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Gerson on Afghanistan

Michael Sean Winters | Sep. 30, 2009 NCR Today

Michael Gerson?s column this morning [1]on the choice President Obama faces in Afghanistan is a congeries of fears, almost all of them misplaced. He is concerned that the deliberateness of the decision-making process the President is following is itself part of the problem, that ?the debate, however, should generally take place in private and produce outcomes with al deliberate speed.? I am not so sure that privacy of judgment helped the Bush administration make wise choices, but never mind.

Gerson warns that an enemy can use delays to conduct propaganda. He quotes Al-Qaeda?s most recent video, directed at the Europeans, warning them that America will cut and run and then ?will have gone away far beyond the Atlantic? leaving the Europeans exposed to Islamicist wrath. Well, isolationism exists in the far reaches of the left and right, among a few MoveOn.org types and Pat Buchanan, but Robert Taft is no longer the senior Senator from Ohio. And, NATO isn?t going anywhere.

Then, Gerson warns that the deliberations are unfair to the troops, writing that ?No one wants to be the last to die for the sake of yesterday?s strategy.? This is a re-make of John Kerry?s line about Vietnam that no one wants to be the last person to die for a mistake. In fact, the deaths of American troops in Afghanistan to date are the result of a lack of strategy. Obama may choose a bad strategy or a good one, but at least the current deliberations will produce a strategy.

We all want a better outcome in Afghanistan than what we have now. It is less clear that any better outcome is achievable. Throwing in more troops might work, but it might not. What worked, sort of, in Iraq with the Surge might not work in Afghanistan, as the Soviets can attest. Prolonging American involvement may itself prevent anything resembling a resolution. These outcomes are all somewhat unknowable. But, shame on Gerson for worrying about the President?s desire to deliberate over the decision, to ask precisely what the objectives are, and find what appears to be the strategy that is most likely to succeed.

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[1] http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/29/AR2009092902932.html