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Civil Military Relations Case Study

Former General Stanley A. McChrystal resigned as a general on 23 June 2010. He had an honorable career serving in the 75th Ranger, the 504th Infantry Regiment, commanding the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), and resigning as the commander in Afghanistan. Although General McChrystal is an accomplished man his resignation was due to a great failure on his part. This failure was not maintaining a civil relationship with civilian counterparts working within the government, specifically former vice president Joe Biden, and former president Barack Obama, by being hostile and saying some incredibly negative things in a Rolling Stone article. The failure on McCrystal’s part created issues with civil-military relations and trust, stained the stewards of the military profession, politicized the military in a way that can negatively impact the military role in the policy process. These issues in turn led to his resignation.

General McChrystal greatly damaged his civil-military relations with former vice president Joe Biden when McChrystal had stated some negative things in a Rolling Stones Article. The article states: “McChrystal dismissed the counterterrorism strategy being advocated by Vice President Joe Biden as ‘shortsighted,’ saying it would lead to a state of ‘Chaos-istan.’” (Hastings, *The Runaway General: The Profile That Brought Down McChrystal*). There is nothing wrong with a general disagreeing with the vice president, in fact that can even be a part of the job. It makes sense for a general to disagree and try to give guidance. However, what he said in this Rolling Stone article ruins the relationship between military and civilian leaders of our country. Going out and openly discussing how terrible of an idea Joe Biden had ruins the relationship and dynamic between the civilian and military leaders. A relationship where the military respects the civilian’s decisions of running the country, and the military can respect the civilian leaders, without being open and hostile regarding certain issues. This lack of trust makes it difficult for civilians to trust those in the military, especially those like General McChrystal who hold a large amount of power and have lots of military influence, can make it seem like the different parts of the government are hostile to each other, and provide a sense of insecurity to the American public. This is a great failure that is entirely to the fault of General McChrystal for being hostile unnecessarily in a Rolling Stone article.

General McChrystal had also stained the steward of the profession. “Stewardship is the responsibility of Army professionals to strengthen the Army as a profession and to care for the people and other resources entrusted to them by the American people.” (ADRP 1 chapter 6-3). As an Army professional it was the responsibility of General McChrystal to care for the resources and people entrusted to them by the American people. A part of the American people being the leaders that the American people elect. General McChrystal is damaging that relationship where the American people entrust those in the military with resources and people. Moreover, General McChrystal also seemed to weaken the Army as a profession. In the Rolling Stone article, he very nonchalantly talks down about the vice president of the United States and seems to not care as to what the public will think of his words. In fact, a lot of his staff join in and say things that create a barrier between the civilian politicians and senior military. Such could cause even greater distrust, which damages the steward of the profession even more. General McChrystal had damaged the steward of the profession, and as such ruined his status as a respected general which in turn led to his resignation.

General McChrystal had caused a form of politicization in the military that can negatively change the military role in the policy making process. As a general your position is earned by years of experience, and is generally respected by the American people, however a general is not an elected official. This means that the American people did not choose the general to make decisions on the behalf of the American people, politicians bear the responsibility of making these decisions. However, the statements that General McChrystal said in the Rolling Stone article politicized his position, and made it appear as if Generals can blatantly disagree and come up with their own ideas separated from the vice president or president. This changes the military role in the policy making process as the elected politicians are the ones that essentially create and design policy, whereas senior officers in the military are not there to create policy but are there to give guidance to politicians creating policy. General McChrystal’s attempt to alter this process resulted in politicization of the military and had created a negative impact on the military’s role as guidance in the policy making process. In this way he was responsible for his own resignation.

The resignation of General Stanley A. McChrystal was ultimately due to failures placed on his own actions. Furthermore, his resignation was a privilege that former President Barack Obama gave him, as his actions may have caused other presidents to kick him out of his position. General Stanley A. McChrystal caused issues with civil-military relations and trust, stained the steward of profession, and unnecessarily politicized the military negatively. He did this in such a way that he had caused great distrust among civilian and military personnel alike, and this ultimately led to his own downfall.

Works Cited

Department of the Army. The Army Profession (ADRP 1), 14 Jun. 2014

Hastings, Michael. *The Runaway General: The Profile That Brought Down McChrystal*. Rolling Stone,

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