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## Marjah Madness

Posted By [Jeff Huber](#)

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As journalist Gareth Porter said in a recent interview with [Real News](#), Gen. Stanley McChrystal's offensive in Marjah, Afghanistan, is "more of an effort to shape public opinion in the United States than to shape the politics of the future of Afghanistan." Like so much of what we've seen in our woeful war on terrorism, the Marjah effort is short on substance and long on [Newspeak](#), [Doublethink](#), and other Orwellian deceptions.

The [Washington Post](#), the [New York Times](#), the [Christian Science Monitor](#), and an unhealthy chunk of the rest of the news outlets are calling the Marjah madness a "test" of "Obama's strategy" in Afghanistan. Amazingly, nobody is calling it a test of McChrystal's strategy. Stan the Man is, after all, the maestro who orchestrated the big honking counterinsurgency (COIN) plan with its attendant troop escalation and who then, along with Gen. David Petraeus and the rest of the warmongery, [boxed Obama into](#) going along with the scheme through an expansive media campaign that included [McChrystal's September 2009 infomercial on 60 Minutes](#).

We don't need to feel sorry for Obama, though. He asked for this during the 2008 presidential race when he decided to show the hawks his baby-makers by saying he'd pull us out of Iraq but he'd "get the job" done in Afghanistan. Pavlov's dogs of war started frothing when he stepped on that land mine. Obama had a chance to get rid of the war dons – Petraeus, McChrystal, Joint Chiefs chairman Adm. Mike Mullen, and the Pentagon's bureaucratic survival savant, Robert Gates – when he took office. But no, President Obama kept them around, despite the fact that they all had [publicly criticized](#) Candidate Obama's plan to establish an Iraq withdrawal timeline.

Obama exacerbated things when he named retired Army Gen. James Jones as national security adviser; Jones had stated for the record in 2007 that an Iraq withdrawal deadline would be "[against our national interest](#)."

So, yes, Marjah is a referendum on Obama's fitness as commander in chief, and it's becoming clear that the guy is in over his pay grade.

A key component of McChrystal's hallucinatory COIN plan is an initiative to build up Afghanistan's security forces to an end-strength of [400,000](#). He'd be better off paying them all off to go home and keep out of the way.

When [60 Minutes](#) reported on the status of Afghan security forces training in late January, the native troops were literally shooting themselves in the foot and their instructors in the leg. According to *60 Minutes* – which means according to what Af-Pak propaganda czar Rear Adm. Gregory Smith told *60 minutes* – the Afghan troops were commandos, Afghanistan's best soldiers, and they were being trained by Green Berets, America's "best soldiers."

The "specialized" Afghan troops had received three months of "advanced training" before coming under the tutelage of the Green Berets. When they displayed their tendency to shoot everybody but the bad guys, the Green Berets drilled them in the fundamentals of how to load their weapons and hold them safely. When the Afghan commandos couldn't even perform those tasks correctly, the Green Berets started treating them like raw recruits and tried to instruct them by yelling at them.

Yet somehow Smith and his spin merchants and their dupes in the mainstream media expected us to believe that by late February, Afghan forces were ready to take charge of their country's destiny. "In Marjah offensive, Afghan forces take the lead," claimed a Feb. 15 headline in the [Christian Science Monitor](#). But by Feb. 20 even the *New York Times*, the journalistic home of McChrystal idolater [Dexter Filkins](#), had to confess that "Marines Do Heavy Lifting as Afghan Army Lags in Battle."

Bravo to journalist [C.J. Chivers](#), a former Marine, for reporting that the assertion by American and Afghan officials that portrays "the Afghan Army as the force out front in this important offensive against the Taliban" conflicts with "what is visible in the field." By all important measures, "from transporting troops, directing them in battle and coordinating fire support to arranging modern communications, logistics, aviation, and medical support – the mission in Marjah has been a Marine operation conducted in the presence of fledgling Afghan Army units, whose officers and soldiers follow behind the Americans and do what they are told."

I hope the owners of the *Times* don't fire Chivers. It would be nice to think that the rag of record has at least one reporter capable of telling the truth.

Another *Times* contributor, [Timothy Hsia](#), a West Point graduate who has served in Iraq, says in a Feb. 18 piece that success in Marjah will hinge on a "civilian surge." Hsia has, lamentably, bitten off on the jagged piece of crack-pottery that says in order to succeed in Afghanistan we need lots and lots of American civilians to go over there and be policemen and fire dudes and

construction workers and so on as part of a Civilian Response Corps. The idea is so ludicrous that its proponents picked Dick Cheney protégé Doug Feith, the dumbest freaking guy on the planet, to shill it in a May 2009 [Wall Street Journal](#) op-ed.

We already have a Civilian Response Corps; it's called the Peace Corps, and it's been around since before people joined it to get out of fighting in Vietnam. As you might have already inferred, the reason we call it a "Peace" Corps is that it only works in a peacetime scenario. Sending U.S. civilians into a hot war zone, especially one like we have in Afghanistan where there are no front lines, doesn't accomplish a whole lot except get a whole lot of U.S. civilians killed. The only way to try to protect the civilians is to send more soldiers to the war zone or (aha!) hire mercenary outfits like Blackwater to do the job. Even then, the civilians have to stay holed up in areas where the soldiers or the hired thugs can protect them, so they can't do what we supposedly sent them for.

But civilians provide a vital layer in the Pentagon's lame-excuse stratagem. If our military can't win a war, it's because we don't have enough military in the theater of operations. If we have enough military, we don't have enough military from the country we're fighting in to fight with us. If we have enough military from the country we're fighting in but they turn out to be a pack of Gomer Pyles, then we don't have enough civilians involved. Next, I suppose, come household pets.

Of course, civilians might be able to do one thing that our Green Berets can't: teach Afghan soldiers how to load and carry their rifles.