

AFGHAN SITUATION SO BAD PROPAGANDISTS ONLY SPEAK OF “SOMETHING THAT COULD STILL RESEMBLE VICTORY”

Back in April, I ridiculed the Senate Armed Services Committee and especially ISAF Commander Joseph Dunford for continuing to hold on to the delusion that the US can still “win” in Afghanistan. As the situation in Afghanistan continues to get worse, a new wave of summer propaganda is being trotted out to combat the gore being produced by the Taliban’s summer offensive. One arm of the propaganda has been to tout an individual vigilante group that claims to have cleared a hundred villages of Taliban fighters in one small region. I’ll return to the problems with that a bit later, but the big propaganda blitz that is now hitting is so pitiful that I keep checking the URL of the report to make sure it wasn’t published by The Onion.

The feel-good war hawk think tank that is supposed to make the left love war, Center for a New American Security, just released a “report” that is meant to get the country to buck up and continue to support the war effort in Afghanistan. In order to get anyone to lend their name to this drivel, the group had to sink so far as to recruit serial “liberal” war apologist (and always wrong) Michael O’Hanlon. O’Hanlon was joined by John Allen, the former ISAF Commander who is so smart that he blamed green on blue killings on Ramadan fasting and former Undersecretary of Defense Michele Flournoy. But even this hand-picked group of people guaranteed to be in favor of any kind of violence that the US can wage could only muster half-hearted enthusiasm for “success” in

Afghanistan. From the report (pdf):

The United States can still achieve its strategic objectives in Afghanistan if it maintains and adequately resources its current policy course – and if Afghan partners in particular do their part, including by successfully navigating the shoals of their presidential election and transition in 2014. The core reasons for this judgment are the impressive progress of the Afghan security forces and the significant strides made in areas such as agriculture, health and education, combined with the promising pool of human capital that is increasingly influential within the country and that may be poised to gain greater influence in the country's future politics. However, the United States and other international security and development partners would risk snatching defeat from the jaws of something that could still resemble victory if, due to frustration with President Hamid Karzai or domestic budgetary pressures, they were to accelerate disengagement between now and 2014 and under-resource their commitment to Afghanistan after 2014.

Note that this group is carefully laying out several potential villains on whom to blame the upcoming failure. The primary warnings are that the US must not change its current "policy course" and it must continue to "adequately resource" the war plans. This is a clear warning to the Obama administration that if there is any small deviation from the military establishment's recommendations on the process for ending our engagement in Afghanistan, they will gladly pin their failures on the White House. This group also knows where their livelihood comes from, and so they provide their warning that success depends on keeping the money flowing at full force for all those

sucking at the government teat of war contracts. Anyone who dares to cut any bit of the funding for Afghanistan will also be in line to wear the failure.

And should the Obama administration continue to bow down to the military commanders “in the field” and “adequately resource” their plans, our group of war hawks have also set up the Afghans themselves as the final way to deflect blame from their own failed policy of permawar.

Even after setting up the future villains on whom they will pin the upcoming failure, though, our group of merry war mongers can only generate a partial guarantee of success, saying that by avoiding the pitfalls they have described, we can arrive at the nirvana of ... “something that could still resemble victory”. That’s right. We need to continue to put US troops in peril, hemorrhage billions of dollars a month and by our presence continue a situation in which innocent Afghan civilians are slaughtered as bystanders all so that our military industrial complex can continue to hum merrily along in a situation in which even the strongest war proponents see no remaining path to clear victory. I hope there is a special section of hell for people who promote such carnage just so their overlords can continue to wallow in riches.

Simple examples of the situation on the ground in Afghanistan come from looking at what took place Sunday and today in Paktia province. On Sunday, ISAF helicopters gunned down six Taliban militants in the Zurmat district. The next day, a suicide bomber targeting a US convoy killed at least 15, including ten schoolchildren, on the opposite end of this small province of only 2400 square miles.

But what of the vigilante discussed above? From the propaganda piece praising him, we do see this caveat:

But Logar officials express concern that his freelance exploits could inspire

other forms of vigilantism that could undermine the authority of Afghan security forces as coalition troops pull out over the next year.

"We are happy with what he has done, but we need people like him to come in under the established security framework and abide by the law," said Logar Gov.

Arsala Jamal, who was recently appointed by President Hamid Karzai, a longtime critic of private militias. "He might be effective in one place, but if there are 10 other Farhads, one of them might make a serious mistake."

How could a vigilante group of commandos make a "serious mistake"? Perhaps Arsala is referring to Nerkh district, where we are now up to fourteen dead bodies having been found from the original seventeen people who were disappeared by the commando group that prompted Karzai to expel US Special Forces from the district. As I touched on a couple of weeks ago, US denials of backing for this group should be taken with a grain of salt, as the backing could well come through covert CIA action.

The sad game of Washington finger-pointing is likely to continue throughout the summer and fall, all while lives are lost and cash is burned.