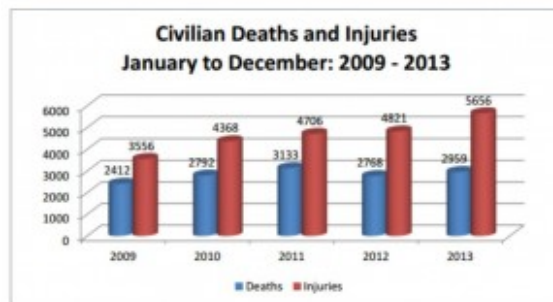


CIVILIAN CASUALTIES RISE YET AGAIN IN AFGHANISTAN, CONFIRMING SURGE FAILURE

Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2013



Click on image for a larger view.

The United Nations is the best source of information on the impact of the war in Afghanistan on civilians. They released their latest data this weekend (pdf), and their results show that the vaunted “surge” of US troops into the country in early 2010 through late 2012 failed to protect civilians. In fact, the data show that civilian injuries have shown a steady rise from 2009 pre-surge levels through 2013’s post-surge period. Civilian deaths rose in 2010 and 2011. They went down slightly in 2012 before rising again in 2013.

Despite this clear indication that the surge was a waste of lives and money, recall that the Pentagon continued to spew its positive spin as troops were drawn down. From September, 2012 as the surge ended:

Very quietly, the surge of troops into Afghanistan that President Obama announced to such fanfare in late 2009 is now over.

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said today that 33,000 troops have been

withdrawn, calling the Afghan surge “a very important milestone” in a war the Obama administration is winding down; there are still 68,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

The “surge did accomplish its objectives of reversing the Taliban momentum on the battlefield and dramatically increase the size and capability of the Afghan national security forces,” Panetta said.

As seen in the UN data, the surge did nothing to reverse attacks on civilians, with civilian casualties continuing a steady increase. How about Panetta’s other claim, the one about dramatically increasing the size and capability of Afghan national security forces? To answer that, we depend on data supplied by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. Their latest report can be found here (pdf). Once again, the target for ANSF size was not achieved, even after moving the goalposts (footnotes removed):

This quarter, ANSF’s assigned force strength was 334,852, according to data provided by CSTC-A. This is short of the goal to have an end strength of 352,000 ANSF personnel by October 2012. That goal had been in the Department of Defense’s (DOD) April 2012 Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan. When that end strength was not met, DOD revised the goal to 352,000 ANSF by 2014 (187,000 ANA by December 2012, 157,000 ANP by February 2013, and 8,000 Air Force by December 2014). Neither the ANA nor the ANP met their end-strength goal by the revised deadline, as shown in Table 3.6.

But the reality could be far worse than those numbers indicate. While the force size falls just barely short of the target, the functionality of those troops is suspect.

Further, it appears that Afghanistan may be playing games with the meaning of “available” (sorry, this bit of text won’t copy, so I have to use images instead):

This quarter, the ANA consisted of 178,816 personnel (not counting Afghan Air Force personnel), according to data provided to CSTC-A by the ANA. Of those 126,658 personnel were assigned to the ANA’s combat forces—the ANA’s six corps, the 111th Capital Division, and Special Operations Forces. Another, 25,992 were assigned to the MOD’s general staff and intermediate commands (a decrease of 7,695 since last quarter). CSTC-A did not provide an explanation for the 30% decrease in ANA general staff and intermediate command staff, but did note that 1,139 of them were absent without leave (AWOL).⁹³

Of the 126,658 combat personnel, 9,043 were absent without leave (AWOL) and 15,915 were in training, were cadets, or were awaiting transfer to an ANA unit. The rest were “present for duty” or “unavailable.” This quarter, 62,753 personnel were “present for duty.” According to CSTC-A, the term “present for duty” corresponds to “combat strength” and refers to soldiers who are “physically parading with assigned unit, healthy, ready for orders, and [are] accounted in combat strength.”⁹⁴

Another 63,905 of them (more than 50%) were “unavailable.” The “unavailable” category includes personnel who cannot currently perform military duties because they are missing, arrested, in hospital, on training assignments, on scheduled leave, and for other reasons—but also personnel who are on duty and under ANA control, but are deployed in the field.⁹⁵ For example, according to data provided to SIGAR by CSTC-A in the course of an ongoing audit, 39,249 ANA personnel were in “combat.”⁹⁶ It was unclear

why “combat strength” does not include soldiers categorized as in “combat” who are instead categorized as “unavailable.” For a more complete listing of “unavailable” categories, see “ANA Strength” in this section, page 91.

In addition, a SIGAR audit now under way is examining the quality of personnel-numbers reporting for the ANSF, which is an important issue both for assessing the capability of the force and for verifying U.S.-funded sustainment costs that are partly a function of reported personnel numbers.

Somehow, the Afghans have decided to mix the count of troops that are still in training, in jail or missing with those who are deployed for combat. At any rate, it appears that the number of Afghan troops who are trained, present and either deployable or deployed is significantly below the force size that is reported. It should come as no surprise that SIGAR is in the process of auditing the fiasco of ANSF self-reporting on force size and availability.

Sorting through those numbers gives a very troubling view. Of the 126,658 ANA combat force members, there were 9043 AWOL and 15,915 still in training. Of the strangely classified “unavailable” count of 63,905, we learn that 39,249 of them were in combat. That seems to leave 24,656 as truly unavailable. Combining these groups gives a whopping 49,614 who are

unable to be used for defense. That means that of the 126,658, "force size" of the ANA combat force, fully 39% would not be included in an accurate assessment of troops ready and available for action.

In conclusion, then, Panetta's claims about surge success both fail when held up to the light of data against which to compare them. UN data clearly indicate that the surge did nothing to stop the trend of increasing civilian casualties. Further, SIGAR data show that the training of ANSF to take over combat responsibilities also is an abject failure, with Afghanistan resorting to ridiculous manipulation of troop counts to create the illusion of a fully staffed and trained force which really sits at about 60% of the claimed combat force size.

Oh, and the SIGAR report places the total funds expended so far in this fabulous "training" adventure at just over \$59 billion. How can the Defense Department and Obama administration think that extending this "training" past 2014 will accomplish anything different from extending the well-documented failure?