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## Jones To McChrystal: Enough

By: [Spencer Ackerman](#) Monday October 5, 2009 9:23 am



As criticisms go, [substantively mild and theatrically loud](#), as I [wrote at the Windy](#). We're probably through with public McChrystal remarks ahead of Obama's strategy decision, even though McChrystal didn't do anything but support Obama in public. Still, we are where we are, and it's understandable that Jones would say it's enough.

So was the McChrystal speech *inappropriate*? I don't think anything in the remarks themselves are. His defense of a counterinsurgency strategy, [as I wrote over at the Windy](#), was not only a mere recapitulation of everything he has already said and written on Afghanistan in public already, but it would have been an even bigger media spectacle to have understated his arguments. So doesn't that mean he just shouldn't have given them? I suppose. But a glimpse of what McChrystal's purpose most likely was can be found in this remark from the Q&A: "I think the more deliberations we have, the more debate we have, the healthier this is gonna be. Because at the end of the day, we would be in much worse shape to have a decision made without that level of public debate." Since we're constantly calling on the Europeans to do more in Afghanistan, and European public opinion on the war is even more sour than it is in the U.S., that quote resonates. Still, if it was a mistake, it was a mistake.

But it wasn't insubordination, and the substantive harm is... well, nonexistent. I like Benjamin Friedman's [perspective](#), particularly as he decides to step in between myself and Bernard:

The traditional view of these matters, the idea of [objective civilian control](#), says that this is a political decision that officers should not publicly consider, as doing so will politicize the military. But what exactly is the grave harm we fear here? A coup? A collapse of command authority? These are impossible and far-fetched, respectively. I doubt politicized generals are going to poison debate, and they might even improve it. For example, it would have been helpful if more generals publicly knocked the light footprint Rumsfeld wanted for the invasion of Iraq. A bigger danger from comments like McChrystal's is that they damage the Army's apolitical reputation. But since that reputation is somewhat fictional — the top layers of the military are plenty political — I don't know if that's a bad thing. A realist's view of this matter is that McChrystal can express his views and the President can always fire him, if he can bear the political cost.

Well put, from a smart counterinsurgency skeptic. For other perspectives, see [Adam](#) ("Without a [legitimate](#) Afghan government, the COIN strategy cannot succeed, so it's best that the administration consider its options very [carefully](#), given at the moment, there isn't one") [Serwer](#); [Michael](#) ("[Obama] must be allowed to make the decision without worrying about his military commanders airing their opinions in public and pushing them toward their preferred military course") [Cohen](#); our own Siun ("... it seems that a number of informed voices seem to share my concern that McChrystal is [teetering towards insubordination](#)."); and [Bernard](#) ("If [Jones] is saying that in public, you be bet he was hoping mad in private.") [Finel](#).

[Spotlight](#)



### One Response to "Jones To McChrystal: Enough"

carsick October 5th, 2009 at 10:05 am

[1](#)

"...But what exactly is the grave harm we fear here? "

I think it could be successfully argued that a general stepping out of the chain of command and addressing the American voters will give the voters a sense of being informed. It will be a false sense because they will feel confident that an elephant is defined by its feet and not trunk, size, skin, tail, etc. The resulting misinformed now opinionated Americans will show up in polls and House elections both of which could/would force the president's hand away from what he and his advisers (like the Joint Chief, SoS) know are more informed options.

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