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Adm. Mullen Says Afghan Situation Deteriorating

Speaking on CNN's "State of the Union" program on August 23, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, said the situation in Afghanistan "is serious and it is deteriorating." Mullen added: "I've said that over the last couple of years, that the Taliban insurgency has gotten better, more sophisticated. Their tactics just in my recent visits out there and talking with our troops certainly indicate that."



As far as the possibility of increased U.S. troop strength to meet the Taliban threat, Mullen said that the new U.S. military commander in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, is still completing an assessment of his needs for the military operation. "We're not at a point yet where he's made any decisions about asking for additional troops. His guidance from me and from the secretary of defense was to go out, assess where you are and tell us what you need. And we'll get to that point."

As we noted in our July 31 article, "[Advisers Call for Afghanistan Troop Buildup](#)," about a dozen members of a "strategic assessment team" met in July in Kabul with General McChrystal to complete what was described as a 60-day Afghanistan Review. In calling for the assessment, McChrystal was acting on orders from his superiors in Washington, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates and Admiral Mullen.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that Admiral Mullen said he also was "extremely concerned" about the rising level of violence in Iraq, noting: "I think everybody was, and the key is whether this is an indicator of future sectarian violence. Certainly, many of us believe that one way that this can come unwound is through sectarian violence."

Speaking on NBC's *Meet the Press* on August 23, Mullen addressed the rising number of U.S. combat deaths in Afghanistan, with 44 U.S. troops killed in July: "Certainly the numbers are of concern," said the general.

In the face of a new Washington Post-ABC News poll indicating that a majority of Americans believe the war in Afghanistan is not worth fighting (and with just a quarter saying that more troops should be sent there) Admiral Mullen said: "I'm certainly aware of the criticality of support of the American people for this war and in fact, any war.... That said, the president's given me and the American military a mission, and that focuses on a new strategy, new leadership, and we're moving very much in that direction."

He continued, "I believe we've got to start to turn this thing around from a security standpoint in the



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next 12 to 18 months."

Mullen said that General McChrystal, was "wrapping up" his assessment of the situation and would submit it in a couple of weeks. "We'll see where that goes once the assessment is in here," Reuters news quoted the commander. "And I've had this conversation with the president, who understands that whatever the mission is, it needs to be resourced correctly."

Reuters reported that McChrystal's report, originally due in mid-August, was expected after the continuing Afghan election process is completed, with early results expected on August 25.

Current plans call for increasing troop deployment in Afghanistan from 32,000 at the start of 2009 to 68,000 U.S. troops — plus 30,000 allied NATO troops — later this year.

When he was asked about an exit strategy for Afghanistan on *Meet the Press*, Mullen responded: "I've said from a military perspective I believe we've got to start to turn this thing around from a security standpoint in the next 12 to 18 months. And I think after that we'd have a better view of how long it's going to take and what we need to do."

Senator John McCain, last year's unsuccessful Republican candidate for president, concurred with the need for more troops when he said on ABC's *This Week* program on August 23 that the "clock is ticking" on American public opinion of the Afghan war. "I think you need to see a reversal of these very alarming and disturbing trends on attacks, casualties and areas of the country that the Taliban has increased control of," said the Arizona senator.

Senator McCain, like General McChrystal and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), a highly influential public policy group that has long advocated an interventionist U.S. foreign policy.

The *New York Times* reported that on August 24 U.S. Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard C. Holbrooke (also CFR) stopped at the Bagram military base, where Maj. Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti, commander of the United States and NATO forces in eastern Afghanistan, told him and visiting reporters that the Haqqani network was expanding its reach. "We've seen that expansion, and that's part of what we're fighting," said Scaparrotti.

U.S. military commanders believe that the network, headed by Jalaluddin Haqqani and his son Sirajuddin, has been linked to al-Qaeda, and is using sanctuaries in Pakistan to launch attacks against American and Afghan forces.

Which recalls similar circumstance during the long war in Vietnam, where North Vietnamese-supported Viet Cong guerrilla fighters traveled the Ho Chi Minh trail through Laos and Cambodia to launch attacks against U.S. and South Vietnamese government forces. In response to increased Vietcong and North Vietnamese activity, U.S. troop strength was progressively escalated until eventually it reached 500,000.

The United States finally conducted a process called Vietnamization, similar to what is now taking place in Iraq, under which the United States gradually withdrew combat forces and shifted responsibility to the South Vietnamese. Unfortunately, once U.S. troops were withdrawn, the country fell to the communists, after 58,228 U.S. service members had lost their lives.

There are many other parallels: The war in Vietnam was fought under the authority of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), while the war in Afghanistan is similarly a NATO operation. Both the now-defunct SEATO and NATO were formed as "regional arrangements" under Articles 51-54 of the UN



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Charter.

We have noted the considerable presence of CFR members among those overseeing the war in Afghanistan (Gates, McChrystal, Holbrooke) and a similar situation existed during the Vietnam war, with such influential players as President John Kennedy, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam Henry Cabot Lodge, and Generals Lyman Lemnitzer, Maxwell Taylor, William Westmoreland, and Andrew Goodpaster all being CFR members.

As the French say: *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*

Photo of Adm. Michael Mullen: AP Images



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