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McChrystal Wants More Troops in Afghanistan

A Fox News report on September 16 cited sources that said U.S. Army General Stanley McChrystal, the commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan has privately been requesting between 30,000 and 40,000 additional troops, a request that has produced "sticker shock" and "huge resistance" among key legislators.



The report noted that members of the "Out of Iraq" House caucus founded in the 110th Congress by Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) are organizing into a new caucus whose objective will be to question the military surge in Afghanistan that President Obama has deemed critical to the fight against terrorism.

"[President Obama] will hear from us," said Rep. Lynn Woolsey, (D-Calif.), who was a founding member of the Iraq caucus.

"Afghanistan is not Iraq. The terrain is different. It's difficult. It's harsh. There's a question whether you could ever end all of your efforts successfully," said Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, (D-Texas), another member of both groups.

Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told a Senate panel on September 15 that the military operation needs another 4,000 U.S. troops to train the Afghan army and an unspecified number of additional U.S. combat forces to defeat the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

On September 17, Reuters news reported a statement made that day by Defense Secretary Robert Gates cautioning that a decision to deploy additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan should not be hurried: "This decision process should not be rushed," said Gates. "We need to take our time and get this right."

Interestingly, both Gates and McChrystal are members of the Council on Foreign Relations, a policy group that usually advocates an interventionist foreign policy and whose members filled a large number of key diplomatic and military leadership positions during the Vietnam war.

President Obama, meanwhile, while meeting at the White House on September 16 with Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, said he will not decide whether to increase the number of troops in Afghanistan until he has "the strategy right." "You don't make determinations about resources, and certainly you don't make determinations about sending young men and women into battle, without having absolute clarity about what the strategy is going to be," said Obama. He added: "I'm going to take a very deliberate process in making those decisions. And so I just want to absolutely clear, because there's been a lot of discussion in the press about this: There is no immediate decision pending on resources."

Canada plans to withdraw its 2,500 troops from Afghanistan in 2011.

As the all-Democrat "Out of Iraq" caucus members start turning up the heat with regard to Afghanistan,



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House members from the other side of the aisle increased pressure on September 17 for more information about the war. However, Defense Secretary Gates, in reply to a question asked at a Pentagon press conference about why a war assessment by McChrystal hasn't been made public, urged a time-out: "There has been a lot of talk this week and the last two or three weeks about Afghanistan and frankly, from my standpoint, everybody ought to take a deep breath."

An AP reported noted that House Minority Leader John Boehner (R-Ohio) complained at a Capitol Hill press conference that General McChrystal was not being allowed by the administration to testify to Congress. "We need to hear from him soon," said Boehner, stating that he believes McChrystal doesn't have enough troops to succeed in the operation.

AP quoted Senator Dick Lugar, (R-Ind.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a frequent supporter of Obama's Afghanistan strategy, who complained that the administration declined invitations to speak at committee hearings held this week to discuss Afghanistan. "I hope that the administration will soon decide on the time for its views to reach the American people," Lugar said in a statement. "In any event, it is critical that the full force and voice of the president lead the discussion around this national strategic priority with so many American lives and hundreds of billions of U.S. dollars at stake."

The latest CNN/Opinion Research Corporation Poll taken from September 11-13 shows that only 39 percent of American favor the U.S. war in Afghanistan, while 58 percent oppose it. That is down from 42 percent in favor in August.

It appears that the growing public disenchantment with the war is beginning to filter down to members of Congress, at least to the extent that Representatives and Senators want better answers.



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