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Generally speaking, Petraeus replaces McChrystal as top Afghan commander

Obama: 'A change in personnel, but not a change in policy.'



Gen. Stanley McChrystal seen in the Oval Office recently with President Barack Obama. He was relieved of his command of international forces in Afghanistan Wednesday.

WASHINGTON--President Barack Obama relieved General Stanley McChrystal of command of the Afghan war on Wednesday, a day after Rolling Stone published critical comments about top White House officials by members of McChrystal's staff.

Obama read the magazine's article, "The Runaway General," on Monday night before meeting with McChrystal in the Oval Office. The president asked McChrystal to explain statements by him and his aides, mocking the president as a nobody, National Security Adviser James Jones as a "clown," and the president himself as uncomfortable with military leaders and initially unengaged on defense policy.

In the article authored by Michael Hastings, he also writes that McChrystal and his staff had imagined ways of dismissing Vice

President Joe Biden, referring to him as "Bite Me."

Obama then accepted the general's resignation and ended the half-hour meeting. Shortly after, Obama named McChrystal's immediate superior, Gen. David Petraeus, top U.S. commander in Afghanistan.

"I don't make this decision based on any difference in policy with Gen. McChrystal...nor do I make this decision out of any sense of personal insult," Obama told reporters in the Rose Garden. However, he said, the "conduct" reflected in the article "erodes the trust that's necessary for our team to work together to achieve our objectives in Afghanistan. This is a change in personnel, but it is not a change in policy.

"I welcome debate among my team," he said, "but I won't tolerate division."

However, the president lauded McChrystal as "one of our nation's finest soldiers," but said the conduct shown in the Rolling Stone article did "not meet the standard that should be set by a commanding general."

Gen. McChrystal apologizes

McChrystal apologized for the profile Tuesday. "I extend my sincerest apology," he said in a Pentagon statement. "It was a mistake reflecting poor judgment and should have never happened. Throughout my career, I have lived by the principles of personal honor and professional integrity. What is reflected in this article falls far short of that standard."

Petraeus, the chief of Central Command, is widely credited with turning the tide of the war in Iraq with counterinsurgency strategy he authored. As Obama's third top commander in Afghanistan, he will be expected to repeat his Iraq success.



Gen. David Petraeus

Reaction from the Senate, which must confirm Petraeus, was enthusiastic. Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.) said the Armed Services Committee he leads will be conduct hearings by Tuesday. Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz) the panel's top Republican, said Petraeus' confirmation could be "probably the fastest in the committee's history."

But not all were cheering. An unidentified Pentagon official said that Defense Secretary Robert Gates supported McChrystal because he felt that he was vital to the war effort in Afghanistan. Gates was overruled.

Pending Petraeus's confirmation by the Senate, the British deputy commander of international forces in Afghanistan, Lt. Gen. Nick Parker, has assumed command.



Federal Judge Martin Feldman

NEW ORLEANS, La.--A New Orleans federal judge lifted the six-month moratorium on deepwater drilling in the Gulf of Mexico Tuesday, striking a blow to President Barack Obama's administration.

Obama temporarily halted all drilling in waters deeper than 500 feet May 27 to give a presidential commission time to study improvements in the safety of offshore operations. The Interior Department had suspended drilling of 33 exploratory wells in the Gulf. More than a dozen Louisiana offshore service and supply companies sued U.S. regulators to lift the ban.

The White House will appeal the decision by U.S. District Judge Martin Feldman who granted a preliminary injunction, halting the moratorium. He also prohibited the U.S. from enforcing the ban. The U.S. argued that the moratorium was necessary to assure public safety.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar said he would

Fight on offshore drilling just beginning!

White House to appeal lifting of deepwater drilling ban by federal judge

issue a new order within the next couple of days imposing a moratorium that eliminates any doubt it is needed and appropriate.

Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said that Obama believes strongly that drilling at such depths does not make sense and puts the safety of workers "at a danger that the president does not believe we can afford."

Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal and oilfield officials said the moratorium would force drilling rigs to leave the Gulf of Mexico for lucrative business in foreign waters. They said the loss of business would cost the area thousands of lucrative jobs, most paying more than \$50,000 annually.

Feldman agreed, writing: "The defendants trivialize such losses by characterizing them as merely a small percentage of the drilling rigs affected, but it does not follow that this will somehow reduce the convincing harm suffered."

He said the economic impacts of the ban would "clearly ripple throughout the economy of this region."

In making his decision, Feldman also wrote, "What seems clear is that the federal government has been pressed by what happened on the Deepwater Horizon into an otherwise sweeping confirmation that all deepwater drilling activities put us all in a universal threat of irreparable harm."

Royal Dutch Shell Plc spokesman Bill Tanner said in an e-mail statement that the ruling by Feldman "is an important step in returning thousands of oil service workers to their jobs."

The Interior Department had argued the moratorium was necessary as attempts to stop the leak and clean the Gulf until new safety standards are developed. "A second deepwater blowout could overwhelm the efforts to respond to the current disaster," the Interior Department said.



Interior Secretary Ken Salazar

The government also challenged contentions the moratorium would cause long-term economic harm inasmuch as 3,600 oil and gas production platforms remain in the Gulf.

Feldman's financial disclosure report for 2008 shows holdings in at least eight petroleum companies or companies that invest in them, including Transocean Ltd., which owned the Deepwater Horizon. The report shows that most of his holdings were valued at less than \$15,000.

It's not clear whether Feldman still has all the energy industry stock listed in the report. Record court filings indicated he may no longer have Transocean shares, and did not own shares in big companies like BP PLC, which was leasing the rig that exploded, or ExxonMobil.

Josh Reichert, managing director of the Pew Environment Group, said his ruling should be rescinded if he still has investments in companies that could benefit from Tuesday's ruling.