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The Desperate Search for a Rationale in Afghanistan

| [More](#)^[1]

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| [Malou Innocent](#)^[2]

A [new report](#)^[3] by The International Council on Security and Development (ICOS), an international policy think-tank, shows the overwhelming majority of Afghan men surveyed in two crucial southern provinces are unaware of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and what precipitated America's invasion.

These views may not reflect the opinions of Afghans as a whole, but this survey raises many questions. Serious discussions about the war tend to obsess over "What happens when we leave?" and rarely address the more immediate question of "Does the invasion's original rationale justify our subsequent actions?"

Afghan citizens who are [punished mercilessly](#)^[4] for [living their lives](#)^[5] will tell anyone who will listen that their governing elites [violate laws they are entrusted to uphold](#)^[6]. A lack of confidence in both public institutions and the international community causes many Afghans to look for alternative providers of security and welfare, including the insurgents the United States and NATO target and kill. But the most perplexing question is why those who advocate a [long-term, open-ended nation-building engagement](#)^[7] are seldom bothered by the moral question of whether we should be expanding the reach and scope of an abusive and despotic regime?

Some stay the course advocates -- after reflexively invoking the [much disputed](#)^[8] "origins of 9/11" argument -- pivot to the more limited argument of why we should continue to expand the size of Afghanistan's army and police. That's a bit more reasonable, but it overlooks the reality that from illiteracy and corruption to poor vetting and low pay, the current training effort has yielded [a force of compromised caliber](#)^[9]. Even the ICOS report shows that Afghan security forces would not be able to provide adequate security when foreign forces withdraw, that 56 percent of Afghan police are helping the Taliban, and that there is clear "potential for the Afghan security forces to switch sides" after being trained by NATO forces.

On top of all this, not even the U.S. public can justify continuing the war. A [new poll](#)^[10] by Quinnipiac University found that more Americans now oppose the war in Afghanistan than

support it.

To review: we have trouble disaggregating U.S. war funding from Afghan government corruption [11], the "9/11-safe haven" argument does not hold water, the security forces we train are defecting to the enemy, and there is waning public backing for the mission. Yet, despite all of this, President Barack Obama says that the U.S. footprint will last long beyond 2014 [12]. Most observers assert that the president must convince NATO allies to continue their support [12], and that we must explain to the Afghan people why we are there [13]. This is a mission in desperate search of a rationale. What more is there left to say?

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[4] <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2010/05/10/93849/corruption-incompetence-charges.html>

[5] <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1199608/Afghan-villagers-Crooked-police-officers-bigger-problem-Taliban.html>

[6] <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2010/January/corruption-widespread-in-afghanistan-unodc-survey-says.html>

[7] <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2010/1119/New-Afghan-war-plans-could-cost-US-taxpayers-an-extra-125-billion>

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[10] <http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=5069286&c=POL&s=TOP>

[11] <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/09/AR2010090906828.html>

[12] <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/terrorism-security/2010/1119/Obama-arrives-at-NATO-summit-with-a-revised-US-strategy-in-Afghanistan-Stay-past-2014>

[13] <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/40273302/>