US ACHIEVES SHAM AGREEMENT TRIFECTA WITH AFGHANISTAN

It is becoming a signature of the Obama administration that as self-imposed deadlines approach, the quality of agreements reached drops precipitously. Recall that Obama had worked furiously to be able to announce a mortgage fraud settlement in this year's State of the Union speech. He missed that deadline by several weeks on the actual agreement, and so at the last minute developed the Schneiderman Mortgage Fraud Task Force to have something to announce in the speech. Nearly three months later, the "task force" does not yet have the basics of an office, telephone number or executive director, but Obama got his big announcement.

With public opinion on the war in Afghanistan so low that even Republicans now see it as not worth the cost, Obama has been determined to have a long term agreement in place with Afghanistan prior to the upcoming NATO summit next month in Chicago, perhaps as a move to prevent calls for a strategic reassessment prior to November's elections. The agreement has been broken into three pieces. Earlier, agreements on the handover of prisons and on night raids have been executed and we learned yesterday that an agreement on long term support for Afghanistan has been reached and is ready for approval.

Although stated as giving Afghanistan full control over operations, the prison agreement keeps the US in full control of veto power over the release of any prisoners, so the handover is far from complete in terms of who makes critical decisions. Similarly, the night raid agreement purports to put night raids completely under Afghan control, but US forces can still enter Afghan homes once Afghan forces invite them. Crucially, "planning and execution of future raids will still rely heavily on U.S.

intelligence”, suggesting to me that the US is likely to maintain the lead role in choosing targets.

The early description of Sunday’s agreement on long term support for Afghanistan paints this agreement as the ultimate sham, as virtually all details appear to be subject to later change:

> After more than a year of negotiations, U.S. and Afghan officials reached an agreement Sunday affirming the United States’ commitment to Afghanistan for a decade after its formal troop withdrawal in 2014.
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> The document, which must be reviewed by the Afghan parliament and U.S. security agencies and signed by both nations’ presidents, does not specify troop numbers or funding levels, but it offers a broad guarantee that the U.S. role here will not end as abruptly as some feared it might.
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> But the specifics of the U.S. commitment have yet to be formally outlined and could be governed by future agreements.

Maybe Schniederman will be put in charge of filling in the details on the agreement, since he’s not very busy these days.