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## Right Now

Inside the conservative movement and the Republican Party with David Weigel

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### WHAT I'M READING

- 1 People forget that Sean Hannity was informing viewers of Barack Obama's "radical ties" long before Glenn Beck hauled out a chalkboard. [Conservative Victory](#) puts Hannity back in the Obama-bashing vanguard.
- 2 Mark Lilla's "[Tea Party Jacobins](#)" is the first meditation on the movement that seems to have struck a chord.
- 3 Years after I should have, I'm finally reading [Philip K. Dick](#).

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## To clap or not to clap for Akbar Ganji

Last week I [attended](#) the Cato Institute's Milton Friedman Prize dinner and noticed that applause came only once during award-winner Akbar Ganji's speech -- when he quoted a pro-freedom statement from former president George W. Bush. In his blog, Cato research fellow Julian Sanchez challenges my take on the audience reaction:

I think the inference Dave tacitly draws -- that the crowd was out of sympathy with Ganji's critique and supportive of George Bush -- is quite wrong. Indeed, I suspect the majority view in the room was just the reverse. At any rate, I know I was substantially in agreement, and I think I clapped at the same points.

Why? Well, first, even if you're not especially jingoistic, and even when the speaker is a hero like Ganji, and even when you agree with the basic substance of what he's saying, I think most people feel a little awkward listening to a lecture from a foreigner about their country's misdeeds. I don't remember exactly what the Bush line was, but it was a natural applause line in an otherwise fairly wonkish disquisition, and as Ganji deployed it (not entirely consistently with Bush's original intent, I suspect) the quotation was in line with the general tenor of his remarks. Also, I think people may have finally felt they had "permission" to applaud the critique when it was filtered through a domestic source.

I think this is largely true, but the timing was important. Ganji's Bush quote came very early in the speech. It was unclear, to anyone unfamiliar with his thinking, whether he'd go on to praise American foreign policy. He went on to criticize it, specifically as it affects the Middle East, and he got no applause. How much can we read into the reaction of a crowd from the sound of applause? Usually, a great deal, and the conversations I had after the speech bolstered my sense that Ganji's brutally frank talk surprised many people in the room. But Sanchez's caveat is worth considering.


By David Weigel | May 17, 2010; 5:01 PM ET  
Categories: [Libertarians](#), [National Security](#)

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