

MCKEON TOO LOW FOR ZERO OPTION

Late Saturday, the New York Times posted an article with the misleading headline “US Considers Faster Pullout in Afghanistan”. In a classic case of burying the lede, the article contained the important news that negotiations between Barack Obama and Hamid Karzai are going so badly that Obama is considering a total withdrawal from Afghanistan at the end of 2014, rather than signing an agreement outlining conditions under which a residual US force would remain in the country:

Increasingly frustrated by his dealings with President Hamid Karzai, President Obama is giving serious consideration to speeding up the withdrawal of United States forces from Afghanistan and to a “zero option” that would leave no American troops there after next year, according to American and European officials.

It appears that the latest attempt at a video conference went so badly that the zero option is now under serious consideration:

A videoconference between Mr. Obama and Mr. Karzai designed to defuse the tensions ended badly, according to both American and Afghan officials with knowledge of it. Mr. Karzai, according to those sources, accused the United States of trying to negotiate a separate peace with both the Taliban and their backers in Pakistan, leaving Afghanistan’s fragile government exposed to its enemies.

Mr. Karzai had made similar accusations in the past. But those comments were delivered to Afghans – not to Mr. Obama, who responded by pointing out the American lives that have been lost

propping up Mr. Karzai's government, the officials said.

The option of leaving no troops in Afghanistan after 2014 was gaining momentum before the June 27 video conference, according to the officials. But since then, the idea of a complete military exit similar to the American military pullout from Iraq has gone from being considered the worst-case scenario – and a useful negotiating tool with Mr. Karzai – to an alternative under serious consideration in Washington and Kabul.

For the record, it should be noted that I have maintained since negotiations began last November that Afghanistan will never grant the criminal immunity the US insists on for soldiers remaining in the country and that the US will bumble into the same zero option in Afghanistan that it reached in Iraq.

It would appear that the Taliban also agree that things are going very badly on the negotiation front. From CBS News yesterday morning:

A diplomat and Taliban official say the Afghan Taliban are closing their Qatar office at least temporarily to protest demands they remove a sign that identified the movement as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

The office was opened less than a month ago to facilitate peace talks, and has also come under pressure for using the same white flag flown during the Taliban's five-year rule of Afghanistan that ended with the U.S.-led invasion in 2001.

Clearly, if the US winds up with zero residual forces, there would be no reason for the Taliban to negotiate with the US (or Karzai).

ToloNews has this report on yesterday's press

briefing by White House spokesman Jay Carney (the transcript was not yet posted when I wrote this post):

Jay Carney, the White House Press Secretary, said on Tuesday that a decision on the exact pace and numbers of the U.S. troop withdraw from Afghanistan is not "imminent." However, he said that a "zero option" for the U.S. troop presence post-2014 is still on the table.

The idea that the US could finally completely end its misadventure in Afghanistan should appeal to most rational people who are concerned about the loss of soldiers on both sides of the conflict, the huge losses of civilians who have been killed in the conflict and the massive drain on the US treasury.

Sadly, Buck McKeon, who chairs the House Armed Services Committee, is both one of the most corrupt members of Congress (even getting national defense contractors to contribute for the first time ever to a state legislature race when his wife was running) and not rational when it comes to concern for life and tax dollars. Sensing that his corporate masters in the defense contracting business stand to lose money under a zero option, McKeon rushed to their rescue. From an article in The Hill, yesterday evening:

The Obama administration is not considering the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan after 2014, House Armed Services Chairman Buck McKeon (R-Calif.) said Tuesday.

"This evening, senior Administration officials assured me that there is no 'zero option' scenario under consideration," McKeon said in a statement. "I was assured that the United States has committed to post-2014 support to include troops on the ground.

I was further informed that a 'zero option' would violate American commitments to the Afghan people."

It's nice to know that McKeon has "senior Administration officials" in his pocket who will help him try to keep defense contractors feeding at the trough while soldiers and civilians are slaughtered senselessly. McKeon has proven that he is too low for (the) zero option.

And if you aren't singing it by now, you should be:

[youtuber
youtube='http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-xMr6o3
SDo']