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The Big Question: Will Obama's speech win support for the war?

By Sydelle Moore and Tony Romm - 12/02/09 10:59 AM ET

Some of the nation's top political commentators, legislators and intellectuals offer some insight into the biggest question burning up the blogosphere today.

Today's question:

Will President Barack Obama's speech boost public support for the war in Afghanistan?

Cheri Jacobus, [Pundits Blog](#) contributor, said:

For a man who has been so very committed to victory when it comes to his own political campaigns, President Barack Obama conveyed little of that same commitment to victory in Afghanistan with this speech last night at West Point.

America was already convinced we need more boots on the ground in Afghanistan, but Obama now has us all a bit nervous.

Rather than operating from a position of strength and certainty, Obama seems to have merely acquiesced to the request by General Stanley McChrystal. His delay and equivocating thus compromises confidence in what is unquestionably the most important and impactful decision of his presidency to date.

Obama's "dithering" on Afghanistan telegraphs to Americans, Al Qaeda and the Taliban, as well as those around the globe who may doubt or be tempted to test American strength under the new-ish president, that he is not altogether comfortable in his role as Commander-In-Chief and the job requirement to make troop level decisions. Can he make even bigger, tougher decisions on war if the need arises? Can he do so in a timely fashion that enhances our chances for success and security rather than indecisive meandering resulting in a split decision in an attempt to placate political factions here at home?

Craig Newmark, founder of Craiglist, said:

Well, people are really glad to hear from a president who's making deliberate, smart decisions, hearing all sides, then acting decisively. In terms of public support, that matters. When given the facts, people prefer a president who faces reality.

Christopher A. Preble, director of Foreign Policy Studies at [The Cato Institute](#), said:

President Obama's speech was aimed squarely at the middle ground. Politically, the talk of a withdrawal date is necessary to quell American fears of an open-ended mission, already the longest war in American history. Strategically, he hopes to turn the military tide against the Taliban, stiffen the resolve of the Afghans, the Pakistanis and our NATO allies.

The president's problem -- and it is now America's problem -- is that this is a very tall order, and one that will not be made easier by the introduction of an additional 30,000 troops. Defense Secretary Gates fixed on the dilemma several weeks ago when he pondered aloud: "How do we signal resolve and at the same time signal to the Afghans and the American people that this is not open-ended?"

It turns out you can't. The president's decision to deepen our commitment to Afghanistan, while simultaneously promising an exit, is ultimately absurd on its face.

While All Americans hope that the mission in Afghanistan turns out well, and have great confidence in the U.S. military, our troops can only do so much with a strategy that is shot full of contradictions and inconsistencies.

Bill Press, host of the "[Bill Press Show](#)," said:

Selling a war is always tough, for any president, and President Obama did the best job he could. But I still don't think he'll be successful in convincing the American people that this long war is worth continuing, let alone escalating. We can't afford another eight years in Afghanistan, but it looks like that's where we're heading.

John F. McManus, president of [The John Birch Society](#), said:

The speech by President Obama will likely change few minds. Those opposed to the continuation of this undeclared and therefore unconstitutional "war" will remain opposed. Those in favor will, for a time, stay in favor. But sentiment favoring participation in this conflict will continue to wane. The significance of the president starting his speech with authorization for our nation's involvement emanating from NATO and the United Nations is highly significant and should not be overlooked. He certainly didn't cite the U.S. Constitution to justify this "war"! NATO arose in 1949 as a U.N. regional arrangement. The speech added one more reason why the U.S. should withdraw from the U.N. and all its subsidiaries, and why the American people should demand that all U.S. officials get back to adhering to the limitations in the U.S. Constitution.

Source:

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