

We are accustomed to thinking of relations with an ally, an enemy, or an interest when we consider a foreign policy relationship. This is part of our assumption that a nation has an independent identity that is like ours, "one nation, indivisible?" This is a convenient fiction, of course, as if a nation is a person, which it is not.

o Pakistan, India, Afghanistan. Some of our most troubling relationships are with countries with not only complex internal identities, but also equally complex overlapping relationships with their neighbors. Pakistan cannot be understood without knowing that it is a country with a secular educated elite living in cities surrounded by slums of recently arrived villagers who are ignorant and very religious. One quarter of the population is even more uneducated and religious, tribal peoples living astride both sides of the border dividing Pakistan from Afghanistan. Out of these tribes come the Taliban.

Who supports the Taliban? The Security Services of Pakistan, who want to keep Afghanistan off-balance and ultimately under Pakistan's control in their struggle against their archenemy, India. India, however much it dislikes Pakistan, really fears China more. China knows this, and supports Pakistan with weapons and mischief. The British and Russians have variously played devastating and destabilizing roles in this region for the past couple of centuries, and now the United States has joined the fray.

o Kurds, Iranians, Turks, Syrians. The Kurds, a large tribe related to the Iranians, were promised their own country after World War I. The promise was broken when the power-brokers realized that Kurds sat on a pool of oil. The Kurds were divided up among five nations: Iran, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Azerbaijan. Now Iraq is falling apart. Will the Kurds get their own country at last? The US may back this, but it will infuriate a number of other players if they do.

o Israel and the Palestinians. Had the Palestinians accepted the 1947 UN division of the former Turkish territory into two countries, Israel and Palestine, Palestine would have been a country. But the Palestinians rejected the division, opting instead for war, supported by the entire Arab world, to take the entire territory from the Israelis. They lost. Despite numerous re-matches, they lost every time. The only reason the re-matches happen is that other players make it so: money from every Muslim country in the world, weapons and training from the former Soviet Union, an endless flow of UN and European money for Palestinian refugee camps, and without Israeli ingenuity and US support, the Palestinians would have a wobbly country by now.

o The European "Union." Despite all the predictions a decade ago that the EU would clean our clock economically and politically, it has not happened. The vaunted prosperity of Europe was owed entirely to the United States: saving them from Hitler's Nazi Empire, then from the Soviet Empire, and permitting them to thrive for a half century while they abandoned war as an institution that they wanted no more of. Europe is now being overrun by immigrants who want a piece of that prosperity without any of the western cultural values that made it possible. France is now finding itself at war with people it thought it could absorb and make French. This union is not much of a union yet.

o Internal Disunities. The United States has sold the idea that democracy means voting--holding free and fair elections. We send observers around the world (as does the UN) to make certain that elections are held without obvious duress. The mistake here is that voting is no guarantee of a liberal democracy, a democracy that rests on a whole range of institutions that are the warp and woof of our structure. Democracy requires the vast majority of men and women literate; protection for private property; a free and competitive press; separation of religion from state enforcement; separation of governmental powers (independent judiciary); and participation of the public in multiple self-governing institutions and organizations (the practice of democracy).

Aside from the Western democracies, these conditions do not yet exist. Take off the rose colored glasses when doing foreign policy.

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