

LATEST “ISOLATED INCIDENT” RAISES DEATH TOLL TO 15 NATO TROOPS KILLED BY AFGHAN TROOPS THIS YEAR

Reacting to the killing of two senior NATO officers inside the previously secure Interior Ministry building in Kabul, Presidential Press Secretary Jay Carney on February 27 continued to insist that the ongoing killing of NATO troops by Afghan troops is just a series of “isolated incidents”. This stance is necessary in order for Obama administration and Pentagon officials to continue their attempts to hide the retroactively classified report “A Crisis of Trust and Cultural Incompatibility” (pdf) which clearly describes the cultural barriers which contribute to the disturbing trend of green on blue killings. Sadly, today marks another “isolated incident”, with the killing of two more NATO soldiers by a man “in an Afghan army uniform”:

A man wearing an Afghan army uniform killed two NATO troops in southern Afghanistan on Monday, military officials said, the latest in a string of shootings that have undermined trust between allies.

The gunman was killed by NATO troops shortly after he opened fire on a group of foreign troops, the military said in a statement. A military spokesman said officials were investigating whether the man was an Afghan soldier or an infiltrator wearing the uniform. No other details were released.

So-called “green on blue” shootings have become a rising threat this year,

following a series of incidents that have created distrust between Afghan forces and their international coalition partners. The most significant was last month's burning of Korans by U.S. troops. The episode sparked violent riots and prompted the Taliban to call on Afghan security forces to open fire on foreign troops.

From Reuters, we get an update on the fratricide statistics, along with an observation on the importance of this trend:

Before Monday's attack, 13 members of the NATO-led force had been killed this year in what appeared to be attacks by members of Afghan forces, the commander of U.S. and NATO forces, General John Allen, told a U.S. senate committee last week.

About 70 members of the NATO force have been killed in 42 insider attacks from May 2007 to January this year.

The shootings raise new concern about the reliability of Afghan forces and their ability to take over security responsibilities by the end of 2014, when most Western combat forces leave.

So far, there has been no indication from the Obama administration that the clearly increasing trend of fratricide or other catastrophic events like the Panjwai Massacre will prompt a review of strategy in Afghanistan until after the November election. However, there is a hint that the Pentagon realizes they now stand on the precipice, as the blood money paid to the survivors in Panjwai is significantly higher than what was paid in previous incidents in Iraq and Afghanistan:

U.S. military officials paid relatives \$50,000 for each of the villagers allegedly killed by a rogue

U.S. soldier this month in Kandahar province, Afghan officials said Sunday.

Payment of “blood money” is a common way to settle disputes stemming from violent deaths in Afghanistan, but the amounts seemed unusually high compared with past U.S. military practice. The money could defuse the intense anger the March 11 massacre has generated in the southern province.

U.S. military officials handed the money to the villagers Saturday during a meeting at the office of Kandahar Gov. Tooryalai Wesa, according to Fazal Mohammed Esqzai, the deputy chairman of the Panjwai district council, who was present.

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Esqzai said U.S. Special Forces commanders gave villagers \$50,000 for each of the 17 people shot to death and \$11,000 for each of the six people wounded in the shootings.

Previously, the AP informs us, payments were much lower:

However, civilian death compensations are occasionally made public. In 2010, U.S. troops in Helmand province said they paid \$1,500 to \$2,000 if a civilian was killed in a military operation and \$600 to \$1,500 for a serious injury. The Panjwai shootings are different because they were not part of a sanctioned operation, but it is a distinction lost on many Afghans who see any civilian deaths as criminal.

Of course, the official story on Panjwai remains that Bales acted alone. Will the compensation go up even further if evidence is released showing that at least one of Bales’ reported two

excursions from the outpost on that fateful night was with accomplices?

In the end, however, the US will find that merely increasing the payouts when civilians are killed is a meaningless step in trying to close the cultural void between US troops and the Afghans. As long as cultural divisions continue to be ignored, the situation in Afghanistan will continue to deteriorate rapidly.

Postscript: During the time that this post was in preparation, the Reuters article was updated. The 4:41 am version opened "A gunman wearing an Afghan army uniform killed two NATO troops in southern Afghanistan on Monday, NATO's International Security Assistance Force said, in what appeared to be the latest attack by rogue Afghan security forces on Western troops." It appears that NATO is now convinced the killer was indeed an Afghan soldier, as the 8:29 am version opens: "An Afghan army soldier killed two NATO troops in southern Afghanistan on Monday, NATO forces and a provincial official said, in the latest attack by rogue Afghan security personnel on Western troops."