

Obama Moves to Muzzle Top Military Commanders

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By: David A. Patten

Sources tell Newsmax the Obama administration is muffling its top military leaders, and keeping them from publicly airing their views on how to fight the war in Afghanistan.

The administration's primary target: top Afghanistan commander Gen. Stanley McChrystal, whose speech in London last week apparently caught administration officials off guard.

In fact, The Daily Telegraph reported that Obama's advisers were "shocked and angered" by McChrystal's speech.

"This is a food fight in the war room, and it's getting ugly," observed Pulitzer Prize winning correspondent and Manhattan Institute scholar Judith Miller, regarding the sharply contrasting views being aired within the administration over how to fight the war.

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In his speech, McChrystal defended his request for 40,000 more soldiers to wage a counter-insurgency campaign in Afghanistan, warning "a strategy that does not leave Afghanistan in a stable position is probably a shortsighted strategy."

Without mentioning Vice President Joe Biden by name, McChrystal said the vice president's proposal to scale back the objectives for the war would lead to "chaos-istan."

Shortly after those remarks, McChrystal was summoned to a face-to-face meeting with President Obama aboard Air Force One in Copenhagen, where Obama was making his ill-fated attempt to support Chicago's bid to host the 2016 summer Olympic games. Obama's National Security Adviser, Jim Jones, described their discussion as an exchange of "very direct views."

On Monday, in an obvious reference to McChrystal, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates told the Association of the U.S. Army that "It is imperative that all of us taking part in these deliberations -- civilian and military alike -- provide our best advice to the president candidly but privately."

That statement appeared to echo remarks on Sunday from Jones, a retired Marine general. He told CNN, "Ideally, it's best for military advice to come up through the chain of command."

The none-too-subtle message to America's top military leaders: Don't share your candid views on the war in public. It appears McChrystal received the message loud and clear. According to The Washington Independent, McChrystal spokesperson and Air Force Lt. Col. Tadd Sholtis stated:

“General McChrystal concurs with the secretary and shares his perspective that the president’s military and civilian policy advisers need to provide candid but private advice.”

Sholtis also said that McChrystal has no current plans for additional public appearances, The Washington Independent reported.

McChrystal became the top U.S. general in Afghanistan after Gates fired Gen. David D. McKiernan in May. McKiernan, who was criticized in some circles as insufficiently innovative, presided over a troop-strength increase of 21,000 soldiers. He had filed a request with the Pentagon for 10,000 more at the time he was replaced.

At the time, Gates ordered McChrystal to provide "fresh thinking" and "fresh eyes" on Afghanistan. But apparently it was McChrystal's fresh tongue that got him in trouble.

The New York Times reported Monday that Gen. David H. Petraeus, who was widely credited with carrying out the successful surge in Iraq, has already toned down his remarks since Obama attained the presidency.

"General Petraeus's aides now privately call him 'David the Dull,'" the Times reports, "and say he has largely muzzled himself from the fierce public debate about the war to avoid antagonizing the White House, which does not want pressure from military superstars and is wary of the general's ambitions in particular."

The concern among some experts is that President Obama's effort to tone down his military leaders may indicate he wants to triangulate a more politically palatable approach to fighting the war that may fall short of being militarily decisive.

"The president won't get honest opinions from his military advisers," warns Dr. James Jay Carafano, a former Army lieutenant colonel who serves as a leading Heritage Foundation expert on defense and homeland security. "He has to trust people who work for him. And when you've muzzled the people who work for you, you can't turn around and trust them to give you honest, candid guidance."

Carafano sharply criticized what he sees as Obama's "committee" approach to Afghanistan.

"This is not how wars get fought," Carafano tells Newsmax. "You don't fight wars by committee. Because now he's turned this into a political debate, and you're going to end up with a sub-optimal outcome."

Carafano says Obama appears to be "replaying all the worst decision making of McNamara and Johnson in Vietnam."

"This is the classic prescription for failure," Carafano says of the administration's indecisive approach. "And the military guy is sort of caught in the middle, because when the president doesn't want to fight the war the right way, you have three options: You can salute and drive on, or you can resign, or you can stay but play politics and leak things. None of those are good

outcomes; none of them are the way to win a war."

Carafano says: "I think this is a case where the generals are dead right and the politicians are dead wrong. And we're going to choose a strategy based on what's politically convenient."

Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., issued the following statement to Newsmax on Monday evening: "As we near the 8th anniversary of sustained combat in Afghanistan, it is important to reaffirm our commitment to victory there. At a time when record numbers of American and allied troops are losing their lives during combat in Afghanistan, we should give the utmost priority to listening to our commanders on the ground. We owe it to the troops who have already lost their lives to provide our forces with the adequate number of troops to accomplish the mission that they set out to do.

"After the release of General McChrystal's assessment, some Obama administration officials have gone so far as to minimize the value of the Commanding General's assessment.

"Instead, President Obama should be predominantly relying on the advice of his two senior commanders for the region, General Petraeus and General McChrystal."

Petraeus and Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Admiral Michael Mullen have voiced support for deploying additional troops, but Petraeus has stopped short of endorsing McChrystal's specific report. As Gen. Jones' comments indicate, the military is far from united over how best to prosecute the war, however.

Inhofe also stated Monday: "Politics, indecision, or ambivalence have no place in this process when we are clearly at a crucial stage of the war. Time and decisiveness are critical. As many have said, time may not be on our side in Afghanistan. With the winter approaching and the time to allocate additional forces dwindling, it is imperative that we enable our military leaders and the troops on the ground with all the resources and tools they require to make inroads against the insurgency.

"While I agree that the Afghan Security Forces (ASF) also need to be dramatically increased to adequately protect the Afghan people and fight the Taliban, those efforts should happen in conjunction with an allied troop increase, not in place of such an increase. 'Wait and see' is not a war strategy and certainly not an approach that our military commanders are recommending," he stated.

While Miller believes McChrystal's statements about Biden's ideas went too far, she says she understands the frustration of some military leaders with an extended policy review that, in some ways, actually began even before Obama assumed office. She says Obama's policy reversals on a host of issues – military tribunals, CIA torture investigations, and support for a shield law to protect reporters' sources are but three examples – have left onlookers both at home and abroad wary of the direction Obama's new Afghan strategy may take.

"It's been a series of flip-flops, and they have people very nervous," she says.

Obama also finds himself under serious pressure from the left wing of his party. Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Calif., has proposed legislation that would halt sending any additional troops to Afghanistan. Lee enlisted 21 members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus as co-sponsors.

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