

DESPITE MILITARY'S ROSY SPIN, TRUTH COMING FROM AFGHANISTAN HIGHLIGHTS CIVILIAN CASUALTIES, COMING POLITICAL MELTDOWN

Even though ISAF continues its political spin claiming that the military's strategy leading to Afghanistan assuming full control of security in 2014 is progressing as planned, new information from two independent sources indicates that the situation is far more bleak than the military's claims.

The nonpartisan NGO International Crisis Group has released a new report (pdf) today and it predicts that a complete meltdown of the government of Afghanistan could occur in conjunction with the upcoming elections.

From the press release on the report:

Afghanistan is hurtling toward a devastating political crisis as the government prepares to take full control of security in 2014.

"There is a real risk that the regime in Kabul could collapse upon NATO's withdrawal in 2014", says Candace Rondeaux, the International Crisis Group's Senior Afghanistan Analyst. "The window for remedial action is closing fast".

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"The Afghan army and police are overwhelmed and underprepared for the transition", says Rondeaux. "Another botched election and resultant unrest

would push them to breaking point”.

[Emphasis added.]

Wow. Afghan security forces being described as “overwhelmed and underprepared” is so far away from the glory days of David Petraeus’ vaunted COIN strategy that had training of ANSF as a key component. But don’t look for Petraeus’ role in this clusterfuck to be pointed out by anyone inside the Beltway.

Moving to the report itself, this section on the security situation for civilians and the government is particularly damning:

The situation worsened considerably in the wake of the September 2010 polls, which saw violence hit an all-time high on election day. Security further deteriorated shortly after President Karzai announced plans to begin transferring responsibility for it in several parts of the country from NATO to the government by July 2011. The downward trend continued almost unabated through much of 2011 and early 2012. Following an unusually severe winter that saw record snowfalls and lasted well into late March 2012, civilian casualties dropped by nearly 15 per cent to 1,154 killed and 1,954 injured in the first half of the year. This trend saw a marked reverse over the summer months, with UNAMA noting that August 2012 was the second deadliest month on record: 374 civilians killed and 581 injured.

Statistics demonstrate a notable increase overall in targeted killings of civilians and government officials, from 94 during January-June 2009 to 255 for the same six-month period in 2012. More than a dozen members of parliament have been killed since the first elections in 2005, and eleven candidates were killed during the 2010 campaign. Scores of

midlevel government officials have recently been assassinated, as insurgents have ramped up such operations. Likewise, Afghans who work for non-governmental organisations and development agencies are regularly targeted, and intimidation campaigns frequently force them to live outside their home villages. The Taliban's use of targeted killings and threats has been especially effective most recently in the northeastern provinces of Nuristan and Kunar, where cross-border shelling between Pakistan and Afghanistan has additionally plagued an already exposed population. As the 2014 campaign approaches and political competition heats up, targeted killings are likely to increase, a phenomenon witnessed repeatedly since 2003.

It has become increasingly clear that ISAF is unable to dislodge the Taliban from its strongholds in the south and east. A widening trust deficit between NATO and Afghan forces has also put ISAF further on the defensive. The Taliban, the Haqqani network and other affiliated insurgent actors have exploited these weaknesses by sending fighters into particularly vulnerable areas such as Kunar, Nuristan, Paktika, Paktia, Ghazni, Wardak and Logar.

[Emphasis added.]

Will the military dare to respond to the charge that "It has become increasingly clear that ISAF is unable to dislodge the Taliban from its strongholds in the south and east"? That is hardly in line with the military's constant claim that "We have the Taliban on the run".

As if the report from the International Crisis Group isn't enough, the outgoing head of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Afghanistan warns that the situation for

civilians in Afghanistan is already very bad but is likely to get much worse once NATO forces leave:

The outgoing head of the delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Afghanistan, Reto Stocker, declared in Kabul today that for ordinary Afghans the armed conflict in the country has taken a turn for the worse. Mr Stocker is leaving Afghanistan after seven years in his current position.

“I am filled with concern as I leave this country. Since I arrived here in 2005, local armed groups have proliferated, civilians have been caught between not just one but multiple front lines, and it has become increasingly difficult for ordinary Afghans to obtain health care,” said Mr Stocker. “People are not just suffering the effects of the armed conflict. Hardship arising from the economic situation, or from severe weather or natural disaster, has become more widespread, and hope for the future has been steadily declining.

Mr Stocker placed particular emphasis on the lack of access to health care for ordinary Afghans. “There have to be some things that are off limits, and interfering with health care is one of them. Attacks on health-care staff, vehicles and facilities cannot be considered part of the ordinary conduct of war. Health care must remain available to everyone who needs it. It must be provided impartially, on the basis of medical considerations only.”


Stocker’s efforts in Afghanistan have been impressive. In an accompanying article at the ICRC website, we see a summary of activities during the current year in Afghanistan by the ICRC. There have been hundreds of visits to

prisoners and the enabling of thousands of visits by families to prisoners, distribution of tons of food, microloans to assist families in producing food, treatment of thousands of patients, first aid lessons to many Afghan troops, extensive rehab services for wounded civilians and tremendous work on providing clean water to civilians. But most striking to me is that it is the ICRC who must teach Afghan forces that they are required to abide by international law on treatment of civilians and detainees despite the fact that NATO is responsible for "training" them:

As part of its dialogue with parties to the conflict, the ICRC reminds them of their obligation to protect civilians and other war victims by promoting compliance with international humanitarian law. The organization also promotes international humanitarian law among armed and security forces, civil-society groups, government bodies and universities.

Between January and September 2012, the ICRC:

- *gave presentations on international humanitarian law to almost 3,000 members of the Afghan National Army, Afghan National Police and local police units, the National Directorate of Security and armed opposition groups;*
- *held briefings about its mandate and work for over 17,300 people, including community elders, religious*



*scholars, members of
provincial councils,
political authorities,
NGOs, the Afghan Red
Crescent and
beneficiaries of ICRC
assistance programmes.*

I guess the NATO trainers are too busy turning out “overwhelmed and underprepared” ANSF members to mention international humanitarian law requirements to them.