



Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies

## CAPS SPECIAL EVENT ANNOUNCEMENT

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***On Friday, August 28, 2009, the Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies (CAPS) was honored to host General Stanley McChrystal, Four Star General, Commander of the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) and the US Forces in Afghanistan. General McChrystal met with a delegation of young and prominent Afghan intellectuals and professionals in a round table at CAPS.***

General Stanley McChrystal gave the delegation a briefing on the strategic 60-day review that he conducted during the last two months in Afghanistan. His review will be submitted to the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and to the Secretary of Defense of the United States.

The General started by talking about a shared history between Afghanistan and the United States, citing the role of the United States in assisting the Afghan *mujahidin* to defeat the Soviets in the 1980s. He mentioned that in the current scenario, stakes were immensely high for the international community and for the Afghan government. He also emphasized that the Afghan government and the international forces could win and that the mission could be accomplished. He, however, stated that fundamental changes were required in the approach to the mission to achieve success and to execute the counter-insurgency (COIN) strategy effectively.

General McChrystal mentioned that the importance of the Afghan mission lied in several reasons. First, there was an imminent danger of the transnational terrorism returning to Afghanistan if the situation continued to deteriorate. Second, there was an issue of regional stability. As long as Afghanistan remained destabilized, the South and Central Asian regions would be vulnerable to the spillover of radicalization and politically motivated violence. Third, the

US commitment to Afghanistan went beyond dismantling Al-Qaeda as the US wanted to ensure that Afghanistan was able to stand on its own feet. And, fourth, the Afghanistan mission was a serious test of the credibility of the international community's will and capability.

General McChrystal underscored two factors that complicated the nature of threat in Afghanistan – a resurgent, resilient insurgency, and a crisis of confidence among the Afghans in the ability of the Afghan government institutions and the international community to deliver.

The General mentioned that corruption and predatory governance took away what was provided for the people. He added that both the Afghan government institutions and the international community were undermining the confidence of the Afghan people in progress in general and in Afghan and international institutions working towards achieving that progress. He also mentioned that culturally unacceptable house searches and the civilian casualties resulting from airstrikes by the foreign forces undermined their credibility in Afghanistan.

Among the highlights of his review was therefore a clear realization of the need to operate better in Afghanistan. He acknowledged, however, that the mission posed a tough challenge because most of the ISAF troops were conventionally trained and mentally conditioned in an environment that scarcely prepared them for the complex and unconventional warfare in Afghanistan.

His review stressed upon the primacy of protecting the civilians, achieving the military success through the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), vigorously pursuing a political strategy in parallel with the military one, and enhancing the accountability of the Afghan government and the international forces.

According to the General, the new strategy would require more resources, and a surge in civilians and military forces. He, however, cautioned that there was no silver bullet to a complex context that Afghanistan posed and that the objective during the next 12-18 months was not to unrealistically turn around the situation but to create some success stories to make the Afghans start believing in progress.

He highlighted the importance of protecting the population for the success of the mission. He mentioned that it was the responsibility of the Afghan government and the international forces to support and protect the people from violence and from becoming the collateral damage in the operations. He stressed that this responsibility could not be wished away and that the population needed to be kept away from all harm. The General also mentioned that it would take about three years at the very least to build up the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)

to an optimal level and that the military success has to be led and achieved by the ANSF, backed by the ISAF.

Of note was the General's allusion to the efforts on reconciliation with the Taliban, where he mentioned that reconciliation was meant to be a process between the Afghan government and the senior Taliban leadership, while re-integration was about getting the insurgents at the ground level integrated into the system with livelihood opportunities. 60% of the insurgents would stop fighting if there were offered jobs, said the General.

General McChrystal mentioned that the patience of the international community and the Afghan people was running thin and that the next 12 to 18 months were critical to the future of Afghanistan. He also mentioned that in the absence of a concrete strategy, succeeding in this mission would be an illusion and that progress centered on redefining the strategy and re-strategizing the approach.

Some of the questions posed and issues raised with the General were about the night time raids on people's houses, the inflamed issue of civilian casualties, and Pakistan's role in destabilizing Afghanistan. Other issues raised were about the need to enhance Afghan ownership in the stabilization initiatives, the criticality of developing a vision for Afghanistan, the question of a possible timeline for the endgame in Afghanistan, and the need for strategic and entrepreneurial investments. The issue of parallel structures weakening the government and lack of accountability in the PRT projects, the need to strengthen Afghan government as the bridge between the populace and the international community, and a lack of coordination among civilian and military side were also raised in the meeting.

***Participants to the meeting with General Stanley McChrystal:***

*Hekmat Karzai, Director of CAPS (Chair of the meeting); Ahmed Javaid Zeerak, Coordinator, Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Programme (MRRD); Aziz Hakimi, Director of Future Generation; Barna Karimi, Deputy Minister of IDLG; Bilal Sarwary, Afghan Reporter for BBC; Hamyoun Hamidzada, Spokesperson for the President; Kabir Haqjo, Director of the Afghan Chamber of Commerce; Malik Quraishi, Director of Policy, National Security Council (NSC); Nader Naderi, Commissioner at Independent Human Rights Commission; Ria Dilawar, Independent Analyst; Shaida Mohammed, Deputy National Security Advisor; Shinkai Karokhail, MP; Shukria Barakzai, MP; Suleman Fatimie, Chief Executive Officer of Harakat; Suliman Kakar, Deputy Minister of Education; Tariq Osman, Senior Program*

*Manager at the Asia Foundation; Yama Karzai, Director of Department 25 at the National Directorate for Security (NDS).*