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More of the Same Promised in Petraeus' Afghanistan

By Jason Ditz

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Having [unceremoniously dismissed of Gen. Stanley McChrystal](#) just one year after installing him as the commander and public face of the Obama Administration's favorite war, the President has brought in a "new" general, but all parties involved were quick to assure that the disastrous McChrystal Plan, a strategy to escalate the war in Afghanistan an enormous amount, would remain in place and that the change was essentially a cosmetic one.

NATO leadership, British and [German officials](#), even the [Afghan government itself](#), have all predicted that the strategy, one which the Pentagon was openly questioning before the recent budget push, does not need any sort of rethink, and that the plan, such as it is, will remain as it has been since President Obama took office. More escalations, more troops, more funding, and more predictions that the situation will get worse before it gets better.

In that regard Gen. Petraeus is an extremely convenient replacement, because if there is one US military commander with ample experience in transmitting false hope to the Congress, it is surely him. In fact in his role as Centcom Commander Petraeus has been regularly called upon to [predict that the situation will worsen in Afghanistan](#) but that some improbable victory would emerge at some indeterminate point down the road, if only everyone believes hard enough.

In fact, analysts say the only change Petraeus will bring, to the extent it is a change at all, is a rhetorical one. Several other [officials have dismissed the July 2011 “drawdown date”](#) for Afghanistan is largely meaningless and [Gen. Petraeus appears to be firmly in the crowd opposing any exit date](#). The could be spun as “renewed debate,” but it is more realistically an opportunity to finally do away with yet another timeline.

President Obama insisted in his announcement that the replacement of McChrystal had nothing to do with “[any sense of personal insult](#),” but as he reiterated that he is in “full agreement” with McChrystal on his strategy and in fact intends to continue that strategy even now that McChrystal is gone, it leaves open the question of why such a change would be made, other than for change’s sake.

Gen. Petraeus’ ill-deserved reputation for having “won” Iraq, a war which is still going on, will likely be his biggest asset, as it will allow him to credibly present the McChrystal Plan as an Iraq-styled surge. The claim might not stand up to close scrutiny on a number of levels, but war policy in recent years has rarely been subjected to anything more than cursory glances and occasional weary sighs, usually when the administration is trying to shove more “emergency” funding down Congress’ throat. Funding which, in the end, they always produce.