

Top General In Afghan War: US Envoy Betrayed Me

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WASHINGTON (AP) — The top U.S. war commander in Afghanistan told an interviewer he felt betrayed by the man the White House chose to be his diplomatic partner, Ambassador Karl Eikenberry.

An article out this week in "Rolling Stone" magazine depicts Gen. Stanley McChrystal as a lone wolf on the outs with many important figures in the Obama administration and unable to convince even some of his own soldiers that his strategy can win the war.

A band of McChrystal's profane, irreverent aides are quoted mocking Vice President Joe Biden and Richard Holbrooke, the special U.S. representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

McChrystal himself is described by an aide as "disappointed" in his first Oval Office meeting with an unprepared President Barack Obama. The article says that although McChrystal voted for Obama, the two failed to connect from the start. Obama called McChrystal on the carpet last fall for speaking too bluntly about his desire for more troops.

"I found that time painful," McChrystal said in the article, on newsstands Friday. "I was selling an unsellable position."

Obama agreed to dispatch an additional 30,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan only after months of study that many in the military found frustrating. And the White House's troop commitment was coupled with a pledge to begin bringing them home in July 2011, in what counterinsurgency strategists advising McChrystal regarded as an arbitrary deadline.

The profile, titled "The Runaway General" emerged from several weeks of interviews and travel with McChrystal's tight circle of aides this spring.

It includes a list of administration figures said to back McChrystal, including Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, and puts Biden at the top of a list of those who don't.

The article claims McChrystal has seized control of the war "by never taking his eye off the real enemy: The wimps in the White House."

Biden initially opposed McChrystal's proposal for additional forces last year. He favored a narrower focus on hunting terrorists.

If Eikenberry had the same doubts, McChrystal said he never expressed them until a leaked internal document threw a wild card into the debate over whether to add more troops last November. In the document, Eikenberry said Afghan President Hamid Karzai was not a reliable partner for the counterinsurgency strategy McChrystal was hired to execute.

McChrystal said he felt "betrayed" and accused the ambassador of giving himself cover.

"Here's one that covers his flank for the history books," McChrystal told the magazine. "Now, if we fail, they can say 'I told you so.'"

There was no immediate response from Eikenberry. The Associated Press requested comment through an aide after business hours on Monday in Kabul.

Eikenberry remains in his post in Kabul, and although both men publicly say they are friends, their rift is on full display.

McChrystal and Eikenberry, himself a retired Army general, stood as far apart as the speakers' platform would allow during a White House news conference last month.

"Rolling Stone" interviewed troops frustrated by McChrystal's strict rules for combat that are intended to reduce the number of civilian casualties.

At one outpost, a soldier McChrystal had met earlier was killed in a house that the local U.S. commander had repeatedly asked to destroy. The request was denied, apparently out of concern that razing the house would anger locals whose allegiance the U.S. is trying to win.

"Does that make any (expletive) sense?" Pfc. Jared Pautsch asks. "We should just drop a (expletive) bomb on this place. You sit and ask yourself, 'What are we doing here?'"