

DUNFORD DECLARES TALIBAN'S POLITICAL SPACE "SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED" ON DAY OF THEIR BIGGEST PROPAGANDA WIN

I often note how the US military, throughout its nearly 13 year quagmire in Afghanistan, continues to spout "we're winning" messages when it is clear that the entire effort has been an utter failure from the start. Juxtaposing a story in today's Washington Post with another in today's New York Times shows how the military's rosy statements are devoid of all connection to reality on the ground.

The Post story centers on the military, with Joseph Dunford in the lead, filling in more details on projected troop staffing levels in Afghanistan beyond the end of this year. The article ends with this gem:

U.S. and NATO officials described a Taliban force that has been greatly debilitated since the beginning of this year and pointed to the successful first round of Afghanistan's presidential election in April as a defeat for the militants. The top two vote-getters are competing in next week's runoff to succeed President Hamid Karzai, who has refused to sign the bilateral security and status-of-forces agreements.

"In the wake of the election, for the first time . . . the Taliban are on the defensive in the information space," the senior military official said. For 10 years, he said, the Taliban has had two messages – that the United States was occupying their country and ultimately would abandon it. In the wake of the

turnover of combat operations to Afghan national forces over the past year, and Obama's announcement for the future, those messages have less resonance, the official said. The coalition has made clear, the official said, that we "won't fall off the cliff at the end of 2014."

Dunford described "friction" within the Taliban and said that although the militants are still carrying out lethal attacks against Afghan forces, "if you compare the political space of the Taliban, it's significantly reduced."

Okay, then. The Taliban is "greatly debilitated", are "on the defensive in the information space" and are "significantly reduced" in "the political space". Yet, on the very day that Dunford and a "senior military officer" made such outrageous claims, the Taliban were happily scoring their biggest propaganda victory of the entire war in Afghanistan. From the Times:

The Taliban seem loose, almost offhand, on camera as they wait for the American Black Hawk to land. Two fighters walk their hostage, Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, out to American troops, greeting their enemies eye to eye as they quickly shake hands. They wave as the Americans retreat back to the chopper.

In their [viral video to the world](#) on Wednesday, framing dramatic images of their transaction with the United States with music, commentary and context, the Taliban scored their biggest hit yet after years of effort to improve their publicity machine – one bent on portraying them as the legitimate government of Afghanistan in exile.

Within hours of the video's release, the Taliban website where it was posted was overwhelmed with traffic and the page

hosting it crashed, according to Zabiullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the insurgents. The video has since been uploaded in dozens of different versions on YouTube.

It is the product of a Taliban propaganda effort that has grown increasingly savvy.

It's hard to imagine a better example of how the US has lost all credibility when it comes to describing conditions in Afghanistan. Granted, the statements in the Post stem initially from claims made around the election going "smoothly", but the sweeping statements quoted clearly are meant to apply to the Taliban's situation generally, not just regarding the election. But the Taliban even covered that:

And they suggested that they had purposefully held back on attacking civilians on election day in April, and that Afghans should trust the Taliban over a government being chosen by Western ways.

We can only wonder how Dunford and his associates will ever be able to top this one.