



Free-wheeling Trump reins in the rhetoric in Afghanistan u-turn

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After arguably one of the most difficult weeks in his young presidency, Donald Trump addressed the nation and troops in a prime time slot from Fort Myer in Arlington as Commander in Chief.

This was a speech which would finally detail his delayed vision for Afghanistan.

However, faced with falling approval ratings and widespread criticism he started with a much demanded call for unity: "Love for America requires love for all of its people."

He told the audience: "When we open our hearts to patriotism, there is no room for prejudice, no place for bigotry, and no tolerance for hate. The young men and women we send to fight our wars abroad deserve to return to a country that is not at war with itself at home."

For a man who had vocally supported withdrawing from Afghanistan on the campaign trail, committing more to the fight was never going to be easy.

Foreign policy expert Trevor Thrall, from the Cato Institute, summed it up saying: "I think this was an agonising decision for Donald Trump, for years he talked about getting out of Afghanistan, we were losing, we weren't getting anything from it. I don't think anything has happened to change his mind since he became president so I'm sure this was a very difficult decision for him."

"My original instinct was to pull out - and, historically, I like following my instincts," he said, before justifying his policy u-turn.

"A hasty withdrawal would create a vacuum that terrorists, including ISIS and al Qaeda, would instantly fill, just as happened before September 11th."

While the continued commitment to fighting in Afghanistan follows a similar line to his predecessors, Donald Trump was keen to make it clear his policy was different, that he wasn't part of the dreaded establishment which he had railed against to win the election.

Refusing to talk about troop numbers, instead he focused on his repeated promise to defeat terrorists.

"We are not nation-building again. We are killing terrorists," he declared, stating: "These killers need to know they have nowhere to hide; that no place is beyond the reach of American might and Americans arms. Retribution will be fast and powerful."

Afghanistan is the USA's longest war and it's stalling.

While the speech was heavy in rhetoric, it was light on detail. People still don't know how many troops are going, what they'll be doing and for how long.

By focussing on putting America's needs first, warning the flow of dollars to Pakistan will cease if they continue to house terrorists and repeatedly promising victory, this speech played to Donald Trump's base but his response to the violence in Virginia has caused widespread division and anger at a time when he's asking the country to back him.

The dent in his support means that in the coming weeks not only does Donald Trump have to convince voters that he's a capable President, but also the lawmakers in Congress, many of whom have spoken out against him over his perceived support of white supremacists and whose support is vital if he wants to move his agenda forward.

The need for stability meant this time Donald Trump stuck to the script, but the traditional presidential pose presented here could be short-lived as in a matter of hours there's a rally in Arizona where the free-wheeling, campaigning President may once again be unleashed.