Quote of the week: *"I didn't see a lot of warmth in that crowd out there that the President chose to address tonight and I thought that was interesting. He went to maybe the enemy camp tonight to make his case."* – Chris Matthews on MSNBC after the President's speech at West Point.

Wait a minute Mr. Matthews. The United States Military Academy is an "enemy camp" for the Commander-in-Chief?

Afghanistan: Before I comment on the President's plan for the war in Afghanistan, let me reiterate that this is a very difficult situation with no easy answers. The President laid out his plan this week, and that plan will have some Republicans and some Democrats in support, and other Republicans and Democrats in opposition.

I will be one of the Republicans in opposition. Perhaps for not the reasons readers of this missive might expect. Some people will legitimately oppose this plan because the 30,000 additional troops is below the minimum range of troops outlined by General McChrystal several months ago to get the job done. He had called for 40,000 to 80,000. The strategic maxim of "overwhelming force" would probably call for 80,000 additional troops if not more. Furthermore, the President's decision to announce a date for the beginning of withdrawal makes one wonder about the level of his commitment and seems to give the enemy a winning card they can play if they just wait the surge out. Zalmay Khalizad, the former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, once received a direct message from the Taliban saying:"You have all the watches. But we have all the time," a clear reference to their ability to wait us out.

Moreover, I did not hear any definition of victory or success in the President's speech Tuesday night. That question was asked and answered over and over again about the surge in Iraq. The answer then was that the definition of victory was the establishment of a stable, democratic government in Iraq that was friendly to western interests, not a threat to Israel, and that could support and defend itself thereby permitting the withdrawal of US troops. Arguably, those objectives have been met.

But I heard no such definition of victory Tuesday night. Nor do I think there is one. I simply do not believe that we can establish a lasting westernized democracy in a society that has been based on tribal cultural ties for centuries. Furthermore, the mountainous terrain in Afghanistan,

as well as the porous and uncontrolled border region with Northern Pakistan, makes control of this area exceedingly difficult. Iraq's terrain and culture were and are much more suited to these types of operations. I still believe that there was much strategic value to establishing a friendly Iraqi government in a critical region of the world that includes Iran, Syria, Israel, and others. While I acknowledge the significance of Pakistan's possession of, by some estimates, as many as 100 nuclear weapons, I just don't believe that control of Afghanistan has the same strategic value.

You can probably see where I am going here. In fact, I think the best way to address our current problems in Afghanistan should be more focused on utilizing intelligence and air assets aimed at neutralizing potential threats to the United States and her allies. We are in Afghanistan because that is where Al Qaeda was located. Yet, even by the President's own admission, what is left of that organization has now marshaled its forces inside the borders of Pakistan. So, how does controlling more of Afghanistan root them out of Pakistan? The Taliban has other competitors in the region like the Northern Alliance; such that they, or anyone else for that matter, are unlikely to control the entire country. Furthermore, the national government we are promoting over the former tribal leadership is admittedly, and horribly corrupt. Even if you believe that a westernized democracy could succeed in Afghanistan, which I don't, how can the Afghan people embrace a government rife with corruption and abuse? We certainly do not want Afghanistan to once again become a place of sanctuary for terrorists, but we cannot occupy every inch of ground in the world where terrorists are likely to be found. Al Qaeda is now largely operating out of Pakistan, where we cannot send troops. I'm sure that Iran, North Korea, and a number of African countries have a similar predisposition for terrorist activity, but we are not going to, and cannot put boots on the ground in those countries.

In the President's speech, he specifically rejected comparisons to Vietnam. Unfortunately, I think those rejected comparisons are painfully valid. I fear that his strategy will be enough to continue the war, the costs, and the casualties, but fail to produce a decisive strategic result. Even if we did prevail, it would not produce any long term stability, which would prompt the country to revert back to where it was. In the end, the strategic importance of Vietnam was overrated and Afghanistan is as well.

And we haven't even begun to talk about the cost. In the midst of record debts, deficits, and spending, this surge will cost about $200 billion just over the next 2 years. A number of Democrats in the House are already talking about a "war surtax" to pay for it. That would be on top of the proposed "Health care surtax," and the proposed "global warming surtax," and the proposed deficit reduction surtax, and the 2011 tax increases. With all of this, we could become the one of the highest taxed, biggest government, and least prosperous countries on earth. We can't afford that for such an uncertain strategy or outcome.

We all owe our young men and women of the Armed Forces, military and civilian, a debt of gratitude for their dedicated and tireless service in defense of our nation. They are the best, and most well trained in the world and will accomplish anything we ask them to do, no matter how tall the order.

The truth is, tactical victories do not always translate into strategic successes. We need a new strategy to keep America safe from terrorism that is both pragmatic and effective. I don't think that this is it.

I remain respectfully,

Congressman John Campbell
Member of Congress