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## About the Author

Thomas Fleming is the editor of *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture* and president of The Rockford Institute. He is the author of several books, including *The Morality of Everyday Life*.

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# Humanitarian Bribery

by Thomas Fleming

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Secretary of State Hilary Clinton has finally asserted herself as a foreign policy leader of Metternichian or rather Machiavellian proportions. On January 6, the day before Rajiv Shah is sworn in as director of USAID, Madame Clinton delivered her first major policy address, “[Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century](#),” at the Peterson Institute for International Economics. The secretary conceded that it is hard to sell development aid to “farmers and factory workers and teachers and nurses and students, hard-working mothers and fathers [be grateful for the concession, fathers] who wonder, why is their government spending taxpayer dollars to improve the lives of people in the developing world when there is so much hardship and unmet needs right here at home.”

Then how can we justify throwing even more money down the foreign aid rathole? The honest and true answer—admittedly dressed up in the pseudo-humanitarian verbiage that politicians have to use if they are to snooker the American people—is that foreign aid is an important part of what politicians like to call “national defense,” though there are far more accurate words. [Foreign Policy](#) offers the key paragraphs.

*“We cannot stop terrorism or defeat the ideologies of violent extremism when hundreds of millions of young people see a future with no jobs, no hope, and no way ever to catch up to the developed world...”*

*“We cannot rely on regional partners to help us stop conflicts and counter global criminal networks when those countries are struggling to stabilize and secure their own societies.”*

*“We cannot advance democracy and human rights when hunger and poverty threaten to undermine the good governance and rule of law needed to make rights real.”*

Obviously, regional struggles or the state of poverty, democracy, human rights, and good governance in the Third World have little or nothing to do with the defense of these United States. They are the usual justification for the expansion of what the neoconservatives used to call—for anyone who can remember back to when anyone listened to them—the “American Imperium.” In order to expand American Imperium, we have to stick our nose into every African brush war and every Latin American conflict between dispossessed peasants and oppressive patroons—or is it communist insurgents and defenders of property rights and free enterprise? No matter, we have to pick sides. “We cannot stand idly by, while...” Fill in whatever vapid cliché you like. And one very valuable weapon in supporting one side over another—Muslims against Christians in the Balkans, for example—is to subsidize “our guys” against “their guys.” That is why “their guys” regard The International Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders as the enemy. One researcher told me how shocked he was to discover that the Red Cross gave

much more aid to the Bosnian Muslims than to the Serbs and Croats together. Giving these people money is like selling liquor to the Indians or sending guns to Somalia.

What all this comes down to is quite simple. Like all predecessor empires, the American Empire finds it convenient to pay subsidies to the barbarian thugs that threaten the stability of its frontiers. It is much cheaper, as we learned in Iraq, to pay one set of America-hating Muslim thugs to fight another set of America-hating Muslim thugs than it is to fight both groups at the same time. The Obama administration thinks they can play the same trick in Afghanistan, but that is a far more complicated situation.

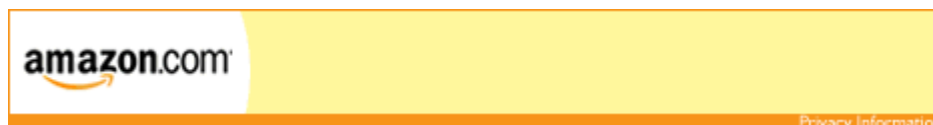
The British were fairly successful at bribing the Afghans. British bullying led to disaster in the First Afghan War, but at the end of the Second (1878-80), they set up a puppet ruler, Abdur Rahman, whom they paid to stay out of trouble. The new Amir proved to be an astute ruler, keeping the British out and fighting off the Russians by himself to avoid giving the Governor General of India any pretext for invading Afghanistan. If quiet was what the British wanted, they got it, but if it they thought they had gained the friendship of the Afghan nation, they were sadly mistaken, as the Third Afghan War was to prove.

Afghanistan is not a nation, much less a nation-state. It is an endless civil war, alternately lapsing into a cold or blowing up into a hot war. It is one Pashtun tribe against another, Pashtun against Uzbeks and Iranians, and Uzbeks against Iranians, old guard corrupt Mujaheddin against idealistic Taliban, and, overall, Shia against Sunni. I know too little about the place to speak with any more authority than the CIA experts who permitted a Jordanian triple agent to blow them up, but even that little is more than I wish to know.

So let us hear no more criticism of the fraud, waste, and mismanagement of US foreign aid. People like Doug Bandow and myself have been fools to complain that too much of the assistance ends up in the hands of military dictators and warlords who oppress their people. As Madame Clinton now reveals, that is the whole point. Buy off the dirty buggers with food parcels and old-tech weaponry that dazzle them into temporary subservience. Who cares how many people they kill or how much opium they produce. They're working for us, damn it, they're working for us.

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1. 1 Comment by M.A. Roberts on [7 January 2010](#):

Excellent piece.