

NATO FIGURES: GREEN ON GREEN DEATH RATE EXCEEDS GREEN ON BLUE. WHAT ABOUT BLUE ON BLUE?

The skyrocketing rate of green on blue attacks, where Afghan security forces turn their weapons on NATO troops, is forcing such desperate measures that NATO has given orders for all coalition troops to remain armed at all times, even when “inside the wire” on US bases, and General John Allen went so far yesterday as to suggest that Ramadan fasting may have contributed to the latest uptick in these attacks. We learn today from the New York Times that NATO has released figures for green on green attacks, where Afghan troops kill one another. The green on green killings exceed the green on blue figures. Recent history tells us, however, that even if NATO releases the final set of data to complete the full picture on inside the wire deaths (the depressingly high suicide rate, which exceeds the combat death rate, is known) and gives us data on blue on blue deaths (more commonly referred to in the US press as “friendly fire” deaths), those numbers are likely to be so low as to lead to speculation that the real rate is being hidden.

The Times story on green on green deaths begins in a straightforward way:

Even as attacks by Afghan security forces on NATO troops have become an increasing source of tension, new NATO data shows another sign of vulnerability for the training mission: even greater numbers of the Afghan police and military forces have killed each other this year.

So far, Afghan soldiers or police

officers have killed 53 of their comrades and wounded at least 22 others in 35 separate attacks this year, according to NATO data provided to The New York Times by officials in Kabul. By comparison, at least 40 NATO service members were reported killed by Afghan security forces or others working with them.

NATO displays a remarkable bit of ironic cluelessness when they describe to the Times how they think these killings come about. After first mentioning Taliban coercion of new recruits in the Afghan forces, NATO then moves on to describe the same sorts of cultural clashes among Afghan recruits that have been described as underlying green on blue attacks in a report that the US chose to retroactively classify. NATO has steadfastly refused to acknowledge the cultural clashes that underlie green on blue attacks but is now rolling them out to describe green on green:

Further, there are concerns about cultural clashes within the rapidly expanding Afghan forces themselves, Afghan and NATO officials say, raising questions about their ability to weather the country's deep factional differences after the NATO troop withdrawal in 2014.

"Three decades of war can play a pivotal role in the internal causes," said Maj. Bashir Ishaqzia, commander of the Afghan National Police recruitment center in Nangarhar Province. He said one of the biggest challenges for the army and police forces was a lasting "culture of intolerance among Afghans, as well as old family, tribal, ethnic, factional, lingual and personal disputes."

Compare the "culture of intolerance" with this bit from the executive summary of the retroactively classified report, titled "A

Crisis of Trust and Cultural Incompatibility”
(pdf):

They found many U.S. Soldiers to be extremely arrogant, bullying, unwilling to listen to their advice, and were often seen as lacking concern for civilian and ANSF safety during combat.

That sounds like a pretty good description of a culture of intolerance. NATO will readily cite it for green on green deaths but quashes the report when NATO forces are shown to display the same trait.

As mentioned above, if we want to get the full picture of deaths that occur inside the wire, we must include suicides and that rate has skyrocketed at the same time as green on blue and green on green:

Suicides are surging among America’s troops, averaging nearly one a day this year – the fastest pace in the nation’s decade of war.

The 154 suicides for active-duty troops in the first 155 days of the year far outdistance the U.S. forces killed in action in Afghanistan – about 50 percent more – according to Pentagon statistics obtained by The Associated Press.

But if we are going to finish the complete picture of inside the wire deaths, in addition to suicides, green on blue and green on green, we will need to see the data on blue on blue attacks, or “friendly fire” deaths. Little attention been paid to this issue lately. Back in 2009, however, Mark Benjamin of Salon noted that the figures being given out at that time were so low that they stretched credulity when compared to historical figures:

New statistics obtained by Salon depict a spectacularly low number of U.S. Army deaths from friendly fire in the current

conflict in Iraq, a mere fraction of historical rates. According to data released to Salon by the Army's Combat Readiness/Safety Center, only 24 of the 3,059 U.S. Army soldiers killed in Iraq since the invasion in 2003 died by fratricide.

That is a rate of .78 percent, less than one-tenth of almost every estimate from previous conflicts stretching back to World War II, despite six years of combat in Iraq, often in confusing urban terrain, using intense U.S. firepower. Army officials gave Salon similar statistics for Afghanistan: six out of 484 dead, or a rate of 1.24 percent. By comparison, the Army's own estimates of the friendly fire rates for every war from World War II to Desert Storm are between 10 and 14 percent, except for a low of 6 percent during the invasion of Panama. During the last U.S. conflict in Iraq, 1991's Operation Desert Storm, fratricide killed 35 of 298 U.S. service members, or a rate of nearly 12 percent, according to a 1992 report by the Center for Army Lessons Learned.

Benjamin provided Andrew Bacevitch's response to the data:

"To say we have suddenly stopped all these problems that have been a part of warfare since the beginning of time? I don't believe it ... To claim that this Army is somehow uniquely disciplined in that regard? It is a great army, but they are still human beings. They are still scared shitless."

When NATO finally gets around to releasing current figures on blue on blue deaths, will they be as low as the 2009 figures or will the rate magically come back to a level closer to the historical average?