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A Libertarian Perspective on the Afghanistan War

2009 September 21

by Jason



Many in the conservative media are calling for an increased troop presence within Afghanistan. (*With even reports of the military requesting [more troops](#) as of today.*) The premise amongst these supporters is that to win the war in Afghanistan, the US military must increase their soldiers. These soldiers are therefore vital in order to assist the current Afghan government in protecting cities and towns while rebuilding the country, at the same time training new Afghan police and troops.

You may be surprised to find that many libertarian patriots are in complete disagreement on this new objective and feel that it is in the best interest of America to change strategies and narrow the U.S.'s primary mission in the Afghan conflict. Since these libertarian strategies are not being broadcast in the main stream media (because they are essentially Libertarian owned) I would like to share some of them with you.

In an excellent [article](#) from the CATO Institute, authors Malou Innocent and Christopher Preble discusses the current 'mission creep' in Afghanistan and insist that the US should focus solely on counter-insurgency and should be leery of 'social engineering' and 'nation building' objectives. Essentially they call for a decreased troop presence and a focus on a mission that the US originally went in to accomplish – disrupting and killing Al-Qaida terrorists. To support their claims, they show that statistically 'nation building' has a 71% failure rate, and that within Afghanistan the success rate will probably be worse.

The essential question now is not whether the war is winnable, but whether the mission is vital to U.S. national security interests.

From this perspective the current open-ended strategy fails. The United States and its allies must instead narrow their objectives. A long-term, large-scale presence is not necessary to disrupt al-Qaida. Indeed, that limited aim has largely been achieved, with the exception of capturing Osama bin Laden. What we have seen over the past eight years is a classic case of mission creep. U.S. military operations today draw from the "clear-hold-build" model offered in the U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual, a volume that didn't even exist in 2001. It states, "Soldiers and Marines are expected to be nation builders as well as warriors rebuilding infrastructure and basic services.

But for how long? Afghanistan has not made any progress toward being able to function without the assistance of the U.S. and its allies. Congress mandated that the Obama administration come up with a set of benchmarks to measure progress, but this list — supposedly 50-items long — has still not been presented publicly. And no wonder. These metrics, due by Sept. 24, will surely raise questions about whether such ambitious objectives can be achieved within costs acceptable to the American public.

The United States does not have the patience, cultural knowledge or legitimacy to transform what is a deeply divided, poverty stricken, tribal-based society into a self-sufficient, non-corrupt, and stable electoral democracy. And even if Americans did commit several hundred thousand troops and decades of armed nation-building, success would hardly be guaranteed, especially in a country notoriously suspicious of outsiders and largely devoid of central authority.

Continue the article [here](#).

I believe it is important for the opinion of this article to be addressed and debated by the citizens and the administration of the United States.

Is it in the best interest of the US to rebuild Afghanistan and conduct a 'nation building' program within the country? Is this the true objective of the Afghanistan war, or was the objective to kill and route out Al-Qaida operatives and capture Osama Bin Laden?

What if the foreign policy experts at CATO institute are correct and the cost to such a program would be unnecessary, unwarranted, and a mistake?

Such an undertaking, amounting to a large-scale social-engineering project, is unwarranted. The cost in blood and treasure that we would have to incur — coming on top of what we have already paid — far outweighs any possible benefits, even accepting the most optimistic estimates for the likelihood of success.

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I think it is important to continue to debate this issue, given that American soldiers are dying in Afghanistan. I thought there were at least two reasons for our war in this country:

1. To defeat and tie up the Taliban so that they are so engaged that they cannot do their mischief in the US or other friendly countries.
2. To defeat the Taliban, a vicious terrorist group, for the sake of the Afghan people.

This is Obama's war, although I do not remember him devoting one speech to articulate why we need to fight there. This is odd since he must have given 1000 speeches since becoming President. As commander-in-chief, he has failed miserably. I suspect our soldiers despise him.

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