

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

Inter Service Press

For the US in Afghanistan, the News Is Bad

By Jim Lobe

June 10, 2010

While U.S. officials insist they are making progress in reversing the momentum built up by the Taliban insurgency over the last several years, the latest news from Afghanistan suggests the opposite may be closer to the truth.

Even senior military officials are conceding privately that their much-touted new counterinsurgency strategy of "clear, hold and build" in contested areas of the Pashtun southern and eastern parts of the country are not working out as planned despite the "surge" of some 20,000 additional U.S. troops over the past six months.

Casualties among the nearly 130,000 U.S. and other NATO troops now deployed in Afghanistan are also mounting quickly.

Four U.S. troops were killed Wednesday when Taliban fire brought down their helicopter in the southern province of Helmand, the scene of a major U.S. offensive centered on the strategic farming region of Marja over the past several months.

That brought the death toll of NATO soldiers just this week to 23, including 10 killed in various attacks around the country on Monday, the deadliest day for NATO forces in two years.

"It's been a tough week," Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman said Wednesday.

Seventeen of the 23 were U.S. soldiers, bringing the total U.S. death toll in and around Afghanistan since the U.S. intervened to oust the Taliban from power in late 2001 to more than 1,100, according to the independent iCasualties website.

While senior military officials attributed the steadily rising toll to Washington's surge of a total of 30,000 additional troops by next month, as well as the beginning of the Taliban's annual summer offensive, none other than Secretary of Defense Robert Gates warned that the U.S. and its NATO allies were running out of time to show results.

"The one thing none of the (alliance's) publics...including the American public, will tolerate is the perception of stalemate in which we're losing young men," he said in London Wednesday on the eve of a key NATO ministerial meeting in Brussels this week at which Afghanistan will top the agenda and Gates himself is expected to prod his interlocutors to fulfil pledges to provide more troops.

"All of us, for our publics, are going to have to show by the end of the year that our strategy is on the track, making some headway," he said.

Obama, who last November set a July 2011 as the date after which Washington would begin to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan, has said his administration will conduct a major review of U.S. strategy and whether it is working at the end of this year.

The latest polling here shows a noticeable erosion of support for Washington's commitment to the war compared to eight months ago when Obama agreed to the Pentagon's recommendations to send the 30,000 additional troops to Afghanistan to bring the total U.S. presence there to around 100,000.

An additional 34,000 troops from NATO and non-NATO allies are supposed to be deployed there by year's end.

According to a *Washington Post*/ABC News poll released Thursday, 53 percent of respondents said the war in Afghanistan, which last month, according to most measures, exceeded the Vietnam conflict as the longest-running war in U.S. history, was "not worth fighting." That was the highest percentage in more than three years.

The same poll found that 39 percent of the public believe that Washington is losing the war, compared to 42 percent who believe it is winning.

While public skepticism about the war appears to be growing, the foreign policy elite, including within the military, also seems increasingly doubtful for a number of reasons.

Disillusionment with President Hamid Karzai — already running high as a result of last year's rigged elections and his tolerance for government and family corruption — gained new momentum last weekend with the forced resignations of his two top security

officials, Interior Minister Hanif Atmar and intelligence chief Amrullah Saleh, who were considered by Western officials as among the most competent of Karzai's cabinet members.

The two men reportedly objected strongly to Karzai's order to release all accused Taliban prisoners who are being held without enough evidence for trials.

The order was seen as the latest in a series of moves designed to reconcile with the Taliban leadership, a step that Washington has strongly opposed until now.

Among other things, the U.S. fears that such a move could prompt leaders of the Northern Alliance, which consists of non-Pashtun groups, to break with the government and prepare for renewed civil war of the kind that devastated Afghanistan before the Taliban first took control in 1996.

Karzai's bid for reconciliation stems from his conviction, according to a number of accounts, that U.S. strategy is unlikely to succeed in weakening — let alone defeating — the Taliban and that his hold on power will ultimately rely on reaching an accommodation with them.

That impression may well be grounded in an accurate assessment of the way Washington's counterinsurgency strategy is actually playing out.

Indeed, the Marjah campaign, which was heralded as a major test of Washington's new strategy when it was launched in February, appears to be faltering badly. Late last month, Washington's overall military commander, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, even referred to it as "a bleeding ulcer."

While it initially succeeded in "clearing" Taliban from the region McChrystal's pledge that U.S. troops would bring with them an Afghan "government in a box" that would provide basic security and social services proved, as a feature story in Thursday's Washington Post described it, "largely empty."

As a result of local disillusionment with the police and the very few Afghan civilian officials that followed the U.S. military into the area, insurgents have regrouped and in some areas regained the offensive, according to the latest reports. One recent study found that the majority of the population had become more antagonistic to NATO forces than was the case before the operation began.

The Marja experience has cast doubt on a yet more ambitious and strategically critical operation planned for Kandahar.

While Washington had initially planned to launch a major military operation to "clear" Taliban from neighborhoods in and around the city before introducing the civilian component of the counterinsurgency strategy, it has now reversed the order in hopes of not alienating the local population as it did in Marja.

But the presence of more police and civilian officials will no doubt require a build-up of NATO troops to protect them, particularly in light of a stepped-up and highly effective Taliban campaign to intimidate government officials who are perceived as cooperating with the Western forces by assassinating selected targets, including even low-level bureaucrats.