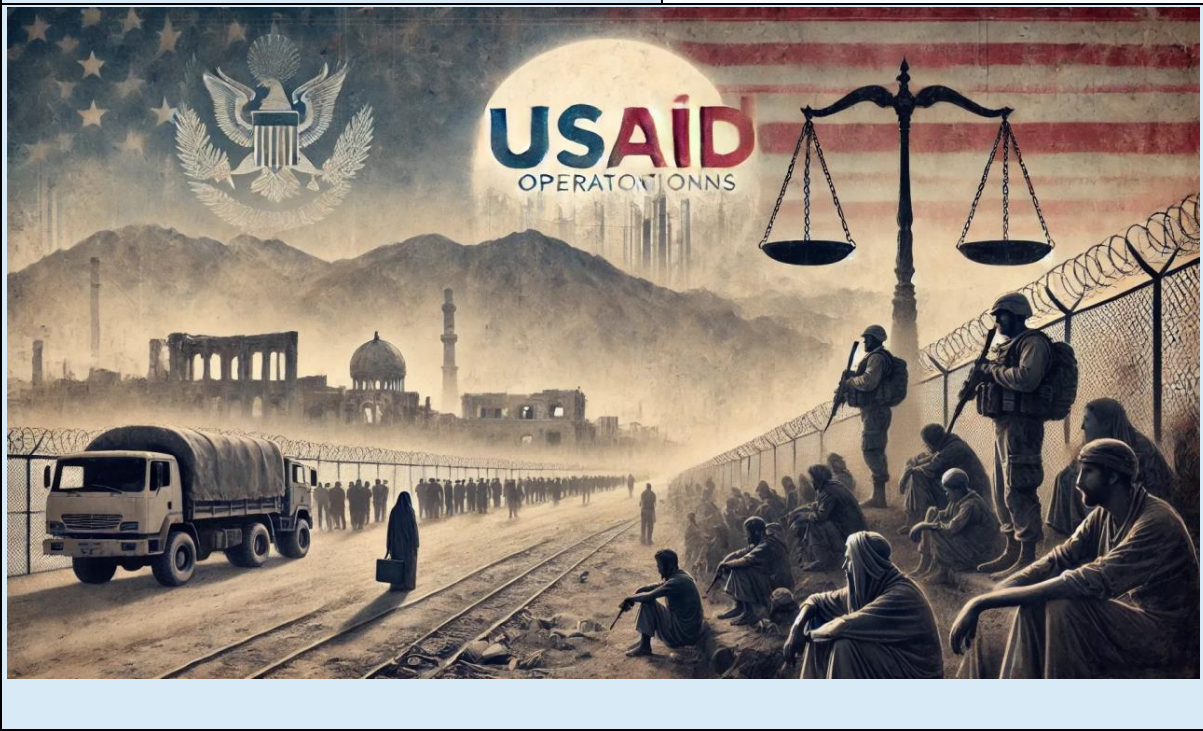


Why USAID Owes Repatriation Costs to Rebuild Nations like Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, and Bangladesh.

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In a world where the self-proclaimed champions of democracy wield their influence with the precision of a wrecking ball, the USA's interventions have often left behind a trail of shattered nations and fractured societies. Cloaked in the rhetoric of liberation, these actions have birthed chaos rather than stability, leaving countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria to grapple with the aftermath of imposed "freedom." It's an ironic tragedy when the harbinger of destruction moonlights as a savior through entities like USAID, raising the question: Does charity absolve the cost of calamity, or does it underline an unfulfilled debt of justice?

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has long positioned itself as a global leader in humanitarian and developmental assistance. However, a closer examination reveals an underlying moral obligation for the United States, through USAID, to engage in meaningful repatriation and reconstruction in nations devastated by its direct or indirect interventions. Countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, and Bangladesh bear the scars of prolonged US involvement, which necessitates a nuanced approach to rebuilding these nations.

Historical Context of US Interventions and Destruction:

Afghanistan (2001–2021): The US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, following the September 11 attacks, was justified under the premise of combating terrorism. While the Taliban regime was toppled, the prolonged military presence exacerbated instability, destroyed critical infrastructure, and fueled a cycle of conflict. By the time the US withdrew in 2021, Afghanistan's economy was crippled, and millions were displaced. Despite USAID's presence, its focus was often skewed toward short-term objectives rather than sustainable development.

Iraq (2003–2011): The 2003 invasion of Iraq, under the pretext of dismantling weapons of mass destruction (later proven nonexistent), devastated the country's infrastructure, economy, and societal fabric. The intervention destabilized governance structures, leading to sectarian violence and the rise of extremist groups like ISIS. The destruction of key facilities, including hospitals, schools, and water systems, left Iraq reliant on external aid for survival.

Syria (2011–Present): The US involvement in Syria's civil war has been marked by military support to opposition groups and airstrikes that often inflicted collateral damage. While aimed at countering the Assad regime and ISIS, the actions intensified displacement crises and destroyed urban centers like Aleppo and Raqqa. Reconstruction efforts have been piecemeal, leaving millions of Syrians without access to basic services.

Sudan (1990s–2005): US sanctions on Sudan during its civil war and accusations of terrorism links exacerbated economic hardships, limiting the country's ability to invest in peacebuilding. While USAID provided humanitarian aid, the long-term economic restrictions hampered recovery efforts in regions like Darfur, where conflict-related damage persists.

Bangladesh (1971): Though indirect, US support for Pakistan during Bangladesh's Liberation War contributed to human rights abuses and widespread devastation. The destruction of infrastructure and a delayed response to humanitarian crises intensified suffering. USAID's role in post-war recovery has been significant but insufficient in addressing historical accountability.

USAID's Role and Its Limitations

While USAID has been instrumental in providing immediate relief in these regions, its interventions often fall short of addressing the structural damage caused by US policies. Key limitations include:

1. **Focus on Strategic Interests:** Many USAID programs are designed to align with US geopolitical objectives rather than the long-term needs of affected populations. For example, in Afghanistan, significant funds were spent on military-adjacent projects rather than sustainable livelihoods.
2. **Short-Term Vision:** Aid programs frequently prioritize immediate relief over capacity-building, leaving nations ill-equipped to manage post-conflict recovery independently.
3. **Accountability Deficit:** USAID operates as a tool of soft power without addressing the broader accountability of US foreign policies that necessitated the aid in the first place.

The Moral and Legal Obligation to Pay Repatriation Costs

International Legal Frameworks:

- **UN Charter (1945):** Articles 55 and 56 emphasize the duty of nations to promote social and economic progress in war-torn regions.
- **Geneva Conventions (1949):** Mandates that occupying powers must ensure the welfare of civilian populations and facilitate post-conflict recovery.
- **Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998):** Defines war-related destruction as a basis for reparative measures.

The US, as a signatory to these frameworks, holds a responsibility to extend its obligations beyond military withdrawal to include rebuilding efforts.

Economic Reparation Models:

1. **Direct Infrastructure Investments:** USAID should prioritize rebuilding critical infrastructure destroyed during interventions, such as roads, schools, and hospitals.
2. **Capacity Building:** Focused investments in education, healthcare, and governance can empower local populations to rebuild autonomously.
3. **Debt Forgiveness:** Nations like Iraq and Afghanistan burdened by war-related debt should receive financial relief to facilitate recovery.

Justifications for USAID-Driven Repatriation

1. **Restorative Justice:** The principle of restorative justice underscores the moral imperative for the US to make amends for the destruction caused by its interventions.
2. **Geopolitical Stability:** Investing in reconstruction reduces the likelihood of future conflicts and extremist resurgence, aligning with global security interests.
3. **Soft Power Enhancement:** Genuine reparative efforts through USAID can rebuild trust in US global leadership, which has been eroded by perceptions of imperialism.

Recent Incidences Underscoring the Need

- **Afghan Humanitarian Crisis (2021):** The abrupt US withdrawal left millions without food, shelter, or security, necessitating a scaled-up USAID presence.
- **Iraq's Energy Crisis (2023):** Decades after US intervention, Iraq still struggles with power shortages due to insufficient reconstruction.
- **Syria's Earthquake Response (2023):** USAID's limited role in addressing compounded crises highlights the need for more robust engagement.

The US has a historical and moral obligation to fund the reconstruction of nations devastated by its interventions. USAID, as the primary tool for humanitarian and developmental assistance, must transcend its role as a relief provider to become a conduit for reparative justice. By aligning its efforts with the principles of international law and restorative justice, the US can address its historical accountability while fostering global stability and trust.

--KHARKA Ravi, PhD Research Scholar.