NATO: “AFGHANISTAN WILL NOT UNRAVEL AFTER WITHDRAWAL” — PROBABLY BECAUSE IT’S UNRAVELING NOW



Overall force size, recruitment and attrition for the Afghanistan National Army from latest DoD report.

The situation in Afghanistan is falling apart so quickly and so dramatically that a senior NATO civilian official took it upon himself today to put out an assurance that Afghanistan will not unravel after NATO withdraws its security forces. One can only infer from this statement that NATO can make this assurance because the unraveling is already underway and will be complete prior to the late 2014 date for full withdrawal.

Consider the array of ways in which Afghanistan has forged its way into the news cycle in the last 24 hours at a time when “legitimate rape” should have edged out all other issues. President Obama made an “unscheduled” appearance in the White House Briefing Room yesterday, and Jake Tapper was able to force Obama onto the record on the issue of rapidly escalating green on blue attacks. Yesterday’s brilliant idea from the Defense Department on stemming the tide of green on blue attacks was to claim that

Afghanistan now will spy on its own troops to prevent the attacks. Robert Caruso provided the best response to this revelation on Twitter: “riiiiiiiiiiight.” Perhaps the most stunning development, though, is that while General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, was in Kabul for emergency meetings on the green on blue issue, insurgents were able to get close enough to Bagram Air Base to damage his plane (which was unoccupied at the time) in a rocket attack.

I have long maintained that the principal failure in the coalition’s plans for Afghanistan is the abject failure of David Petraeus’ training program that he started in Iraq and moved to Afghanistan. The figure above is taken from the most recent DoD “Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan” (pdf). The bar graph and the figures below it (click on the image for a slightly larger view) show us figures for Afghanistan’s National Army. If we consider the twelve month period from ~~March~~ April 2011 to ~~April~~ March 2012, we see that the size of the ANA grew from 164,003 to 194,455. However, in order to achieve that growth, it was necessary to recruit a total of 79,501 troops during that time. Such massive recruiting was necessary because the same twelve month period saw attrition of 48,577 troops. Compared to the force size at the end of this period, that is an attrition rate of 25% (actually 24.98%) for the year.

It simply does not make sense to call the ANA a “combat ready” force that can take the lead on security any time in the foreseeable future when it has an annual attrition rate of 25%. Such a high rate of turnover in the force means that the Afghan population from which the force is drawn does not ~~ascribe~~ subscribe to the idea of a national army. The entire NATO “mission” of preparing Afghan security forces to take responsibility for security is built on a fable that the Afghan people do not support. Green on blue attacks may be dominating the news today, but the failure of the people of Afghanistan to

get behind the concept of a national army is what will ultimately end the current NATO strategy.