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THE HILL'S Congress Blog

Where lawmakers come to blog

The Big Question: Did Gen. McChrystal break the chain of command?

By Tony Romm - 10/06/09 04:17 PM ET

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The nation's top political commentators, legislators and intellectuals offer some insight into the biggest question burning up the blogosphere today.

Did Gen. Stanley McChrystal break the chain of command by getting ahead of the president and publicly backing more troops in Afghanistan?

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) said:

Gen. McChrystal did not leak the report. It was very clear. Gen. McChrystal was asked a direct question about a strategy that wouldn't succeed, and he said it wouldn't succeed. I think Gen. McChrystal has handled himself very well.

Sen. Roland Burris (D-Ill.) said:

Gen. McChrystal's a great general and he's done a great job. My preference would be that he not answered; he probably should have ducked the question. Why wasn't he here in America meeting with Gen. Jones and Secretary of Defense Gates? But that being as it may, I think it will all work out and they'll come together. The president will be properly advised and we'll have a good strategy going forward as to how we're going to train the police and the armed forces in Afghanistan and the number we seek to build up based on information that identifies all the claims at the table. The commander in chief in the end will make the decision."

Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) said:

No, I don't think so. I think the report was leaked by somebody, but I don't think he's jumped the chain of command. I think he's being honest. The president in March announced a strategy to deny al Qaeda a safe haven by defeating the Taliban. For that strategy to become a reality we need more troops, and I think that's all he's ever said.

John Hostettler, former Indiana GOP congressman (1995-2007), said:

Did Gen. McChrystal disobey a direct order from his commander in chief to not voice an opinion about the military situation in Afghanistan? If not then I would suggest, with all of the respect for their patriotism and service due

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the pundits and unnamed staff of the Obama Administration, shut up and salute. President Obama is well within his constitutional prerogative to “gag” his subordinates who wear the uniform and forbid them from informing the public – much more so than he is to do to insurance companies. And so the question is: Is the commander in chief of the United States military paying enough attention to even offer that very simple command? The clear answer is: Obviously not. It seems that not only is Commander in Chief Obama learning as he goes, he has consigned his commanders in the field so to do...learn as the president goes.

Former Capt. Michael McPhearson, executive director of [Veterans for Peace](#), said:

When it comes to Gen McChrystal, the first question you have to ask is: Why was his troop request leaked, and did he have anything to do with it?

As far as his speech in London and his public statements, Gen. McChrystal is definitely out of bounds here. I have always been taught, and believed, that civilians run the military. We can offer our honest input in private, offer some different strategies, and once the decision is made you carry out orders. Gen. McChrystal is out of bounds when he says that he won't support a particular military position, as he said about the vice president's plan. If he doesn't want to support a particular option, he should disagree and then resign.

Just think, if he has a right to speak out, what is to stop lower level troops from speaking out against their commanders' decisions? That is not how the military works.

Paul Begala, former adviser to President Bill Clinton, said:

No one wants to return to the days when the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld national security team surrounded itself with sycophants and yes-men, and abused and denigrated career officers who dared to raise questions. Our nation deserves, and I suspect our president demands, robust debate over life-and-death issues of national security. But there are two conditions for participating in that debate: the first is to conduct it in private, the second is to salute and carry out the President's orders when the debate is resolved. Anyone who cannot abide by those two conditions is, I believe, honor-bound to resign. Secretary Gates had it right when he said, "It is imperative that all of us taking part in these deliberations provide our best advice to the president candidly, but privately."

Mark Dillen, a former State Department official and current head of [Dillen Communications](#), said:

Gen. McChrystal clearly broke the chain of command; less clearly, he was wrong to do so. The fact that his recommendation to increase U.S. forces in Afghanistan has been public knowledge for two weeks, with partisans on both sides making their views known publicly, forced a choice on McChrystal: turn to surrogates to make his case in public, or do so himself. He chose the wrong course, motivated by a commander's sense of urgency that failure to promptly increase forces will expose those under his command to greater risk. Admirable motive, but wrong choice.

David Rittgers, legal policy analyst at the [Cato Institute](#), said:

Gen. McChrystal's remarks have been taken a bit out of context.

McChrystal used the term "Chaos-istan" to refer to a policy paper, not to take a swipe at the vice president. McChrystal also refused to answer a question regarding troop levels because the President had not yet made a decision on this issue. McChrystal's remarks certainly do not rise to the level of a prosecutable offense under Article 88 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, which bars "contemptuous" words against civilian

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officials, and this speech represents no threat to civilian rule.

The media made a mountain out of a molehill in this instance, and everyone should lighten up a bit.

Herb London, president of the [Hudson Institute](#), said:

Gen. McChrystal may have violated the chain of command, but if he did so it was because the administration has been unresponsive to his request for additional troops. Since the president has described Afghanistan as the critical front, his Hamlet-like pose is standing in the way of a strategic vision that might result in victory.

Comments (9)

Members of the uniformed services should never miss an opportunity to keep their mouths shut when asked questions bearing on national policy.

BY **CHARLES FROM CAPECOD** on 10/06/2009 at 15:27

Yeah, he broke the chain of cammand when he disagreed with the clown in the white house...The other rear kissers are going to lose this conflict (WAR) because they have no SPINE!!!!As for Paul Begala aka The Forehead has NO clue what is going on so why waste the space to ask him the question he is a MORON 1st CLASS!!!!

BY **CHESTY PULLER** on 10/06/2009 at 15:31

Chesty Puller died on October 11, 1971. Who is the coward that is using his name?

BY **JOHN P** on 10/06/2009 at 16:04

What does Hillary know about war? The same as Obama—NOTHING.What do the two suits, Gates and Jones know about war—NOTHING.Gates statment about acceptance truly identifies the American militaty as a Roman type Gladiator.Unfortunately Rumsfeld tried to use Democrat techniques.—standoff and fight clean, it does work because people are killed (both innocent and not so innocent) in War. When targets need to be cleared by lawyers it is time to pick up the marbles and go home. What Obama wants to do is move a few Americans into a fixed position to train Afganis and let the Talaban and al Q have a turkey shoot before the troops are pulled out.Obama can't get help from Europe.The only just wars in the European mind is WWI and WWII with some believing that FDR provoked the Japanese to attack Pearl to justify going to war. It was morally correct to kill anything that walked or breathed in Germany. Firebombs total distruction of cities. Now airbags NATO and UN hide and forget that the USA had to "help" in Bosoina. The European has learned to live with life as it is no matter who rules. They will accept Shira law. Obama believes that it is time for Americans to learn to live with whatever. LESSON—Learn the direction to Mecca so you can kneel.

BY **AWHECK** on 10/06/2009 at 16:08

A General has the right to speak his mind to the American people on War and Strategy, and how to win. In fact the marketplace of ideas and the American people need to listen to a non-politicians perspective. In World War II Generals spoke regarding their ideas-and yes even to the press and public. However, what a General was not allowed to do was threaten unilateral action and state that he would defy the President or Congress, such as the MacArthur Truman incident. This General did no such thing. What he has done is sound the alarm bell to show that standard operating policies need to be reworked if we want to win. How that is wrong is beyond logic. I am sickened to think that the DOD and this administration want to ignore realities on the ground and suppress options that could lead to victory. This Administration and Congress need to look at what worked for FDR on December 7th, 1941 and its aftermath. Total commitment. Drastic increases in manpower, drastic increases in weapons that work and are cost effective (a bullet is cheaper than an missile idea). The cost for total commitment would be cheaper in the long run than this protracted slow bleed. Total Victory would have three outcomes. One -Victory in Afghanistan would lead to real freedom for real people, a real regional ally, stabilization (both economic and political) in Central Asia, political capital in the world and remind the world to play nice with America. Second-We would have a force in place to counter Iran and China,as Afghanistan is a fantastic strategic base to encircle our enemies/competitors, it gives the US options. Third-it would lower unemployment and help transform the economy into a juggernaut, as it has historically. Remember FDR's 1930's policies did not work (which are again being used today) to revive the economy and in fact exacerbated the depression, despite the current myths academia perpetuates today. It is time for America to win the War, fix our economy and move on with peace after Victory.

BY **D STONE** on 10/06/2009 at 17:20

I think the General was wrong. He really had no business making that speech in London. I can't say I think much of his Commander-in-Chief but quality of the President is that's not germane. Everything that Obama touches seems to invoke controversy and in cases out and our failure.



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BY **HUMPHSTER** on 10/06/2009 at 17:31

Yes he did. He should be relieved of command and re-assigned somewhere that he can be collared!

BY **ALLAN P. SMALL** on 10/06/2009 at 18:39

To Herb from the Hudson Institute There is no excuse for breaking the chain of command. Your premise that because the General didn't get what he wanted, it was okay. Your reasoning is anarchistic. Does this represent the reasoning of the Hudson Institute, to promote anarchy in America?!

BY **JOHN** on 10/06/2009 at 20:48

didnt 8 guys just get killed earlier this week because they got caught sleeping. Maybe if we had a solid plan of action and proper training we wouldnt need more troops in Afghanistan.

BY **SPEN** on 10/07/2009 at 03:37

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