



Written by on October 2, 2009

Obama Meets McChrystal Aboard Air Force One

President Obama met with U.S. Army General Stanley McChrystal, the commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, aboard Air Force One at the Copenhagen, Denmark, airport on October 2. The pair continued discussions of war strategy begun during a three-hour brainstorming session at the White House Situation Room on September 30. McChrystal had participated in that meeting from Afghanistan by means of a video link.



The *Washington Post* reported that Obama — who was in Copenhagen addressing the International Olympic Committee in an unsuccessful bid to make a case for holding the 2016 Summer Games in Chicago — had summoned McChrystal earlier that morning to take advantage of their proximity to have a face-to-face discussion.

McChrystal had been in London, where he had addressed the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) the preceding day, and he flew to Copenhagen specifically to meet with the President before returning to Afghanistan.

Aboard Air Force One, 15 minutes into the meeting between the President and the general, White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs told the press corps: “The President wanted to take the opportunity to get together with General McChrystal and continue the conversation that they had as part of the meeting on [September 30].”

In answer to a reporter’s question about whether the discussion was a follow-up to the White House session two days earlier, Gibbs relied: “Yes, this is — again, they realized — the President realized that he would be close and thought it was a good opportunity to continue the conversation and discussion about Afghanistan and Pakistan that happened — at least started in the middle of September in a meeting and continued in the Situation Room for three hours on Wednesday.”

When a reporter asked what General McChrystal was doing in London, Gibbs appeared out of the loop, since he did not seem to know the venue of the general’s speech, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), which was the subject of an [online report](#) here on October 1. Gibbs simply replied: “I believe he gave a speech. I assume there were other — that he had other — I don’t know if you call them ‘business appointments’ — activities around Afghanistan, but I honestly don’t know what his schedule was.”

A report in the *Washington Post* for October 2 observed:

White House officials are resisting McChrystal’s call for urgent U.S. action on Afghanistan, which he underscored [on October 1] during a speech in London [at the IISS]. Officials also are



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questioning important elements of the general's assessment, which calls for a vast expansion of an increasingly unpopular war. One senior administration official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss the meeting, said, "A lot of assumptions — and I don't want to say myths, but a lot of assumptions — were exposed to the light of day."

Among them, according to three senior administration officials who attended [the September 30] meeting at the White House, is McChrystal's contention that the Taliban and al-Qaeda share the same strategic interests and that the return to power of the Taliban would automatically mean a new sanctuary for al-Qaeda.

An AP report on what transpired in the White House Situation Room meeting on September 30 revealed that the President's circle of advisors are not uniformly in agreement with General McChrystal's assessment that more troops are needed to successfully carry on the war:

Wednesday's war council meeting, the second of at least five planned by Obama, exposed emerging fault lines within the administration over Afghanistan — with military commanders pressing for more troops and other advisers expressing skepticism.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and special Afghan and Pakistan envoy Richard Holbrooke appeared to be leaning toward supporting a troop increase, while White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel and Gen. James Jones, Obama's national security adviser, appeared to be skeptical of troop increases. Vice President Joe Biden also has been reluctant to support sending more troops, favoring a strategy that directly targets al-Qaida fighters who are believed to be hiding in Pakistan.

The assessment of divisions within Obama's inner circle came from a senior administration official who attended the meeting and spoke on the condition of anonymity, because the discussions were private.

Of all the options, Vice President Biden's plan actually seems the most sensible, except for the fact that it may be too little, too late, and too much outside the Constitution.

Had President Bush asked for and received a congressional declaration of war against al-Qaeda following 9/11, and had sufficient resources been devoted to hunting down and eliminating the terrorist organization's leadership, we might be reading about al-Qaeda in history books instead of the daily news. It is also possible that al-Qaeda could have been eliminated even without declaring war, but by Congress exercising its constitutional authority to grant letters of marque and reprisal. According to a definition posted at constitution.org:

Letters of marque and reprisal are commissions or warrants issued to someone to commit what would otherwise be acts of piracy. They will normally contain the following first three elements, unless they imply or refer to a declaration of war to define the enemies, and may optionally contain the remainder:

1. Names person, authorizes him to pass beyond borders with forces under his command.
2. Specifies nationality of targets for action.
3. Authorizes seizure or destruction of assets or personnel of target nationality.
4. Describes offense for which commission is issued as reprisal.
5. Restriction on time, manner, place, or amount of reprisal.

The above-referenced article notes that there was only one example of a letter of marque having been granted by Congress after the War of 1812: "In December 1941 and the first months of 1942, the



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Goodyear blimp *Resolute* was operated as an anti-submarine privateer based out of Los Angeles. As the only US craft to operate under a Letter of Marque since the War of 1812, the *Resolute*, armed with a rifle and flown by its civilian crew, patrolled the seas for submarines.”

As for hunting down al-Qaeda, it is not hard to imagine personnel capable of the task, perhaps a unit of recently retired Israeli Mossad agents, for example.

It is an alternative that seems well worth exploring, especially considering the negligible results obtained so far from spending \$864 billion and over 4,300 lives on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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