

OPERATION "THE SURGE IS A SUCCESS-BURY THE AFGHANISTAN NIE"

John McCain has a narrow road to the Presidency. He has to bank on his claimed greater qualifications to be Commander-in-Chief to attract the votes of those who still believe the Global War on Terrorists and the Nations We Occupy (GWOTANWO) is our biggest concern. To win his Commander-in-Chief argument, McCain has to downplay the fact that Obama's gradual withdrawal from Iraq is in fact the plan Maliki supports (and McCain has to hope Bush remains successful in shutting Maliki up about it), emphasize the spin that Obama has said the surge was a success, and hope no one remembers that McCain was a big hawk on the Iraq war back when we could have avoided it.

Oh, and he has to hope no one talks about how the McCain-Bush Iraq myopia led to the utter neglect of Afghanistan, thereby letting the terrorists regain a foothold in Pakistan's tribal areas.

And to that end, the Bush Administration will not tell us what its NIE on Afghanistan says.

Officials say a draft of the classified NIE, representing the key judgments of the US intelligence community's 17 agencies and departments, is being circulated in Washington and a final "coordination meeting" of the agencies involved, under the direction of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, is scheduled in the next few weeks.

According to people who have been briefed, the NIE will paint a "grim" picture of the situation in Afghanistan, seven years after the US invaded in an effort to dismantle the al Qaeda network and its Taliban protectors.

After all, the only way the Iraq surge can look even remotely successful is if we remain ignorant of the opportunity costs we paid to execute it.