



Insight

McChrystal Should Not Go

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Rolling Stone magazine was iconic a couple of decades ago.

It was a great place to read about cultural trends, about pot, about rock 'n' roll, and every once in while, it had an interesting political story.

Rolling Stone is now going all retro on us. It suddenly has a story that might have a major-league impact on our foreign policy, on how our president is perceived overseas, and more importantly, how our enemies view us.

In this week's version, as I am sure you have all heard, Rolling Stone does a profile of the general who is in charge of our wartime strategy in Afghanistan.

The story, itself, is of limited significance. It talks about how Stanley McChrystal was a whiz kid when he was growing up, how he was a badass when he was at West Point, how he kicked ass as a Ranger when he got out of West Point and how he willingly took over the battle of Afghanistan with a controversial counterinsurgency strategy that has ruffled the feathers of some notable politicians, like Joe Biden.

But the buzz that has come from the story may sack McChrystal and it may complicate our efforts to win in Afghanistan.

The article has many blind quotes from McChrystal aides about the incompetent political leaders who are screwing up by the numbers. But it has no real damaging quotes from McChrystal himself.

He is caught laughing when an aide calls Joe Biden "Joe Bite-me." He complains, in fairly gentle terms, about an e-mail from Richard Holbrooke, who is supposed to be the politician in charge in Afghanistan.

This is not exactly MacArthur challenging Truman on the efficacy of invading China.

Sure, McChrystal at times looks like a frat boy snapping towels with his colleagues.

Sure, the idiot press officer who allowed a Rolling Stone reporter this kind of access should be fired.

Sure, some heads should roll from some of the aides who made the stupid comments about the political leaders.

But if you read the story itself, it doesn't amount to much. This is no insurrection by the generals here. Not even close.

The White House, as it is prone to do on occasion, overreacted.

Robert Gibbs, intent on proving to everybody that Barack Obama is not actually Mr. Spock, said that the

president is “very angry!” (He said the same thing about the oil spill, btw.)

There will be pressure on Defense Secretary Robert Gates to do Obama’s dirty work and fire McChrystal. But Gates should do no such thing.

Firing McChrystal makes just one group of people very happy. And that group is the Taliban.

The Taliban is already happily waiting for the president’s deadline to approach so they can flood back into Kabul from their caves and start terrorizing people again.

The buzz from this Rolling Story was so much worse than its actual bite.

The president’s PR guys, so desperate to show that the president actually has a backbone, are making a huge mistake by overplaying it.

The president will probably take the bait and fire McChrystal, and then our Afghanistan strategy will suffer as a result.

All because of a Rolling Stone article.

This reminds me when Jimmy Carter did an interview with Playboy three decades ago. He said that while he was faithful to his wife, he had “lust in his heart.” The story reverberated for months, and made Carter seem, well, kind of weird.

The question that was never answered to my satisfaction back then (and I was only, like, 15 at the time), was, Why the hell was he doing an interview with Playboy in the first place?

That is the same question that came to mind about McChrystal and Rolling Stone.

What was he thinking?

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