

DECISION TIME: Obama must change Afghanistan course

Written by Editorial Staff
Friday, 25 June 2010 12:47

It's no big surprise that President Barack Obama ousted Gen. Stanley McChrystal last Wednesday after McChrystal's poor judgement and loose lips. But the key for President Obama is what he does next.

And his options are not very appealing.

McChrystal brought this on himself by letting his ego and arrogance get the better of his military discipline. The general may be regarded as a top-flight military mind, but most Americans are okay with the President's decision.

And the President's decision to move Gen. Daniel Petraeus — who was instrumental in turning the war in Iraq — is also being hailed as a wise move. Now, however, the President must decide America's military course and he must do so quickly.

McChrystal was the chief architect of the counterinsurgency strategy, which meant flooding Afghanistan with troops to subdue the insurgents and help build a stable political environment. A similar strategy certainly worked for Gen. Petraeus in Iraq. But most observers in Afghanistan say that McChrystal's plan has not succeeded as well as Petraeus' did. The insurgents in Afghanistan are proving harder to put down, the government is still in disarray and allied deaths are mounting.

Making matters worse, the President so far seems to be sticking to his plan to begin troop withdrawals by July 2011. That publicly-announced deadline not only has proven to put tremendous pressure on the U.S. effort — but most likely has energized the insurgents, who realize they only have to hold on for another year before being free of U.S. resistance.

At this point, the President really has only two choices: Admit that his deadline was premature and announce that U.S. forces will finish what they started — which in turn could severely demoralize the insurgents; or pull the American troops out now and call it a day.

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Staying on the current course is only inviting more problems and more American deaths — and that simply isn't going to work.