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Obama's Speech

Michael Sean Winters | Jun. 23, 2011 Distinctly Catholic

Generally speaking, when a President finds a speech being criticized alike by the more extreme partisans of both left and right, he probably got it just about right.

Last night, President Obama outlined his policy regarding the war in Afghanistan. The increase in troops he ordered in January 2009, the "surge," always came with a timetable. Obama never gave Gen. Petraeus an open-ended engagement nor, to be clear, did Petraeus ever ask for one. Naturally, any commander would rather have more resources than fewer, but Obama's decision to draw down 10,000 troops this year and an additional 23,000 next year reportedly fell within the parameters Petraeus outlined.

The President did a fine job articulating both the possibilities, and the limits, of our engagement in Afghanistan. He made a bit of news by announcing that the U.S. was open to negotiations with the Taliban under certain circumstances. And, he also made news by disclosing that the information cache we got at bin Laden's compound showed the former Al-Qaeda leader aware that his efforts were failing. Obama was gracious about Pakistan, which may require him to cross his fingers while speaking the words, but nonetheless makes geo-strategic sense.

Within minutes of the conclusion of his brief speech, Oabam was being attacked from both left and right. The left, found mostly over at MSNBC, wanted more troops out sooner: I love Barney Frank, but I would not trust him with my foreign policy for a second, not least because his arguments seemed to lack any factual basis for his claims. The right, found mostly at Fox, worried that we were cutting and running, even though "victory" (whatever that means) is, they claimed, so close at hand. Hannity and his ilk conveniently ignored the fact that after the drawdowns announced last night, there will still be more troops in Afghanistan than George W. Bush ever sent.

When Barney Frank and Sean Hannity both think you got it wrong, you probably got it right.

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