Scholar Profile

Malou Innocent

Malou Innocent is a Foreign Policy Analyst at the Cato Institute researching Middle East and Persian Gulf security issues and U.S. foreign policy toward Pakistan, Afghanistan, and China. She is a member of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, and has appeared as a guest analyst on CNN, BBC News, Fox News Channel, Al Jazeera, Voice of America, CNBC Asia, and Reuters.

Innocent has published reviews and articles on national security and international affairs in journals such as *Congressional Quarterly*, *Foreign Policy*, *Wall Street Journal Asia*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Armed Forces Journal*, the *Guardian*, *Huffington Post*, and the *Washington Times*. She earned dual B.A. degrees in Mass Communications and Political Science from the University of California at Berkeley, and an M.A. degree in International Relations from the University of Chicago.

In 2008, Innocent traveled to Pakistan for an on-the-ground perspective. In 2010, she returned to the region, this time to neighboring Afghanistan to study the impact of American policies. We asked her to talk about some of her experiences.

The terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, which happened my freshman year of college, was the defining moment of my generation. However, far from instilling in me a "rally 'round the flag" effect, the attacks severely eroded my trust in government. To me, 9/11 reflected the folly of our own statecraft: our Department of "Defense" was better designed for launching pre-emptive invasions against foreign countries, rather than serving the primary constitutional function of protecting our own country. Perhaps even worse, ever since 9/11, politicians continue to implement counterproductive policies that drain us economically, spread our resources thin, and drag us into endless wars—all of which plays directly into al Qaeda's hands and does little to increase my faith in government.

My trip to Afghanistan in May 2010 exposed the discrepancy between the impact of our policies abroad and how those policies are portrayed to Americans back at home. For example, the Obama administration has been selling the fantasy that by paving roads and building schools we can win Afghan hearts and minds. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, in many instances the belief that outside government planners can promote stability and growth robs Afghans of the opportunity to do things better for themselves. Moreover, in many poor subsistence areas, insurgents collect taxes, provide policing and a rudimentary court system, and are often better liked than the Afghan officials we support. If anything, the prolonged Western troop presence has given rise to a sort of "neo"-Taliban, that tend to be far more hardened then the generation of jihadists left over from the Soviet occupation.

As for my trip to Pakistan in August 2008, it was my first exposure to a conservative, Muslim society. Certainly, my travels there made me appreciate the freedoms I have in the West. A few of the men I interviewed refused to shake my hand and another had to be persuaded to be in the same room with me. That being said, I find it stunningly naïve for political activists in America to assume it is our responsibility to redress these gender inequalities. They focus too narrowly on changing a single variable of social life and overlook the highly interconnected interplay of broader societal forces that keep many Muslim women subjugated. One can strongly dislike cultural prohibitions that discriminate against women and simultaneously reject calls for these women's so-called "liberation" by U.S. forces.

Having been born and raised in the liberal bastion of the San Francisco Bay Area, I saw quite clearly—and often up close—the intrusiveness of the nanny state and the failure of big government policies. To me, Cato's core principles reflect my own beliefs about the proper role of government and its relation to individuals within society. ■

MALOU INNOCENT (third from right) is joined by JOSEF STORM (far left), senior fellow DOUG BANDOW (far right), and Afghan police officers at a site several miles outside of Kabul.