


RELEASE IN PART
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From: sbwhoep [redacted]
Sent: Saturday, December 26, 2009 5:52 PM
To: H
Subject: fyi... who's on first? Sid

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H: In case you haven't seen the Wash Post piece today, here is Pat Lang's brief commentary and then below that the piece itself. Sid

Men on Horseback

 The NSC's strategic guidance, a classified document that outlines the president's new approach, was described by the senior administration official as limiting military operations "in scale and scope to the minimum required to achieve two goals -- to prevent al-Qaeda safe havens and to prevent the Taliban from toppling the government." The use of resource-intensive counterinsurgency tactics -- employing U.S. forces to protect Afghan civilians from the Taliban -- is supposed to be restricted to key cities and towns in southern and eastern parts of the country, the official said. "The strategy has fundamentally changed. This is not a COIN strategy," Vice President Biden said on MSNBC last week, using the military's shorthand for counterinsurgency. "This is not 'go out and occupy the whole country.'" " [Washpost](#)

It appears that the Afghan policy war is not over. Chandrasekaran is a good reporter but not good enough to get this unaided. Sooo, someone(s) at the NSC briefed him so that the message would be delivered to the "other team" that their behavior is being watched closely and that the NSC team is prepared to use the public media as a weapon if need be. The reporter then went to the Defense Department where he was told their side of the story. Secretary Gates appears to have become the leader of the pentagon faction

Petraeus is interestingly absent from this nearly open struggle. He will wait to see what the outcome may be. A major confrontation over policy and presidential authority is coming. The policy review scheduled for July 2010 may well precipitate it. pl

26 December 2009 in [Afghanistan, government, Policy, Politics](#) | [Permalink](#)

Civilian, military planners have different views on new approach to Afghanistan

By Rajiv Chandrasekaran

Washington Post Staff Writer

Saturday, December 26, 2009; A01

Two days before announcing the deployment of additional U.S. troops to [Afghanistan](#), President Obama informed Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal that he was not granting McChrystal's request to double the size of the Afghan army and police. Cost was a factor, as were questions about whether the capacity exists to train 400,000 personnel. The president told McChrystal, the top commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, to focus for now on fielding a little more than half that number by next October.

Ten days after Obama's speech, the U.S. command responsible for training the Afghans circulated a chart detailing the combined personnel targets for the army and police. McChrystal's goal of 400,000 remained unchanged.

"It's an open issue," a senior Pentagon official said last week.

Nearly a month after Obama unveiled his revised Afghanistan strategy, military and civilian leaders have come away with differing views of several fundamental aspects of the president's new approach, according to more than a dozen senior administration and military officials involved in Afghanistan policy, all of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

Members of Obama's war cabinet disagree over the meaning of his pledge to begin drawing down forces in July 2011 and whether the mission has been narrowed from a proposal advanced by McChrystal in his August assessment of the war. The disagreements have opened a fault line between a desire for an early exit among several senior officials at the White House and a conviction among military commanders that victory is still achievable on their terms.

The differences are complicating implementation of the new strategy. Some officers have responded to the July 2011 date by seeking to accelerate the pace of operations, instead of narrowing them. At the White House, a senior administration official said, the National Security Council is discussing ways to increase monitoring of military and State Department activities in Afghanistan to prevent "overreaching."

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Setting limits

During a videoconference two days before the speech, Obama made it clear to McChrystal and U.S. Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry that he did not want the additional troops to fuel a broader mission. Speaking to both men from the White House Situation Room, the president told them not to deploy the forces to areas they would not be able to transfer to Afghan security forces by July 2011, according to two senior officials with knowledge of the conversation.

Obama's essential instruction was, according to one of the officials, "Don't bite off more than you can chew."

White House officials said the president opposes using the forces he has authorized to duplicate an expansive, Iraq-style counterinsurgency operation -- in part because he questions whether it will be possible to achieve a similar outcome in Afghanistan, which is less developed, and because he wants to start reducing troops in 18 months. The White House's desired end state in Afghanistan, officials said, envisions more informal local security arrangements than in Iraq, a less-capable national government and a greater tolerance of insurgent violence.

Senior military officials still think they can achieve a better outcome than envisaged by civilian skeptics in the administration by using the new forces to mount more comprehensive counterinsurgency operations. Although Pentagon strategists and McChrystal's advisers in Kabul are looking at how they can fulfill the White House desire for a less extensive mission, military officials said they are reluctant to strip too much away and weaken an approach that has come to be revered within the ranks as the only way to suppress guerrilla movements.

Military officials contend that McChrystal does not harbor expansionist aims. They note that he has begun removing troops from remote mountain valleys and concentrating resources on a modest number of key population centers. But the approach in those areas will involve counterinsurgency tactics: Troops will focus on restoring normal patterns of life by trying to keep the Taliban at bay, helping the Afghan government provide basic services to the population and training local security forces.

McChrystal's plan, the senior Pentagon official said, "is still counterinsurgency, regardless of the various agendas people are trying to spin."

Dissent over drawdown

During strategy discussions at the White House, differences between the White House and the military came into sharp relief over Obama's decision to announce his intention to begin drawing down troops in July 2011.

McChrystal argued against it, according to three officials familiar with the process. The head of the U.S. Central Command, Gen. David H. Petraeus, also expressed concerns. Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates urged Obama to make the drawdown "conditions-based."

"There was a lot of pushback" from the Defense Department, one of the officials said.

The president received cover from one uniformed general at the table, James E. Cartwright, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Cartwright had adopted a more skeptical view of the mission than many of his military colleagues, one that resonated with Obama and Biden.

Cartwright effectively endorsed the July 2011 date, arguing that increasing forces and engaging in limited counterinsurgency made sense, the senior administration official said, "but given the risk factors -- Pakistan, the Karzai government, the whole notion of sub-national governance and our track record with the [Afghan security forces], which is not prestigious -- that it made sense to demonstrate that we could actually do this."

It also helped Obama that the principal troop-increase proposal being discussed at the time -- a recommendation that McChrystal receive 30,000 forces for 18 to 24 months -- had been developed by Gates. The Defense Department paperwork detailing the proposal identified the increase as starting in the summer of 2009, when the first troops deployed by the president this year began conducting operations in Afghanistan, but it did not specify an end date.

"Rather than leaving this indefinite and hypothetical, the president's intervention was to say, 'Okay, if we're starting in July of '09, then we're really talking about July of '11,'" said the senior administration official who described the NSC guidance.

Obama eventually told his war cabinet that he would announce the July 2011 deadline but that the pace of withdrawals would be determined, as Gates had sought, by conditions on the ground. Obama said he would conduct a thorough review of progress in a year's time. Although he did not endorse McChrystal's request to increase the Afghan security forces to 400,000, he said he would reevaluate the issue once the 2010 goal of training 230,000 forces is achieved.

The president avoided details in his Dec. 1 address, leaving it up to members of his Cabinet and to his advisers to explain the specifics. The result has been a wide divergence of expectations. Gates, appearing on NBC's "Meet the Press" the Sunday after the speech, said that perhaps only "some handful or some small number" would be withdrawn. Biden, during

his MSNBC appearance last week, said a chart showing an increase in U.S. deployments this year would be "coming down as rapidly over the next two years."

The ambiguity over the meaning of the July 2011 deadline has generated uncertainty over the president's intent. "Is the surge a way of helping us leave more quickly, or is the timeline a way to help win support for the surge?" asked a senior Democratic staff member in Congress. "Which is the strategy and which is the head-fake? Nobody knows."

One senior military officer in Afghanistan said he and his fellow soldiers "don't know if this is all over in 18 months, or whether this is just a progress report that leads to minor changes."

"Until they tell us otherwise," the officer said, "we're operating as if the latter is the policy."

A 'dramatic change'?

Although senior-level civilians in the administration emerged from the review process thinking the mission had been circumscribed, senior military officials continue to have a different view. The result, as they see it, is that the White House has embraced McChrystal's original plan.

"We had already been pretty focused that we wouldn't try to clear and hold things more than we needed to," said a senior commander involved in the war. "It wasn't a dramatic change by any means."

White House officials have cited a meeting among NSC staff members and McChrystal in which the general displayed a slide stating that his mission was to "Defeat the Taliban," which some civilians deemed overly ambitious because it suggested that every last member of the Taliban would have to be killed or captured. The officials said the mission was redefined to avoid the term.

But to military officers, defeat "doesn't mean wipe everyone out," the commander said. "It means after Waterloo, Napoleon still had an army but he wasn't going to threaten Europe. We used that view when we worked defeat."

Even before the White House review had finished, the commander in charge of day-to-day operations, Lt. Gen. David M. Rodriguez, had developed a plan to concentrate U.S. and NATO efforts in 80 of the country's nearly 400 districts.

"They're taking credit for some of the things that McChrystal was already doing and calling it a narrowed focus," a senior military official said.

White House advisers maintain that the review process did refine the mission beyond what McChrystal had proposed over the summer.

"There was a real narrowing here," the senior administration official said. "Stan has a big leadership task to adapt his original concept to the new strategic guidance."

The official said NSC officials recognize it will take time for the new orders to filter through the ranks. "This doesn't turn around with a speech," the official said. "But I hope we don't see slides a month from now that continue to state that our goal is 400,000" Afghan security forces.

The challenge, said that official and another senior administration official, is to recalibrate military operations over the next 18 months in accordance with the new goal.

"The guidance they have is that we're not doing everything, and we're not doing it forever," the second official said. "The hardest intellectual exercise will be settling on how much is enough."

For now, however, top military officers speak more expansively than White House advisers.

"Winning means we hand off to a security force that can secure the country," the senior Pentagon official said. "We've separated the enemy, we've connected the people to the government, and we're helping them to rebuild their economy. It's at that point that we begin to transition it over to them."

Terms such as "winning" and "victory" have been eschewed by the White House. Obama did not use either in his Dec. 1 address, and he said in an interview earlier this year that he was uncomfortable using the term "victory" when fighting "a non-state actor, a shadowy operation like al-Qaeda."

But when Gates visited Kabul a week after Obama's speech, he made a point of telling military personnel there that "we are in this thing to win."

"From a moral perspective, when you ask soldiers and families to sacrifice, we do that to win," the Pentagon official said. "We need to be able to articulate winning."

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