

US commander's report paves way for military escalation in Afghanistan

Tom Eley
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The commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, has issued a dire assessment of the state of military operations there. The classified report sets the stage for an expansion of US troop levels in Afghanistan by as many as 45,000.

McChrystal's report, which was immediately endorsed by the chief of the US Central Command, Gen. David Petraeus, is to be handed over to President Barack Obama today. According to press reports, McChrystal's review makes no specific request for additional troops. However, according to Tuesday's *New York Times*, American officials said "it effectively lays the groundwork for such a request in the coming weeks."

After sending his report to Gen. Petraeus, McChrystal issued a statement declaring, "The situation in Afghanistan is serious, but success is achievable and demands a revised implementation strategy, commitment and resolve, and increased unity of effort."

An adviser to McChrystal, speaking to the McClatchy News Service on condition of anonymity, was more blunt. "It says that this could get much worse unless we invest ourselves in this now," he said.

The report, which is just over ten pages long, admits that it will take a number of years before the US can create a functional Afghan security force. Congressional leaders are to be briefed on the report, once it is approved by Defense Secretary Robert Gates, but they will not be given copies of the document.

The Obama White House immediately signaled its inclination to approve an increase in US troop levels above the 21,000 additional troops Obama approved last February. Robert Gibbs, the White House press secretary, said Monday, "There's broad agreement that for many years our effort in Afghanistan has been under-resourced politically, militarily and economically." The *Times* noted that Gibbs used the term "under-resourced" six times in the course of his daily briefing.

According to press reports, the substance of discussions within the Obama administration is whether to increase troop levels by 20,000 or 40,000-45,000. The escalation already approved by the Obama administration will bring US troops levels to 68,000 and combined NATO military forces to 100,000 by the end of this year.

There are also reports that McChrystal and Petraeus are demanding greater operational independence for military commanders in Afghanistan from civilian control. The McClatchy article summarized the thoughts of McChrystal's aide, referring to a "streamlining of the military's command structure [because] too much bureaucracy is making it difficult for commanders to make decisions on the ground."

In an opinion piece published Monday in the *Washington Post*, a Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a leading Washington military/security think tank, wrote that McChrystal and US Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry (himself a former military commander in Afghanistan) "can win only if they are allowed to manage both the civil and military sides of the conflict without constant micromanagement from Washington or traveling envoys."

The *Guardian* notes that officers such as McChrystal view "the effort of the last eight years [as] wasted." Cordesman shares this view, asserting that Washington "never provided the forces, money or leadership necessary to win, effectively wasting more than half a decade."

This amounts to the demand for a carte blanche for the US military to intensify the killing in Afghanistan in order to drown popular opposition to the US-led occupation in blood. It is also an implicit challenge to the Obama administration and Congress and to the constitutional principle of civilian control of the military.

Highlighting the growing independence of the military from civilian control, an anonymous "senior military official" told the McClatchy News Service that McChrystal and Petraeus have been "pressuring" Obama to commit additional troops. "The official said that retired Marine Gen. James Jones, Obama's national security adviser, told McChrystal last month not to ask for more troops, but that McChrystal went ahead anyway and indicated in interviews that he may need more," McClatchy reported.

The security situation for the US in both Afghanistan and Pakistan is indeed in a perilous state. August was the bloodiest month for the US and NATO since the war began. The US lost 49 soldiers in August and US and NATO forces overall suffered 77 deaths. August's death toll has already made 2009 the worst year for US and NATO military casualties since the onset of the war in October of 2001. The Afghan war is now the second longest in US history.

Despite a US offensive against Taliban strongholds in the South of Afghanistan, press reports cite military officials who acknowledge that the Taliban is gaining strength in the North and West of the country.

There are no reliable statistics for the number of Afghans who have been killed as a result of the US-led invasion and occupation. But civilian deaths have soared in recent months, according to the United Nations, and the death toll is undoubtedly in the tens of thousands.

Media commentators assert that the thrust of McChrystal's report is about "protecting the Afghan people against the Taliban," as Britain's *Guardian* put it. The *New York Times* wrote that "the overriding goal of American and NATO forces would not be so much to kill Taliban insurgents as to make ordinary Afghans feel secure."

These are contemptible lies. The report presages an intensification of US military violence, increasingly directed against popular opposition to the US-led colonial occupation. Recent polls taken in Afghanistan show massive opposition to the foreign occupiers and their puppet government in Kabul.

McChrystal is associated with the “unconventional” methods of imperialist counterinsurgency warfare, including the use of assassinations and torture. He was long the commander of what *Newsweek* called “the most secretive force in the US military,” the Joint Special Operations Command, whose unit in Iraq has been accused of abuse of prisoners at Camp Nama. The unit is believed to have played a critical role in the assassination program that targeted Iraqi tribal leaders supportive of the anti-US insurgency.

McChrystal’s report is being considered in the context of the recent Afghan election, which Obama hailed as a major “milestone” for the nation, but which is now widely acknowledged to be mired in vote-rigging and fraud by incumbent President Hamid Karzai. The American press is rife with commentaries warning that the election debacle will further inflame ethnic and regional tensions and increase the power of the Taliban-led insurgency against a puppet regime seen to be illegitimate by large sections of the Afghan population.

There are mounting indications that Washington is preparing to dispense with Karzai. The *New York Times* warned on Tuesday of “Mr. Obama’s entanglement with an Afghan government widely viewed as corrupt and illegitimate.” Ominously for Karzai, the *Times* wrote that the election farce has left the US “with little hope for a credible partner in the war once the results are final.”

A senior advisor to McChrystal, David Kilcullen, recently pinned the blame for the crisis confronting the occupation squarely on Karzai. “A government that is losing to a counter-insurgency isn’t being outfought, it is being out-governed. And that’s what’s happening in Afghanistan,” Kilcullen said in an interview with Australia’s National Press Club.

Karzai could be jettisoned through a second round of elections, which will be held sometime later this year if no candidate is credited with winning 50 percent of the vote in the initial poll. With just under half of the ballots tallied, Karzai has been allocated about 46 percent of the vote. He would face Abdullah Abdullah, a former government minister under Karzai, in a runoff.

Karzai might also be sidelined by the US installing a new executive officer to oversee the day-to-day operations of the government in Kabul.

But the incumbent president, despite his pliant service to Washington since he was installed in 2002, might meet a worse end. Over the past several months, media commentators and figures close to the US military occupation have compared Karzai to the US stooge dictator of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem. President John F. Kennedy approved Diem’s removal and assassination in November of 1963, less than three weeks before Kennedy was himself assassinated.

The CIA coup against Diem set the stage for the massive military escalation and full-scale war that was launched by Kennedy’s successor, Lyndon B. Johnson.

Whatever Karzai’s fate, Obama’s Afghanistan policy is bringing his administration into conflict with the US population, which increasingly

opposes the war.

A CBS News poll released Tuesday reveals a dramatic decline in public support for Obama’s war policy. Forty-eight percent of Americans approve of Obama’s handling of the war, a decline from 56 percent in April. More than four in ten Americans want to see US troops start coming home, up from only 24 percent in February. The CBS poll substantiates findings of a Washington Post/ABC News poll released August 20, which showed majority opposition to the war and an even larger percentage opposed to any increase in US troop levels.

Opposition to the Afghanistan war has mounted in spite of unanimous support for the war within the political establishment. Moreover, unlike the war in Iraq, popular opposition to the Afghanistan war has mounted despite the absence of any organized opposition by the so-called “anti-war” groups which campaigned for Obama’s election and continue to back his administration.

Some voices within the ruling elite fear the political implications of the emergence of an anti-war movement independent of the Democratic Party and its middle-class front groups, and entertain doubts about the feasibility of subjugating Afghanistan.

According to media accounts citing anonymous White House sources, Vice President Joseph Biden has argued against substantial troop increases in Afghanistan on these grounds. Defense Secretary Gates expressed concerns to *Bloomberg News* over “the implications of significant additional forces in terms of the foreign footprint in Afghanistan, whether the Afghans will see this as us becoming more of an occupier...”

There can be little doubt, however, that Obama will accede to McChrystal’s demands. In his presidential campaign, Obama staked his entire foreign policy on expanding the US military presence in Afghanistan and defeating the anti-US insurgency.

Obama, no less than his predecessor Bush, is an instrument of the American ruling elite, which is conducting wars of aggression in Iraq and Afghanistan and intervening militarily in Pakistan in order to secure its imperialist aims in the Middle East and Central Asia. These center on gaining control over the regions’ vast energy resources and establishing military and geo-political dominance over these strategic areas.

The prospect of endless war, untold death and destruction for populations targeted by the US and a further tragic loss of American lives can be ended only through the independent mobilization of the working class in the US and internationally against the Obama administration and both parties of American imperialism.



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