ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FAILURE IN AFGHANISTAN SPREADS THROUGHOUT US GOVERNMENT

Mostly abandoned $7.3 million Border Police facility in Kunduz Province, Click on photo for a larger view.

After staying out of the headlines while the military carried out its panty-sniffing investigation of his emails, General John Allen is back in today's Washington Post in the first of what will be many valedictories of his time as commander of US forces in Afghanistan. He is the 11th commander there since 2001, so a year seems to be about all anyone can stomach. But Allen's reappearance comes at an inauspicious time, as two different documents released yesterday show that despite the continued "we won" attitude from Allen and his minions, many of the rest of the branches of the US government (h/t to Marcy for pointing me toward both these documents) now openly admit that we have failed there.

McClatchy's Jonathan Landay tweeted Monday afternoon: "State Dept **#Afghanistan** travel warning: Afghan govt has "limited ability to maintain order and ensure security." Did White House read this?" Following up on his tweet, the travel warning paints a bleak picture of the security situation in Afghanistan:

> The Department of State warns U.S. citizens against travel to Afghanistan. The security threat to all U.S. citizens in Afghanistan remains critical.
>
> /snip/
>
> No region in Afghanistan should be considered immune from violence, and the potential exists throughout the country for hostile acts, either targeted or random, against U.S. and other Western nationals at any time. Remnants of the former Taliban regime and the al-Qaida terrorist network, as well as other groups hostile to International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) military operations, remain active.

The next sentence, though, is the most devastating and is what Landay referenced:

> Afghan authorities have a limited ability to maintain order and ensure the security of Afghan citizens and foreign visitors.

As Landay asks, has the White House read this? After a long string of no longer operational explanations for why we are still in Afghanistan, the current line is that we must stay long enough to train and support the 352,000-strong Afghan National Security Force so that it can take responsibility for security as we withdraw. Although the Post article does note that the future for Afghanistan does not look good, when Allen is quoted, victory language returns, and it is in stark contrast to the State Department view of conditions:

> With 11 days left in his tour, Allen says he’s proud of the growth of the Afghan security forces and the success of NATO’s troop surge in places such as southern Helmand, where four years ago the Taliban operated freely.

The State Department would appear to dispute that claim that the Taliban no longer operates freely in Helmand.

As if the State Department's travel warning isn't devastating enough to the Afghan war situation, a report released yesterday by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) (pdf) demonstrates that the claim that ANSF force size has achieved the 352,000 goal is a sham. The photos above depict a $7.3 million facility built by the US for Afghan Border Police in Kunduz Province. The findings of the report are devastating:

> SIGAR's inspection was limited to two buildings and a portion of a third of the total 12 buildings at the facility because most buildings were locked and on-site personnel did not have keys. No major construction quality issues were identified at the buildings SIGAR inspected.
>
> Built with a capacity for 175 persons, only about 12 Afghan personnel were on site during SIGAR's inspection, and they were unaware of plans to move additional staff to the facility. Construction plans for Afghan forces were aligned to the personnel strength of 352,000, and there were no plans to adjust the building program to varying circumstances. Most buildings appeared unused and some equipment—specifically, wood-burning stoves near the site's dining facility—had been dismantled.

Although SIGAR spends an inordinate amount of effort in the report discussing the dismantling of the wood-burning stoves (without apparently realizing they could well have been just about the only items in the whole facility with some value to the local populace), their recommendations for moving forward incorporate an underlying assumption that ANSF force size will be much smaller in the future and US

facility construction plans need to be downsized accordingly. Most significantly, SIGAR states outright that this facility was planned under the 352,000 force size assumption and wasn't subsequently "adjusted" to what now appears to be "varying circumstances".

Consider the figures just for this one facility. SIGAR notes it was built under a plan where it would be staffed by 175. Despite claims from the US military that the plan (called a tashkil) was revised downward to a staff size of 59, SIGAR found only 12 personnel on site and most of the buildings locked and unused. SIGAR's recommendations include a warning that future facility plans should be scaled back to levels in line with actual ANSF force size rather than the sham public figures. Well, yes, I put a few words in their mouths there, but here is their actual wording on that point:

> SIGAR recommends that USACE, in coordination with the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan/Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (NTM-A/CSTC-A), review plans for constructing Afghan police facilities to determine whether site construction contracts can be downsized or facilities redesigned to reduce unnecessary costs or if facilities, including this location, are needed.

This recommendation bounced through several different commands in the military with each adding its own response, but the one from NTM-A/CSTC-A is most interesting, because it appears to me that the NTM-A/DCOM-P entity within their purview will be tasked with maintaining the police component of the 352,000 force size sham claim until December of this calendar year, when responsibility for force size will be handed over to Afghanistan's Ministry of the Interior. [It appears that NTM-A/DCOM-P is NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan, Deputy Commander-Police.] Here is how they couch their response:

NTM-A builds the ANSF infrastructure to a 100% manned tashkil. A change of the tashkil will result in a descope or cancellation of future builds. NTM-A DCOM-P is the tashkil requirement owner until December 2013 when the Ministry of Interior (MoI) will assume full responsibility of all tashkil changes. We have recently had discussions with Afghan facility leadership regarding the design requirements of the ABP HQs, and have been told that a site designed for 59 will rarely be at full capacity due to dispersed daily operations. Border Police operations and their impact on facility usage will be incorporated into future modifications for the remaining ABP builds.

So the explanation for only 12 personnel on site at an almost completely unused facility is that Border Police conduct “dispersed daily operations” and many of them won’t be found at their facilities. I’m guessing these personnel are so dispersed that they mostly can be found at their homes rather than being on duty, just like the rest of the ANSF deserters who were originally trained as part of the 352,000 force size and no longer have any real affiliation with ANSF.