

# Obama dismisses McChrystal, taps Petraeus

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WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama dismissed Gen. Stanley McChrystal on Wednesday after concluding that his military chief in Afghanistan had badly damaged the chain of command and could no longer work effectively with the civilian leadership at a crucial moment in the war.

White House officials said Obama's decision, made over a tense 40 hours, pitted his desire to retain a talented general who designed the Afghan strategy against the importance of preserving the authority of the commander in chief. Ultimately, his decision to turn over the Afghan command to Gen. David Petraeus allowed the president to keep his war strategy intact, given Petraeus's key role in formulating it last year, and changed the calculus of a choice that once seemed to have no political upside.

Obama's dismissal of McChrystal, 55, calmed fears within his own party that he might look weak if he refused to confront the general. Meanwhile, Petraeus's appointment, expected to sail through the Senate confirmation process, drew praise from congressional Republicans, who provide crucial support for a war that a majority of Americans routinely say is no longer worth fighting.

"War is bigger than any one man or woman, whether a pri-



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**President Barack Obama**, followed by Gen. David Petraeus, right, and Defense Secretary Robert Gates, left, arrives Wednesday in the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington to announce that Petraeus would replace Gen. Stanley McChrystal as the commander of the U.S. military in Afghanistan.

vate, a general or a president," Obama said in a Rose Garden announcement. "And as difficult as it is to lose General McChrystal, I believe it is the right decision for our national security."

The announcement effectively ended McChrystal's 34-year Army career less than two days after the publication of a Rolling Stone article featuring disparaging remarks by the general and his fiercely loyal staff about some of Obama's senior civilian advisers, including Vice President Joe Biden, who argued against McChrystal's strategy.

The fallout from the profile laid bare the dysfunctional relationships among senior civilian and military officials responsible for the Afghan campaign, and undermined the methodical competence that the president has sought to bring to his man-

agement of the 9-year-old war.

McChrystal's departure played out against a faltering campaign in southern Afghanistan's Helmand province, rising U.S. and NATO casualties on the battlefield, and delays in a Kandahar offensive that has been described as the linchpin to the war effort. Obama faces an uncertain partner in Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who lobbied against McChrystal's dismissal, and pervasive corruption that is undermining the attempt to build a viable Afghan state.

Obama called Karzai on Wednesday to inform him of his decision; he also called British Prime Minister David Cameron, whose office later announced that British Maj. Gen. Nick Carter, the deputy commander of international forces in Afghanistan, would lead the op-

eration pending Petraeus's confirmation.

James Jones, Obama's national security adviser, called NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and his counterparts in half a dozen countries, including France. McChrystal and his aides had mocked the French in the article.

"This position involves managing our international partners, and there really had been some damage done there as well," said a senior administration official, adding that Obama told Karzai the importance of defending the chain of command.

If confirmed by the Senate, Petraeus, 57, will take control of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, which comprises nearly 100,000 U.S. troops and about 40,000 forces from other countries.

## Timeline to termination

► **Vice President Joe Biden** alerted President Barack Obama to the Rolling Stone article Monday evening after he received an apology call from Gen. Stanley McChrystal as Biden returned to Washington from Illinois aboard Air Force Two, White House officials said.

► **From the residence**, Obama called White House press secretary Robert Gibbs for a copy of the profile, which many of his senior advisers had been mulling over for several hours.

► **After reading it himself**, Obama headed to the Oval Office, where Gibbs, National Security Council Chief of Staff Denis McDonough, senior adviser David Axelrod and Ben Rhodes, the deputy national security adviser for strategic communications, had assembled. Jones and White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel had left the building, but quickly returned for the impromptu meeting.

► **By the end of the session**, White House officials said, the question had already been raised: Can McChrystal continue in his post?

► **Tuesday morning**, Obama took up the issue during

his daily intelligence briefing, which he holds with Biden. Hours later, the two held their weekly private lunch, and officials said the discussion focused in part on McChrystal.

► **Gen. David Petraeus** was first suggested as a possible successor to McChrystal a few hours later in a Tuesday afternoon meeting Obama held with Defense Secretary Robert Gates, officials said. By that evening, Petraeus was on a list of possible replacements the Pentagon had drawn up at the president's request.

► **Obama fired McChrystal** — officially he accepted his resignation — on Wednesday in an Oval Office meeting that lasted less than 30 minutes. The president had decided, as he said later in the Rose Garden, that "the conduct represented in the recently published article does not meet the standard that should be set by a commanding general."

► **"It undermines the civilian control of the military** that is at the core of our democratic system," he added. "And it erodes the trust that's necessary for our team to work together to achieve our objectives in Afghanistan."