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McChrystal Afghanistan Report Calls for More Troops

What had previously been suspected from reports leaked from private sources is now official: U.S. Army General Stanley McChrystal, the commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, has warned that more troops are needed within the next year or the war "will likely result in failure."

"Resources will not win this war, but under-resourcing could lose it," AP quoted from McChrystal's five-page Commander's Summary. "Although considerable effort and sacrifice have resulted in some progress, many indicators suggest the overall effort is deteriorating."



"Failure to gain the initiative and reverse insurgent momentum in the near-term [next 12 months] — while Afghan security capacity matures — risks an outcome where defeating the insurgency is no longer possible," McChrystal said in his 66-page report, sent to Defense Secretary Robert Gates on August 30, now under review by President Obama and his advisers. The document was obtained by the *Washington Post* and was cited in a September 21 article written by the *Post*'s Bob Woodward, half of the team of Woodward and Bernstein that in 1972 broke the news that would contribute to the exposure of the Watergate scandal.

Woodward called McChrystal's assessment "a striking thing for a general to say to the secretary of defense and the commander-in-chief."

The *Post* article noted that McChrystal clearly stated that his call for more forces is based on the adoption of a new strategy in which troops would place emphasis on protecting Afghans rather than killing insurgents or controlling territory. His report plainly states: "Inadequate resources will likely result in failure. However, without a new strategy, the mission should not be resourced."

As for what he believes is wrong with the present strategy of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) — the official name of the U.S.-led NATO coalition — McChrystal writes: "Pre-occupied with protection of our own forces, we have operated in a manner that distances us — physically and psychologically — from the people we seek to protect.... The insurgents cannot defeat us militarily; but we can defeat ourselves."

McChrystal continues: "Afghan social, political, economic, and cultural affairs are complex and poorly understood. ISAF does not sufficiently appreciate the dynamics in local communities, nor how the insurgency, corruption, incompetent officials, power-brokers, and criminality all combine to affect the Afghan population."

McChrystal complained that ISAF's intelligence-gathering has focused on how to attack insurgents, hindering "ISAF's comprehension of the critical aspects of Afghan society."

McChrystal "really takes his finger and puts it in their eye, 'Deliver or this won't work,'" Woodward told CNN's *American Morning* on Monday. "He says if they don't endorse this full counterinsurgency



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strategy, don't even give me the troops because it won't work."

The *Post* said it had withheld publication of portions of the document at the government's request.

Pentagon Press Secretary Geoff Morrell confirmed the report, but said the Pentagon would not release the text. He said in a statement quoted by AP that McChrystal's assessment "is a classified, pre-decisional document, intended to provide President Obama and his national security team with the basis for a very important discussion about where we are now in Afghanistan and how best to get to where we want to be. While we would have much preferred none of this be made public at this time we appreciate the paper's willingness to edit out those passages which would likely have endangered personnel and operations in Afghanistan."

President Obama, speaking on CNN's *State of the Union* on September 20, indicated he is considering McChrystal's assessment, but that a review of U.S. strategy in Afghanistan won't be driven "by the politics of the moment."

"Every time I sign an order, you know, I'm answerable to the parents of those young men and women who I'm sending over there, and I want to make sure that it's for the right reason," said Obama, declining to answer questions about whether additional troops would be needed. He replied: "I don't want to put the resource question before the strategy question." He also said that Afghans need to show that they are "willing to make the commitment to build their capacity to secure their own country."

The British *Guardian* newspaper quoted a portion of the report not widely circulated in the U.S. press, noting that McChrystal said NATO forces should spend "as little time as possible in armored vehicles or behind the walls of forward operating bases," while warning that in the short term this meant it was "realistic to expect that Afghan and coalition casualties will increase."

While the Defense Department has curiously leaked a report it insists it does want to make public (at least not all of it), President Obama hit the news-analysis show circuit on the morning of September 20 (as in CNN's *State of the Union* noted above) delivering a message that appears to part company with McChrystal's assessment. Before viewing this as an unlikely intra-governmental squabble, however, it is important to recall that President Barack Obama, acting through Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, was the one who asked McChrystal for an assessment of the war back in June as part of an effort to meet the challenge of a growing insurgency of Taliban and al-Qaeda militants.

In July, Gates sent a 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. Since Senator McCain, Defense Secretary Gates, and General McChrystal are all members of the internationalist Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), whose members have more than a little representation in the Obama administration, the likelihood of the McChrystal report contradicting the administration's policy is extremely remote.

"We're there because al-Qaida killed 3,000 Americans and we cannot allow extremists who want to do violence to the United States to be able to operate with impunity," Obama said on ABC's *This Week with George Stephanopoulos*. "If by sending young men and women into harm's way we are defeating al-Qaida, and that can be shown to a skeptical audience, namely me ... then we do what is required to keep the American people safe," the president said. "You don't make decisions about resources before



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you have the strategy right.”

On CBS’ *Face the Nation*, Obama said that the core of U.S./NATO strategy should be efforts to “dismantle, defeat and destroy al-Qaida.” ??“The only reason I send a single young man or woman in uniform anywhere in the world is because I think it’s necessary to keep us safe,” he said. “Whatever decisions I make are going to be based first on a strategy to keep us safe, and then we’ll figure out how to resource it. We’re not going to put the cart before the horse and just think that by sending more troops we’re automatically going to make Americans safe.” ??Obama called the war in Afghanistan “complicated terrain,” and he said any strategy would be reviewed every six months to ensure it was on the right track.

On NBC’s *Meet the Press*, the president said that any continued military efforts in Afghanistan should align with the overall national security interests of the United States and that if supporting the Afghan national government and helping build capacity for their army advances that strategy, then the United States will move forward.??“But if it doesn’t, then I’m not interested in just being in Afghanistan for the sake of being in Afghanistan or saving face or, in some way ... sending a message that America is here for the duration. I think it’s important that we match strategy to resources,” Obama said.

Obama has received support from Republicans in Congress to expand the war, but increased resistance emanating from members of his own party, especially from members who were part of the group “Out of Iraq” in the last Congress. And the latest CNN/Opinion Research Corporation Poll taken from September 11-13 shows that only 39 percent of American favor the U.S. war in Afghanistan, while 58 percent oppose it, down from 42 percent in favor in August.

With the war becoming more unpopular by the day, President Obama is no doubt made aware that the unpopularity of the war in Vietnam once brought down President Lyndon Johnson’s numbers in the polls to such a low level that Johnson declined to run for reelection, leaving his Great Society domestic agenda unfinished. Since advocating a policy of expanding the war effort is becoming political untenable, how can Obama’s CFR handlers arrange it so he can have his cake and eat it, too — expand the war while not suffering grave political fallout?

If a strategic member of our nation’s military like General McChrystal makes a good case for more troops from outside the political arena, it is possible the public (and Congress) might soften its opposition to the war. The leak to the *Post* might just represent limited test marketing, following the old advertising industry’s maxim: “Run it up the flag and see if anyone salutes.”

If the public softens, Obama can go ahead and expand the war. If not, Obama has lost nothing politically.

Photo of Gen. McChrystal (on right): AP Images



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