

DESPITE AFGHANISTAN SPIRALING OUT OF CONTROL, ALLEN WANTS NO DRAWDOWN ACCELERATION UNTIL AFTER ELECTION

There can be no doubt that American troops in Afghanistan have become nothing more than political pawns for the Obama administration. Appearing before the House Armed Services Committee yesterday, General John R. Allen, who commands US forces in Afghanistan, made it clear that there will be no increase in the rate of troop drawdown from Afghanistan before the end of the year – a move that even the New York Times identifies as likely being more political than strategic:

The top allied commander in Afghanistan told Congress on Tuesday that he would not be recommending further American troop reductions until late this year, after the departure of the current “surge” forces and the end of the summer fighting season.

That timetable would defer one of the thorniest military decisions facing President Obama – the pace at which the United States removes its forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2014 – until after the November elections.

If strategic reviews were based on changes in operating conditions (remember the old catchphrase “conditions on the ground?”), then the current situation would rightly call for immediate action. However, since the Obama administration senses that any adjustments in the strategy for Afghanistan now would be a tacit admission that the current strategy has

flaws, the craven decision is to delay the review until after the November elections have taken place. It appears that the lives of our troops are a lower priority than winning the election.

That no real progress is being made in terms of reducing violence in Afghanistan was made crystal clear by the valiant truth-telling from Lt. Col. Daniel Davis. In addition, despite attempts to retroactively classify a key report on the ongoing cultural clash between US and Afghan forces, fratricide appears to be on a path of increasing frequency, as well.

In a Defense Department release coinciding with Allen's testimony, we have more denial of the cultural clash:

Recent incidents have been deplorable, but they will not stand in the way of accomplishing goals in Afghanistan, the International Security Assistance Force commander said here.

Marine Corps Gen. John R. Allen also said the incidents do not represent the actions of the vast majority of U.S. military personnel who have served in Afghanistan.

Three incidents have been lumped together, the general said: desecration of corpses, the accidental burning of Qurans and the murder of 16 Afghans in Kandahar province. "It's important to understand that while tragic, these few incidents do not represent who we are," Allen said during an interview. "The Afghan people know that, the Afghan government knows that, and more importantly, the Afghan national security forces know who we are."

Allen emphasized that U.S. and Afghan forces have been working together for years, and many Afghans and Americans have close working relationships.

"We have a sound campaign plan that is developed jointly by the Afghan national security forces and the International Security Assistance Force," he said. "It is a good plan and we are executing that plan. I think we can accomplish our objectives, without question."

Allen goes on to include the obligatory claims of progress despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary:

It is important to remember that considerable progress has taken place in Afghanistan, Allen said. "Security in many places in Afghanistan is near normal," he added, citing the city of Herat as a prime example of a place "on a very positive trajectory."

The civil government, the Italian-led ISAF forces, the Afghan national security forces and the population as a whole are combining to create a peaceful, stable area in and around Herat, where economic progress provides opportunities, the general said.

The Afghan capital of Kabul is jammed with cars and is known for the "hustle and bustle of a city where the people are going about their way on a moment-to-moment basis free from the oppression of the Taliban, free from the threat of terrorist attack," he said

That can only be followed with this:

We're in transition. Are we headed in the right direction? I emphatically think we are.

Oops, sorry. That last quote was from Will Muschamp talking about the beginning of spring football practice, but seems to fit into Allen's comments pretty well. Go team.