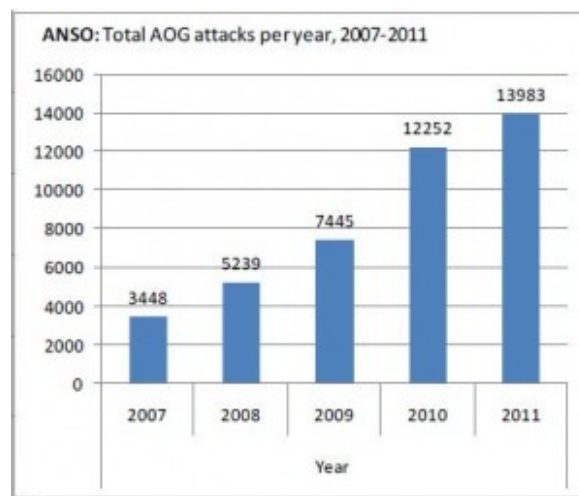


US VOWS NO CHANGE OF COURSE IN AFGHANISTAN DESPITE 17% OF NATO DEATHS IN 2012 FROM FRATRICIDE



"There is absolutely no reason to change course when we're making the kind of progress we're making" -- Pentagon spokesman George Little, February 27, 2012

Displaying a remarkable inability to process the meaning of ongoing events, both White House spokesman Jay Carney and Pentagon spokesman George Little ventured dangerously close to "Baghdad Bob" territory on Monday, declaring that there is no reason to change the strategy or timetable for withdrawal in Afghanistan despite violence levels that have been on a steady rise since the US diverted its attention from Afghanistan to Iraq in 2003 and a rising toll of NATO forces being killed by Afghan forces.

The first question in Monday's White House press briefing went right to the heart of the crisis that is ongoing in Afghanistan:

But I'm wondering how you explain to the average American who has seen this war go on for 10 years and is ready for troops to come home – how do explain it when the people that we're training turn their guns on us, or U.S. officers in a secure Afghan Interior building are shot dead? How do you explain why it's working?

After Jay Carney responded with a very long “stay the course” explanation of how we must remove any possibility of al Qaeda re-emerging and that we must make conditions appropriate for handing off security to the Afghans, there was this follow-up:

Q So you just sort of recounted the case there of how the President redefined the mission and how it's important to stick with it, to stay the course. But I'm wondering what you do about the attitudes of the American people who, in the case – more than one case in this last week – they say the people that we are going to war with, in some cases, are killing us. Why should we still support this war? How do you make that case? And do you worry that it's going to erode – the American public support will continue to erode in an election year?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the incidents that you refer to are tragic and horrific and indefensible, there's no question. But it is important to remember that 95 to 97 percent of the missions the U.S. forces embark on in Afghanistan, they do so with their Afghan partners. We're talking about thousands and thousands of operations that proceed successfully with Afghan partners without anything like this happening.

These are isolated incidents – which does not, of course, mean they are not

terrible – and are being investigated by both the Afghan government and ISAF. But the overall importance of defeating al Qaeda remains and that is why we need to see – to continue the focus on that; to continue the process of, in the implementation of the President's objectives, transferring security lead over to the Afghans so that American troops can come home.

It's important to remember the President has already, through his strategy, laid out a process by which American troops will come home as we turn over security responsibility, security lead to Afghan forces. And as we do that, we will be unrelenting in our pursuit of al Qaeda and unrelenting in our efforts to remove leaders of al Qaeda from the battlefield.

That's just stunning. Carney insists that "These are isolated incidents" and yet, if we look at the numbers from this year, they are horrific. From AP:

Of 52 U.S. and NATO troops killed this year in Afghanistan, nine were apparently killed by Afghan forces or impersonators.

Nine out of fifty-two deaths comes to seventeen percent of all NATO deaths in Afghanistan coming at the hands of Afghan forces. Carney can claim that these are "isolated" incidents, but when they are viewed through the context of the retroactively classified report "A Crisis of Trust and Cultural Incompatibility" then we see that there is an underlying conflict that simply is not addressed in the current US strategy and that has led to the increased fratricide and to the overall increase in violence in Afghanistan that is based merely on our presence there.

And as for Carney's claim that fratricide is

isolated? We have this from Reuters:

According to the Pentagon, around 70 members of the NATO force were killed in 42 insider attacks from May 2007 through January 2012.

But Carney is not the only reality-denier in the Obama administration. The Reuters article linked above has this from the briefing by Pentagon spokesman George Little:

The Obama administration will not swerve from plans to move into an advisory role in Afghanistan, U.S. officials said on Monday, despite the killing of U.S. advisers over the weekend that underscored the risks foreign soldiers will face as they rush to train Afghan forces.

"We're not going to let the events of the past week, which are regrettable and unfortunate and tragic, influence the long horizon view that we're taking," Defense Department spokesman George Little told reporters at the Pentagon.

"There is absolutely no reason to change course when we're making the kind of progress we're making," Little said later.

I just couldn't resist making that last sentence from Little into the caption for the figure above showing the number of violent incidents in Afghanistan over the past five years. What on earth could be the basis for Little claiming that progress is being made? Violence still trends up. Fratricide is at its highest level ever. Widespread demonstrations across the country still demand the US leave now.

There is even more from Little in the Washington Post:

On Monday, Pentagon officials sought to play down the effects of those killings

as well as the violent protests that erupted across Afghanistan beginning last week, when Afghans witnessed U.S. military personnel burning copies of the Koran at Bagram Air Base. U.S. officials have said that the burning of the Islamic holy book and other religious texts was accidental, but public apologies by President Obama and other leaders have not ended the fallout.

“Anyone who believes they can weaken our resolve through these cowardly attacks is severely mistaken,” Pentagon press secretary George Little said at a news conference. “There is much at stake in Afghanistan, and our commitment to our mission and our strategy will not waver.”

If there weren't so many lives and so much of the US economy at stake, these statements by our government's spokesmen would be comic. But with the losses that are being sustained, the public statements and policies that underlie them are nothing short of morally repugnant sacrifices of lives and treasure for short term political gain. As the Reuters article points out, both sides in the US political scene will try to score points on Afghanistan:

The path ahead will not be an easy one for Obama, who is running for re-election in November. He is likely to face mounting pressure from some within his own party to accelerate the U.S. exit from Afghanistan, while Republicans are likely to seize on any indication of an accelerated departure as proof the president is neglecting a key security priority.

From what we saw in Monday's response from the Obama administration, look for cynical political calculation to continue to trump reality and concern for lives and treasure when it comes to

policy in Afghanistan.