

WHEN GREEN ON BLUE ATTACKS AREN'T “TECHNICALLY” GREEN ON BLUE ATTACKS

On April 30, AP's Robert Burns revealed that the number of attacks on NATO soldiers by Afghan military and police had been systematically under-reported because only attacks resulting in fatalities were reported. An attack in Herat, Afghanistan over the weekend now raises the possibility that another category of Afghan attacks on personnel associated with the NATO coalition's efforts is also under-reported. In Sunday's attack, three contractors involved in training Afghan forces were killed, but the Reuters report on this attack mentions that since those killed were contractors and not military personnel, the attack was not "technically" a green on blue attack. Ironically, Burns' exposure of the under-reporting on non-fatal attacks has resulted in at least some of them now being reported, and there was one today.

Burns' report opens with his discovery of the under-reporting:

The military is under-reporting the number of times that Afghan soldiers and police open fire on American and other foreign troops.

The U.S.-led coalition routinely reports each time an American or other foreign soldier is killed by an Afghan in uniform. But The Associated Press has learned it does not report insider attacks in which the Afghan wounds – or misses – his U.S. or allied target. It also doesn't report the wounding of troops who were attacked alongside those who were killed.

CNN was the first to report the Herat attack yesterday. It is important to note that they first cite information from an Afghan police official before they cite NATO:

An Afghan policeman opened fire at a training center in western Afghanistan on Sunday, killing three Americans, a police official told CNN.

The Afghan official, who declined to be named, said the three victims were most probably trainers at the West Zone Police Training Center in Herat province. The shooter was also killed, the official said.

NATO spokesman Maj. Adam Wojack said the three killed were civilian contractors working for the International Security Assistance Force. He could not confirm their nationality or what their specific jobs were.

Today's story from Reuters on the multiple NATO-related deaths in Afghanistan yesterday has the line about this event not "technically" being a green on blue event:

"An individual wearing an Afghan National Security Force uniform turned his weapon against ISAF contracted civilian employees in western Afghanistan today, killing three," a spokesman for the NATO-led coalition said, adding that an unknown number of other people had been wounded.

"Also, one insurgent was killed in the engagement and we are still looking for one more shooter," he said

/snip/

According to NATO, there have been 20 green on blue attacks on foreign troops since January in which 27 people have been killed. Last year, there were 21 attacks in which 35 people were killed.

The latest attack is not technically considered to be the 21st green on blue attack this year as the victims were all contractors.

Considering that the “technically” comment follows on the heels of a citation of NATO, it seems likely that it was NATO who pointed out the technicality to Reuters. Curiously, NATO even found it worth mentioning to the AP for their version of this story that Afghan forces turning on NATO forces have not been targeting contractors:

Afghan security forces or militants dressed in their uniforms have been killing a rising number of coalition forces, but they have not been specifically targeting contractors working for the coalition. So far this year, 26 foreign troops have been killed in this type of attacks.

Interestingly, AFP still considers the attack to have been green on blue and added it to the known number of casualties. From their story on the Herat attack:

The number of so-called green-on-blue attacks – in which Afghan forces turn their weapons against their Western allies – has escalated this year.

The latest deaths would take the green-on-blue toll this year to at least 29, in 19 such incidents.

Although CNN’s initial report said all three victims were American, The Guardian reports that two were American and one was British. From their reporting:

Last year, 35 soldiers were killed in such attacks on Nato soldiers and employees, and there have been 30 deaths already this year.

This suggests that The Guardian also includes this attack as a legitimate green on blue. It appears that the various reporting groups differ both on the number of attacks that have occurred this year and how many fatalities have resulted.

The suggestion that killing contractors is not “technically” a green on blue attack really makes me wonder whether there are additional events where contractors have been killed by Afghan military or police personnel. Merely stating that contractors have not been “specifically” targeted is not enough to prove that no such events have taken place. Considering that American contractor deaths in Afghanistan, even though presumed to be substantially under-reported, outnumber American military deaths in Afghanistan, it seems highly likely to me that these attempts by ISAF to describe Sunday’s attack as not “technically” green on blue and that contractors aren’t “specifically” targeted is aimed at tamping down any potential interest in whether there are a number of other contractors who have been killed by personnel in Afghan uniforms but not reported in the media.

There is at least one more report of a contractor killed by a man in an Afghan uniform. From the New York Times story linked above about the growing role of contractors overall in Afghanistan:

The American dead have included people like James McLaughlin, 55, who trained pilots on a contract for MPRI and was killed by a rogue Afghan pilot who also killed eight American soldiers last April

How many more contractors are dead at the hands of those in Afghan uniforms not because they were specifically targeted as contractors but because they were targeted as part of the NATO effort? I’d love for ISAF spokesman in Kabul, Jamie Graybeal, who confirmed the under-reporting of non-fatal attacks to Robert Burns,

to address this question on the record.