

WASHINGTON POST CONTRADICTS ISAF NARRATIVE ON AFGHAN TROOP CAPABILITIES

If you visit ISAF's website this morning, you are greeted with the yet another dose of ISAF's propaganda campaign aimed at building an image of the capability of Afghan forces that is far beyond reality. Today's headliner from ISAF is proudly titled "Afghan troops lead mission to secure Afghanistan's Highway 1". Unfortunately for ISAF, the Washington Post this morning is providing a cold dose of reality, as they have visited a post handed over to the Afghans less than six months ago. We learn from the Post that the image of Afghan forces being ready to assume control of this outpost was deeply flawed, and that with US support withdrawn, conditions have worsened steadily to a point nearing total dysfunction. Coming on the heels of last month's revelations by McClatchy on the overstatement of Afghan force capabilities, this report should serve as a wakeup call to the Obama administration, Congress and the Defense Department. We can rest assured, however, that those in power will pay no attention to this information that negates the dominant propaganda.

Here is the rosy prose from ISAF that sets the stage for describing the Afghan patrols:

Every day, thousands of cars, buses and highly-decorated trucks travel Afghanistan's Highway 1, the ring road that connects the country's largest and most populated cities.

The 300-mile stretch of road between Kabul and Kandahar is the main focus of the area's Afghan National Security Forces and Battle Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, Task

Force 173rd.

Trees, grass and fields of deep green provide the impression of rich farmland safe from the frequent violence along the road. However, the ANA and the men of Battle Company know the real story of small-arms fire, improvised explosive devices and ambushes that plague the area, leading them to conduct Operation Assaly II, July 23-27, 2012.

“We have some Taliban fighters that attempt to engage us and we also have a unique situation here, in that there are criminal networks that actively engage the fuel trucks and the supply trucks that come out of Kabul down to Kandahar,” said U.S. Army Capt. Colin Layne, commander of Battle Company and a native of Albuquerque, N.M. “So we have two groups of people out there that are firing weapons and setting off improvised explosive devices.

“Operation Assaly II is focused clearing patrols with the ANA going into villages and searching specific houses that could be associated with the Taliban,” he said.

We now get to Layne dancing around the fact that the ANA troops did not patrol on their own, but instead patrolled alongside US forces:

The ANA led the patrols during the operation, start to finish. Two units participated, the 4th Toli and Weapons Toli from the 3rd Kandak, 201st Corps. Tolis are the ANA version of a U.S. Army company.

“Much like we would send two U.S. platoons out, it’s an ANA platoon and an American platoon working in conjunction with each other, not three ANA with four of my guys or us just throwing them in a squad,” Layne said.

See how good the Afghan forces are? We can say that they sent an entire platoon out to patrol with one of our platoons (even though we really would just prefer to send two of our own platoons). And we can claim that the ANA platoon was even in the lead!

So what happens when ANA forces are given their own base? The Washington Post tells us, and it is not a pretty story:

After U.S. soldiers left Combat Outpost Conlon in February – packing up weapons, generators and portable toilets – their Afghan successors rushed to the American barracks and command center, eager to inspect their inheritance.

The Afghans renamed Conlon in Dari and scrawled Koran verses on the walls. The base was now theirs, and they were proud.

Months later, it's a dismal scene. The 240 Afghan soldiers are down to three hours of electricity a day. Almost all of their vehicles have broken down. They don't have the night-vision goggles needed to guard their base after sunset.

As the Taliban ramped up its attacks in eastern Afghanistan's Wardak province this spring, the Afghan soldiers here came to a painful conclusion: They were not ready to take on the fight alone. But it was too late – the Americans were not coming back.

American contractors also are not coming back:

"These men don't know how to fix these things when they break," Raziq said. "American contractors used to fix them for us, but they are gone."

So what does this portend as more and more responsibility is handed over to the Afghans? Afghan officials are not encouraged:

But Afghan officials worry that the problems plaguing Conlon could be replicated across the country as the U.S. military hands over authority, leaving 200,000 Afghan soldiers without the equipment or wherewithal to defeat a resilient enemy.

“The Americans left too early, and they left without giving us what we need,” said Lt. Col. Hamidullah Kohdamany, the battalion commander.

But if you ask ISAF about force readiness of the Afghans, all you will get is rosy propaganda.