

Afghanistan's Failure Is Good For Beltway Careers

By Steve Hynd, on December 11th, 2012

The New York Times today has a piece on the latest Pentagon report on Afghanistan. Violence is higher than it was two years ago, before the surge, Afghan training has been an abysmal failure with only a single one of the ANA's 22 brigades able to make it on its own, Afghan security forces are still as likely to attack their mentors as an insurgency which "retains a significant regenerative capacity" and much of the nation's wealth is being swapped among the elite in rampant corruption. It has cost the US \$500 billion and 2,000 dead to get to this, and Obama still wants to keep 10-20,000 troops in-country after 2014.

What Steve Walt said.

Here's what I'd like to know: did any Pentagon officials or military leaders tell Barack Obama that the "surge" was a mistake? Did any of them ever say something like this to him:

"Mr. President, we respect civilian authority and if you order us to continue this war we will give it our all. But in my best professional judgment I believe this is not a war we can win at an acceptable cost. The conditions for waging a successful counterinsurgency do not exist, and we do not need to defeat the Taliban or build a stable new state in Afghanistan in order to destroy the original nucleus of al Qaeda. I will follow whatever orders you give me, sir, but my advice as a soldier is that we end this war."

If not, then Obama got very bad advice. And for the United States to have fought so long and with so little to show for it is a stunning indictment of our entire national security establishment: civilians, military leaders, and think tank experts alike.

Word.

The reason Obama didn't get, or if he did didn't take, such advice is simple. The money quote from [Cato's Benjamin Friedman in his recent post](#) on why Susan Rice is symptomatic of a deep DC malaise illustrates:

To be fair, Rice's opinions on all these matters are little different from most Democratic foreign-policy elites, including most of the other people advising Obama about wars. Their Republican counterparts differ only in having less use for multilateralism and being somewhat more belligerent. A small irony here is that, substantively, McCain and Rice differ little on these wars, probably less than he and Sen. John Kerry, who is also a rumored to be in the running for secretary of state. Rice is just a notably successful exemplar of a foreign policy community where supporting war is generally better for one's career than opposing it.