



Obama Afghan Strategy Taken from Bush's Playbook

Before he had finished invoking the blessings of God upon the nation he was elected to lead, researchers and pundits had evaluated every assertion made by President Barack Obama during his speech to West Point cadets on December 1. During the presentation, President Obama set forth his plan for deploying 30,000 additional ground troops to Afghanistan and for bringing them home beginning in 18 months. Listening to the president's evaluation of the situation on the ground in Afghanistan, one is reminded of Yogi Berra's famous malapropism: "déjà vu all over again."



Much of Obama's math is as fuzzy as his predecessor's, and his trust in the ability of natives to defend their own homeland is as staggeringly unbelievable as that demonstrated by George W. Bush with regard to Iraq. Obama's assessment of the commitment the United States can expect from Afghans was so similar to that made repeatedly over the past several years by former President Bush that one would think he had cobbled together his own speech by copying and pasting from Bush's own pronouncements.

The first of several statements with a familiar ring addressed the ability and willingness of Afghan military forces to be trained and deployed in their own defense. President Obama told cadets, many of whom would themselves be officers in the Afghan theatre, that the surge of U.S. troops in Afghanistan "will increase our ability to train competent Afghan security forces and to partner with them so that more Afghans can get into the fight. And they will help create the conditions for the United States to transfer responsibility to the Afghans." The president had studied the Bush playbook well. President Bush made nearly identical promises to the American people regarding the training of Iraqi Defense Forces and the transfer of power to them. To date, there are over 100,000 American troops remaining in Iraq.

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The problem with this misplaced trust is that not only are the numbers of currently enlisted Afghan troops insufficient to the task, but reports from the field indicate that those that do "get into the fight" very often desert. And, furthermore, those that remain are often hamstrung by untenable levels of inter-tribal conflict within the Afghani ranks. The new U.S. commander in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, recently announced plans to increase the level of NATO and American leadership in Afghan units, hoping that increased exposure to their more well-trained European and American colleagues will accelerate their own increase in combat performance.

President Obama made another Bushian exaggeration Tuesday, assuring Americans that other nations soon will offer more substantial levels of armed forces dedicated to the mission of eradicating the Taliban. "Because this is an international effort, I have asked that our commitment be joined by contributions from our allies. Some have already provided additional troops, and we are confident that



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there will be further contributions in the days and weeks ahead.”

Maybe President Obama in all his zeal for increasing our own military commitment has forgotten that this same vow was made by President Bush upon our invasion of Iraq. As it stands today, however, there are only 150 NATO advisers on the ground in Iraq in addition to the approximately 140,000 American soldiers and Marines currently in harm’s way. Even our traditionally staunchest ally, the United Kingdom, finally wearied of the arrival of coffins draped in the Union Jack and on July 28, 2009, all remaining British forces withdrew from Iraq.

Perhaps it is Obama’s lack of foreign policy experience or an over-estimation of his own charm and power of persuasion that is to blame for his misunderstanding of European tolerance for watching their sons and daughters die in wars that they consider futile exercises of American expansionism and the much-maligned American "cowboy mentality." They are demonstrably unwilling to sacrifice their blood and treasure for the enlargement of our empire.

Finally, President Obama’s third point in his restructuring of American strategy concerned the commitment of our erstwhile ally in the “war on terror” – Pakistan. The commander-in-chief indirectly challenged Pakistan to continue the excising of the cancer of fanaticism in their own body politic. Somehow, President Obama reckons that Pakistan is ready and able to clamp down tighter and fight more fiercely against the agents of extremism that flee to Pakistan for safe harbor. Oddly, Obama embraces this skewed appraisal of the strength of our partnership with Pakistan despite recognizing that “in the past, there have been those in Pakistan who have argued that the struggle against extremism is not their fight, and that Pakistan is better off doing little or seeking accommodation with those who use violence.”

There is no verifiable evidence that the government in Pakistan or the armed forces under their command is any more determined to doggedly seek and destroy the terrorists, or those aiding them among the inhabitants of the mountainous regions along their border with Afghanistan. While it is true that, of late, the Pakistani government has rooted out a few radical elements in those regions most infested with them, it is not true that they have done so in order to rid the world of the threat they pose. Rather, these maneuvers have one simple mission: Eliminate anyone that dares challenge the government’s authority. Despite the President’s personal allure, unfounded assurances and thinly veiled denouncement of Pakistan’s paltry pursuit of al-Qaeda and its associates, there is still one place where terrorists retreat and regroup — Pakistan.

President Obama would have better served the proud men and women attending the U.S. Military Academy in preparation for service to their country if he were to place less emphasis on a pledge of additional brigades of soldiers and rededication of resources to undeclared imperial ventures — and more to a similar pledge inherent in the oath the president and members of the military have taken to defend the timeless principles of the Constitution. These principles include restraint consistent with the limited and enumerated powers, including the power to declare war granted to Congress alone.

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