

On Afghanistan: The Take-Home Lesson

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On June 26th, 2014, I posted the following summary of the situation in Afghanistan. The take-home lesson is explained at the end.

June 26th, 2014

Once again, our President and our Secretary of State have indicated that the governments of Iraq and Afghanistan should be 'inclusive.' The below was written a few days ago in response to a question about our foreign policy in Afghanistan but it applies equally to Iraq, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon.

Afghanistan: Our assessment is flawed and it always has been. In Afghanistan, formed by the breakup of the Ottoman Empire at the end of WWI, there has never been a cohesive bond among the people living there. By normal socio-political standards, it ought to be several small countries reminiscent of Feudal central Europe. Ethnicity, language, religion, and commerce all serve to divide the country internally. These people have never self-identified as Afghans - the label was put upon them by others.

Because the world views Afghanistan as one country (conquered over and over again since Alexander the Great roamed the planet) it appears to be in constant turmoil. If viewed as a cluster of independent peoples forced together by the global society, each gains an identity that can fit the model used now in foreign relations.

The result is that we, Americans, who still expect people of other nations and cultures to behave and respond as if they follow our own social rules (which they don't) attempt to negotiate with one group (perhaps the one in ostensible power at the time) and ignore the others. This policy only deepens the internal rift. The policy can never succeed.

Were I to be magically put in charge of dealing with Afghanistan, I would convene a council of Tribal leaders and facilitate a peaceful fragmentation of the area into independent nations. Some may choose republican forms of government, some theocracies, and some tribal (strong man government, but not quite dictatorships) - after which they can do what they want.

This proposal would certainly lead to border clashes in the future, but the identities formed would eventually lend cohesion to the new nations and provide actual leadership and governance even though some forms of it may be heinous to us as Americans. In other words, the breakup would not end the wars, but would create a situation which would allow the wars to end.

Recent models in this evolution include the breakup of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia and what happened in the 'stans' after 1992.

The Take-Home lesson is embedded in the question of whether the situation described above applies to us here at home. The unfortunate answer is that it might. If it does, that applicability is only recently born. Once we were a nation of immigrants. We considered ourselves to be Americans first. We referred to our ethnicity and cultural heritage by saying we were Americans of Italian, Irish, French, Russian, and even British *extraction*. The implication was that we retained our heritage, but were investing in a new one. The American one.

Now, with the advent of diversity logging on census and employment forms, combined with cultural supremacy over both common sense and selected laws, we are becoming a nation of different people within a single border. We are now Italian-Americans, African-Americans, and Mexican-Americans. Just like Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, and yes, Afghanistan.

Speaking for myself. I am an American first. I am only an American. I am pleased to be of Bohemian extraction, but it is my American heritage of mixed culture that allows me to be a brother to the historical enemies of my grandfathers.