

- [BIG NEWS:](#)
- [Germany](#)
- |
- [Zimbabwe](#)
- |
- [England](#)
- |
- [Iran](#)
- |

[Sustainability](#) | [More...](#)

September 29, 2009

Happening Now:
[WATCH SENATE HEALTH CARE HEARING LIVE: JOIN THE CONVERSATION](#)
[Get Breaking News by Email](#)

[This is the print preview: Back to normal view »](#)



Malou Innocent

Foreign Policy Analyst at the Cato Institute

Posted: September 29, 2009 10:50 AM

More Fear-Mongering Claptrap from Max Boot

Read More: [Afghanistan](#), [Afghanistan War](#), [Al Qaeda](#), [Barack Obama](#), [Colonialism](#), [Empire](#), [Imperialism](#), [World News](#)

What's Your Reaction?

[Amazing](#) [Inspiring](#) [Funny](#) [Scary](#) [Hot](#) [Crazy](#) [Important](#) [Weird](#)

digg [del.icio.us](#)

ShareThis

Max Boot, fellow for National Security Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations and perhaps one of America's most radical neo-imperialists, [eight years ago](#) [this month](#) likened the Afghan mission to British colonial rule:

Afghanistan and other troubled lands today cry out for the sort of enlightened foreign administration once provided by self-confident Englishmen in jodhpurs and pith helmets...This was supposed to be 'for the good of the natives,' a phrase that once made progressives snort in derision, but may be taken more seriously after the left's conversion (or, rather, reversion) in the 1990s to the cause of 'humanitarian' interventions. [emphasis mine]

Just [yesterday](#), this "stay-the-course" proponent said President Obama should fight on in Afghanistan and properly resource the counterinsurgency mission. Sadly, Boot's arguments are so faulty and disjointed that it is difficult to decide where to begin first. Here I go...

Boot believes that the coalition should properly resource the war effort. What does that even mean? What Boot neglects to tell his readers is that our current policy requires more troops than we could ever send. The metric for successful counterinsurgency missions suggested by the U.S. Army and Marine Corps would require 200,000 counterinsurgents in southern Afghanistan alone, and upwards of 650,000 in the country as a whole, for upwards of 12 to 14 years--not including the last eight. The time and resources required for assisting Afghanistan would not be accomplished within costs acceptable to American and NATO publics.

Another critical point that Boot fails to disclose is how recklessly ambitious the current mission is. 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. 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. Western powers could invest hundreds of thousands of troops and twice or three times the materiel and money and still not create a functioning state. Even in the unlikely event that we forged a stable Afghanistan, al Qaeda might simply reposition its presence into other regions of the world.

Of course, America could narrow its objectives in Afghanistan to degrading al Qaeda's capabilities. But Boot pooh-poohs this alternative, arguing, "Vice President Joe Biden favors a smaller-scale strategy that would employ high-tech weapons and special forces to kill terrorists from afar. But such a strategy has rarely, if ever, succeeded." Boot's example of where such a strategy has not succeeded? "It has been employed by Israel against Hamas and Hezbollah. The result: Hamas controls Gaza, and Hezbollah controls southern Lebanon. It has been employed by the U.S. in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The result: The Taliban controls western Pakistan and large swaths of eastern and southern Afghanistan."

Equating the United States vis-à-vis al Qaeda to Israel vis-à-vis Hezbollah is a stretch. For one, the two political and security situations are wildly dissimilar. Afghanistan presents a liberation insurgency that includes indigenous groups attempting to expel a foreign occupier, while Hezbollah is a national insurgency of indigenous groups attempting to control the government of Lebanon. Moreover, one could make the argument that Hezbollah presents a pressing existential threat to Israel, whereas al Qaeda presents nothing in the way of an existential threat to the United States.

In addition, the strategy that Boot casually dismisses, that of targeting key militant conspirators, had a far-reaching effect in Iraq, and, according to authoritative sources, was quite possibly the biggest factor in reducing violence there. These operations were highly classified direct action activities, dubbed "collaborative warfare," which combined intelligence intercepts with precision strikes to eliminate key insurgent leaders of the Shia and Sunni insurgency. Bob Woodward accounts these techniques in his book *The War Within: A Secret White House History 2006-2008*.

Overall, I couldn't disagree with Boot more. Instead of increasing troops, America should scale back its military presence. Rather than trying to protect Afghan villages from the Taliban, the United States should concentrate on al Qaeda cells in Pakistan through surgical tactic such as special forces operations, intelligence sharing, and Predator missile attacks when necessary. Whether al Qaeda coalesces in Sudan, in Yemen, or in Miami, Florida, our policy should not be to redesign a people's way of life or tinker with the importance of their communal identity. Yet that is what Boot wants us to do in Afghanistan.

Sadly, people like Boot have lost sight of a crucial question: not about whether a state-building mission in Afghanistan is achievable, but whether it constitutes a vital U.S. national security interest. Central Asia holds little intrinsic strategic value to the United States, and America's security will not necessarily be endangered even if an oppressive political faction takes over portions of Afghan territory. Given Afghanistan's numerous challenges, and the fact that a protracted guerrilla war will weaken Western powers militarily and economically, the fundamental objective should be to get out of Afghanistan.

C/P Cato@Liberty

 

HuffPost Social News

POWERED BY Facebook

Connect to

HuffPost Social News
with Facebook

- [Copyright © 2009 HuffingtonPost.com, Inc.](#) |
- [Archive](#) |
- [User Agreement](#) |
- [Privacy](#) |
- [Comment Policy](#) |
- [About Us](#) |
- [Powered by Movable Type](#)

