NEWEST LEAKED NATO REPORT AIMED AT PREVENTING AFGHANISTAN WITHDRAWAL?

Fresh on the heels of the "leak" to the New York Times two weeks ago of an already public report on Afghan troops killing US troops, another NATO report casting a bad light on the current war effort in Afghanistan has been leaked. This time the report was made available to the British press, with BBC and the Times of London (behind a paywall and therefore not getting a link) being shown copies of the report. Interestingly, most news stories on the leaked report concentrate on the report's claim that Pakistan, and especially Pakistan's ISI, is helping the Taliban in Afghanistan, a fact which is already known and which was dismissed by Pakistan's Foreign Minister Hina Khar as "old wine in an even older bottle." Reuters hits on another, likely more important aspect of the report, however, even including it as their headline: "Taliban 'poised to retake Afghanistan' after NATO pullout".

The information contained in this new leak gives further support for my thinking on the reasoning behind the information fed to the New York Times for their January 20 article, when I said "The story appears to me to be presented from the angle of military higher-ups who don't want to withdraw from Afghanistan and point to the failed training of Afghan forces to support their argument that we must stay there." In much the same way, this report, which points out that the Taliban will retake Afghanistan shortly after we leave, supports the conclusion that we must stay there to "win" what President Obama has called our "war of necessity".

For a President who has put so much effort into

punishing those who leak sensitive information (well, at least whistleblowers who leak), Obama now appears to me to be faced with a military that is engaged in the selective release of information that is designed to make it impossible for him to continue his plan to withdraw troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. Will there be any punishment for these two recent leaks, or are they some "multidimensional chess" setting the stage for Obama to throw up his hands and declare that we can't leave after all?

As for the meat of the leaked report, BBC has posted selected excerpts. This excerpt, for example, is along the lines of most press reports:

> "ISI is thoroughly aware of Taliban activities and the whereabouts of all senior Taliban personnel. The Haqqani family, for example, resides immediately west of the ISI office at the airfield in Miram Shah, Pakistan."

However, it also appears that Afghans and even some Afghans within the government are interested in joining with the insurgents:

> "In the last year there has been unprecedented interest, even from GIRoA [Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan] members, in joining the the insurgent cause. Afghan civilians frequently prefer Taliban governance over GIRoA, usually as a result of government corruption, ethnic bias and lack of connection with local religious and tribal leaders. The effectiveness of Taliban governance allows for increased recruitment rates which, subsequently, bolsters their ability to replace losses."

However, this simple quote still stands out to me as the most important:

> "Once Isaf [International Security
> Assistance Force] is no longer a factor,
> the Taliban consider victory
> inevitable."

This simple statement tells us that despite ten
years of war, with over 1800 US troops (and
countless civilian and enemy deaths) killed and
over half a ~~billion~~ trillion dollars wasted,
Afghanistan will go back to Taliban rule shortly
after we leave. If this report has indeed been
leaked by high level military sources, then it
appears to me that they are willing to make
public their own failure to "win" the war in
order to achieve their goal of continuing to
fight, presumably so that they can achieve some
form of salvaged victory in the end.

Here are the relevant portions of the Reuters
article that hits on the idea of the Taliban
taking over and the failure of the US-led NATO
effort:

> The U.S. military said in a secret
> report the Taliban, backed by Pakistan,
> are set to retake control
> of Afghanistan after NATO-led forces
> withdraw from the country, raising the
> prospect of a major failure of western
> policy after a costly war.
>
> /snip/
>
> The document may leave some policy
> makers in Washington wondering whether
> the war was worth the steep cost in
> human lives and funding.
>
> As of late January, 1,889 U.S. soldiers
> had been killed in Afghanistan in a
> conflict launched after the September
> 11, 2001, attacks that has drained
> almost half a trillion dollars from U.S.
> coffers.
>
> "The unfortunate reality is that this is
> a failure of the allied strategy in
> Afghanistan. They have not been able to

> achieve the goals they set out to
> achieve," said Mahmud Durrani, a
> former Pakistan army general and
> ambassador to Washington.

Obviously, with "failure" now being openly discussed, US military figures will be highly resistant to the idea of staying with the current withdrawal timetable. Withdrawal under these conditions will mean that Afghanistan has become the next Vietnam, where the US withdrew only to see the country fall to the very foe we had gone there to fight.

With Mitt Romney now appearing to be building an almost insurmountable lead in the Republican primary race, look for his neocon advisory team to advise him to start claiming that we cannot possibly withdraw from Afghanistan until we are assured of "victory". Sadly, I think Obama then will agree with that position and also say we must discard the current withdrawal plan. It's really too bad that none of the "great" military minds involved here can grasp that "winning" in Afghanistan has proven throughout history to be impossible for outside forces.