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The U.S. combat mission in Afghanistan assumed another dimension last week when Gen. Stanley McChrystal was replaced by Gen. David Petraeus — a logical choice given Petraeus's skillful leadership during the Iraq surge. With this change in command, there is now an opportunity for Congress and the Obama administration to renew its commitment to mission success.

Gen. Petraeus has shown that he knows how to win. Of course, Afghanistan is not Iraq, presenting different and unique challenges in certain areas. But there are some important lessons learned during combat in Iraq that, if incorporated in Afghanistan, will help save lives on the battlefield and bring us closer to achieving victory.

Needless to say, General Petraeus is familiar with each of these lessons. With his experience, gained through operations in Iraq and commander of U.S. Central Command, America will have its best and perhaps final chance in Afghanistan, but he cannot go at it alone. Congress and the administration must do its part too, supporting the Afghan mission by providing the necessary funding, resources and flexibility to get the job done.

This renewed focus must involve all aspects of the Afghan mission. In addition to a reevaluation of current policy overall, several areas where re-examination is immediately needed include the military's counter-improvised explosive device strategy, rules of engagement and the impending troop drawdown timeline.

Combating Roadside Bombs

At the height of the Iraq war, roadside bombs were the biggest threat to U.S. forces, contributing to the majority of U.S. casualties. The solution to this problem was implemented in 2007 under Task Force ODIN (Observe, Detect, Identify and Neutralize), which incorporated unmanned aerial vehicles, cameras and other assets into a network that provided persistent surveillance of areas with high instances of roadside bomb attacks.

Quick reaction forces would then target bomb locations and emplacements, giving U.S. troops added advantage and better protection on Iraqi roadways. Soon after ODIN was fully operational, the rate of roadside bomb attacks and coalition casualties decreased markedly.

ODIN worked. It saved lives, reaffirmed confidence in the Iraq mission and contributed immensely to our overall objectives. Replicating ODIN in Afghanistan would have the same effect, especially now that roadside bomb incidents have increased by more than 200 percent over the last year alone.

During the month of June — the deadliest month in Afghanistan to date — more than 60 percent of casualties were due to roadside bombs. Still, there is no reliable counter-improvised explosive strategy in Afghanistan. Such a strategy is long overdue and much needed to protect our military against a range of threats.

Revising the Rules of Engagement

One of the more regular complaints coming from commanders and ground personnel are the limitations and risks associated with the current rules of engagement. The counter insurgency tactics — or COIN strategy — put in place by General McChrystal generally aims to limit civilian casualties by prohibiting troops from firing unless engaged by the enemy first.

Rules of engagement must reflect the realities on the ground and, therefore, should be reconsidered and modified appropriately. This was the message from U.S. Special Operations Commander, Admiral Eric Olson, who recently called the COIN doctrine an “oxymoron” and reiterated the belief that “counterinsurgency should involve countering the insurgents.”

Admiral Olson is right. American troops, including the special operators under his command, are undertaking a dangerous mission and the rules of engagement must reflect that fact.

General Petraeus has indicated he intends to review the rules of engagement. It's important any needed changes occur quickly so our military is no longer operating under a restrictive framework of rules governing its interaction with the enemy.

Adjusting Drawdown Timeline

Perhaps the biggest challenge we face is time. President Obama announced to the American people and the rest of the world, including our enemy, that a drawdown of U.S. troops will begin July 2011.

Such a short window of time raises serious concerns about the ability to sufficiently strengthen Afghanistan's security forces, enough at least to protect the Afghan people and government and to foster a trustworthy political system that serves the interests of its citizens. The enemy will continue to wait us out, doing what it can in the meantime to remind political leaders and the Afghan population that the United States and its coalition will soon be gone.

More appropriately, conditions on the ground should dictate the course forward. Both the administration and Congress would be wise to back away from the drawdown date and refocus on transitioning the Afghan government to accept more responsibility, without being constrained by unrealistic or arbitrary timelines.

Under Gen. Petraeus, there is new opportunity to advance the global mission in Afghanistan. It's important that the administration and Congress recognize this opportunity, too — and recommit to achieving victory.