

US FAILURES IN AFGHANISTAN MULTIPLYING: NEGOTIATION IMPASSE, BOMB AT JIRGA SITE AND INCREASING VIOLENCE

It is difficult to imagine how the situation could be any worse for the US ahead of Thursday's opening of the loya jirga that was meant to give a stamp of approval to the Bilateral Security Agreement that would govern US troops remaining in Afghanistan after 2014. Both the New York Times and Reuters are reporting a sticking point (the issue is not a new one) in the negotiations that threatens to prevent an agreement being reached. Furthermore, a suicide bomber struck on Saturday at the site where the jirga is planned. The Taliban has claimed responsibility. Finally, the UN is reporting that despite as many as 12,000 Taliban fighters being killed, wounded or captured in the last year, violence in Afghanistan is at its highest point since the US surge.

The latest sticking point in the Bilateral Security Agreement (immunity for US troops also is a sticking point that is just as likely to derail approval by the jirga) addresses US troops entering Afghan homes without permission. This is at the heart of the operations of US death squads as Special Operations forces carry out night raids. From the Times:

Offstage, however, American raids continued to be a point of deadlock, according to the Afghan officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the negotiations were continuing. In recent days, the talks

have been led on the Afghan side by Mr. Karzai, and on the American side by Ambassador James B. Cunningham and the military coalition commander, Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr.

The Afghan officials said Mr. Karzai would not change his position before Thursday's loya jirga, to which 3,000 officials, elders and notables from around the country have been invited to ratify or reject the security agreement.

So even though these negotiations are being carried out at the highest level, it appears that a serious disagreement persists, just a few days short of the critical jirga. The article notes that some on the US side feel that this is a last-minute ploy by the Afghans, but considering that Karzai has opposed the raids from the beginning, it is hard to see how that argument has any merit. The article continues to show how this disagreement could scuttle the entire deal:

The Afghans said that if Washington did not give up its insistence that American troops be allowed to enter Afghan homes, they would present two versions of the disputed clause to the loya jirga: one with the American position and another with the Afghan government's position.

But one official acknowledged that the loya jirga would almost certainly reject the agreement with the American wording, which would make it all but impossible politically for Mr. Karzai to make a subsequent deal.

So not only does the US insistence on its right to carry out night raids risk the jirga voting against the Bilateral Security Agreement, it risks doing so in a way that prevents Karzai cutting any deal later to work around the failure.

Meanwhile, Karzai has approved the list of the 3000 or so who will attend the jirga, but the Taliban has illustrated its opposition to the meeting by bombing the site as final preparations were underway. Reports from Saturday put the death toll at six, but the ToloNews article on the attendance list places the death toll at 13 and notes that the attack occurred just hours after Karzai had urged the Taliban to attend the jirga and vote on the BSA.

Back when the US was starting Obama's surge into Afghanistan, the Taliban was estimated to have about 25,000 fighters in Afghanistan. The surge was so successful that now, nearly three full years since the surge began, the UN reports that in 2013 up to 12,000 Taliban have been killed, wounded or captured. Unless ISAF is practicing a catch and release program so that the same fighters are counted three or four times in these figures, it is clear that the surge was a complete failure in terms of reducing the size of the Taliban fighting force. But it is even worse than that:

Up to 12,000 Afghan Taliban fighters have been killed, wounded or captured this year, according to a United Nations report, which said violence in the war-torn nation was at a three-year high.

The surge not only didn't reduce violence in Afghanistan, it appears to have increased it.

So violence is at an three year high and negotiations are at an impasse on the agreement that would give US troops the ability to carry out the night raids that are the centerpiece of their strategy that has utterly failed to produce the desired result. The Times article on the impasse in negotiations mentions that billions of dollars of support for "training" Afghan forces (that I noted back in February was an open invitation to embezzlement) would no longer flow into the country if the BSA is not approved, but it is looking more and more likely that the money being dangled in front of Afghan

authorities will not prompt them to make an agreement that will be deeply unpopular with most Afghans. The military's failure in Afghanistan is continuing to mirror its failure in Iraq—all the way down to essentially being booted out of the country by an "ungrateful" government finally allowed a bit of sovereignty.