GREEN ON BLUE (INSIDER) KILLINGS TOO COMMON FOR REUTERS HEADLINES

The rapidly increasing trend of green on blue (or, in new ISAF-speak, insider) killings has become so common that the killings are no longer headline news for at least one news outlet. Today's Reuters dispatch from Afghanistan takes its headline from the fact that Mullah Omar has issued a message in conjunction with Eid al-Fitr. Reuters leads with Omar calling for fewer civilian deaths in Taliban attacks, but in his message, Omar also touts that the Taliban has successfully infiltrated Afghan forces to carry out green on blue attacks. It is not until the tenth paragraph of the story that we learn that two more US trainers were killed by an Afghan policeman today. By contrast, an AP story carried by the Washington Post draws its headline from the killings and then moves on to mention the Mullah Omar message later. The New York Times has nothing as of this writing on either the killings or the Mullah Omar message.

From the AP story in the Post:

> A member of the Afghan security forces killed two U.S. troops Friday morning — the most recent in a string of insider attacks that threaten to undermine U.S.-Afghan military relations.
>
> An officer in the Afghan Local Police shot and killed two Americans in Farah province during a training exercise on an Afghan base, according to Abdul Rahman, a spokesman for the provincial governor.
>
> U.S. military officials confirmed the two deaths. The assassin was shot and killed, according to a statement.

Reuters allows Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and other military officials to continue their claim that infiltration is not a significant problem:

> "Mujahideen have cleverly infiltrated in the ranks of the enemy according to the plan given to them last year," he [Omar] said. "They are able to (safely) enter bases, offices and intelligence centers of the enemy. Then, they easily carry out decisive and coordinated attacks."
>
> So called green-on-blue shootings, which NATO-led forces recently began calling "insider incidents", have so far this year have accounted for 13 percent of foreign troop deaths, according to the Long War Journal website.
>
> The coalition has said most were the result of stress or personal disagreements between NATO mentors and Afghan police or soldiers, rather than insurgent infiltration.
>
> But U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta acknowledged this week that the Taliban had been behind at least some of them, but said they did not "reflect any kind of broad pattern".
>
> "The reality is, the Taliban has not been able to regain any territory lost, so they're resorting to these kinds of attacks to create havoc," Panetta told reporters.

It is particularly insidious that US spokesmen continue to push the "personal disagreement" approach. When a report on fratricide in June of 2011 suggested that deep cultural differences that are not addressed in the training of US troops contributed to green on blue killings, the US responded by retroactively classifying the report. In trying to hide the report, it was clear that the military was trying to hide behind an explanation of personal grievances

leading to the killings. Now that the distrust of coalition forces has gone so far that the Taliban can exploit it to achieve infiltration of Afghan forces, the US has to go all the way to the Defense Secretary to continue using this same deflection from the truth while clinging to the personal disagreement cover story.

The US commander of troops in Afghanistan, General John Allen, found it necessary to respond to Omar's message. With regard to the question of infiltration, it appears that Allen is no longer claiming it is not significant:

> Omar also says his thugs have infiltrated the ranks of Afghanistan's legitimate armed forces. The pride of the Afghan people has been smeared by killers who pose as Soldiers and police, yet they represent the worst of humanity. Today, the Afghan Army and National Police are trying to build a better future for the Afghan people, yet Omar wants to stop these efforts. Coalition forces are here to help the people; we have no other reason for being here other than to make Afghanistan a stable country, founded on educated and healthy citizens.

Allen's message might as well paraphrase the old Ronald Reagan smear "We're from the United States military and we're here to help." If the US is reduced to repeating that we are there to help, it seems to me that the battle for hearts and minds is over and the US did not win.