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US Answer to Taliban Victories in Afghanistan: Blame Russia

By Jason Ditz
February 12, 2016

There are a lot of reasons why the Taliban have been beating the Afghan military across the country in exchanges over the past year, and they mostly boil down to the fact that about 40% of the Afghan military doesn't even exist, but is simply there on paper for politicians to embezzle money out of the military's coffers.

There's not much the US can do about that, however, and in the search for a more politically expedient excuse, some officials have locked on to the idea that it's all Russia's fault, with an unnamed US intelligence official telling Yahoo News that Russia is arming the Taliban to spite the US.

The claim is extremely light on evidence, centering on Russia's report back in December that they've shared ISIS intelligence with the Taliban, and anecdotal claims that a lot of the Taliban seem to have newer-looking AK-47 rifles.

The notion that Russia supports the Taliban because the US is an enemy, however, doesn't make any sense, as Russia has been backing the NATO occupation of Afghanistan since it began, and has a keen interest in keeping Islamists out of the former Soviet states north of Afghanistan. Indeed, the whole logic behind giving the Taliban intel on ISIS was to keep them in Afghanistan, fighting one another.

In many ways, the US allegation that Russia would do this only makes sense because it's the sort of thing the US would, and often does, do, as the US has regularly thrown its weight behind factions in recent history, like the Afghan mujahedin, whose victory would obviously be contrary to US interests, simply over the idea that it would be even worse for Russia.