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Woodward's Narrative

The *New York Times* reports that the book, *Obama's Wars*, by longtime *Washington Post* reporter Bob Woodward and scheduled for publication next week, depicts an administration completely at odds over the war in Afghanistan.

According to Woodward, the president concluded from the start that "I have two years with the public on this." He implored his advisers at one meeting, "I want an exit strategy," and he set a withdrawal timetable because, "I can't lose the whole Democratic Party."

It's unfortunate that the policy debate over Afghanistan will be *further* spun into a left-vs.-right issue. After all, there are growing, if nascent, signs that some on the political right have reservations about our continued military involvement in Afghanistan. Earlier this year, Congressman Tim Johnson (R-IL), who earned an 80 percent favorable rating from the American Conservative Union, was a GOP co-sponsor to Rep. Dennis Kucinich's (D-OH) resolution to force the removal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan. In March, Congressman John Duncan (R-TN) came to the Cato Institute and explained why "there is nothing conservative about the war in Afghanistan."

And as Cato founder Ed Crane wrote last year in the pages of the *LA Times*:

Republicans should take this opportunity to return to their traditional non-interventionist roots, and throw their neoconservative wing under the bus and forcefully oppose the war in Afghanistan. The Republicans have a chance at this moment to reclaim the mantle of the party of non-intervention -- in your healthcare, in your wallet, in your lifestyle, and in the affairs of other nations.

I am not a conservative, and neither are many of my Cato colleagues. But these comments are intended to highlight that leaving Afghanistan is far beyond Left vs. Right. In fact, many conservatives used to deride nation-building as a utopian venture that had little to do with the

nation's real interests. In the case of Afghanistan, troops are being deployed to prop up a regime Washington doesn't trust, for goals our president can't define. There is a principled case to be made that a prolonged nation-building occupation is weakening our country militarily and economically. It's a question of scarce resources and limiting the power of government. The immense price tag for war in Afghanistan can no longer be swept under the carpet or dismissed as an issue owned by peaceniks and pacifists, much less "the Democratic Party."

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