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Gen. McChrystal Calls for New Strategy

U.S. Army General Stanley McChrystal, the commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, has completed his "60-Day Afghanistan Review" and has delivered his assessment to U.S. and NATO officials. The British Guardian newspaper reported that the document has been sent to the U.S. military's central command (CentCom), responsible for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and to NATO headquarters in Brussels.



"The situation in Afghanistan is serious, but success is achievable and demands a revised implementation strategy, commitment and resolve, and increased unity of effort," McChrystal said in a statement on August 31.

Reuters reported August 31 that McChrystal will suggest in his report a "completely revised strategy" for the war in Afghanistan.

AP reported that while McChrystal did not ask for more troops, he is expected to do so in a separate request in a couple weeks, citing two NATO officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak on the matter.

President Barack Obama, acting through Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, asked McChrystal for an assessment of the war in June as part of an effort to meet the challenge of a growing insurgency of Taliban and al-Qaida militants. In July, Gates sent an assessment group of about a dozen analysts to Kabul to meet with McChrystal and advise the commander about improving U.S. military strategy. The team included Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, who was once a national security assistant to Senator John McCain on the Senate Armed Services Committee. Another member of the team was Stephen Biddle, a military analyst at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington. Senator McCain, Defense Secretary Gates, and General McChrystal are all members of the internationalist Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), whose main office is in New York City. The CFR is a very influential public policy group that has long advocated an "interventionist" U.S. foreign policy.

The *Guardian* quoted a statement that Biddle made to the McClatchy-Tribune news service: "Over the next 12 to 15 months among the things you absolutely, positively have to do is persuade a skeptical American public that this can work, that you have a plan and a strategy that is feasible."

A report distributed by Reuters news quoted David Kilcullen, a senior adviser to General McChrystal, who told Australia's National Press Club on August 31 that Afghanistan's government must fight corruption and move quickly to provide basic services to Afghans, because Taliban militants are moving into the vacuum, providing services to Afghans' and winning them over. The report cited Kilcullen's statement that the Taliban are already running courts, hospitals, and an ombudsman in parallel to the government, gaining support from the local people. "A government that is losing to a counter-



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insurgency isn't being outfought, it is being out-governed. And that's what's happening in Afghanistan," said Kilcullen .

The Middle East-based Al Jazeera news network reported that McChrystal's report is believed to contain a recommendation that the Afghan army and police forces be nearly doubled in size.

Al Jazeera's James Bays, reporting from Kabul, said:

I think a lot of the focus will be on the Afghan security forces.

General McChrystal believes that they need to be increased in size — currently the Afghan army and police are both above the 80,000 mark — we are hearing reports that he is going to announce that the army and police in total will be over 300,000.

However, Bays said that it was unlikely that a request for additional international forces had been included in the review. "What happens is that [McChrystal] puts in the strategic review and then there is another process - called the 'troop-to-task' process — which takes place after this assessment to decide if there should be more American and international troops," said Bay. "I know that one of his plans is to look at the amount of the troops he currently has in the country and work out what all of them are doing. I think that the general would like to see more of the troops who are here moved to frontline fighting positions."

While there can be little doubt that — from a purely military standpoint — an assessment strategy may result in more efficient use of U.S. and NATO resources, other assessments need to be made. The current military operation in Afghanistan, like the waning campaign in Iraq, needs to be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- From a constitutional viewpoint, how can the past two presidential administrations justify committing U.S. troops to a long-term operation without first asking for a congressional declaration of war?
- Even if the president were to ask for such a declaration, against whom would it be made? Since the Taliban were removed from central power in late 2001, they have not been a government, but an insurgency movement fighting a guerrilla war against the government of Afghanistan in Kabul, with separate organizations operating in neighboring Pakistan. Just as Britain was wise not to intervene in the U.S. War Between the States, the United States would be wise to allow Afghans to iron out their difference without our intervention.
- Exactly who are the "good guys" and "bad guys" in Afghanistan? Even in Vietnam, the alignments along communist versus non-communist sides made that task simpler. But who knows which varieties of Sunni and Shiite Afghans, some seemingly Westernized and others eager to restore Sharia, are our allies against al Qaeda and which groups will sell us out for a profitable opium deal?

In short, our fight is not in the Middle East. If the objective is to defend ourselves against another 9-11-style attack, the answer is to beef up our intelligence, but focussing it not on Americans but aliens within our borders. We must also be stricter about who we will allow to enter our country on work and study visas. A member of al-Qaeda should not be learning how to fly an airliner within the United States without our intelligence agents knowing about it!

Photo of Gen. Stanley McChrystal: AP Images



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