

# **AFTER STEARNS OUSTED BY YOHO, GAILLOT HAS OPPORTUNITY FOR DEMOCRATIC PICK-UP IN FL3**

The biggest national story emanating from the August 14 primaries held in several states was the upset by Tea Party political novice Ted Yoho of Cliff Stearns, a twelve term Republican incumbent. Florida Congressional districts were realigned this year and Cliff Stearns chose to move into Clay County in District 3 after he learned he would face another Republican incumbent if he remained at his long-standing Marion County address. Stearns' move into Clay County was not smooth, as he became embroiled in a scandal in which he was accused of trying to buy off another candidate there. Despite the fact that Stearns had placed himself at the heart of Republican attacks on Barack Obama and liberal causes by staging "hearings" into Solyndra and government funding of Planned Parenthood, he clearly was not seen as conservative enough by the small band of die-hard Tea Partiers in his new district.

Yoho's ousting of Stearns, however, especially when it is coupled with other national trends, does not mean that he will coast to a win in November. First, it should be noted that the new district is dramatically different from the one which Stearns won repeatedly. While Stearns enjoyed large Republican registration advantages during his career, the new District 3 in Florida is almost exactly 50-50 when it comes to Republicans and Democrats. Figures at the close of registration just prior to the primary (pdf) show there were 175,138 Republicans and 176,788 Democrats in the district. There were also 66,082 voters registered with no political affiliation and when all registered voters were counted, the district came to 431,601 voters.

For his surprising victory, Yoho received a total of only 22,273 votes. That was only 34.4% of the Republican votes cast. Yes, because Florida's primaries were structured this year to not have runoffs, Yoho won even though 65.6% of Republicans who voted cast votes against him instead of for him. That also means that only 12.7% of the district's registered Republicans (and only 5.2% of its registered voters) voted for Yoho. It seems possible from at least some of the coverage of this race to believe that the Tea Party Republicans were the most engaged during the primary. If the Tea Party was more engaged than other factions of the Republican party for the primary, then Yoho faces the twin challenges of bringing the other 65% of his party into his favor and stimulating Republican turnout in a district which is evenly split between the major parties.

Larger national trends are likely to have a huge impact on that second question of turnout. When even Dana Milbank is beginning to believe that Republicans' outrageous positions and actions might provoke divine intervention (but Milbank completely missed that Isaac has been predicted to hit Gitmo on the way to the Republican convention in Tampa), the nation seems to be teetering on the edge of realizing just how crazed extreme Republican positions are. Especially important here is the continued candidacy of Todd Akin, who could force national attention onto the depravity of banning abortions even in the case of rape or incest. Also to be factored in is that Yoho now has the added burden of a Sarah Palin endorsement.

Yoho fits perfectly within the crazed realm of Tea Party Republican extremists. On his website he rails against socialism, endorses Ryan's Medicare plan, promotes his anti-abortion position, advocates "Drill, Baby, Drill" even though tourism in the Panhandle has barely recovered from the BP spill and even throws his support to the Fair Tax initiative.

Democratic challenger J.R. Gaillot, while facing

a very large uphill battle on name recognition after Yoho's victory garnered national attention, seems poised to take advantage of some of these factors which could weigh down Republicans in November. His positions are far from extreme: he is pro-choice, favors strengthening Social Security and Medicare and favors reform of Wall Street. He also is a strong advocate for equal opportunities for women and the Lilly Ledbetter Act. Despite these entirely reasonable positions, Gaillot chose to define himself as a "Blue Dog/ Old School Democrat" on Twitter (Gaillot followed me this morning and re-tweeted some of my tweets from election night, and that served to remind me that I had planned to write this post last week). While that won't endear him to me and perhaps many of my 58,619 fellow Democrats here in the more liberal Alachua County which is home to the University of Florida, it may serve him well with the rest of the more rural Democrats and voters with no party affiliation in the rest of the district.

On the surface, Gaillot also seems more suited to a Congressional position, as he is the son of a life-long diplomat and speaks several languages. That seems to have prepared him for Washington a bit better than Yoho's previous profession that required him to wear gloves that go to the shoulder, although it wouldn't surprise me for Yoho to follow his "pigs at the trough" ad with one where he uses those gloves to "clean up" Washington.

---

## **NATO: "AFGHANISTAN**

# **WILL NOT UNRAVEL AFTER WITHDRAWAL” — PROBABLY BECAUSE IT’S UNRAVELING NOW**

The situation in Afghanistan is falling apart so quickly and so dramatically that a senior NATO civilian official took it upon himself today to put out an assurance that Afghanistan will not unravel after NATO withdraws its security forces. One can only infer from this statement that NATO can make this assurance because the unraveling is already underway and will be complete prior to the late 2014 date for full withdrawal.

Consider the array of ways in which Afghanistan has forged its way into the news cycle in the last 24 hours at a time when “legitimate rape” should have edged out all other issues. President Obama made an “unscheduled” appearance in the White House Briefing Room yesterday, and Jake Tapper was able to force Obama onto the record on the issue of rapidly escalating green on blue attacks. Yesterday’s brilliant idea from the Defense Department on stemming the tide of green on blue attacks was to claim that Afghanistan now will spy on its own troops to prevent the attacks. Robert Caruso provided the best response to this revelation on Twitter: “riiiiiiiiiiiight.” Perhaps the most stunning development, though, is that while General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, was in Kabul for emergency meetings on the green on blue issue, insurgents were able to get close enough to Bagram Air Base to damage his plane (which was unoccupied at the time) in a rocket attack.

I have long maintained that the principal failure in the coalition’s plans for Afghanistan is the abject failure of David Petraeus’ training program that he started in Iraq and moved to Afghanistan. The figure above is taken

from the most recent DoD "Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan" (pdf). The bar graph and the figures below it (click on the image for a slightly larger view) show us figures for Afghanistan's National Army. If we consider the twelve month period from ~~March~~ April 2011 to ~~April~~ March 2012, we see that the size of the ANA grew from 164,003 to 194,455. However, in order to achieve that growth, it was necessary to recruit a total of 79,501 troops during that time. Such massive recruiting was necessary because the same twelve month period saw attrition of 48,577 troops. Compared to the force size at the end of this period, that is an attrition rate of 25% (actually 24.98%) for the year.

It simply does not make sense to call the ANA a "combat ready" force that can take the lead on security any time in the foreseeable future when it has an annual attrition rate of 25%. Such a high rate of turnover in the force means that the Afghan population from which the force is drawn does not ~~ascribe~~ subscribe to the idea of a national army. The entire NATO "mission" of preparing Afghan security forces to take responsibility for security is built on a fable that the Afghan people do not support. Green on blue attacks may be dominating the news today, but the failure of the people of Afghanistan to get behind the concept of a national army is what will ultimately end the current NATO strategy.

---

## **ON THE QUESTIONS OF DRONES, FIRST RESPONDERS AND**

# COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT IN PAKISTAN

Yesterday evening, I took the ill-advised step of jumping into an already ongoing Twitter discussion with Professor Christine Fair on the topic of drones in Pakistan. My jumping in was ill-advised on two fronts: I had not seen the comments to which Fair was responding, but, more importantly, I can't come close to the experience, language skills and overall knowledge Fair brings to the issues of South Asia.

My first entry into the discussion was to respond to a statement from Fair in which she said that she supports drones and does not believe their use to be collective punishment. I asked whether the use of drones to attack first responders and mourners in Pakistan qualified as collective punishment and in a follow-up provided a link to the work by Chris Woods and Christina Lamb at The Bureau of Investigative Journalism where they document such attacks. Fair's response was to point out that Woods and Lamb have not been to FATA and that the Pakistani press is heavily manipulated. She referred me to a piece she wrote for Monkey Cage for elaboration on the points she was making.

It appears that this is the post Fair was asking that I read. Before diving into it, I should point out that it is about a year old and was written primarily in response to earlier work by Woods and Lamb. For fairness, I should also point out that from the context of other tweets later in the evening, Fair was a passenger in a car during our conversation and so would have been working with fewer resources at hand than if at home and using a computer.

With that as prologue, here is Fair's dissection of the reliance on press reports for analysis of drone attacks in Pakistan's tribal areas (BIJ is

The Bureau of Investigative Journalism and NAF is the New America Foundation, where Peter Bergen and others have produced another drone strike database):

Their methodologies and data are fundamental weaknesses, although neither seem aware of this.

Both NAF and BIJ claim that they have assembled a database which covers each individual strike in Pakistan in detail. Unfortunately, both efforts fundamentally rely upon Pakistani press reports of drone attacks. Both claim that they use non-Pakistani media reports as well. For example the BIJ explains in their **methodology discussion** that the “...the most comprehensive information on casualties lies in the thousands of press reports of drone strikes filed by reputable national and international media since 2004. Most reports are filed within a day or two of an attack. Sometimes relevant reports can be filed weeks – even years – after the initial strike. We identify our sources at all times, and provide a direct link to the material where possible.”

/snip/

While these methodologies at first blush appear robust, they don't account for a simple fact that non-Pakistani reports are all drawing from the *same sources: Pakistani media accunts* [sic]. How can they not when journalists, especially *foreign journalists*, cannot enter Pakistan's tribal areas? Unfortunately, Pakistani media reports are not likely to be accurate in any measure and subject to manipulation and outright planting of accounts by the ISI (Pakistan's intelligence agency) and the Pakistani Taliban and affiliated militant outfits.

The more recent report from Woods and Lamb (in which the first responder accusations are made), however, appears to have taken steps to address at least a portion of the shortcomings Fair has pointed out. Since it is not safe for foreign journalists to enter the tribal areas, Woods and Lamb engaged a group of local researchers to carry out interviews on their behalf:

But research by the Bureau has found that since Obama took office three years ago, between 282 and 535 civilians have been credibly reported as killed including more than 60 children. A three month investigation including **eye witness reports** has found evidence that at least 50 civilians were killed in follow-up strikes when they had gone to help victims. More than 20 civilians have also been attacked in deliberate strikes on funerals and mourners. The tactics have been condemned by leading legal experts.

/snip/

For the Americans the attack was a success. A surprise tactic had resulted in the deaths of many Taliban. But locals say that six ordinary villagers also died that day, **identified by Bureau field researchers** as Sabir, Ikram, Mohib, Zahid, Mashal and Syed Noor (most people in the area use only one name).

[emphasis added]

Fair's own analysis, however, seems to presage the targeting of first responders:

I believe that greater transparency about the drones will likely be exculpatory and actually extend the longevity of the drone program. From my own research, drone attacks are more complex than ordinary air strikes. Drone strikes involve lawyers, intelligence officials, actual pilots and others to



assess the nature of the target, establish a pattern of life to avoid civilian casualties, and ultimately to authorize or even call off a strike. Like conventional strikes, they are conducted by actual air force pilots. Unlike conventional air strikes, analysts become familiar with their would-be victims and have to watch the video footage of the strike and assess its outcome. Analysis of such footage also leads to information about other potential targets as affiliated militants often rush to the scene. (Indeed, the United States likely learned this from terrorists who pioneered the tactic of attacking at one site and waiting for first responders to appear only to strike again to maximize casualties.) It is a little known fact that people involved in this program are also vulnerable to post-traumatic stress disorder.

I will assume for the sake of this argument that there is no disputing that follow-on drone strikes occur at the site of initial strikes. Fair clearly understands that the terrorist practice of secondary strikes to attack first responders is particularly heinous. She claims that drone operators are watching the aftermath of strikes to identify additional targets among the “affiliated militants” who “rush to the scene”. At this point, however, she must rely on the same sort of “dependent variable bias” of which she accuses The Bureau of Investigative Journalism and the New America Foundation. Fair must rely on government assurances—which can’t be independently verified and for which the government has strong incentive to hide any evidence of wrongdoing—that follow-on strikes take place only when “affiliated militants” and not when innocent neighbors or official rescue personnel come to the scene of an initial strike. Otherwise, one can’t escape the conclusion that the US has decided that at least

some collateral damage to rescuers is an acceptable price to pay when new targets arrive at the scene of an initial drone strike. How far down the slippery slope toward outright terrorism—and collective punishment—is such a conclusion?

---

## **POOR RESPONSES BY US MILITARY, PRESS TO INCREASED GREEN ON BLUE ATTACKS**

Yesterday, I noted the dramatic increase recently in green on blue attacks in Afghanistan, where Afghan security personnel turn their weapons on NATO forces. This disturbing development clearly has rattled both the US military and the press, because their responses have been entirely bungled.

Late yesterday, we learned from CNN that all NATO troops will now be required to carry loaded weapons at all times, even while on their bases:

The uptick in attacks by Afghan security forces against coalition troops has hit home, with all troops at NATO headquarters and all bases across Afghanistan now ordered to carry loaded weapons around the clock, CNN learned Friday.

Gen. John Allen, the NATO commander in Afghanistan, ordered the move, according to a U.S. official with direct knowledge of the orders. The order, made in recent days, was divulged amid two more so-called green-on-blue or insider attacks Friday.

This move sets the stage for accidental friendly fire deaths (blue on blue in this case) set off by an unexpected noise. If I were an enlisted US soldier with brown skin and black hair, you can bet I'd wear my uniform 24/7 on the base and be ready to dive for the floor quickly when the bullets start flying.

NATO official posturing on the attacks is at least changing slightly. Despite increasing documentation of green on blue killings and outright defections by Afghan forces, NATO now grudgingly admits some infiltration is occurring, but their estimate seems to me to be a serious lowball:

NATO says the majority of attacks by Afghan security forces against coalition troops are driven primarily by personal grievances rather than an infiltration by insurgents.

"Some 10% we know are related to the insurgency," Brig. Gen. Gunter Katz, a spokesman for the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, said late Friday.

Perhaps the most stunning failure of all, though, in the surge of coverage of increased green on blue (I still can't get completely to the new official-speak of "insider") attacks, is this morning's brainless Washington Post article looking "behind the scenes" at an attack from last week. The Post opens by laying out a number of facts surrounding the attack:

The teenage assailant who killed three Marines last week on a U.S. military base in southern Afghanistan had easy access to the weapons arsenal of the Afghan police. He was in near-constant contact with U.S. troops, often when they were without their guns and body armor.

But although Aynoddin, 15, lived among American and Afghan security forces, he

was not a soldier or a police officer. He had never been vetted. According to U.S. and Afghan officials, his role on base was hardly formal: He was the unpaid, underage personal assistant of the district police chief.

Officials would later learn that the quiet, willowy boy was also working for the insurgency.

Nowhere in the article, however, does the Post point out that it is the US, and specifically the “advisors” whom the infiltrator targeted, who had been responsible for training the Afghan security forces the youth infiltrated. Even when the article points out the egregious breach of security that allowed the local police chief to bring his boy toy onto the base, the Post fails to note that had the Afghan forces been properly trained, this never would have happened:

Aynoddin should never have been on the base in the first place, because Afghan and U.S. security standards would not have allowed it. But those standards are often violated – especially by the country’s nascent police force.

Instead, the Post allows a US military spokesman to blame the very Afghan leaders the US was supposed to have trained:

“We have to have better leadership out of our Afghan leaders. There are some things they need to step up to the plate and do now better than they’ve done,” said Marine Maj. Gen. Charles M. Gurganus, the top U.S. commander in southwestern Afghanistan. “They need to be looking in the eyes of their subordinate commanders and holding them accountable for these people who are in and out of police stations.”

With such utterly failed training of Afghan

security forces and willful denying of reality by US military leaders, the current totals of 28 (or 31, depending on the news source) green on blue attacks with 38 deaths already this year can be expected to continue their rapid rise.

I hold out no hope that the press will realize the large role played by the failure to train Afghan security forces in these tragedies. As I have pointed out multiple times, the press is happy to tout the military's claims of success in training both in Iraq and Afghanistan. When that happens, David Petraeus is often painted as the hero in charge of training. However, training failures previously have gone unattributed and now have moved on to being overlooked entirely. Considering that David Petraeus now heads the CIA, this paragraph from near the end of the Post article stands out:

Since the Garmsir incident, top U.S. commanders in Afghanistan and defense officials in Washington have held several meetings to discuss what might be done to prevent insider attacks from occurring, according to senior defense officials. Commanders have agreed to add a counterintelligence specialist at the battalion level to help detect Taliban infiltrators. They are also considering ways to improve the Afghan vetting process.

Will Petraeus' CIA help train the counterintelligence specialists that are now needed because his once-vaunted training of Afghan forces has fallen so woefully short?

---

## **GREEN ON BLUE**

# (INSIDER) KILLINGS TOO COMMON FOR REUTERS HEADLINES

The rapidly increasing trend of green on blue (or, in new ISAF-speak, insider) killings has become so common that the killings are no longer headline news for at least one news outlet. Today's Reuters dispatch from Afghanistan takes its headline from the fact that Mullah Omar has issued a message in conjunction with Eid al-Fitr. Reuters leads with Omar calling for fewer civilian deaths in Taliban attacks, but in his message, Omar also touts that the Taliban has successfully infiltrated Afghan forces to carry out green on blue attacks. It is not until the tenth paragraph of the story that we learn that two more US trainers were killed by an Afghan policeman today. By contrast, an AP story carried by the Washington Post draws its headline from the killings and then moves on to mention the Mullah Omar message later. The New York Times has nothing as of this writing on either the killings or the Mullah Omar message.

From the AP story in the Post:

A member of the Afghan security forces killed two U.S. troops Friday morning – the most recent in a string of insider attacks that threaten to undermine U.S.-Afghan military relations.

An officer in the Afghan Local Police shot and killed two Americans in Farah province during a training exercise on an Afghan base, according to Abdul Rahman, a spokesman for the provincial governor.

U.S. military officials confirmed the two deaths. The assassin was shot and killed, according to a statement.

Reuters allows Defense Secretary Leon Panetta

and other military officials to continue their claim that infiltration is not a significant problem:

“Mujahideen have cleverly infiltrated in the ranks of the enemy according to the plan given to them last year,” he [Omar] said. “They are able to (safely) enter bases, offices and intelligence centers of the enemy. Then, they easily carry out decisive and coordinated attacks.”

So called green-on-blue shootings, which NATO-led forces recently began calling “insider incidents”, have so far this year have accounted for 13 percent of foreign troop deaths, according to the Long War Journal website.

The coalition has said most were the result of stress or personal disagreements between NATO mentors and Afghan police or soldiers, rather than insurgent infiltration.

But U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta acknowledged this week that the Taliban had been behind at least some of them, but said they did not “reflect any kind of broad pattern”.

“The reality is, the Taliban has not been able to regain any territory lost, so they’re resorting to these kinds of attacks to create havoc,” Panetta told reporters.

It is particularly insidious that US spokesmen continue to push the “personal disagreement” approach. When a report on fratricide in June of 2011 suggested that deep cultural differences that are not addressed in the training of US troops contributed to green on blue killings, the US responded by retroactively classifying the report. In trying to hide the report, it was clear that the military was trying to hide behind an explanation of personal grievances leading to the killings. Now that the distrust

of coalition forces has gone so far that the Taliban can exploit it to achieve infiltration of Afghan forces, the US has to go all the way to the Defense Secretary to continue using this same deflection from the truth while clinging to the personal disagreement cover story.

The US commander of troops in Afghanistan, General John Allen, found it necessary to respond to Omar's message. With regard to the question of infiltration, it appears that Allen is no longer claiming it is not significant:

Omar also says his thugs have infiltrated the ranks of Afghanistan's legitimate armed forces. The pride of the Afghan people has been smeared by killers who pose as Soldiers and police, yet they represent the worst of humanity. Today, the Afghan Army and National Police are trying to build a better future for the Afghan people, yet Omar wants to stop these efforts. Coalition forces are here to help the people; we have no other reason for being here other than to make Afghanistan a stable country, founded on educated and healthy citizens.

Allen's message might as well paraphrase the old Ronald Reagan smear "We're from the United States military and we're here to help." If the US is reduced to repeating that we are there to help, it seems to me that the battle for hearts and minds is over and the US did not win.

---

## **CHANGING VOTERS TO NEW PRECINCTS WITH**



# **POOR NOTIFICATION: NEW VOTE SUPPRESSION TACTIC IN FLORIDA?**

Today is primary day in Florida. It is being held on the earliest date in the past 40 years since Florida is hosting the Republican National Convention later this month. While there has been much attention paid to Rick Scott's infamous voter purge that has prompted legal action from the Justice Department, today I encountered a much more insidious situation that could lead to many more people not voting in November.

I have resided at my current address since 2004 and have voted at a wonderful little country church whose building dates back to 1886 (there is music on autoplay at this link). But when my wife and I stopped by to vote on our way to lunch today, we got quite a surprise. The poll workers could not find either one of us on the voter list. After we joked a bit about being included in the purge because of my left wing blogging, the clerk picked up the phone to speak with the Alachua County Supervisor of Elections office to seek an answer for us. While she was still on the phone seeking information, another voter who came in after us also found that he was not listed on the voter roll.

It turns out that we have been switched to another polling place that is only a few blocks away from where we have voted for the past eight years. In order to drive from our house to our new polling place, we must drive past the old one. The election workers insisted that voters who were moved from one precinct to another were informed, but neither my wife nor I could recall seeing any such notification.

We dutifully went to the new polling place and voted. When I got back from lunch, I went

through the spots in our house where mail might have accumulated and found the “notification” that had been sent. From the photo above, it is very easy to see how these notifications (there was one for each of the three registered voters in our household) had been set aside for holding since on first glance it looks only like a standard form for ordering an absentee ballot. Our travel plans did not call for us to be away today, so these forms had been set aside in case our plans changed.

Opening my mailer today, I found that the “Voter Information Card” referenced on the outside of the mailer was actually a new version of what I call my voter registration card. Nowhere on this mailer, either on the outside or inside, does it mention for voters to look carefully to determine whether their precincts have changed. My wife and I inexplicably have been moved from precinct 18 to precinct 58 and the only way to know that is to look at the small entry on the Voter Information Card.

Because I have a car and I don’t work on a time clock, I was able to work my way through this mix-up with only a few minutes lost and minor aggravation. Well, I also did stop to fill out a satisfaction survey to let the Supervisor of Elections know that I felt they handled this transition very poorly. It also helped that I did this during the low-turnout primary rather than November’s general election.

How many people will be disenfranchised in Florida this November because their precincts have changed? How will people who rely on bus transportation to their polling places deal with such a change? Will they have time to go to a new site if they are working on Election Day? The early voting period was shortened from two weeks to eight days this year in another move by Florida Republicans to make it harder for working people to vote and is another factor in today’s expected low turnout.

Oh, and just in case you clicked on the link to the Alachua County Supervisor of Elections,

their link for "Information on Polling Place Changes" is not about people moving from one precinct to another. It is about changes to the voting sites themselves.

**Update:** Oh my. Look what I missed in the local paper while I was on vacation last week. The article bears the headline "Redrawn precincts could create confusion, groups say" and reads in part:

Leaders of the local NAACP and other organizations said Wednesday that new voting precincts could lead to confusion on election day and urged residents to learn their new polling place or to cast ballots early.

About six precincts in areas with a predominately black population are affected. In some cases, precincts have been eliminated entirely. In others, the redrawn lines have placed voters in new precincts.

Leaders believe the changes could lead to frustration on Aug. 14 if voters show up at their former polling place.

"This could be very dispiriting," said Cynthia Chestnut, a former state representative and former Alachua County commissioner. "It's incumbent on the supervisor of elections to mount a very spirited public education campaign from this day forward."

The changes were made as part of redistricting that occurs every 10 years with new census data. Deputy election supervisor Will Boyett said the local changes were made based on new boundaries set by the state.

This would seem to confirm my worst fears about what is going on. It is especially troubling the boundaries were set by the state. That implies

to me that the changes were indeed enacted in a way to suppress minority voting as much as possible.

---

## **NATIONAL SICKNESS: NO DEBATE ALLOWED ON CIVILIANS OWNING WEAPONS OF WAR**

Three fatal mass shootings within three weeks should be providing an opportunity for a national conversation on civilians having easy access to semiautomatic weapons and high capacity clips that are designed for use in war. Two of the killers in these cases were known by family and/or medical personnel to be dealing with mental issues while the third had generated at least some attention from both government and private groups that monitor groups harboring violent extreme racist views. Despite these clear warning signs in the shooters' backgrounds, all three legally purchased and possessed their weapons that were designed for wartime use.

Instead of the nation assessing what can be done to prevent weapons designed solely for killing large numbers of people getting into the hands of those who are most likely to put them to that use, we have major players in our society fanning some of the issues that contribute to the problem. Last week, Congressman Joe Walsh delivered a speech casting Muslims as dangerous extremists bent on killing:

“One thing I’m sure of is that there are people in this country – **there is a radical strain of Islam in this country -- it’s not just over there -- trying to kill Americans every week. It is a real**

threat, and it is a threat that is much more at home now than it was after 9/11," Walsh said.

Walsh went on to claim that radical Islam had found its way into the Chicago suburbs, including some that he represents.

**"It's here. It's in Elk Grove. It's in Addison. It's in Elgin. It's here,"** he said.

Just a few days later, a man was arrested in nearby Morton Grove for firing at a mosque while people were inside praying. Fortunately, this time the shooter only used a pellet gun instead of a weapon of war, which could have led to yet another disaster.

Joe Walsh and other extremists in Congress like Michele Bachmann and Steve King happily spout their venom that fires up racists, but we also learned this week that the man behind the 2009 Department of Homeland Security report on right wing extremist groups capable of violence had his report repudiated and his team dissolved. He subsequently left DHS. Both Democracy Now and Danger Room have chronicled Johnson's plight. Sadly, Johnson's work was quite accurate when it came to the shooting at the Sikh temple. From Spencer Ackerman at Danger Room:

Daryl Johnson had a sinking feeling when he started seeing TV reports on Sunday about a shooting in a Wisconsin temple. "I told my wife, 'This is likely a hate crime perpetrated by a white supremacist who may have had military experience,'" Johnson recalls.

It was anything but a lucky guess on Johnson's part. He spent 15 years studying domestic terrorist groups – particularly white supremacists and neo-Nazis – as a government counterterrorism analyst, the last six of them at the Department of Homeland Security. There,

he even homebrewed his own database on far-right extremist groups on an Oracle platform, allowing his analysts to compile and sift reporting in the media and other law-enforcement agencies on radical and potentially violent groups.

But Johnson's career took an unexpected turn in 2009, when an analysis he wrote on the rise of "Right-Wing Extremism" (.pdf) sparked a political controversy. Under pressure from conservatives, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) repudiated Johnson's paper – an especially bitter pill for him to swallow now that Wade Michael Page, a suspected white supremacist, killed at least six people at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. For Johnson, the shooting was a reminder that the government's counterterrorism efforts are almost exclusively focused on al-Qaida, even as non-Islamist groups threaten Americans domestically.

"DHS is scoffing at the mission of doing domestic counterterrorism, as is Congress," Johnson tells Danger Room. "There've been no hearings about the rising white supremacist threat, but there's been a long list of attacks over the last few years. But they still hold hearings about Muslim extremism. It's out of balance." But even if that balance was reset, he concedes, that doesn't necessarily mean the feds could have found Page before Sunday's rampage.

Despite the clear association of semiautomatic weapons and high capacity clips with the recent mass killings, conventional political wisdom still says that no real action will be taken to control them. The myth that the NRA can defeat any pro-gun control candidate and that the loss of Congress by the Democrats in 1994 was due to the automatic weapon ban means that very few politicians have the courage to advocate new

controls.

Another barrier to bringing back controls is that the original ban is described as not being effective. But that lack of effectiveness very likely was due to how incomplete a measure it was:

The expiration Monday of a 10-year federal ban on assault weapons means firearms like AK-47s, Uzis and TEC-9s can now be legally bought – a development that has critics upset and gun owners pleased.

The 1994 ban, signed by then President Clinton, outlawed 19 types of military-style assault weapons. A clause directed that the ban expire unless Congress specifically reauthorized it, which it did not.

Studies done by pro- and anti-gun groups as well as the Justice Department show conflicting results on whether the ban helped reduce crime. Loopholes allowed manufacturers to keep many weapons on the market simply by changing their names or altering some of their features or accessories.

High capacity clips were also included in the 1994 ban. Here is how gun advocates celebrated the end of the ban. From the same article:

Under the 1994 ban, the maximum capacity of a magazine was set at 10 rounds. That sent the price of high-capacity magazines through the roof, Davis said, even though magazines manufactured before the ban were protected by a “grandfather” provision and could still be sold.

Now, some gun manufacturers are planning to give away high-capacity magazines as bonuses for buying their weapons. Sales of formerly banned gun accessories, such

as flash suppressors and folding stocks, are also expected to take off.

No, we can't have a national discussion on whether there is a way to take weapons designed for war off of the consumer market, even when we have a disturbing uptick in their designed use to kill large numbers of people. Instead, we get a new television show that glorifies war and could make even more people want the weapons of war in their households.

---

## **AFGHANISTAN WAR: NOW WITH EVEN MORE SUCKITUDE**

Just because I happened to read one post and point out a small error before going on a beach walk, Marcy had a hard time believing I really did go on vacation last week. While I was gone, one of the topics I usually track carefully went completely out of control. The rate of green on blue attacks in Afghanistan spiked dramatically, with today's nonfatal attack bringing the total to five attacks in the past week:

An Afghan policeman opened fire on NATO forces and Afghan soldiers Monday morning in the fifth apparent attack in a week by Afghan security forces on their international partners. The U.S.-led military coalition says none of its service members were killed.

/snip/

At least seven American service members have been killed in the past week by either their Afghan counterparts or attackers wearing their uniforms.



Notably, NATO is unable to deviate from its current script of claiming the attacks are all “isolated incidents” and that we should consider just how large the Afghan forces are becoming due to our superior recruiting and training:

Coalition officials say a few rogue policemen and soldiers should not taint the overall integrity of the Afghan security forces and that the attacks have not impeded plans to hand over security to Afghan forces, which will be 352,000 strong in a few months.

But the same AP article doesn't seem to buy the NATO spin:

A recent rash of “green-on-blue” attacks, in which Afghan security forces or attackers wearing their uniforms turn their guns on the coalition troops training them, has raised worries about a deterioration of trust between the two sides as well as the quality of the Afghan police and soldiers who will take over full security responsibility for fighting the Taliban when most international troops leave by the end of 2014. It also raises renewed worry that insurgents may be infiltrating the Afghan army and police despite heightened screening.

When AP wire stories begin to describe the problems with Afghan force training in terms of “deterioration of trust” and express concerns about the “quality of Afghan police and soldiers” while also pointing out infiltration by insurgents, it is clear that the Obama administration and NATO are losing their propaganda campaign in which they continue to insist that everything is just fine in Afghanistan and that progress toward the hand-off of security responsibility in 2014 is on schedule.

But the spike in green on blue attacks isn't the only bad news in Afghanistan. In addition to attacking NATO forces, infiltrators in the Afghan police force are killing fellow policemen and defecting in large groups. Also, local officials in Afghanistan continue to be targeted in attacks.

### **Slightly Better News**

On another front, more evidence is accumulating on improved relations and information sharing between the US intelligence community and Pakistan's ISI. As I noted while ISI head Zaheer ul-Islam was in Washington for meetings, a Haqqani network plot was disrupted in Kabul. Yesterday, another attack in Kabul was disrupted. This time, the perpetrators are not described as Haqqani network members but there is a Pakistan connection:

Afghan security forces foiled an insurgent plot to attack Afghanistan's parliament and the home of one of the country's leaders, Afghan officials said Sunday.

Four Afghans and a Pakistani were arrested in central Kabul late Saturday by officers from Afghanistan's intelligence service, the National Directorate of Security, together with a large amount of weapons and ammunition and some Afghan army uniforms, according to an NDS statement.

/snip/

The NDS statement said that Pakistani ID cards and money as well as Pakistani phone numbers were also found during the raid. The statement said that this demonstrated the plotters' links "with terrorists on the other side of the border" – a reference to Pakistan, which some Afghan and coalition officials have accused of sheltering and supporting insurgents.

This disrupted attack sounds very similar to the one disrupted while ul-Islam was in the US, suggesting to me that perhaps the ISI is sharing information on actions in Afghanistan being carried out by groups within Pakistan.

But there is an even stronger piece of evidence that US intelligence and the ISI are getting along much better. I had predicted that if the meetings in Washington went badly, there would be a poorly targeted drone strike in Pakistan's tribal area shortly after the meetings broke up, perhaps even while ul-Islam was in transit back to Pakistan, as happened at least once to ul-Islam's predecessor, Ahmed Shuja Pasha. But instead of a poorly targeted drone attack, there have been no drone attacks since the meetings that were carried out August 1-3. According to the database maintained by The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, the most recent drone strike in Pakistan was July 29, two days before the Washington meetings started. Perhaps there really is an understanding that Pakistan can reduce US drone attacks inside Pakistan by sharing intelligence on insurgents crossing from Pakistan into Afghanistan.

---

## **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.

---

## **DID PAKISTAN PROVIDE INTELLIGENCE AGAINST HAQQANI NETWORK?**

As I mentioned on Tuesday, the head of Pakistan's spy agency is in the US for meetings with the CIA and other US intelligence interests. Those meetings started yesterday and appear to be slated to go through tomorrow. I had predicted that if the meetings, and particularly the discussions regarding the Haqqani network, don't go well, we will see a poorly targeted drone attack in Pakistan's tribal area within the first day or two after the meetings conclude. Developments today, however, point in the opposite direction, with it looking as though perhaps the ISI has decided to share intelligence on the Haqqani network.

There is word today out of Kabul that a pre-dawn raid has disrupted plans for a major attack by the Haqqani network. Wire services are attributing the raid to Afghan security forces, but as I have pointed out more than once, there is a definite push by the US to over-state the capabilities of Afghan forces so that the best possible spin can be kept on US plans to withdraw from Afghanistan. It seems likely that the US had a large role in the raid but is pushing the story that Afghan forces pulled it off on their own.

Here is the Reuters story on the raid:

Afghan security forces killed five insurgents and wounded one during a pre-dawn raid in Kabul on Thursday, with authorities saying they had thwarted a mass attack and captured intelligence

pointing to the militant Haqqani network.

Soldiers from Afghanistan's spy agency, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), launched the raid just after midnight, entering a single-story house compound on the fringes of Kabul which the insurgents were using as a base.

"They planned mass attacks in different parts of Kabul disguised in burqas," the NDS said in a statement, referring to the head-to-toe covering worn by many Afghan women and sometimes used by insurgents to evade detection.

With that raid occurring in the very early hours of this morning, statements coming out of the meeting later this morning between the US commander in Afghanistan, General John Allen, and Pakistan's army chief, Ashfaq Kayani, take on added significance. From the Express Tribune:

The US commander in Afghanistan said Thursday that "significant progress" was being made in improving cooperation with Pakistan, after his first visit since Islamabad ended a blockade on Nato supplies.

The talks between General John Allen and General Ashfaq Kayani focused on improving security along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and cooperation between Afghan, Pakistani and Nato troops, said a statement released by both sides.

"I look forward to these visits and am pleased with the upward spiral in our relationship they represent," Allen said.

"We are making significant progress toward building a partnership that is enduring, strategic, carefully defined, and that enhances the security and



prosperity of the region.”

A bit later in the article we have this:

US officials have called repeatedly on Pakistan to move against the Haqqani network whose leaders are based on Pakistan’s side of the border.

Did the ISI provide information that allowed the Haqqani network team in Kabul to be found? That would certainly explain the optimism that Allen is voicing after today’s meeting. However, obtaining intelligence on a forward operating team is nothing compared to the real goal the US wants, which is actionable intelligence on the leaders of the Haqqani network. It still seems very unlikely the ISI would hand over information on the Haqqani leaders, so perhaps their “compromise” position will be rein in the network and prevent them from carrying out attacks in Afghanistan until after the US departs. Such a position by the ISI might even achieve their goal of reducing drone strikes in the tribal regions by the US if it becomes clear that Haqqani network forays into Afghanistan have been reduced dramatically.