

DISCLOSURE OF US TROOPS POSING WITH BODY PARTS NEWEST THREAT TO AFGHANISTAN STABILITY

As I pointed out on Monday, the preferred story line surrounding the weekend Taliban attacks across Afghanistan was that Afghan security forces repulsed the attacks with little to no help from outside forces. In fact, Australia used this moment of public confidence in the capabilities of Afghan forces to announce that they would speed up withdrawal of their “forces” (with only 1500 troops there, the Australians hardly represent a true presence), joining NATO allies Canada and Norway, which already have withdrawn, and France, Germany and Britain, who have announced their withdrawal timetables.

Building on the weekend’s success story about Afghan capabilities, a major AP story this morning discusses US and NATO plans for the hand-off of security responsibility to Afghanistan:

The United States and its NATO allies are readying plans to pull away from the front lines in Afghanistan next year as President Barack Obama and fellow leaders try to show that the unpopular war is ending.

/snip/

This week’s sessions are meant to stitch together U.S. and NATO agreements on the pace of U.S. and allied combat withdrawal next year. U.S. and Afghan officials have already said they expect a shift to an Afghan military lead in combat operations by the middle of 2013,

although the U.S. stresses that it will still have a large number of forces in Afghanistan as backup.

Afghan Defense Ministry spokesman Gen. Mohammad Zahir Azimi said Wednesday that the Afghans are on track to take the lead in securing the country by the end of 2013. Azimi said the Afghan Army has already reached its target number of 195,000 troops. Including police and other forces, Afghan security forces now number about 330,000.

A major test of the claim that conditions in Afghanistan are stabilizing will now come from the latest revelation of atrocities by US troops. The Los Angeles Times today published photos of multiple incidents of US troops posing with dismembered bodies of Afghan insurgents killed by roadside bombs:

The 82nd Airborne Division soldiers arrived at the police station in Afghanistan's Zabol province in February 2010. They inspected the body parts. Then the mission turned macabre: The paratroopers posed for photos next to Afghan police, grinning while some held – and others squatted beside – the corpse's severed legs.

/snip/

Two soldiers posed holding a dead man's hand with the middle finger raised. A soldier leaned over the bearded corpse while clutching the man's hand. Someone placed an unofficial platoon patch reading "Zombie Hunter" next to other remains and took a picture.

Given the recent responses to the disclosures of US troops urinating on dead insurgents and burning sacred books, this latest disclosure seems likely to generate a new round of violent protests. This also seems to be the sort of

event that sparks further “green on blue” attacks (pdf) where Afghan forces kill NATO forces.

New green on blue killings would be a major setback to the claim that Afghan forces are nearing the ability to take over full responsibility for security, even though the official US line on such events is that they are “isolated incidents”. Similarly, increased attacks by the Taliban would go against Afghan President Hamid Karzai’s explanation to his “brothers” that their attacks only increase the odds of foreign forces staying longer in Afghanistan.