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Why Is 35% Of Development Aid Being Routed Back To The U.S.?

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INTERNATIONAL POLICY

We've been at war in Afghanistan since 2001 and we are still mired in the same issues. Today, [Malou Innocent](#) of the Cato Institute helps me discuss development dollars, Hillary Clinton dodging questions, and why consistency is the best policy.

Here's a little [more information on Malou](#):

Malou Innocent is a Foreign Policy Analyst at the Cato Institute. Her primary research interests are Middle East and Persian Gulf security issues and U.S. foreign policy toward Pakistan, Afghanistan, and China. Prior to joining Cato, she worked as a public policy intern at the District Office of California Congressman Pete Stark. Innocent has published reviews and articles on national security and international affairs in scholarly and policy journals such as *Survival*, *Congressional Quarterly*, and *Harvard International Review*, as well as in publications such as *Armed Forces Journal*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Wall Street Journal Asia*, the *Huffington Post*, the *Guardian*, *WashingtonPost.com*, and the *Washington Times*. Innocent has appeared as a guest analyst on *BBC News*, *Fox News Channel*, *Al Jazeera*, *Voice of America*, *CNBC Asia*, and *Reuters*. She earned dual Bachelor of Arts degrees in Mass Communications and Political Science from the University of California at Berkeley, and a Master of Arts degree in International Relations from the University of Chicago.

I asked Malou to chat with us to get some perspective on something that is a little difficult to understand - the issues behind why we are still in Afghanistan, why the war still continues, and why withdrawal may be the best course for all the nations involved. Often, when we are watching this coverage on television or listening to updates on the news, we only hear of the carnage - we hear much less of the context, which would help the public to understand why we are choosing a particular course of action and whether or not these actions are effective. So, without further ado, here's Malou:

LatoyaPeterson: Today, we are chatting with Malou Innocent from the Cato Institute. Welcome Malou!

MalouInnocent: Hi Latoya, thank you for having me.

LatoyaPeterson: Malou, can you please talk a little bit about your expertise and work for the Cato Institute?

MalouInnocent: I am a foreign policy analyst for Cato and my research is mainly focused on Middle East and Persian Gulf security issues, as well as U.S. foreign policy toward Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China. Overall, Cato's foreign policy is guided by the principle that when government grows too powerful—and correspondingly too meddlesome—it begins to encroach on our individual freedoms at home and threaten peaceful relations abroad.

LatoyaPeterson: Why is increasing governmental power a threat?

MalouInnocent: In the capacity of international affairs, policymakers have typically been more inclined to intervene; yet (and this is my overarching grouse) is that while democracy, liberty, and freedom are the principles that define the United States of America, historically, these have not always been the principles that have guided its foreign policy. From time to time, especially during the Cold War but also the so-called "war on terror," America's national security interests have led it to cooperate with some of the world's most repressive regimes and unsavory political movements, the latest manifestation being our invasion and occupation of Iraq, while during the 1980s we turned a blind-eye to Saddam's atrocities. It's that discrepancy that sometimes harms our efforts to do good in the world.

LatoyaPeterson: Excellent synopsis. And I find it interesting that the more I talk to experts like yourself and Patricia DeGennaro, who **we spoke with yesterday**, the more we hear that an aggressive foreign policy where we try to remake and shape the interests of other nations simply does not work. Let's focus in specifically on the situation in Afghanistan.

LatoyaPeterson: I read quite a few of your articles online, and it seems that your position for the last few years has been a clear case for withdrawal. Can you elaborate a bit on how you came to the conclusion that this war is un-winnable?

MalouInnocent: After eight years since the fall of the Taliban regime, the country (and the mission) is still plagued by several problems: an intractable cross-border insurgency, pervasive corruption on the local and national levels, a dysfunctional international alliance, and the list goes on and on. U.S. policymakers and defense officials have good intentions. They want to disrupt and defeat al Qaeda (which is a limited and achievable objective) but the broader mission to ensure that Afghanistan never again becomes a terrorist sanctuary is based on the dubious assumption that terrorists thrive in failed states. Does this therefore mean that America must deploy tens of thousands of troops for several decades to stabilize, liberalize, and democratize foreign countries, Afghanistan included? I don't think Americans signed up for that type of mission, so the administration should be straight up about our goals. We can continue to monitor al Qaeda in the region, and keep ongoing relations with the regional players; but going after the Taliban (a guerilla-jihadi movement distinct from al Qaeda) or forging ahead with a robust nation-building effort is too grandiose of a policy.

LatoyaPeterson: Where do you think the US should refocus our efforts, if we are ill-equipped to handle nation building? If we are not assisting in stabilizing the region, how will we be able to receive accurate intelligence as well as the type of nation-to-nation trust that allows for peaceful relationships?

MalouInnocent: I think within the next 18 to 24 months, the administration will find itself at a crossroads: either scale down the foreign troop presence with the recognition that we must narrow our objectives, or continue down the road of "mission creep," with periodic troop increases. I

hold out hope that President Obama proceeds with the former.

Latoya Peterson: And what about reaching out for assistance with other nations in the region?

Malou Innocent: That's an important question, and one that I feel gets rarely asked. I think many times, whether it's health care, Afghanistan policy, what-have-you, the political discourse sets up a binary: reform or no reform, withdrawal or no to withdrawal. I think there can be a middle ground. Economic aid and assistance to Afghanistan and Pakistan can continue, but just like Ms. DeGennaro mentioned yesterday, the foreign aid and funding is atrocious.

Latoya Peterson: You mentioned Pakistan, and I notice that Pakistan tends to factor very heavily in your analysis of the situation in Afghanistan. What is the situation in Pakistan and how does that influence our approach in Afghanistan?

Malou Innocent: For example, the U.S. government has shoveled billions of dollars in aid to Pakistan. Certainly in Pakistan's tribal areas and restive areas of Afghanistan, non-military aid directed to education and comprehensive study programs can help to mitigate the spread of militancy among younger generations. But a coherent distribution mechanism must be in place or else no one in Pakistan or Afghanistan will benefit. Given the problems of corruption and mismanagement afflicting the distribution of aid, why should we expect the distribution of aid to be more effective? I've seen figures pointing to 35-40% of development aid being redirected back to Washington with consultancy fees. That's an unfortunate circumstance but serves to highlight one of the major problems of state-building.

Malou Innocent: As for ongoing relations with Pakistan, policymakers have neglected (or simply ignored) the extent to which leaders in Islamabad fear the rise of an India-leaning government coming to power in Kabul. This has been a persistent fear dating back several decades...

Malou Innocent: The acrimony between India and Pakistan is playing out in Afghanistan. As of only a couple months ago, 80% of the Pakistani military was still on the border with India, not Afghanistan. So I think policymakers must recognize the importance of history, culture, and nationalism, which rarely filter into discussions of policy.

Afghanistan has always been considered Pakistan's strategic backyard, and their leadership has consistently undermined the sovereignty of various Afghan governments. In fact, during the Soviet-Afghan War on the 1980s, the Pakistani military leadership wanted to ensure that an Islamic government aligned with Pakistan—rather than a secular government aligned with India, would come to power in Kabul after Soviet forces withdrew. These larger regional dynamics are playing out, which is another reason to scale down our presence in the region: we do not have compelling strategic rationale to thrust our troops into the middle of a proxy war between two nuclear-armed powers.

Latoya Peterson: Most definitely. I was reading the [NYT interview with Hillary Clinton](#) with great interest and noticed some interesting answers to her questions. In particular, when the reporter asked:

Many of the countries where the abuses against women are most prevalent are also countries that have a vital strategic importance to the United States: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, India. How can you aggressively advocate for women without jeopardizing those strategic relationships?

It was striking to me that HRC completely sidestepped any discussion of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan and reframed to discuss India and China. From your viewpoint, why would she have evaded this question?

MalouInnocent: I'm happy you bring that up, Latoya. Clinton dodged a lot of questions during that interview. For example, when the NYT reporter asked: "in much of the world, gender equality is not accepted as a universal human right. How do you overcome that deep-seated cultural resistance?" Now, logically, what other answer could there be other than that our objectives are sometimes incompatible with our ability to achieve them?

I find that many times our policymakers are unwilling to concede our lack of legitimacy to bring about a better outcome in turbulent parts of the world.

LatoyaPeterson: Thanks for acknowledging that! I feel the same way.

MalouInnocent: She also mentioned that she did not see a distinction between economic empowerment and political, social empowerment...

MalouInnocent: but if you look at Saudi Arabia, women make up 70% of those enrolled in universities, yet just 5% of the workforce.

LatoyaPeterson: Good point .

MalouInnocent: The rights of women in Saudi Arabia is severely restricted, yet we still enjoy warm relations with them. Of course, some partnerships are unavoidable, but even then, the United States must be careful not to needlessly compromise its values.

I think Clinton's empathy toward the plight and suffering of women in other countries is genuine, but our policies—as they stand now—sends a mixed message.

LatoyaPeterson: Did you agree with the assertion made by the reporter, that Clinton agreed to, which said:

There are counterterrorism experts who have made the observation that countries that nurture terrorist groups tend to be the same societies that marginalize women. Do you see a link between your campaign on women's issues and our national security?

MalouInnocent: Absolutely. Some analysts have pointed to a causal link (and essentially a feedback loop) between the spread of more conservative interpretations of Salafist Islamic ideology, the marginalization of women in these societies, and the eventual emergence of extremist groups. Egypt in particular is an excellent example.

Pakistan would be another. Most Pakistanis are not radical, but over the past several years there has been a definite shift towards conservatism...

LatoyaPeterson: Why is that shift occurring?

MalouInnocent: Good question. I think in instances such as these, I liken foreign policy to physics: every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Bush administration policies after 9/11 cut the world into a clear binary of good and evil, even within his administration he and his underlings took criticism as disloyalty. As a result, groupthink became pervasive, and we began to see an incredibly antagonistic foreign policy. The fact that the **CIA outsourced some of the war effort in Iraq and Afghanistan to Blackwater**, an organization led by a man who allegedly wanted to spread Christianity at the barrel of a gun, was a powerful force of discomfort for many around the world, particularly in the Muslim world. And the fact that the administration lacked introspection to see the problems of their policy was even more disillusioning.

Human beings in general are reactionary creatures. Americans don't like being told what to do, so why would other people be any different? It's the Bush administration's lack of self-awareness about that fact that was so problematic.

LatoyaPeterson: Precisely. So, with that in mind, let's double back to something you mentioned earlier about "our policies—as they stand now—sends a mixed message." Moving forward, what do you think is the best course of action to pursue both in Afghanistan and in our broader international policy?

MalouInnocent: With Afghanistan, I think it's important that we narrow our objectives to something more realistic. We can continue to monitor al Qaeda and ensure it doesn't reestablish a safe haven in Afghanistan through aerial surveillance and by retaining special forces for discreet operations against specific targets. Moreover, I would not see a problem maintaining some level of cooperation with Afghan security forces to help beef up their ability to repel insurgents intent on destabilizing the government. Finally, we must continue to forge relations with Iran. Iran is the pivot point for both the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. I commend President Obama for his work to forge a rapprochement with Tehran, and for his pragmatism and sound judgment not to interject his own feelings toward the elections in Iran this summer.

LatoyaPeterson: And with our larger, global strategy?

MalouInnocent: Unfortunately for many people within the administration, there's this unquestioned orthodoxy that terrorists thrive in failed states. First, there's reason to doubt whether state failure or poor governance in itself poses a threat. Second, their logic doesn't explain why terrorists set up in countries with the ability to resist external interference (which is one reason why many militants are across the border in Pakistan).

As for our global strategy, I think my last post sort of answers that point: what force do we want to be in the world? Is it our place to be the global nation builder, police force, and constabulary office? Many Americans are beginning to question the war in Afghanistan, but it does not appear that our policies will end there. Some people want to move on to Somalia, and other ungoverned parts of the world. But once again, sometimes our interference can exacerbate foreign conflict. Sometimes, limiting the scope of our commitments is the best policy.

LatoyaPeterson: Thanks for joining us, Malou!

MalouInnocent: Thank you, Latoya, for providing this amazing opportunity. I really enjoyed it.

[Malou Innocent](#) [SheSource]

[Malou Innocent](#) [The Cato Institute]

[The New Gender Agenda](#) [New York Times]

[C.I.A. Sought Blackwater's Help To Kill Jihadists](#) [New York Times]

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