Comments

Bill C. (not verified)

Sun, 02/20/2011 - 12:41pm

Permalink

In reality, is it not what the United States represents, and what it aggressively attempts to push onto others (in both instances: different foundational ideas and beliefs -- which manifest themselves in a very different way of life);

Is this what, in all truth, causes the United States -- and the foreign governments that it installs, supports and defends -- to be considered illegitimate in the eyes of numerous and varied populations?

If such is the case, then would not a populace-centric approach (just another means to aggressively push our ideas, our beliefs and our way of life onto others?);

Would this not simply add more fuel to the fire and, thereby, enrage, antagonize and divide the subject populations even further; this giving rise to even greater instability, reaped in the form of more instances of internal and external war and terrorism?

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Bob's World

Thu, 02/17/2011 - 3:46pm

Permalink

The Israel example is to make the point that it is human nature to attack what one does not believe deseves to exist in a certain controlling capacity.

Why populaces act out against governments that they do not recognize as having authority over them.

Why students make life hell for substitute teachers.

Why step-partents often struggle with the family and role they married into.

Why neighboring states attacked a Jewish state formed in their midst with the support of strong external forces.

Same dynamics, varying circumstances. Certainly there are elements of the Afghan populace who feel that Mullah Omar has much more legitimacy to rule than Mr. Karzai does. That does not make them right, it's just how they feel, and such feelings contribute to the causation of insurgency. The American Colonists came to feel that the governors placed over them by an English King lacked legitimacy to govern them. District and Province governors picked by Karzai and then sent out to govern a populace who had no say in the matter face similar rebuff.

It is human nature. Much of what is important to understand about conflict in general and insurgency in particular is human nature. This is why I argue that the US in the current security environment helps Israel most by helping them less. All of this is about feelings and perceptions, and facts have little impact on such matters.

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Anonymous (not verified)

Thu, 02/17/2011 - 5:03am

Permalink

You've defined legitimacy as "... essentially the recognition of the governed of the right of government to govern..." so why wouldn't the legitimate government which may not be current incumbent be recognised...isn't this what you're seeking in a populace-centric policy? We're not talking about getting third parties to also recognise that legitimate group - that's a whole new ball game - but recognition by a/the nation that has implemented populace-centric policy. So in your example of Israel, which did meet your definition of legitimate - that Israel's neighbours opted not to, is not really germane - unless we're now seeking to require populace-centric policies of other nations would would seem to defeat your argument against current government= and threat-centric doctrines...?

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Backwards Observer

Wed, 02/16/2011 - 3:04am

Permalink

If China is sincere about Confucian values she should start the wheels in motion for a sensible recognition of Taiwanese independence. Perhaps within the next generation. This is the considered opinion of a random internet clod. Thanks.

Log in or register to post comments

Anonymous (not verified)

Tue, 02/15/2011 - 5:57pm

Permalink

As I said, official recognition is a separate category of "legitimacy." Too often we get in trouble when we think as an outside power we can grant our blessing of recognition of someone elses government, and that somehow makes them also Legitimate in the eyes of their own populace or those of their neighbors.

Consider the young state of Israel. The US was quick to recognize the state, but it is only after generations of proving they have no intent to go away that they are gradually earning legitimacy in the eyes of their neighbors.

As to Taiwan, they may well have tremendous legitmacy in the eyes of their populace, and therefore be extremely stable; but that will not get one officially recognized by the US, UN, etc (but it does make it hard for the PRC to conduct UW to incite insurgency there).

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SJPONeill

Permalink

If legitimacy is "...the recognition of the governed of the right of government to gov ern...", which is I think is a damn fine definition and aim to steal it, then we'll all be recognisng Taiwan soon as a nation-state in its own right...?

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Bob's World

Permalink

Mac,

I take on "legitimacy" in my insurgency model; BL in regards to insurgency causation it is essentially the recognition of the governed of the right of government to govern. Not to be confused with the self- claimed or foreign proclaimed "officalness" brand of legitimacy.

Will lack of legitimacy intitiate active insurgency? Of course not. It is just a factor of c ausation and it still takes a spark, or even where there is plenty of spark heavy hand ed governments, such as exist across the Middle East, can suppress the populace fr om acting out.

In fact, Egypt and Tunisia are very interesting examples of the tremendous potential energy in a populace that is both experiencing high conditions of insurgency causati on, and equally high levels of government suppression. The result is an explosive ac celeration of action (that could be violent or non-violent, that is merely a tactical choi ce that one party forces onto the other). In Egypt this acceleration was so rapid that t he government reached its breaking point before a true insurgent organization could even form. Amazing. This same potential energy is rumbling in several countries, an d smart governments (theirs and ours) should work to relieve that pressure through s mart evolutions of governmental reform. (another example of Populace-centric foreig n policy at work. It can sustain allies in power as well).

Cheers!

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"MAC" McCallister (not verified)

Permalink

Dennis,

It is great to hear that it is not so important to concern ourselves with "implement ation" at lower levels since it is all about messaging... but no message ever actua lly killed a person... but some security force member has...

Hmmm... our communications strategy/messaging should at the very least demo nstrate our desire for a legitimate system of government and at the very least tell folks that we actually believe in and support the very ideals on which our country

was founded... That's an interesting comment...

Where the hell have I been for the last 30 years? I actually thought that every President and Secretary of State since Woodrow Wilson sought in their communications strategy or what we used to call "diplomacy" to shout from the highest mountain tops our desire for a legitimate system of government for everyone and in line with the ideals upon which our country was founded... I guess no backdoor discussions and economic pressures to get the local leadership to give more ground to the more enlightened local folks seeking a participatory voice and role in local governance took place... ever.

"Legitimate government"... please don't point loaded terms only to explain that its meaning is for someone else to unpack... It is your responsibility to pick up the brown matter after your pet is finished pushing some stool in the public square... so please unpack the term yourself.

So, let me get this straight... a government's legitimacy is based on popular will and a lack of legitimacy undermines stability... ok... How do the following examples fit into this scheme? In the case of Mubarak's Egypt... 30 years of illegitimacy and stability.. In the case of Saddam Hussein's Iraq... 24 years of illegitimacy and stability and in the case of Iran.... 32 years of illegitimacy (if you believe that the Vilayet-i-faqih, which means the rule of the jurisprudent is less than popular or democratic) and stability. I believe that there is someone, somewhere right now trying to make the case that a form of violent instability (violent regime change in Iraq in a quest, believe it or not, for greater regional stability) actually created the conditions for the removal of Mubarak... or maybe Mubarak was so easily toppled because he got too old to out-fox and out-lion his rivals... or maybe old age tempered his ruthlessness... something that we might want to consider as we poke (encourage) the Iranian Vilayet-i-faqih to embrace civil society.

I'd love to be a fly on the wall in Cairo right now and listen to the elites renegotiate the existing patronage relationships...

I actually like the implied cost savings in a foreign policy approach in which the appropriate strategic messaging lets the people know that we support legitimacy and the popular will and that this very act creates and maintains stability in a very complex global system... I'll say this for the concept... it briefs well ;-)

Man-hugs...

r/
MAC

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Old
Eagle

This is great. But a coupla points (as usual).

Mon,
02/14/2011
- 3:51pm

1. Foriegn policy is a Westphalian concept in that it is the policy of a government.

2. The concept of policy places it even above that of strategy. Strategy uses EWM to implement policy. Yet within a few lines here, we're at the tactical level in two or three very specific geographical/cultural/ethnic locations.

3. Even during the much maligned Cold War, the US had pop-centric elements to its foreign policy AND better means to implement them: a robust USAID (now pretty much emasculated) and the now-defunct USIA. In addition, covert CIA activities were often pop-centric.

4. Although not under gov't control, US gained(?) pop-centric effects through non-gov't actors: microsoft, McD's, MGM, CNN, etc. In many ways, this was a win-win deal, a lot of influence for zero tax dollars. Want some fries w/that?

5. Goose-Gander? Shouldn't we open our borders to teams from other countries to try to convince our population how they ought to behave? Or is this approach just a one-way street?

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Bill C.
(not
verified)

Mon,
02/14/2011
- 12:18pm

If one were to view a foreign power, for example, the United States, as being the primary actor pushing for and prosecuting a "global insurgency," then might this help us understand the need for and utility of a populace-centric foreign policy?

Consider this definition of a "global insurgency" and see if the shoe fits:

***** A global insurgency is a protracted conflict in which one or more foreign entities, acting with allies and through convenient local intermediaries, seeks to overthrow -- or fundamentally change -- the political, economic and/or social order of various states, societies and regions. The overall purpose and goal of this effort being -- by this process -- to gain greater direct or indirect control over, and access to, these states, societies and regions. *****

Does this context (US post-Cold War role as that of a global insurgent seeking -- by various means to overthrow or fundamentally change the political, economic and social order of various outlier states, socieites and regions); does this explanation provide us with a better foundation for understanding the need for and utility of a populace-centric foreign policy going forward?

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SJPONeill

Bob

Permalink

Have just posted on the Malaya thread but it just struck me that the creation of Sin
gapore in 1965 as a separate nation for ethnic Chinese dissatisfied with the way
Malaysia was going at the time. might be a good example of a populace-centric a
pproach, where the interests of a distinct group in the population were put before
possibly the greater needs of the state?

Simon

Log in or register to post comments

Dennis
M. (not
verified)

Permalink

It seems to me -- without any formal education in the field -- that "foreign policy" is, at
its core, a communications strategy. As such, it is not all that relevant to talk about "i
mplementation" at lower levels (the "guys on the ground"). It is about messaging.

These messages can be communicated to the target audience in a number of ways -
- through diplomats, other government officials such as the Secretary of State, or thr
ough presidential statements. The question that we seem to be discussing here is w
ho is the proper audience for these messages. Is it strictly the government of the targ
et nation, or should we also be trying to communicate with the people of that nation?
The fact is that even if we are not targeting the people with our messages, they are s
till listening -- they still hear what we are saying.

Therefore, if we admit that the people are part of our communication, whether we lik
e that or not, we need to adjust our strategy accordingly.

As everyone seems to admit here, every situation will be different and will require a d
ifferent strategy. But the one thing that we cannot forget is that it is in our interest to
work with legitimate governments (that is a loaded term that I will allow someone els
e to unpack). A government's legitimacy is based on popular will. And as recent even
ts have demonstrated, a lack of legitimacy undermines stability. If stability is our goa
l, then our communications strategy should be tailored to at the very least demonstra
te our desire for a legitimate system of government. It need not spell out specifics or
even be targeted toward any specific oppressed group within a particular country. Ou
r communications should at the very least show that we believe in and support the v
ery ideals on which our country was founded.

Otherwise, we will be much less able to adjust to the instability that comes when the
people finally assert their rights and to work with whatever comes after that.

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Bill M.

Sun, 02/13/2011 - 12:55pm

Permalink

Putting more pressure on the government could result in the U.S. becoming unwelcome in any sovreign nation, but assuming this is the right path you're still referring to the government engaging their government. Our lukewarm support for the population in Egypt and Tunisa could have backfired if the "so-called" popular movements failed. I only call it "so-called", because a few 10s of thousands on the streets don't "necessarily" represent a majority (though in Egypt I suspect they did).

Still I think there is much merit in your arguments, but as you know and preach each situation is different and our approach needs to be tailored appropriately.

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Bob's World

Sun, 02/13/2011 - 9:43am

Permalink

Our approach to Egypt and Tunisa has been Populace-centric so far.

Our approach toward the Middle East to date over the course of the GWOT has been largely Government-Centric and Threat-Centric.

Our approach to Vietnam was Government-Centric and Threat-Centric.

Our approach to the Philippines is a Hybrid. It was in working that mission that I began to develop these theories. While more respective of the concerns of the populace and the sovereignty of the government than in most such interventions; it still is far too focused on the symptoms of the problem IMO. Does not put enough pressure on the National Government to grant greater respect and justice to the people of the south (similar dynamic in Thailand as well).

Each situation is unique and must be tailored, but people are people.

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sjponeill.word… (not verified)

Sat, 02/12/2011 - 6:50pm

Permalink

Got distracted by three year olds...that should be Southern Iraq NOT Afghanistan!!!!

Log in or register to post comments

sjponeill.word… (not verified)

Sat, 02/12/2011 - 6:49pm

Permalink

"...Besides, if the current approach isn't working, what does it hurt to try something new?..."

Or something old...some of the tools may be new if Facebook and Twitter tools AND relevant but the issues are old and it often seems, so are many of the solutions...part of the problem seems to be that we keep seeming to clasify every twist as new when there are really very few new twists that have not been encountered and overcome in the past - engaging a population directly and not its 'parent' government: isn't that what agents provaceur(?) were invented for before the 'information age'...did the Germans not support Lenin and co to achieve this in WW1...? Were we not doing this with the partisans in Yugoslavia and France in the next big go-round? and did we not do with in Southern Afghanistan in the go-round we had in Iraq in 1990 when the third big go-round didn't eventuate...

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"MAC" McCallister (not verified)

Sat, 02/12/2011 - 5:50pm

Permalink

.. and then there are some who proclaim their idealism the loudest and wish to live in some Disney-like "tomorrow world"...

... it is also a type of fallacy... it is called the "fallacy of idealism" in which the other side is told that they are approaching the problem all wrong and that they should be addressing the causes of badness... and if we could only root out the causes of badness we will solve the problem.... Not that there is anything wrong with that approach... It is well intentioned but most times hopelessly impractical... if the study of bloody history is any indication...

... the fallacy of idealism is countered by the fallacy of reversion... it is actually more a rationalization in which it is argued that changing how we do business is actually a waste of time since all things, in time, will revert to their worst state...

... if only we could eliminate the fallacy of determination which is the rationalization that improvements in social life have not happened because we haven't been determined enough to make it happen... I think that is what concentration and reeducation camps are for...

Isn't this fun :-)

.... and in the end a waste of time... :-/

Robert, I actually respect your point of view and will now "stop vying for reputation, fighting for prestige, striving day and night to get power and emerge on top" (Lucretius, II, 7-13).

Man-hugs all around...

v/r
MAC

Bob's World

Sat,
02/12/2011
- 10:01am

Permalink

Hell, I havta be a little dogmatic on an idea I throw out to the mob for analysis. Not one to say something and then not be willing to stand behind my words. (Besides I learn a lot in the process).

On that note, yeah, putting Mr. Karzai in a golden cage for a short time in order to finally get movement on actions that can truly bring stability to Afghanistan may be a bit extreme. But then, we are getting ready to spend billions and take thousands of casualties this coming fighting season in the pursuit of a plan that promises little more than a short stalemate that might allow us to slide out with our honor intact. I find that to be far more extreme.

"The populace" is indeed a diverse mix everywhere. When our founding fathers proclaimed bold principles as god given rights in the name of "the people" many would never share in those rights for generations to come. Even today what brings one man happiness is a curse to another; or what one finds to be tremendous liberty another sees as a horrible burden. Such is always the case. But if one names and protects these rights and then ensures they apply to all, it matters little how each niche deems to define it. But when one ties their nation to some foreign government that denies such rights or excludes large swaths of the populce from full participation in governance and opportunity, one ties a millstone about their neck and dives into the deep end of the pool.

As populaces become more empowered, those millstones grow in size and weight. As U.S. influence wanes due to outdated policies, a stagnant economy, and a growing sense of impunity in how we treat our neighbors on this planet, it demands more energy to keep our head above water as well. Dropping millstones, such as the government of Tunisia and Eqypt lightened the load, but many more remain. Rebuilding our influence will help as well through the adoption of new policies better suited to the world we live in today rather than the 1950 world they were formed for.

I am an optimist and if that makes me a bit dogmatic at times, or a bit of an idealist, I am ok with that. But I always try to remain a realist as to the environment we live within. Far too many who proclaim their realism the loudest live in some Disney-like "Yesterday Land."

Besides, if the current approach isn't working, what does it hurt to try something new?

Log in or register to post comments

SJPONeill (not verified)

Fri, 02/11/2011 - 5:48pm

Permalink

Damn...that was me - AGAIN!!!

Log in or register to post comments

Anonymous (not verified)

Fri, 02/11/2011 - 5:35pm

Permalink

MAC said "...I would have you more clearly define this glittering generality "the people" you keep talking about..."

Yep, absolutely...it get so that I now parenthesise (it doesn't hurt) 'the people' every time I use the term...

Log in or register to post comments

Surferbeetle

Fri, 02/11/2011 - 5:14pm

Permalink

Hasta la victoria siempre!

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"MAC" McCallister (not verified)

Fri, 02/11/2011 - 4:30pm

Permalink

I looked up the word dogmatic and learned that dogmatic utterances are assertions of unproven or unprovable principles or assertions pertaining to or characteristic of a doctrine or code of beliefs accepted as authoritative... I am so confused, does there or does there not exist that one sheet of music from which everyone might play beautiful music together?

... I submit that we are all a bit dogmatic each in our own way... I personally consider myself not only dogmatically challenged but also a bit of a fanatic because I know God would agree with me if he had all the facts...

Also, whoever in this day and age actually believes that "democracies" dont go to war with one another and proceed to jump for joy every-time this or that social movement or mob drapes itself in a "democratic" label is just down right silly...

In the Analects, Confucius tells his disciple Zilu that words and titles no longer mean what they once did and that actions and behavior no longer correspond to the labels originally associated with them. Confucius sought the rectification of names i.e. the proper use of language and rectifying people's behavior so that the behavior exactly corresponded to the language with which they identified and described themselves...

So what does this have to do with the idea that democracies don't fight one another? Technically speaking, Iraq under Saddam Hussein was a revolutionary democracy, Iran is a revolutionary democracy... Egypt might evolve into a revolutionary democracy in which the "people" will vote themselves a popular representative body but will find themselves no closer establishing what we might consider a true democratic institution.

Long live the fanatic in all of us!

I'm sorry... that was out of line and uncalled for...

Long live the revolution!!!

:-)

r/
MAC

Log in or register to post comments

Ken White (not verified)

Fri, 02/11/2011 - 1:50pm

Permalink

Robert C. Jones:

Heh. I can see why you dislike the Mead article. It essentially says that dogma is the enemy and while you are a great strategist, bon vivant and I'm sure a wonderful person, you do seem to lean a bit toward the dogmatic...

As for his recommending nothing, I did not get that impression. He wrote:<blockquote>" We want sure and safe rules: democracies dont go to war with each other, rational considerations guide the policy of great states, most problems have win-win solutions that everyone can accept, the age of great power war is behind us. Sun Tzu says we are fooling ourselves by inventing these rules, blinding ourselves to perils on every side."</blockquote>Have you not proposed variations on those themes? Could the mantra "poor governance is the cause of all insurgencies" and a few others amount to similar rules?

He further said:<blockquote>"The Art of War is a handbook for living in an uncertain and dangerous world. It is dominated by paradox: training is necessary to produce a good general, but any general who comes to trust the rules he has learned is headed for defeat. The successful general will have studied The Art of War so profoundly that he ceases to trust it."</blockquote>To me that suggests a need to be adaptable and to strongly question <i>all</i> 'rules' or received values.

He advocates flexibility of thought as opposed to single minded devotion to an evolved and perceived -- not necessarily real -- concept or set of them. That IMO is far from nothing. It is anathema to the bureaucratic mindset, for sure; it is difficult for those who believe in the 'order of things' to accept.

Seems to me that many of the things you denounce are representative of such 'order' -- yet you appear to propose simply replacing that 'order' with another...

Mead suggests -- accurately, I believe -- that there is really is no order, nor does there need to be. That's probably just as well, the US polity and psyche do not lend themselves to such order. The US Army and some of its denizens seem to crave such order due IMO to far too many European habits ingested. Fortunately, most ugly, gauche Americans will consistently reject such a strait jacket...

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"MAC" McCallister (not verified)

Fri, 02/11/2011 - 11:09am

Permalink

Brother Robert please.... (smiling as I write this)...

reference ... "and victory will soon be ours" retort... sarcasm... I like it ;-) but is that all you got from my last post? Really?

If I was a General... or a SAMS grad for that matter... I would have you more clearly define this glittering generality "the people" you keep talking about... (which you have refused to do so far... or are unable to) especially since some poor schmuk on the ground is going to have to talk and interact with them... I can only imagine our representative engaging the thousands of folks currently hanging out in El Tahrir Square with a bull-horn. Who exactly should we be talking with (or is it "talking at" when engaging thousands of individuals) to determine what is best for the "people" of Egypt? Warning... sarcasm follows... Maybe the academic community (another gross and glittering generality) will be able to explain and define everything for us... wait.. they are already doing this and look where that got us :-)

On the other hand, there is a beautiful simplicity to your political and diplomatic formula... We no longer require local allies since a populace-centric foreign policy need not concern itself with local allies but only the people...

Wouldn't it be much easier just to say that our foreign policy should provide the greatest good for the greatest amount of folks and that we no longer support Mubarak or the Karzai regime because Mubarak turned out to be a bad man and Karzai has reneged on what we thought we agreed upon when we empowered him and his kith and kin network. A more appropriate response might be to explain that we will no longer stand by and watch how leaders (ours included) manipulate the social contract (even though this might be exactly how things are done along the frontier... or Chicago, Albany, of Jackson, Mississippi for that matter...) instead of pushing a concept that is challenged to explain itself in Cairo or Kabul.

I understand that Dr. Abdullah Abdullah is waiting in the wings... leverage anyone? But wait... we are now people focused... so dealing with individuals who propose to represent segments of the people is now out. This last comment is payback for the "victory will soon be ours" remark... :-)

Believe it or not but I actually share to some extend in your moral outrage... and also believe that taking our ball and going home is a viable option...

By the way... does "populace resource control" have a place in a populace-centric foreign policy?

Man-hugs...

v/r
MAC

Log in or register to post comments

Dayuhan

Fri, 02/11/2011 - 8:33am

Permalink

<i>Step one would be to tell Karzai that we are done "clearing, holding, and building" in support of his government as it is currently organized. That he can either lead the process, and call for a truce with the Taliban to open reconciliation talks and initiate plans to form a new constitution that represents all of the people of Afghanistan; or he can be placed under house arrest while we work with some member of the government who is willing to make such mandatory changes</i>

Whoa... we're going to arrest the President of Afghanistan if he doesn't do what we declare is "mandatory"? In what capacity are we acting here? Wouldn't that be an effective declaration that we govern Afghanistan?

<i>If he calls, we walk. No regrets. We gave him a chance to build something new and good for the people of Afghanistan and he squandered the opportunity on cronyism, greed and power. We make the same offer to the Taliban on the way out. If they are willing to embrace the same criteria that Karzai has refused, we will be happy to support them if they agree to switch to non-violent tactics to advance their position.</i>

Once we walk, we are in no position to make offers or demands. The Taliban will do as they please, as will everybody else. Anybody want to take a guess on what that will be? Once we walk, do you really think the Taliban will care what we offer or what we want?

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Madhu (not verified)

Fri, 02/11/2011 - 8:14am

Permalink

Oops, missed the part about withdrawing forces if he says no, or putting him under house arrest.

Would our NATO partners object?

Yes, it's an interesting theory. Unfortunately, I think our decision makers are on autopilot for the next few years....

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Madhu (not verified)

Fri, 02/11/2011 - 8:12am

Permalink

And yes, Populace-centric approaches are by definition tailored to every populace

I worded my comments poorly. What I meant was:

How do you know an approach is tailored correctly for the populace? Through the institutions you develop such as courts and government?

I'm too concrete a thinker for this stuff :) I always need examples.

In the above example, what Karzai and the Taliban representatives say no? Or, what if they agree to the forms of what you suggest, but go back to their old behavior once we leave?

Is the theory to leave such strong institutions that they would be unable to?

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Bob's World

Fri, 02/11/2011 - 7:35am

Permalink

I have no problem with doing nothing (just ask my wife); I just didn't see where he recommended that or anything else. It was like the E-4 who complains "this sucks" but has nothing to offer as an alternative.

And yes, Populace-centric approaches are by definition tailored to every popualce.

Log in or register to post comments

Madhu (not verified)

Fri, 02/11/2011 - 7:29am

Permalink

Walter Russell Mead's post fits into a different conversation that has been taking place in some "COIN" blogs about the academic political and social sciences and their limits in predicting human behavior. (Abu Muqawama has some good posts and links and there were some top notch articles recently in the better "ideas" mags like City Journal and the American Interest.)

As a physician that sometimes teaches medical students, I've been pretty surprised at some of the things I've seen described as the scientific method in comments here....

If I have to read about surveys of war zones "proving" something scientifically one m ore time....

:)

The scientific method is tortured and stretched by managerialism and technocrats. R egression analysis is a tool and a method. No more. No less.

Sorry to go off subject. Interesting article on the populace-centric nature of foreign po licy.

Basically we are talking about the difference between illiberal and liberal regimes, rig ht?

Dictatorships and other illiberal regimes (democracies with poor rule of law and inad equate civilian capacity - ugh, dislike the word capacity - can be illiberal too) are alwa ys difficult to study and deal with because the data we obtain about the population is distorted in so many ways: access to populations, fear, intimidation, etc.

I imagine population centric would require a very good case by case study of differen t populaces or you would run into the same problems - assuming one solution fits all circumstances.

Log in or register to post comments

Chet (not verified)

Fri, 02/11/2011 - 7:17am

Permalink

Mr. Jones,

Even if Mr. Mead suggests doing nothing, is that necessarily bad? You are making hi s point for him. I agree with Madhu, though. I don't think he advocates doing nothing. Remember, the article is in reference to Sun Tzu.

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Madhu (not verified)

Fri, 02/11/2011 - 7:05am

Permalink

Walter Russell Mead's post is brilliant.

I don't believe he suggests "doing nothing." At least, that is not how I read the post. I read it as a plea to stop, take a hard look at what isn't working, and plan accordingly.

It was a post about technocraticism and blindly following rules developed via govern ment or academia that may not have application in all settings.

In short, pretty much what everyone has been saying in the comments section aroun d here for ages.

If something looks like it is not working, you don't go back and torture the data to fit a preconceived hypothesis, you go back and rethink the hypothesis or initial theory.

It is a brilliant indictment of managerialism.

IMO ")

Log in or register to post comments

Bob's World

Permalink

Chet,

So what does Mr. Mead suggest? Nothing. I think we need to follow Rome's example and "Have a take, and don't suck" (Yeah, Jim, not the empire).

Mac,

You're killing me...! You're thinking like a general or a SAMS grad! :-) I would definitely send the planning team back to their dark little corner of the HQ to start over. "Sir, we've received your guidance, and upon careful consideration and much debate we have determined that we are already executing it and victory will soon be ours!!"

Granted, we don't have a magic time machine, so let's start with the pieces on the board as they currently sit.

Step one would be to tell Karzai that we are done "clearing, holding, and building" in support of his government as it is currently organized. That he can either lead the process, and call for a truce with the Taliban to open reconciliation talks and initiate plans to form a new constitution that represents all of the people of Afghanistan; or he can be placed under house arrest while we work with some member of the government who is willing to make such mandatory changes, or we can just publicly announce what we have asked him to do, his refusal of the same, and begin withdrawing our forces immediately. That we would rather take our chances on his survival or on working with whatever new government emerges than to continue to reap the lost influence and strategic risk associated with continuing to enable his current behavior.

If he calls, we walk. No regrets. We gave him a chance to build something new and good for the people of Afghanistan and he squandered the opportunity on cronyism, greed and power. We make the same offer to the Taliban on the way out. If they are willing to embrace the same criteria that Karzai has refused, we will be happy to support them if they agree to switch to non-violent tactics to advance their position. As with Egypt we will ensure that the security forces of the ANSF are not employed against peaceful agents of change.

We become more neutral in regards to the two organizations competing for the support of this populace, and focus our position on the populace itself. Whichever (or both) side is willing to share that focus on the people over their own agenda wins our support.

Meanwhile at home pundits will be screaming about "sanctuaries" and "dominoes" and "Islamists" and any number of terms that have been effective in stirring up the fear and hate of the American people for the past 10 years. Unfortunately the Military, Diplomacy and Intelligence communities have contributed to this spin in our own biased pursuit of objectives as we have defined them in our own respective lanes.

Someone will need to explain that "sanctuaries" have been poorly defined, and that in fact if AQ wants to continue to pursue the US they can do it from Pittsburgh as easily as Pakistan; from Frankfurt as easily as the FATA; but that when the US supports the people of the region we rob AQ of their base of moral, physical, and financial support. That while the US does indeed have interests in South Asia, blindly supporting dictators in ways that take us counter to our national principles does not really advance those interests in a cost effective way. That the "vital" aspect of those interests can be served better by our absence than by our presence.

This does indeed require a major paradigm shift in how we think about these problems, in how we understand various components of these problems, and in how we as a nation best advance our national interests in a post-Cold War world.

We see the leading edge of the inevitable rise of the people in Tunisia and Egypt; and this will continue and there will be sweeping changes across the Middle East over the next few months and years. Wise governments will evolve; stubborn governments will fall. Hopefully one of those "wise" governments will be our own.

Cheers!

Bob

Log in or register to post comments

Chet (not verified)

Thu, 02/10/2011 - 6:45pm

Permalink

Populace-Centric foreign policy? Why bother?:

<i>"Much of America today is as addicted to bureaucratic, rule based thinking as ancient China. The uncertainties of life in a thermonuclear world haunt us. There must, we feel, be infallible techniques for making the economy grow, keeping inflation at bay, understanding international events and managing American foreign policy. When there is a problem -- a financial crash, a revolution in a friendly country, an attack by hostile forces -- somebody must have made an obvious mistake. They must have misapplied or failed to apply an obvious technique. We would rather believe that our leaders are foolish and incompetent (which they often are) than face the truth that we live in a radically unpredictable world in which no methods and no rules can guarantee safety.

Sun Tzus approach is directly opposed to most modern thought about social problems. He speaks about art and comes to war from a deeply Taoist worldview that highlights chaos, evanescence and change. We study "IR theory" and "political science" in

the hope that some rational explanations exist that will hold all this chaos at bay. (At Bard I am happy to say we have "Political Studies" instead of "Political Science"; the more modest title recognizes the limits of the discipline. Sun Tzu, I think, would appr ove.) We want sure and safe rules: democracies dont go to war with each other, ratio nal considerations guide the policy of great states, most problems have win-win solut ions that everyone can accept, the age of great power war is behind us. Sun Tzu say s we are fooling ourselves by inventing these rules, blinding ourselves to perils on ev ery side."</i> - Walter Russell Mead of The American Interest http://blogs.the-americ an-interest.com/wrm/2011/02/08/sun-tzu-the-enemy…

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"MAC" McCallister (not verified)

Thu, 02/10/2011 - 5:11pm

Permalink

Simon,

... you'd hope so... but the desires of villages, local leaderships etc, will vary... like the desires of a pro-government administrator who also supports members of his kith and kin network seeking administrative posts in the Taliban shadow governm ent... It gets downright confusing along the frontier :-)

I no longer see it as "our way or the highway"... We have adapted much to Afgha n ways in the last ten years...

r/
MAC

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SJPONeill

Thu, 02/10/2011 - 4:34pm

Permalink

MAC

Nice tight statements...are the desires of those villages, local leaderships, etc rele vant to the plan?

Seems like this is very much a our way or the highway approach...?

Simon

Log in or register to post comments

"MAC" McCallister (not verified)

Brother Bob,

Is this what you mean?

Mission.

Seize, clear and hold Marjah. Organize villages in greater Marjah area into distin ct subordinate administrative districts and transition control of these component p olitical subdivisions to local and provincial administration authorities (government -centric approach).

On order, find, fix and finish local Taliban forces, support networks and infrastruct ure (threat- centric approach).

Be prepared to incorporate local leadership and forms of governance (jirga, shur a) into newly established village/district administrative structure (mix of populace centric and government centric approach).

On order establish local constabulary forces in support of government fight again st local Taliban forces (mix of populace centric, threat-centric and government ce ntric approaches).

If so, are we not already doing this?

r/
MAC

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SJPONeill

I've had to go off and do 'work' the last couple of days and lost track of this most e xcellent and challenging thread...Robert Jones makes a good point with

...So, relying on the coercive power of our relative positions, and not giving two da mns what the populaces of Europe thought, we engaged through their governmen ts and dragged them off to war with us. In so doing we weakened the positions of t hose governments with their own populaces and also weakened the overall influe nce of the US with those nations as well. We opened scars in the process that hav e made them more susceptible to the infection of popular discontent that AQ feed s upon in Arab countries...

I don't disagree at all however would offer that at least some of those countries (th inking specifically of the UK and Australia) suffered from weak leadership that was only to happy to simply follow the US lead into Iraq, especially in the light of the di minishing credibility of the WMD argument. Perhaps if, as Helen Clark did, they fol lowed Nancy Reagan's advice and simply said 'no', the world may have had an op portunity to step back and reconsider before stepping into the morass...the weakn ess of those two leaders (Blair and Howard) was probably more of a contributing f actor to Iraq because, not only did they have a choice, they were not engaging the ir own populations which were pretty firmly rejecting US attempts at influence in su pport of what was to be OIF.

Maybe, in terms of established states, the question is not so much how the US or other nations might engage other populations, but more one of how can we encourage leaders in the position of Blair, Howard and Mubarak to listen to what THEIR people are saying...?

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Bob's World

Thu, 02/10/2011 - 3:16pm

Permalink

All good comments.

I know many struggle with this conceptually, and that is fine, its a concept afterall, and interpretation is in the eyes and mind of the beholder.

A simple example of application to Afghanistan though:

Government-Centric: Establish and preserve the current government and constitution; regardless of how flawed or causative it may be in the current conflict.

Threat-Centric: Defeat the Taliban and rob them of their support through development projects at the local level; all while increasing the capacity of Afghan security forces to be able to continue to suppress resistance to the government once the Coalition withdraws.

Populace-Centric: Achieve stability without making that stability contingent upon any particular form of government being in place or any particular element of the populace either defeated or enabled. Threat-centric components listed above would be subjugated to efforts that focus on identification and reconciliation of the principle issues of the Taliban and the subsuquent updating of the constitution to endure it represents all Afghan peoples equally, protects important rights and processes of legitmacy, and guards against government abuses. The U.S. then being open to establish relations with whatever form or manning of government emerges from that process.

Much of this is simply relenquishing a few degrees of the control that we have come to exert upon others in the name of shaping outcomes that we believe will be most favorable to us. To instead empower others to shape outcomes that they believe will be most favorable to them(up to the point where it actually posses a real threat to an interest that has not been artifically inflated to "vital" status to justify questionable activities).

Log in or register to post comments

"MAC" McCallister (not verified)

Brother Jed,

In my humble and not very intellectually challenging/stimulating opinion... the concept of populace-centric foreign policy is nothing new... Although I very much embrace the justification for greater focus on "the little people"... we act as though leaders throughout history have not taken the "mob" into consideration. Apologize for the derogatory term "mob"... I meant "people". Those who failed did so at their own risk... I recommend reading a little LeBon (if still credible in the eyes of contemporary social scientists) and Human Factors of Undergrounds in Insurgencies: Chapter 12, Subversive Manipulation of Crowds, Strategy and Tactics, Riots and Demonstrations and Phases of Subversive Manipulation... to wet your whistle.

No tyrant, monarch, autocrat or democrat is an island unto him/herself... all throughout history were depended upon allies. Multiple power-centers or virtual centers of power have always existed... Please read the correspondence of the Great Kings of the late Bronze Age... I recommend looking up the career of Abdi-Ashirt a... an ambitious and visionary local tribal chieftain who rose through the ranks with the support of "the Habiru" (little people with swords and knives) to challenge Tuthmosis III and Hittite authority... Believe it or not... concepts of sovereignty, legitimacy, moral compass, evolution, revolution, dynamic versus static stability and organizational agility all apply... maybe even class warfare if we wish to view Abdi-Ashirta's rise to power through a Marxist (dialectic - materialism) prism...

This conversation really has nothing to do with conceptual traction. The topic of this conversation is as old as civilization itself. It matters not whether we cloak the discussion in opinions, social science, lies, damned lies, or statistics... You need to know that I personally and totally dig the language of ecosystems and resistant microbes, re-triangulation, dynamic versus static stability, evolution or revolution, multiple power centers and centers of gravity, moral compass, sovereignty and legitimacy, and proactive and organizational agility or perturbation analysis... Great stuff... I submit that we might also be able to add entropy as a doctrine of inevitable social decline and degeneration into the mix.

Short afterthought... if we kill 99.9% of microbes with every new microbe killing social approach but yet retain a .01 % survival rate for more virulent survivors... what makes us believe that this new pro-populace approach won't create a much more virulent strain of future rebel? Just a thought experiment...

... there is nothing new here for me to wrap my conceptual brain around... I've read it before ... In the end, it all boils down to our assumptions on the nature of social change... and how and who gets to impose, control and manage social change... does it not?

... but don't get me wrong... I am happy that someone is earning some money peddling the better mouse-trap... :-)

Lovingly and Respectfully,

MAC

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Jed (not verified)

Thu, 02/10/2011 - 12:35pm

Permalink

rick,

You expressed frustration that the ongoing dialogue represents a lack of traction for the concept. Perhaps that lack of traction should usher a re-look at the concept vice a dogma lesson with more and more of the same supporting buzz words.

You have succeeded in stifling the contrarion dialogue, at least from me.

Auf Wiedersehen,
Jed

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rick (not verified)

Thu, 02/10/2011 - 3:56am

Permalink

Frustrating to read discussion here, and on Bunker's democracy threads, because it seems you're not getting conceptual traction.

We might be able to unify Realpolitik's respect for *Power*,
with "Democracy"/Pop-Centric's respect for *People*.

How? The concept of *Dynamic* Stability vs. *Static* Stability.

Evolution vs. Revolution. With a little insight, we can predict Evolution (e.g, we're very good at driving microbial resistance to antibiotics ;-) We have enough visibility into (real) Democracies, that we can do short-term predictions. (Our govt. doesn't bother to, but our larger corporations have been forced to develop these skills.)

But predicting the when/where/who of Revolution?

Seems our bureaucrats have their own "Zero Defect" career path
mentality: (1) Don't rock the boat, and (2) Under no circumstances,
should you ever predict that one of our Dictatorial Client-States
will get its boat rocked internally! (Bearers of bad news
get shot; keep mum; let it crash on somebody else's watch.)

Dynamic stability is like riding a bicycle.
Unless you're actually moving ("forward"), with enough speed to keep
the (COG) gravitational forces of your "body politic" above the
dis-unifying forces, you're probably going to fall. OTOH,
being fully stopped -- Static -- is also a stable equilibrium ...
until the Revolution. (Stall speed on aircraft is another analogy,
or you can stay static on the ground, and get bombed.)

When X is the opponent, we analyze its COGs, and we Red-team
methods to undermine its social cohesion. When X is the ally
(e.g, the EU coalition of the unwilling), we either assume cohesion,
or don't care if we destroy a government (assuming, incorrectly,
that the People of Spain, Britain, etc. will elect a New govt.
that supports our Same-old policies).

When X is not a sycophantic EU ally, but a finicky client-state
(Mubarak; Karzai; Pakistan), we allow ourselves to be manipulated
by the bogeyman of Islamic-Extremism (aka The Red Menace, in its
former incarnation). Suddenly Social Cohesion is extremely important,
and we must TRUST our client-state dictator's assessment of that,
since we don't have much of a clue about internal dynamics.

Moreover, our friendly neighborhood dictator's *repression*
has polarized the *Culture*, ensuring that the only perceived
viable alternative to his rule, probably is Extremist.
I.e, he has killed all the moderate microbes, and has been breeding
antibiotic-resistant killer-strains! Security Ecology is real.

(Hint -- are we there yet, regarding "Fixing Afghan Intel"?
We seem to be as surprised about Egyptian unrest, as we were
about the Shah's Iran.)

The RATIO/NUMBERS rough calcs perhaps drive home the point that,
although we can *listen* to everybody via polls, etc. there is
a combinatorial explosion of *Complexity* in trying to *talk*
or "negotiate" with the "People" individually.

Nevertheless, if we are given direct access to *randomly-selected*
People, we can wargame ("peace-game"?) many "What-if" scenarios to
get a better feel for the *Dynamics*, and hence, what contingencies
our own *dynamic* Policy-Perturbations should support.

(In systems-stability engineering, this is called
<i>"Perturbation Analysis"</i>. Hopefully, that term, itself,
can create some 60-watt photon kinetics above some Beltway Brains.
Getting genuinely *random* and *free-from-retribution* access
to People is one of the better Realpolitik arguments for Democracy.)

See, e.g, the "Americans Talk Issues Foundation" methodology:
https://fp.auburn.edu/tann/ati/purpose1.html
and http://www.pipa.org/
(I have no affiliation with either.)

The "Failed States Index", trends in the Gini Inequality index, etc., are top-down stati
stical methods that may raise fewer hackles about "interfering in internal affairs", tha
n polling.

When a corporation seeks a supplier for a "Mission-critical" part,
both parties understand that some internal transparency is required:
"Trust, but Verify" that the supplier can meet all requirements.
Typically, that means visibility into intermediate stages of the
manufacturing *process*, not just surface Q/A tests on the final *product*.

Westphalian international "policy" seems to be 1 Fiction that highly
respects State sovereignty ("Gentlemen don't listen to one another's
telephone calls"), plus 1 Fact ("Covertly, we will do whatever we
can get away with Plausibly Denying").

Perhaps a more Pop-Centric policy process is really more honest --
we demand the right to overtly snoop in the "internal affairs"
of your State, and maybe do a little light meddling with your People.

Realpolitic argues strongly that our risk-based investment
in cooperating with you, should depend on that degree of internal access.

Domestic politicians (given the "flattening" of the Info-sphere)
can no longer fool most people most of the time via separate messages.
Instead, they are forced to <i>"Triangulate"</i> among
different constituencies -- multiple Power Centers.

Shouldn't this approach to Real-Politikal-Dynamics be a more explicit
part of our foreign policy-making process?

How to "sell" an approach with more strategic depth,
that recognizes and engages in-country players of the
sub- or non-governmental variety?
Why not dust off the "Prophylactic COIN" term to baptize these policy approaches, th
en further *legitimize* them by quoting Kilcullen and FM 3-24?

Specifically, Kilcullen writes:
<blockquote>
<i>"It is critically important to realize that we, the intervening
counterinsurgent, are not outside this ecosystem,
looking in at a Petrie dish of unsavory microbes.
Rather, we are inside the system.
The theater of operations is not a supine, inert medium on which we practise our ope
rational art. Rather it is a dynamic, living system
that changes in response to our actions and requires
continuous balancing between competing requirements."</i>
</blockquote>

Yes, and that applies *proactively* as well: By supporting *Stability*
of a regime, we are correctly *perceived* to be an Actor inside the
"Security Ecology" of that "unsavory dish of foreign microbes".

FM 3-24 says:
<blockquote>
<i>"Today's Soldiers and Marines ... must also <u>rapidly adapt cognitively and emo
tionally</u> to the perplexing challenges of counterinsurgency
and master new competencies as well as new contexts. Those in leadership position
s must provide the moral compass for their subordinates as they navigate thi
s complex environment."</i>
</blockquote>

Yes, that too applies *proactively*. And it applies not merely to
forward-based individuals, but especially to home-based *Institutions*!

(Elsewhere, I described how those 3 factors -- Cognition, Emotion,
and Ethics -- are the 3 legs of Stability of any Social Institution.
If you fail to rapidly adapt, too much Stability-burden shifts onto
other legs, that cannot sustain that extra burden without warping/breaking.)

FM 3-24 says:
<blockquote>
<i>"7-25. A key part of any insurgent's strategy is to <u>attack the will</u>
of the domestic and international opposition.
One of the insurgents' most effective ways to undermine and erode political will is to
portray their opposition as untrustworthy or illegitimate.
These attacks work especially well when insurgents can
<u>portray their opposition as unethical by the opposition's own standards</u>."
</i>
</blockquote>

Again, we are correctly *perceived* to be an Actor inside the
"Security Ecology" of every complex, "unsavory dish of foreign microbes".

Are we *perceived* as supporting the Stability of the Dictatorship,
against our own avowed ethical principle of Democracy?

If so, perhaps we need to <i>"Re-Triangulate"</i> our Policy.
It's wise to consider multiple Power Centers -- "Virtual COGs" --
to be real (i.e, they can kill you), even if they have not yet
coalesced around particular opposition leaders or parties.
(We should *measure* their "Potential Energy" via polls and Social
Perturbation Analysis -- before that Energy transforms into Kinetic forms.)

See a good paper on Moral COGs:
"What Clausewitz (Really) Meant by Center of Gravity"
http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/awc-thry.htm#cog

I agree with Michael Vlahos that -- like any Empire -- our
Pax Americana is unable to stop "midwifing" new social orders.
We are perceived as the bull in the china shop, because we *are*

the only superpower, and we "midwife" new social movements
even (especially!) when we do not intend to.

So let's watch how many "little people" our big feet are stepping on,
and maybe do some proactive planning (and learn to dance an organizationally-agile Ali-shuffle),
so as to avoid Real-Politically unnecessary -- and unethical --
bloody blowback.

The new National Military Strategy has a good "Problem Statement".
It recognizes that our new strategic environment is ...
<blockquote><i>
"characterized more by shifting, interest-driven coalitions
based on diplomatic, military, and economic power than by
rigid security competition between opposing blocs,"
[which therefore]
"requires America's foreign policy to employ an *adaptive* blend
of diplomacy, development, and defense,"
</i></blockquote>

But Machiavelli taught us why Institutional change is glacial.

Also, see one cabinet-level restructuring recommendation for a new
Dept. of Global Security -- to make policy toward failing states:
http://www.earth-policy.org/book_bytes/2011/wotech7_ss1

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"MAC" McCallister (not verified)

Wed,
02/09/2011 -
10:59pm

Permalink

I am no longer sure whether I am a "realist, idealist, or clown"... so can someone please provide me with some "specific" examples for dealing with these abstractions that are continuously bantered about as if they actually represent something tangible and real... Who are these people exactly that we keep referring too and what is this thing we call the "nation" and the "will of the people" that we are to influence?

Robert, you explain that I am addressing tactical programs but that we are actually talking about strategic concepts... correct? If we are talking about strategic concepts, and accepting the fact that "the people" are the only constant in this world of continuous differential equations... wouldn't it make sense that while a strategic concept guides the execution of tactical programs... it is the targeted application of tactical programs that make and break strategic concepts? It is the tactical program that is used to engages a targeted segment of the population or what our irregular warfare definition defines as the "relevant population". How can we engage all the Egyptians or Germans, or Muslims, or whatever flavored abstract of the moment... Do we really wish to engage all and is this even possible? It is one thin

g to talk about thinking about "everyone" and taking everyone into consideration when we strategize... but quite another when someone on the ground has to make it happen. It is physically impossible. In the military, we call this an economy of force issue... in economics, unlimited wants and limited means and points of diminishing returns... The general mission statement "establish democracy in Iraq" when all planning was said and done actually translated into x amount of trucks, x amount of gallons of fuel, x amount of bullets, etc, etc...

I apologize for my idiocy but I just don't get what this new thing called populace-centric policies is intended to do. It is all well and good to talk about taking the "little people" into account when developing strategic concepts... but I submit that we actually already do this as best as we can considering the limitations of nature, life and resources... I know this to be a fact.. I participated in the planning and execution of the high-diddle-diddle up the left middle in Iraq ... and the "populace" was a major factor of consideration... if only being forced to listen to the green-tabbers repeated admonitions to keep the civilians out of the way of the major armored thrusts north...

It is very easy to talk about the "people"... but there comes a time when you will be forced to define "these people"... or the "nation"... and this thing called national will. Can someone define the American nation for me and how we might engage this American nation? I fear that this gross over-simplifications will only lead to fallacious reasoning for what must be done... On the other hand, if you seek to engage the nation as a whole... nothing gets done... your initiatives would be lost in a cacophony of voices and identities. There is no one sheet of music from which everyone plays beautiful music together...

Dealing with "the people" translates into talking to "specific folks" and not some abstract concept of humanity...

No need to answer my post... I am resigned to the fact that I just don't get it... :-(

Hugs,

r/
MAC

Log in or register to post comments

Dayuhan

Wed,
02/09/2011
- 9:36pm

Permalink

I'd certainly not suggest ignoring "the will of the people", but I'd submit that we should be very, very careful about basing action, let alone intervention, on our perception of "the will of the people". Our perception and interpretation of popular will are likely to be heavily colored by our own preconceived ideas, and may have very little to do with what the people actually think... and, of course, as oft mentioned above, there are generally numerous and often contradictory popular wills in play at any given pl

ace and time. It's easy to focus on those voices and those factions that are saying t
hings that we are predisposed to hear, and to give them more credence than they m
ay deserve.

Even where the popular will is reasonably clear, that doesn't necessarily mean a po
pulace trusts us or wants us involved. Trying to appoint ourselves as champion of a
ny populace, especially without an invitation or request from that populace, strikes
me as a pretty dubious and pretty dangerous enterprise.

Log in or register to post comments

Bob's World

Wed,
02/09/2011
- 6:52pm

Permalink

The reality is that we can no longer ignore the will of the people of the nations we de
al with. In an Ideal world we could just focus on the government to government relati
onship and that would be enough.

That is the reality that those who like to call themselves "realists" are going to have t
o wake up to.

Personally, I consider myself to be an "idealist living in the real world." I find most self
-proclaimed realists to be living in an ideal world, and that is a world that just does no
t exist.

Labels are dangerous, they canalize thinking and lead to dismissive responses of co
ncepts that do not fit one's preconceived notions.

Cheers,

Bob

Log in or register to post comments

Jed (not verified)

Wed,
02/09/2011
- 5:12pm

Permalink

Robert,

I spent 4 of the last 6 years in Europe, so I'm fully onboard with your analysis of us dr
agging them into the current conflicts. I also fully concur with the concept of moving t
oward policy that accounts for the populace, though I can't envision too many succes
sful applications. I would argue I take the realist view, while I see this as very idealisti
c.

I think my main divergence is with the concept of a nation-state. I don't believe there
are too many nation-states currently in existence, in the strictest sense of the concep
t. While I think the US still fits the notion of nation-state, most of the countries I've liv

ed in, worked in or analyzed have the nation part (cultural and ethnic identification) c ompletely separate from the state (governance and monopoly on use of force to prot ect, etc) function.

For this reason, I don't feel it's easy or even feasible for the "state" side of our nation -state to engage with the many faces of a given state's "nation" or populace. There a re just too many factions to try and appease.

As I alluded, I see the merit and don't dispute the ideal, but I'm not convinced the ex ecution is possible.

Log in or register to post comments

Robert C. Jones (not verified)
Wed, 02/09/2011 - 4:51pm

Permalink

Jed,

Perhaps, but one must admit that the US has the unique position of being able to tell any other country on the face of the planet to go pound sand if they don't like what th ey are offering. No one else has that luxury, so we are a poor example of one to who m this approach is best applied.

Even Great Britain does not enjoy such a position. Consider the US-led forays into Ir aq and Afghanistan. Does anyone believe it was in the best interest of Great Britain, or that it enjoyed the support of their populace to accept the US "offer" of "you are wi th us or you are against us" to join us?

So, relying on the coercive power of our relative positions, and not giving two damns what the populaces of Europe thought, we engaged through their governments and dragged them off to war with us. In so doing we weakened the positions of those gov ernments with their own populaces and also weakened the overall influence of the U S with those nations as well. We opened scars in the process that have made them more susceptible to the infection of popular discontent that AQ feeds upon in Arab c ountries.

Part of becoming more Populace-Centric is, as Dave Maxwell suggested, recognizin g that the nation-state is composed of far more than just the government.

Looking at this same situation from a slightly different angle, being a bit less "threat-c entric" and a bit more "populace-centric" would have likely lead to an analysis of the problem that we were facing that would have produced a different solution than stayi ng in Afghanistan following the initial punitive raid, or going into Iraq at all.

This is not about who we talk to, this is about how we prioritize what is important. Bu t, as I point out, we have no powerful advocate for the people. We have State for stat es, and Defense and an ungodly glut of intelligence services for threats, and those lo ud voices typically hold sway. It is time for a new voice and a new relative merit to be assigned to the will of the people.

Sawbuck (not verified)

Wed,
02/09/2011 -
4:46pm

Permalink

In theory, the populace discussion all sounds practical and nice.

And of course, the populace needs to be considered when dealing with a foreign nation. Matter of fact, they need to be approached if we want to be involved in deposing the leader of a state, but until that line is crossed, it is the leader that has to make and live with the foreign policy decisions that are made between their country and another.

Jed mentions "What constitutes a legitimate state and their continued right to represent their populace?"

If our country deals with a state, we have legitimized it as far as we are concerned, like it or not. We can't continue to deal with other nations and then bash them over the airwaves. They are either our enemies, or not. We can't afford to continue to create and operate in these gray areas.

"...and their continued right to represent their populace." If they live in the big house and the picture on their money looks strikingly similar to the face in the leader's mirror, they have that right. That right can be taken from them by vote, revolution, or foreign intervention, but not by a foreign country or group of countries acting as if the leader is illegitimate.

Jed (not verified)

Wed,
02/09/2011
- 3:42pm

Permalink

While I laud the intent of establishing policy toward a given country that supports the will of the populace, I think it's much, much easier said than done.

As an example, I'd ask any one of you to Blue Team a generic "Country X" policy toward the US based on the will of our populace. We are so divided politically, religiously, and culturally that I can't imagine a populace-centric approach would even come close to being on target.

Luckily (perhaps?) we have a representative government, so other nations don't have to guess with whom to deal. My point is that chasing this approach could lead to an infinite number of branches and sequels that would quickly drain our resources as much as our never-winning pursuit of COIN has this past decade.

For good or bad, the only viable negotiating partner for a state is another state. When we marginalize other legitimate states, we marginalize our government, too. What constitutes a legitimate state and their continued right to represent their populace? Ahh, there's the rub.

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Dennis M. (not verified)

Wed, 02/09/2011 - 12:51pm

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Mr. Maxwell makes the point, and COL Jones reiterates, that I think is critical here in any foreign policy: our relationships with other nations should not be simply with the government of that nation but with the nation as a whole.

Certainly, it is easier to develop a relationship with a government versus an entire nation. After all, you know who to talk to. But it is also not that hard to figure out "the will of the people." Anybody who didn't see the yearnings for a change in regime among the Egyptian people years ago was simply blind. So structuring a policy for dealing with a nation that accounts for the people's "will" should not be that hard, and it is critical.

This is an interesting debate on a really important topic. Thanks all!

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Bob's World

Wed, 02/09/2011 - 10:52am

Permalink

Dave,

Exactly. This is the type of thinking that I am attempting to promote.

Both Cold War containment and GWOT were/are very ideologically driven. Not by the "threat" so much as by us. WE became committed to preventing certain ideologies while promoting others. To do this we have tied ourselves to individuals and governments that we felt would support our position.

The people are often lost (and last) in this process. Sometimes the quest for idological solutions justified letting a Colonial power reexert or sustain their controls over a populace that had a quest for liberty and self-determination.

Sometimes the quest for ideological solutions justified looking the way when the governments we partnered with became emboldened by that support and acted with greater impunity toward their own populaces over time. Short-circuiting systems that lend legitmacy to governance; enriching themselves; assuming a "let them eat cake" attitude toward their own people.

By shifting our perspective and priorities toward the populace and in greater alignment with our national principles and ethos, we can break from this dangerous trend and emerge in a much healthier position to continue to lead and excell in the world that is emerging around us.

I have a paper coming out soon in Defense Concepts that looks at this from a slightly different perspective. That paper takes the position that it is time to retire "Containment" as the centerpiece of US foreign policy and to embrace less controlling approach

es that I dub simply as "Empowerment." The foundation for Empowerment comes from ideals we held as important prior to WWII, and borrows greatly from FDR's thinking on foreign policy prior to his death.

Cheers!

Bob