

AFGHANISTAN MELTDOWN CONTINUES

As we get closer to the NATO summit next week in Chicago, the meltdown of Afghanistan continues. It is clear that the intent of the Obama administration is to maintain the stance that the surge of US troops into the country over the past two years has stabilized the situation and that developments are on pace for a complete handoff of security to Afghan forces and full NATO withdrawal by the end of 2014. Any deviation from this script could trigger a Congressional review of strategy for Afghanistan just when the campaign season is heating up for the November election. Such a review, the Obama administration fears, would be fodder for accusations that their strategy in Afghanistan has failed.

The news today is not good for maintaining the "success" point of view. Yesterday, yet another member of Afghanistan's High Peace Council was gunned down in Kabul. This morning, a bomb placed on a bicycle killed nine people in what Reuters described as "the relatively peaceful Faryab province of northern Afghanistan". A provincial council member was among those killed. Reuters also reminds us this morning that there are over 500,000 refugees displaced within Afghanistan. Furthermore, at the midpoint of the surge, that total increased by 100,000 during the first half of 2011. The situation has not improved, as 400 more people are displaced daily.

"Isolated events" of green on blue killings appear to be picking up in pace. One American was killed on Friday in Kunar province and two British soldiers were killed on Saturday in Helmand province. These attacks bring the total to 16 isolated incidents for the year. The Department of Defense is now moving closer to adapting the language of the clumsily and retroactively classified report "A Crisis of Trust and Cultural Incompatibility" (pdf), now

saying ““We believe, again, that most of these [attacks] are acted out as an act of honor for most of them representing a grievance of some sort.” Rather than acknowledging that the grievances arise out of cultural insensitivities displayed by NATO forces, however, DoD is offering the grievance explanation as a way of saying the attacks do not stem from Taliban infiltration (although the release does mention that “less than half” of the attacks have such an influence).

Interestingly, it appears that there is another publication that can shed some light on internal DoD analyses of green on blue attacks. Conservative blogger Bob McCarty is on the trail of a publication titled “Inside the Wire Threats – Afghanistan”. He is about a month into an FOIA fight to get a copy of the publication from the Army.

There are two recent stories on Afghanistan that are not entirely bad news. AP has a story this morning from an interview with Agha Jan Motasim, who sits on the Taliban council. They quote Motasim: “I can tell you, though, that the majority of the Taliban and the Taliban leadership want a broad-based government for all Afghan people and an Islamic system like other Islamic countries.” Motasim tells AP that only a few hard-liners are responsible for the violence carried out by the Taliban. On Friday, the Washington Post informed us that on “more than a dozen” occasions since control of night raids was handed over to Afghanistan, Afghan commanders have refused to act, citing a concern for innocent civilians who would be nearby. It appears that there might actually be a healthy process working in this case:

“In the last two months, 14 to 16 [night] operations have been rejected by the Afghans,” said Gen. Sher Mohammad Karimi, the top Afghan army officer. “The U.S. has said, ‘This operation better be conducted. It’s a high-value target.’ Then my people said, ‘It’s a

high-value target. I agree with you. But there are so many civilian children and women [in the area].' "

Many of the rejected night operations are later conducted once civilians are no longer in the vicinity of the targets, Karimi said.

What a concept: waiting until no civilians are present to carry out a raid that is likely to be violent. Why couldn't US forces have come up with that idea on their own?