

ALLEN MAKES WORST EXCUSE YET FOR GREEN ON BLUE ATTACKS: RAMADAN FASTING

Robert Burns of AP has a new story out today on the issue of green on blue killings. It appears that the increasing frequency of these attacks has driven General John Allen, commander of US forces in Afghanistan, to grasping for even the lamest excuse for why these attacks have spiked of late:

The rising number of attacks on U.S. troops by Afghan police and soldiers may be due in part to the stress on Afghan forces from fasting during the just-concluded Muslim holy month of Ramadan, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan said Thursday.

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He cited Ramadan and the requirement for Muslims to not eat or drink during daylight hours as another factor.

"It's a very tough time for these (Afghan) forces," he said, particularly since they were fasting during the heat of the summer and the peak of the fighting season and have been facing combat strains for many years.

"We believe that the combination of many of these particular factors may have come together during the last several weeks to generate the larger numbers" of attacks, he said. Already this month there have been at least 10 "insider" attacks by Afghans, killing 10 Americans. The latest was Sunday when an Afghan police officer opened fire inside a police station in the southern district of Spin Boldak, killing a 55-

year-old U.S. Army soldier.

Allen seems to want us to ignore that Ramadan ended with the Eid al-Fitr feast on Saturday night and the attacker on Sunday would have been able to eat on a normal schedule. Maybe the stress of fasting lingers after daytime eating has returned. In his coverage of Allen's press conference, Spencer Ackerman noted that Ramadan moves around on the Western calendar:

One possible contributing factor: the holy month of Ramazan, which most of the Muslim world calls Ramadan. Although Ramazan is an annual event, it doesn't occur at the same time annually on the western calendar, and this year it fell during the summer fighting season. The "daily pressures" of war and the "sacrifices associated with fasting," especially with a larger and newer force of Afghan recruits, may have contributed to some Afghan forces snapping.

Last year, Ramadan also was in August, so it's hard to see how it had a huge effect this year and not last year.

But the ongoing push by the military to ignore the retroactively classified report explaining that extreme cultural insensitivity on the part of American soldiers plays a major role in Afghans turning their weapons on them continues to have a horrible fallout as more and more Afghans attack American and other NATO troops. With the looming deadline of withdrawal of NATO forces by the end of 2014 and NATO trainers knowing that this can only occur if Afghan forces are seen as capable of taking over security responsibility, it is easy to see how there might a bit more pressure exerted in the training process and how this pressure could cross cultural boundaries, prompting attacks.

Although Ackerman portrayed Allen in the press conference as "not...telling the public – or the

Pentagon, or the Karzai government, or the Obama administration – what it might want to hear”, I see no evidence of Ackerman (or Burns, for that matter) following up on an interesting discrepancy in the description of the role of the Taliban in green on blue attacks.

On August 18, CNN quoted NATO spokesman Gunter Katz on green on blue attacks:

NATO says the majority of attacks by Afghan security forces against coalition troops are driven primarily by personal grievances rather than an infiltration by insurgents.

“Some 10% we know are related to the insurgency,” Brig. Gen. Gunter Katz, a spokesman for the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, said late Friday.

But today, Allen is quoted by Burns:

The general said that roughly 25 percent of insider attacks can be linked to the Taliban, who in some cases have impersonated members of the Afghan security forces and in some cases have co-opted them through threats.

It is very hard to fit Allen’s comment with Katz’s. Allen does say that some Taliban-related attacks are due to impersonation or coercion, but for both statements to be true, the rate of impersonation and coercion would have to be 1.5 times the rate of simple infiltration. Press accounts of green on blue attacks often note that Afghan uniforms are readily available, so it seems that if Allen and Katz are both accurate, NATO claims that 10% of green on blue attacks are infiltration and 15% are impersonation or coercion. It would be useful if someone can force NATO onto the record to confirm this. Alternatively, one is left to think that Katz’s figure was found not to be credible when it came out and the figure has

been revised upward to gain more credibility while blurring the boundaries of what is being described to prevent direct comparison.

Perhaps the most important point coming from Allen, however, did not relate to green on blue. For all the blather that comes out in the official line about how much wonderful progress is being made in Afghanistan, reality is different. From Ackerman's report:

But Allen conceded that the Taliban's ability to attack U.S. troops has not meaningfully diminished over the past year. Attacks initiated by the Taliban are down three percent over this time last year, when the Obama administration announced it would begin to withdraw the 30,000 surge troops. Allen argued that clearing the population centers was significant, but said straightforwardly that the drop in violence "may not be statistically significant." And that relative stasis in violence follows a similar statistical plateau from the previous year.

And yet the push to train Afghans under the myth they can take over security continues. I'll let the father of one recent victim of green on blue violence have the final word here:

The grief-stricken father of a slain Marine lashed out at the U.S. training policies with the Afghan National Security Forces. His son's death became one of many recent insider attacks leading to high-level meetings between U.S. and Afghan leader to re-evaluate their training methods.

"At the end of the day, what happened is my son trained somebody to murder him," Greg Buckley Sr. said at the funeral Saturday for Lance Cpl. Gregory T. Buckley, 21, of Oceanside, N.Y., according to a CBS report.

The Afghan recruits “come in, they say, ‘We want to be police officers,’ and we hand them a blue uniform and hand them an AK-47? That’s insane,” the father told CBS as he stood surrounded by family and friends wearing buttons with a picture of his fallen son in uniform.