Should America Liberate Afghanistan's Women?

Malou Innocent

On 13 May 2009, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, with Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai at her side, made clear that while American officials supported Karzai's plan to 'open the door' to Taliban militants, there were 'certain conditions that [had] to be met'. Along with renouncing violence and abiding by the Afghan constitution, the Taliban, Clinton explained, 'must respect women's rights'.[1]

It is unclear what 'respect' means or what it would entail, as Clinton did not differentiate between the Taliban's system of gender-based oppression and indigenous cultural prohibitions that discriminate against women. That distinction, however, is significant.

Many policymakers and political activists believe the United States, with its commitment to individual liberty, political and religious freedom, and the rule of law, has a unique role to play in the advancement of Afghan women's rights.[2] Though well-meaning, this belief and the prescriptions that follow from it fail to draw a meaningful causal link between desires and outcomes. In fact, the perceived universality of Western values tells us little about the most effective means for advancing them.[3] Current foreign-led efforts to motivate Afghans to adopt new habits also raise a host of practical and ethical considerations, given the unforeseen consequences that arise in the course of military occupation, as well as the situational constraints of operating in the context of a foreign culture.[4]

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Since the overthrow of the Taliban and the infusion of foreign assistance, the quality of life for many Afghan women has undergone extraordinary transformations. Women can attend school, seek treatment at hospitals and clinics, and even run for elected office. To balance gender representation, Afghanistan's constitution mandates a 25% quota for women in parliament. Of the nearly half of school-age children enrolled in school, 47% are girls. And with 70% of the population now enjoying access to basic medical care, the country has experienced a rapid decline in maternal mortality.[5]

But dramatic advancements in women's welfare have failed to translate into women's equality before the law. Theoretically, Afghanistan has one of the most progressive constitutions in the region.[6] Nevertheless, according to rural-development specialist Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddan, who has worked in Afghanistan for 14 years, although men and women are constitutionally guaranteed equal rights, many laws are applied on the basis of rigid, one-sided, patriarchal notions of honour and female integrity.[7] The spokesperson for Afghanistan's Ministry of Women's Affairs, Nooria Haqnagar, has come to the gloomy conclusion that, 'because the constitution is not implemented, we might be better off not having it at all'.[8]

Last year, Afghan female legislators told the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan that they have come to fear the warlords in government and parliament. One legislator said that 'most of the time women don't dare even say a word about sensitive Islamic issues, because they are afraid of being labeled as blasphemous'.[9] Blasphemy is a capital offence.

Regressive forces continue to relegate women to a subservient position within society.[10] Informal institutions in Afghanistan – traditions, customs and norms – still determine property rights, marriage and divorce, and inheritance and custody, thereby diluting the power of formal constitutional equalities. Najia Haneefi, the former head of Afghanistan's largest women's organisation, the Afghan Women's Education Center, concedes that since 2001, the lives of Afghan women have changed, but notes that

> the changes were not fundamental … because Afghanistan is a traditional society … If you are a woman in some areas of this country, you are not considered human … All the legal systems are in favor of men.[11]

By and large, Afghan society no longer suffers from the systematic brutalisation that characterised Taliban rule. Nevertheless, in the face of discernible measures of progress, it is clear that the Taliban's evils have not been completely undone.[12] Conservative Afghan traditionalists, whom Westerners often confuse with the Taliban, still wield considerable influence, resulting in cruelty towards and mistreatment of women despite the infusion of assistance and the introduction of democratic institutions.

Liberation from what?

Wilfully ignoring the contentious history between Islam and the West, and the cultural superiority implied by anointing themselves as 'liberators', American officials are convinced that people around the world not only want to adopt Western values, political institutions and social practices, but also that people in all societies should embrace Western values, institutions and practices, because they embody the most enlightened and most civilised way of thinking.[13] Embedded in these descriptive and normative arguments is the assumption that all countries, regardless of cultural diversity or historical circumstance, should be judged by the same ethical criteria. That Western universalist belief was most powerfully articulated by former President George W. Bush, who, in a 2002 speech at West Point, declared:

> Moral truth is the same in every culture, in every time, and in every place
> … When it comes to the common rights and needs of men and women,
> there is no clash of civilizations.[14]

This way of thinking is profoundly flawed. The notion that moral truths should be singularly interpreted allows policymakers to escape serious judgement about the consequences of intervention. Perhaps more importantly, it implicitly denies the differences between cultures.[15] Those in the West who advocate policy efforts directed at redressing gender inequality in Afghanistan are focusing too narrowly on changing a single variable of social life. In the process, they are overlooking the highly interconnected interplay of broader societal forces that keep Afghan women subjugated.[16] Gender relations are not fully independent from but rather tightly inter-

twined with other, deep-seated norms, ideas and cultural practices.[17] In particular, the private–public separation between the sexes symbolised by the burka must be surveyed and understood before demanding what amounts to Afghanistan's cultural revolution.

In a *Time* magazine editorial entitled 'New Hope for Afghanistan's Women', published mere weeks after the 9/11 attacks, Clinton mentioned the burka, a billowy garment that covers a woman from head to toe, no less than four times.[18] The repetition reflects two views about Muslim women commonly held in the West: firstly, that the covering of a Muslim woman is a symbol of oppression; and secondly, that a Muslim woman's visible 'liberation' from this practice *ipso facto* means she is free. These beliefs, of course, go much deeper philosophically. They are rooted in the viewpoint that people recognise the human agency of others and therefore their freedom to make their own choices.[19] This conception of equality is bound to liberalism, a political philosophy based on the principle of individual freedom; and it would deem Afghan women who are forced to wear the burka as lacking in freedom.[20]

> *Many Muslim women cover up out of choice*

Observers in the West can strongly dislike religious traditions that discriminate against women while simultaneously rejecting foreign-led calls for these women's so-called 'liberation'. In this respect, holding the view that the burka is a symbol of institutionalised intolerance is understandable; however, this visceral reaction can also be misleading if it ignores what is socially appropriate in a particular context. In modern Afghanistan, as in all societies, collective identity is vital for understanding what motivates individual human action.[21] For example, traditional Islam separates unrelated males and females.[22] Women, regarded as objects of temptation, separate themselves symbolically by covering up in public. Many Muslim women living in the West cover up out of choice. In Afghanistan, however, normative social pressures demand that women don the burka. As Columbia University Professor Lila Abu-Lughod has noted, 'liberals sometimes confess their surprise that even though Afghanistan has been liberated from the Taliban, women do not seem to be throwing off their burqas'.[23] All socie-

ties demand that individuals operate in a manner acceptable to its members, by, for example, encouraging them to assert themselves; or, to quote the late social anthropologist Clifford Geertz, 'culture is public because meaning is.'[24] Accordingly, ignoring the social context in which Afghan women operate divorces Afghan culture from the interaction of its subjects.

Throughout Afghanistan, women almost never appear before strangers, anonymously veiling themselves when in public.[25] In more conservative areas, some husbands even prohibit their wives from interacting with other male relatives. In this context, promoting Afghan women's right to look and act however they choose can inadvertently reduce their 'agency': after all, because a burka allows women to walk in public free from the gaze of unrelated men, covering up can enhance a woman's security and mobility. Some political scientists would call this not true 'agency', but 'problem-solving' within constraints.[26] Either way, changing the concept of the burka from a symbolic separation of the genders to that of a mere item of clothing would implicitly demand removing the primary locus of decision-making from the private family sphere to the broader public domain – a radical change in cultural values and attitudes.[27]

Because Afghan society's acceptance of women's social and legal rights has yet to take root organically, from the bottom up, the most viable alternative for changing society's long-standing customs and social practices would be top-down through the Afghan government, with the help of the international community. But third parties willing to protect a discriminated minority need to focus not on the group that is at risk (such as Afghan women) but on more effective punishments against those who provoke violence against that discriminated minority – in this case, Afghan traditionalists.[28]

Yet past efforts to reform, reshape or otherwise revamp Afghan society have only served to unite insular tribal, ethnic and regional-based communities against the imposition of centralised control. Instances of this include the Safi Rebellion (1945–46); the Pashtun revolt in Kandahar against provincial taxes and schools for girls (1959); an Islamist uprising in the Panjshir Valley (1975); and resistance to land reform, education policies and family law in Nuristan and Herat (1978). These rebellions were triggered when

Kabul-based modernists attempted to control the social environment of the more conservative rural hinterland.[29]

In 2009, the Kabul-based Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) found that, among a number of Afghan citizens, the democratisation process had become increasingly associated with 'the individual liberal freedoms of the West and thus distanced from Afghan religious and cultural norms'. The study warned: 'if liberal values continue to be considered "imposed"', the result will be 'a reaction against a perceived Western cultural "invasion"'.[30] Women's rights activists have observed that beatings,

Domestic violence remains common

torture and other forms of domestic violence against Afghan women remain common, because without access to education or financial independence, many women have little option but to stay with their abusive husbands and families.[31] But sadly, as a 2009 *New York Times* article pointed out, 'women's shelters have been criticized as a foreign intrusion in Afghan society, where familial and community problems have traditionally been resolved through the mediation of tribal leaders and councils'. If a woman runs away from her abusive husband and seeks refuge with her family, 'her brothers or father might return her to her husband, to protect the family's honor'.[32] Captured runaways are often shot or stabbed in honour killings; women and girls are even stoned to death for such transgressions.[33]

In addition to potentially inciting a conservative backlash, another problem with foreign-led efforts to promote women's equality is that countries like the United States are reluctant to do what is necessary to protect discriminated minorities from harassment. As Robert Rauchhaus points out, 'the same mechanisms that will commit a third party to intervene in the event of a humanitarian crisis may make it difficult or impossible to punish a domestic minority that has become a cobelligerent or provocateur'.[34] This reluctance to punish wrongdoing highlights the tension between, on the one hand, liberal tolerance of diverse cultures and perspectives, and, on the other, liberal intervention that advocates the use of military and economic coercion to spread liberty. After all, the very freedom that the West seeks to impose immediately entails the freedom to dissent. As the late political sci-

entist Samuel Huntington argued, the West's attempt to impose its will onto other societies is 'contrary to the Western values of self-determination and democracy'. He concluded that the West will eventually come to appreciate 'the connection between universalism and imperialism'.[35]

Interestingly, cultural attitudes once supported the nascent expansion of Afghan women's freedoms. Though largely confined to the capital, Kabul, these changes were fairly successful because they sprouted indigenously rather than being imposed externally. Under King Mohammad Zahir Shah, who ruled Afghanistan from 1933 to 1973, the government successfully balanced a fairly secular legal system, supported by the urban middle class, with consultative meetings or *jirgas*, representative of rural communities and tribes. In Kabul, women pursued careers in medicine, interacted freely with men, and even dressed in Western-style clothing; meanwhile, on the periphery, traditional social practices remained largely untouched.[36] According to Boston University anthropologist Thomas Barfield, who has conducted extensive ethnographic fieldwork in the country since his first visit over 40 years ago, the unveiling of women was an issue reduced to the realm of fashion and thus separated from the more contentious question of women's emancipation.[37] These limited changes were accepted because they did not give the appearance of supplanting local traditions.

In short, outside attempts to shape and influence Afghan social practices have proven problematic. Even today, policies that designate variant habits as culturally 'oppressive', simply because they fall outside of the West's spectrum of normality, could incite more instability in the process of implementing them. Given the difficulty of applying Western moral principles to foreign-policy situations, it is worth asking several questions. Firstly, should state repression (violence used by the state to put down challenges) be used against domestic parties resistant to social change?[38] Secondly, when the West defines a set of cultural practices as morally repugnant, does that necessarily justify a war against the people who practice them? And finally, because social-control techniques dependent on punishment and exclusion risk inciting rebellion, and given that third parties are typically reluctant to enforce such disciplinary powers, should America assume the responsibility to protect Afghan women in the first place?[39]

A job for US troops?

America's ideological drive to remake the world in its image often overlooks the limited effectiveness of America's efforts. The United States deploys its military to protect the nation's territorial integrity and political sovereignty. However, from time to time, the extension of freedom abroad is subsumed under the mantle of America's legitimate self-defence.[40] As Clinton wrote in her 2001 editorial:

> A post-Taliban Afghanistan where women's rights are respected is much less likely to harbor terrorists in the future. Why? Because a society that values all its members, including women, is also likely to put a higher premium on life, opportunities and freedom – values that run directly counter to the evil designs of the Osama bin Laden's of the world.[41]

The idea that America's fight against terrorism is tightly coupled with the absence of women's rights harkens back to former President George W. Bush's claim that 'the survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands'.[42] Such declarations reflect a long-standing tenet of American foreign policy, shared across Republican and Democratic administrations since the end of the Second World War, that America's political well-being and economic prosperity at home cannot flourish unless they are underwritten by America's hegemonic power abroad.[43] A rich body of literature shows why such a sweeping claim does not withstand close scrutiny.[44] Yet American policymakers still conform to what the former president of the Organization of American Historians William Appleman Williams called 'the imperialism of idealism'.[45]

For example, the January 1992 National Military Strategy of the United States, in perhaps the clearest articulation of America's post-Cold War national security, maintained that the United States must 'foster stability; promote peace, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law; protect lives and property; help our friends, allies, and those in need of humanitarian aid'.[46]

Following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, it may have appeared that America's security and development interests converged, but in reality, nothing much changed. It simply became even more of a priority

for America to reconstruct fragile states. As the Bush administration's 2002 National Security Strategy declared in the wake of 9/11:

> the United States will use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe. We will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets and free trade to every corner of the world.[47]

The primary constitutional function of the US government is to defend against threats to its national interest. But because the definition of 'interest' has expanded by leaps and bounds, the United States now combats an exhausting proliferation of 'threats' even in the absence of discernable enemies.[48] Hence, 'a post-Taliban Afghanistan where women's rights are respected' is merely the latest iteration of a long-standing grand strategy that implicitly endorses an interventionist foreign policy.

Although humanitarian assistance to Afghan women remains, in principle, morally defensible, the primary question is whether military occupation is best suited to such a task.[49] As Christopher Coyne, assistant professor of economics at West Virginia University, has argued, 'the historical record indicates ... that attempts to spread liberal democracy via military occupation will fail more often than they will work'.[50]

One example of failure is America's humanitarian endeavour in the Balkans. Fifteen years after the Dayton Accord was signed, the evidence suggests that the US intervention there did not succeed.[51] As political scientists Patrice McMahon and Jon Western argued in a 2009 *Foreign Affairs* article, Bosnia has gone from being 'the poster child for international reconstruction efforts' to being 'on the brink of collapse'.[52] Similarly, in surveying conditions in Bosnia and Kosovo, Gordon Bardos of Columbia University concluded that 'it is becoming increasingly difficult to argue that we have the intellectual, political, or financial wherewithal to transform the political cultures of other countries' at an acceptable cost.[53]

America's intervention in Iraq further underscores the difficulty of marshalling military means for advancing democracy in general and women's rights in particular. Safia al-Souhail, a women's rights advocate and Iraqi

parliamentarian, finds that the overthrow of Saddam Hussein led to a severe deterioration of women's safety. After the invasion, massive social dislocation led many Iraqis to enlist in armed religious factions, sectarian militias and religious political parties, all of which engaged in fanaticism and aggression directed at women. Even the practice of honour killings intensified. Moreover, in sharp contrast to Iraq's Ba'athist regime, under which women were included in the workforce, after 2003 businesses could not afford to hire workers, and when positions did become available they preferred to hire men.[54] Americans concerned about halting gross human-rights abuses also have the right to question whether military occupation is the most effective means of doing so: an estimated 100,000 Iraqis have been killed since America's intervention and occupation, while more than two million displaced persons were forced to flee killings and sectarian bloodshed.[55] In addition, America's credibility and reputation has eroded in recent years following the release of detailed reports about the torture of terrorist suspects and detainee abuse at prison facilities.

One can better understand America's promotion of women's rights by examining those transgressions that have been deemed not to warrant the use of American force.[56] For numerous strategic and historical reasons, no American government has intervened militarily in countries such as Algeria, Jordan or Egypt to honour women's rights. In Saudi Arabia, a long-time US partner, women are not allowed to drive a car or travel without a male relative chaperone. To promote women's rights in Afghanistan while supporting Middle East client states that repress women may reflect America's geopolitical preferences, but nevertheless reveals an enormous discrepancy between what America claims to be doing and what it actually does.

America's ecumenical campaign to battle evil in foreign lands has the potential to generate an assortment of other, more unpleasant evils. In this respect, it is critical that we examine other ways to further the cause of women's rights in Afghanistan.

Is there another way?

Regardless of the moral justification, the United States should not be taking an active role in changing the social status of Afghan women. Although

gender-based oppression constitutes an affront to human rights and individual freedom, there exists a diversity of social and cultural forces around the world within which gender relations are firmly embedded. Notwithstanding the magnanimity of our aims, social change must be achieved by the population in question. Several philosophical arguments demonstrate why individuals in a given society are the most constructive agents for social change, and supply ways that the United States can offer limited assistance.

Attempts to alter any society's informal institutions must take into consideration what factors the majority of the population believes carry the greatest legitimacy. Classical liberalism, as a principled theory of government, places importance on government legitimacy, which itself rests upon self-determination, defined as people being the authors and subjects of the laws of their government. Moreover, the legitimacy of America's intervention and its chances for success will be affected by the obvious fact that its forces are from a different ethnic, linguistic and cultural group than the communities in which they are operating.[57] Culture, religion and history all form the basis for political legitimacy.[58]

Amherst College Professor Uday Singh Mehta has argued that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British liberals were not necessarily ignorant of the foreign populations under Britain's imperial domain. Instead, they were 'unfamiliar' with them. 'Unfamiliarity', writes Mehta, means 'not sharing in the various ways of being and feeling that shape experience and give meaning to the communities and the individuals who constitute them.'[59] Americans who favour an effort in Afghanistan that includes establishing schools, reforming judicial practices and promoting electoral democracy insist that such efforts have thus far proved ineffectual because the United States has paid insufficient attention to understanding how to properly engage local communities. The problem, however, is not that the United States has failed to understand local people, but rather the belief that an understanding of local people is enough to achieve liberal reforms. That is, policymakers can understand the underlying issues of Afghan society and culture and still fail in their efforts to change Afghan society and culture.[60]

Western policymakers, in their attempt to export liberal democracy, also run the risk of establishing a frame of social and political expectation and

thereby making the dynamics most necessary for social change inflexible and ethnocentric. Because foreign-led efforts implicitly deprive local people of their ability to deal with social conflicts on their own, there is an argument to be made that societies grow more attached to that which they have sacrificed through arduous struggle. In his classic text 'A Few Words on Nonintervention', British philosopher John Stuart Mill argued that subjects of an oppressive ruler must achieve freedom for themselves:

> The only test possessing any real value, of a people's having become fit for popular institutions, is that they, or a sufficient portion of them to prevail in the contest, are willing to brave labour and danger for their liberation.
>
> …
>
> But the evil is, that if they have not sufficient love of liberty to be able to wrest it from merely domestic oppressors, the liberty which is bestowed on them by other hands than their own, will have nothing real, nothing permanent.[61]

Observers in the West may point to incremental gains made in Afghan women's rights as proof that cultural transformation can take hold; however, because these gains were reaped during a period of foreign occupation, they may later prove ephemeral. In this respect, progress must evolve in the context of a people's culture; foreign occupiers cannot successfully impose progress.[62] The means best suited for spreading liberal norms are those that support grassroots initiatives, which themselves take considerable time and a great deal of effort.

In the specific case of Afghanistan, the question is what improvements are most feasible. In a country where 70–80% of the population is illiterate, improvements would be driven by radio and broadcast media. Tolo TV and Arman radio are Afghanistan's most popular private media networks. (It is estimated that eight out of ten Afghans own a radio and four out of ten own a TV.[63]) Tolo programmes often feature women alongside men and include makeover shows, music videos and Indian soap operas that depict unveiled

women. One of the biggest contributors to construction costs for Tolo and Arman was the US Agency for International Development. For Fiscal Year 2010, the State Department budgeted $72 million for 'communications and public diplomacy'.[64] Local drivers of social change can be an effective way to export liberal norms to an illiberal society. And, much like America's secret funding of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty during the Cold War, the United States can continue to support independent media in Afghanistan even after it removes its soldiers.

Other indigenous institutions the United States can continue to assist include groups such as the Herat-based Women Activities and Social Services Association (WASSA), which facilitates civil-society and community-development projects and workshops promoting capacity-building and conflict resolution. When WASSA was launched in 2002, many Afghans were not ready to accept a women's organisation. Even Herat's governor, Ishmail Khan, believed women should not work outside of the home. But

Some moderate mullahs help the cause

people slowly began to change their minds. Today, even some moderate mullahs help the organisation's cause. WASSA's training officer, Zahra Hasanpur, credits WASSA's success to its promotion of gender equality, rather than women's rights per se. Foreign organisations typically engineer projects geared toward women while forgetting about men, and thus often fail to gain local support.[65] A focus on both men and women, however, helps women gain personal power within strict social parameters while respecting male family members and others in the community.

Another way to help Afghan women would be to improve their business prospects and access to capital with low-interest loans. Several micro-finance institutions currently operate in Afghanistan and provide small grants to non-governmental organisations on the state and local levels.[66] While most cater to men, many organisations provide vocational training, literacy courses and health-awareness programmes for women.

It is natural to desire that human suffering be alleviated. But rather than beginning with a set of assumptions about Western values and subsuming Afghans under those standards, US policymakers must recognise why

traditional cultural practices must evolve gradually into progressive social norms.[67] The United States can remain engaged in Afghanistan. But rather than using military-directed policies, assisting indigenous initiatives can in due course promote social changes that empower Afghan women. Whereas people resist change when they feel it is being imposed, they are far less resistant, and less likely to dig in their heels, when they feel they have choices. US policies aimed at addressing gender inequality must consider how to encourage Afghan ownership, which can help to ensure long-term local acceptance and participation.

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America's justification for invading Afghanistan – punishing the Taliban and al-Qaeda – was achieved in 2001. But hopes of promoting liberal values and electoral democracy have not been realised: the establishment of democratic institutions and processes has masked the challenge of grafting modern secular values onto a conservative and patriarchal society. The cost has also been great. After nearly a decade, the total amount of American military and economic aid has reached approximately $444 billion, yet severe socioeconomic inequalities and political instability persist.[68]

Many policymakers and political activists are guided by a belief that, because abuses against women are inherently immoral, it is the responsibility of the United States to remain in Afghanistan for the sake of Afghan women. The assumption implicit in this claim is that Western values are universal; however, the perceived universality of those values is insufficient for deciding the most effective means of advancing them. Moreover, such thinking confuses what is desirable with what is feasible, and reflects a lack of realism in accepting the endurance of indigenous cultural practices and long-standing belief systems.

Thus far, efforts to 'liberate' Afghan women have predominately involved imposing liberalism from the top. Meanwhile, within Afghan communities, values and traditions command the respect of the people and form the basis for legitimate political authority.[69] The United States would be more successful spreading its values not by force, but by example. Self-sustaining

institutions require people to acquire the capacity to act independently and to embrace social and political changes that evolve gradually to suit their own ways of life. In the West, institutions supportive of equal rights and individual freedoms took many centuries to develop. Unfortunately, we often make the fatal mistake of exaggerating not only the speed but also the applicability of our unique experience. That error is on full display in Afghanistan.

Notes

1   Stephen Kaufman, 'Clinton: Returning Taliban Must Respect Afghan Women's Rights', America. gov, 14 May 2010, available at http://us-emb-001.openminds.be/headline/clinton-returning-taliban-must-respect-afghan-women's-rights.

2   In addition to Senator Barbara Mikulski and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, other US and NATO officials and leaders who have advocated remaining in Afghanistan for the sake of Afghan women include NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen; US Senator Dianne Feinstein, chairwoman of the Select Committee on Intelligence; and US Senator Barbara Boxer, who sits on the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. See 'NATO Chief Pledges to Uphold Afghan Women's Rights', Reuters, 29 October 2010; George Stephanopoulos, 'Feinstein: Obama Should Approve McChrystal's Recommendations', ABC News, 11 October 2009, http://blogs.abcnews.com/george/2009/10/feinstein-obama-should-approve-mcchrystals-recommendations.html; and 'Bipartisan Group of Women Lawmakers Offer Resolution Condemning Afghan Marital Rape Law', Press Release of US Senator Barbara Boxer, 23 April 2009, www.boxer.senate.gov/en/press/releases/042309.cfm. See also 'Taking Stock in Afghanistan', *New York Times*, 13 June 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/14/opinion/14mon1.html, in which the *New York Times* editorial board makes a similar agument.

3   The United States has an obvious interest in promoting the spread of liberalism, defined as a political philosophy based on the principle of individual freedom; and democracy, defined as a system in which the people choose their leaders, prospective leaders compete for public support, and the power of government is restrained by its accountability to the people. Far more important, however, is understanding whether, how and to what extent democratic electoral procedures can encourage the growth of liberal values. These definitions are adapted from Sean M. Lynn-Jones, 'Why the United States Should Spread Democracy', Discussion Paper 98-07, Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University, March 1998.

4   Culture here is defined as shared knowledge, values and symbols that create meaning for a particular group.

5   Mark Ward, special advisor on development, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, in discussion with the author, 5 May 2010, Kabul, Afghanistan.

6   Afghanistan's constitution calls for equal rights for men and women (Article 22); for women's education (Article 44); for medical care for women without a caretaker (Article 53); and for women in government (Article 84).

7   Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddan, 'The Arrested Development of Afghan Women', in J. Alexander Their (ed.), *The Future of Afghanistan* (Washington DC: US Institute of Peace, 2009), p. 65.

8   *Afghanistan: Fear Behind the Veil*, documentary film directed by Zarghona Rassa (Surrey: Journeyman Pictures, 2007), http://www.journeyman. tv/57790/short-films/fear-behind-the-veil.html.

9   Ann Jones, 'Afghan Women Have Already Been Abandoned', *The Nation,* 12 August 2010, http://www.thenation. com/article/154020/afghan-women-have-already-been-abandoned.

10 There is a vast and rich theoretical literature on the relationship between women's rights and international security. See, for example, Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Carol Cohn, 'Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals', *Signs,*

vol. 12, no. 4, Summer 1987, pp. 687–718; Christine Sylvester, *Feminist International Relations: An Unfinished Journey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Francis Fukuyama, 'Women and the Evolution of World Politics', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 77, no. 5, September–October 1998, pp. 24–40.

11 *Afghanistan: Fear Behind the Veil*.

12 This is not to say that the diffusion of liberal norms in Afghanistan is unrealisable. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, a survey of some 200 women holding public office in 65 countries found that women's participation in the political process can increase the amount of attention given to social welfare and legal protection. Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Politics: Women's Insight* (Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union, January 2000).

13 These attitudes are rooted in the modernisation school of international development, a dominant paradigm that shapes both scholarly work and foreign-assistance policies toward developing countries. See Nalini Visvanathan, Lynn Duggan, Laurie Nisonoff and Nan Wiegersma (eds), *The Women, Gender & Development Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1997); Naomi Chazan, Peter Lewis, Robert A. Mortimer, Donald Rothchild and Stephen John Stedman, *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1999), p. 16; and Samuel Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 310.

14 'Remarks by the President at 2002 Graduation Exercise of the

United States Military Academy',
White House Press Release, 1
June 2002, http://georgewbush-
whitehouse.archives.gov/news/
releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html.

15 As twentieth-century international-
relations theorist Hans Morgenthau
writes, 'What justice means in the
United States can within wide limits
be objectively ascertained: for inter-
ests and convictions, experiences of
life and institutional traditions have
in large measure created a consen-
sus concerning what justice means
under the conditions of American
society. No such consensus exists in
the relations between nations.' Hans
Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National
Interest* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf,
1951), p. 34. See also Rory Stewart, *The
Places In Between* (London: Picador,
2004), p. 248.

16 Marshall D. Sahlins, *Culture and
Practical Reason* (Chicago, IL: University
of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 74.

17 Gender serves as a basic category
of identification and a profound
marker of difference that pervades
various levels of social intercourse.
As anthropologist Barbara Diane
Miller notes, 'We must not forget
that human gender hierarchies are
one of the most persistent, pervasive,
and pernicious forms of inequal-
ity in the world.' See Barbara Diane
Miller, 'The Anthropology of Sex and
Gender Hierarchies', in Barbara Diane
Miller (ed.), *Sex and Gender Hierarchies*
(Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 1993), p. 22.

18 Hillary Clinton, 'New Hope for
Afghanistan's Women', *Time*,
24 November 2001, http://www.
time.com/time/nation/arti-
cle/0,8599,185643,00.html.

19 This conception of agency is similar to
eighteenth-century German philoso-
pher Immanuel Kant's principle of
respect. Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of
the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), trans.
Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis, IN:
Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), pp. 66–7.

20 Readers must bear in mind that this
concept of individual liberty is closely
bound to the Christian moral tradi-
tion. Ronald Inglehart and Pippa
Norris argue that although beliefs
about democracy are not different
between Islamic and Christian cul-
tures, beliefs about gender equality
differ markedly. See Ronald Inglehart
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