakistan's military wants to go back to the "Reagan rules – the way the CIA operated with the ISI against the Soviets" inside Afghanistan, says former CIA officer Bruce Riedel, of the Brookings Institute. "We give them a big check, and they make every decision about how that is spent. Minimal American footprint in country, or involvement in actual fighting the bad guys."

"We cannot trust the ISI to fight this war for us," after finding bin Laden in a Pakistani military town, "showing the ISI was either clueless or complicit," Riedel said.

This is, of course, how we built a bunch of mujahadeen who came back to haunt us.

Are we so sure we're not already doing that ourselves in Afghanistan?