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## Just Say No to McChrystal

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President Barack Obama's war council is meeting to consider Gen. Stanley McChrystal's proposal to increase troop levels in Afghanistan by 10,000 to 40,000 troops. Nobody seems to be pondering why we have troops in Afghanistan at all.

President Obama has reportedly taken the option of withdrawing all our troops from Afghanistan off the table. Republican [John McCain](#), who the Pentagon wishes had won the 2008 election, is shouting about the perils of taking "half measures" and wants Obama to give McChrystal everything he asks for. Blue Dog Democrat Ike Skelton has cautioned Obama against taking a "half-ass it and hope" approach.

The best measure we can take, though, is to start backing out.

Our mission in Afghanistan supposedly has something to do with countering international terrorism, but the various flavors of [Taliban](#) and other militant groups in that country aren't international terrorists; they're just hooligans with guns who want us to leave. McChrystal confesses he sees no sign of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. [National Security Adviser James Jones](#) says the "maximum estimate" says al-Qaeda now has fewer than 100 fighters.

The logic boils down to *We have to escalate or Afghanistan will fall back under control of the Taliban and they'll let 100 or fewer terrorists back in the country.* What unabashed piffle. Our lessons from the last eight years of woebegone war should have taught us a number of things:

Military force is the worst possible means of combating terrorism. As the analysts at the globally respected [Rand Corporation](#) stated in 2008, the best way to proceed in our so-called "war" on terror is with "a light U.S. military footprint or none at all."

There is no such thing as a "successful" counterinsurgency campaign. More than two and a half years into the Iraq surge, Iraq's government and security forces are corrupt and incompetent, and there's not a glimpse of a solution on the horizon.

The worst mistake we made in Iraq was to go into the enterprise with the goal of decapitating its political leadership. Saddam Hussein was nobody's idea of a new-deal Democrat, but he didn't need a field manual to figure out how to run his country. By invading Iraq and deposing Hussein, we let a herd of cats out of the corral and we'll never figure out how to re-combobulate the situation.

I grew weary of the no-fly zone and maritime embargo operations over Iraq that spanned the decade and change between Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom (I did three tours of that abject nonsense), but they beat the bloody snot out of the Iraqi squirrel cage we're tangled in now. We'd have been far, far better off to let Hussein, who we now know was a toothless tyrant when we invaded, stay in power. It's too late to give Iraq back to Hussein, but it's not too late to give Afghanistan back to Mohammed Omar and his Taliban.

We need to learn what conquerors throughout history have known. The best way to occupy a country is to not occupy it. Leave the local burgomasters in charge and keep a low-profile praetorian governor around to collect the tribute on schedule.

We have managed to discard the history of war and reverse that process. We traipse into a country, kick out the folks who know how to run things, insert puppets, and rather than collect tribute we throw reams of bribe money at everybody so they won't shoot us or our anointed stooges. (That's how "[Teflon General](#)" David Petraeus created the illusion of a "successful" surge in Iraq.)

The best way for us to not have foreigners shoot us is to not put our soldiers in their country. The best way to keep foreigners from coming over here to shoot us is to keep pressure on our Homeland Security structure to do its job. 9/11 never would have happened if our alphabet soup agencies — FBI, CIA, NSA, JFCOMM, FAA, NORAD, etc. — hadn't passed out facedown on the stove. Things are different now: nobody wants to be identified as the circle smirk who allowed another 9/11 to happen on their watch.

It's time to bring our troops home. They're not doing any good. That's not their fault. At the tactical level, the level at which combat occurs, they're unbelievably competent. But strategically, use of military force by global hegemon America has become a losing proposition.

We need to let the Afghanistan conflict blow itself calm at the nearest opportunity. We can best do that by fading away and letting the natural political forces that exist in that part of the world duke things out among themselves.

We don't need to send any more kids over there to get killed or have their legs blown off, or to take part in the slaughter of innocents that they'll experience trauma about for the rest of their lives.

We need to shut down this madness now.