

Comments

max161

Wed,
02/09/2011
- 10:32am

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Bob and all,

As usual great comments and discussion. Just one quick thought that has been on my mind. Simple point perhaps. When we call something an ally who (or perhaps more importantly what) are we talking about. As an example given this discussion on population foreign policy- in Egypt is Mubarak our ally? Egyptian populace or the Egyptian nation-state? May seem like semantics but it seems since the cold war we have always called the leader our ally when we should really be talking about the nation-state as our ally. This may be important when there is an internal transition of leadership. When we tie ourselves so tightly to the leader we may lose flexibility and agility to deal with dynamic and changing conditions.

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Bob's
World

Wed,
02/09/2011
- 8:51am

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Mac,

Good insights, I would only add that the programs you mention are much more tactical programs than foreign policy perspectives, and that changing our perspective at the policy level is something that we do currently have the talent to do. It is full recognition of the requirement and will to enact it that we lack.

So, Village Stability Operations. This is a good tactical program and also a good example of Population-Centric COIN tactics as well. But the heart of VSO is the belief that LCDR Sisco has been echoing here in his writing on that topic, the belief that 'we can't give the people what they really need, because GiROA would have to change, and we "can't" change them; so instead we will ignore that and make some islands of hope and legitimacy and hope that they someday penetrate the central government lid of illegitimacy and poor governance that is pressed all the way down to the District level.'

VSO is actually an example of what I would call "Government-Centric Foreign Policy" as it is rooted to the position that the preservation of an allied government in power, no matter how "Poor", "Ineffective", "Corrupt", "Despotic", etc, that government may happen to be. So "people-based tactics to support a government-based policy while we pursue a threat-based plan."

So, in Afghanistan, to apply a Populace-Centric Foreign policy one would focus on determining the "will" of the people, rather than their "wants" and then shape our approach to help support that will. In Afghanistan there is a large minority that does not believe that 100% of governmental power should lie in a Central Government made up solely of the Northern Alliance and that also believes in more local forms of legitimacy and security than the centralized form mandated under the current constitution.

We would focus on that as the basis for forming our strategy. Not the making the "defeat" of some "threat," be it AQ or the Taliban either one as the focus. Threats come and go, organizations evolve, etc. To focus solely on chasing threats ignores why these threats exist and often slows their demise or evolution. Also not making the preservation of any particular government (Afghanistan, Pakistan), or the opposition to any particular government (Iran) drive our strategy development either. Governments too come and go, and today's friend is tomorrow's competitor and enemy the day after tomorrow. We all know this. The people, however, do not change. They are the great constant, and that constant is also what actually has the capacity and capability to harm the U.S. and our interests far more than any small state can.

Shifting to Egypt, one sees the same focus. The "Threat-Centric" crowd rail on about the potential rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, though the evidence is that the people care far more for fundamental freedoms than any particular ideology. They also rail on about how the uncertainty of change could potentially give rise to a situation that might make the Suez less accessible, or the Israel less secure. The "Government-Centric" crowd rails on about how Mubarak and his peers across the region are our long-term allies, and how a domino-effect could cause us to "lose" in the region, etc.

Yet all of these same people recognize that the Egyptian people live in poverty and despotism. That the government we support acts in ways grossly inconsistent with any of the principles we profess to stand for. But that is not the priority. The populace comes last in decision making, behind "Threats" and "Governments." By applying PC E we simply shift our priority. People first. We don't demand that Mubarak step down immediately, but we do go on record for our support for all Egyptian people, not just a few who gather in protest, or who profit from the current regime. We recognize and manage threats, but we do not let their presence blind us to larger, longer term matters that affect who we are as a nation and how we are perceived by the world. (And our approach to Egypt is indeed a critical Stratcom platform to the world, and we should recognize and leverage that fact). Similarly we do not blindly commit to supporting Mubarak either. We give him some rope, if he chooses to hang himself with it that is his call. We don't need to publicly criticize him; publicly supporting the populace is enough. Meet with him in private, have tough love about where our priorities lie, and ensure he understands that we will work with the next guy just as we have worked with him and that we will not put our own nation at risk to preserve any government that acts as his does.

We can do this. We must do this. Waiting until the barbarians are at the gate is one approach, better to get in front of that if one can.

Bob

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"MAC"
McCallister
 (not
 verified)

Tue,
 02/08/2011 -
 7:53pm

[Permalink](#)

Simon....

I'd submit that Jim's initiative is just one more manifestation of what I consider a population-centric approach. It has and always will be about relevant populations. The objective in Afghanistan, although folks just don't want to admit this fact because it doesn't fit our national myth and pop-centric COIN narrative, is the same as was the case with the Abu Risha and other tribes in the Dulaymi Confederation or Gen. P's "one village at a time" initiative. All these operations are intended to gain influence with the relevant political authority of a relevant population... It matters not, for discussion sake, whether the goal is to undermine or to support that authority... In both Jim's tribal engagement and Gen. P's "one village at a time" approach the objective is to link the "village and valley" to the central government in a patronage - security relationship... The Soviets did it before us as did the British before them. The million dollar question is whether these patronage-security relationships that we are establishing between the village and valley and the Karzai regime are sustainable (one of our SOF imperatives) once we depart. How long do we expect the ANA to survive after Uncle Sugar departs the AO? The Najibullah regime survived for six years after the Soviets departed.

I submit that the "tribal" approach has and continues to be used by every competent power-broker everywhere... You and I know it better by different terms such as "divide and conquer"... or poking Peter and blaming Paul...

r/

MAC

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SJPONeill

Tue,
 02/08/2011 -
 7:04pm

[Permalink](#)

Steve, engagement sequence checked and corrected... ;-)

MAC,

I don't think that what Jim Gant was proposing is so much population-centric as it was recognition of the fact that there is no effective central governance in Afghanistan. It is an approach perhaps applicable in that environment but not in others. For example, attempting a 'tribal' approach in the US would probably not get much traction except amongst a few nutjob communities as the notion of central governance is well-established and (for the most part) accepted. On the other hand, you could argue that lobbyists and other interests regularly adopt a population-centric approach to influencing the US. Without wanting to go tangential, the twisting of the 68 Tet Offensive from victory to defeat in the eyes of the public might be an example; global warming might be another, as might the lead-up to each Presidential election?

Simon

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"MAC"
McCallister
(not
verified)

Tue,
02/08/2011 -
4:44pm

[Permalink](#)

Apologize for the late response... I was in seclusion and in mourning having had to endure the loss of my third favorite team... and that half-time show... The commercials weren't bad.

The one thing that I have not read addressed in the process of "becoming more "populace-centric" in our foreign policy" is the notion of sovereignty... and how the notion of sovereignty actually fits into a populace-centric policy.

If we view sovereignty as not just a reflection of uniquely modern and arbitrary boundaries, other alternatives - localized or deterritorialized authority - emerge. The Abu Risha in Anbar province, Iraq come to mind as does Major Jim Gant's tribal approach in eastern Astan and Gen. P's strategy to arm "one village at a time"... You can't get more populace-centric than that... but it also opens a whole new can of worms.

I personally believe that in large parts of the world, the authority structure of the contemporary state system is overlaid onto an informal authority structure that corresponds to something more like feudal authority... and it is this feudal authority that you are actually engaging in a populace-centric approach. I'd venture to say that feudal structures actually still exist in our major metropolitan areas, political parties, unions, etc...

I also believe... and this is based on some personal experience dealing not only with military but also state department personnel... that we are not ready to embrace the confusion and ambiguity that working the myriad feudal authorities or what we are now calling a populace-centric policy entails... Keeping it simple, stupid does not necessarily imply keeping it real... I've had many a heated discussions with military and state department folks discussing the merits of tribal engagement (pop-centric) and the requirement to work within state structures and procedures...

I submit that we don't have the talent and out-of-the-box thinkers in the numbers presently required to make Robert's populace-centric policy work... but now is as good a time to start as any.

Congrats Packers...

r/
MAC

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Surferbeetle

Tue, 02/08/2011
- 3:46pm

[Permalink](#)

Judging from the noise level, my last on 7 Feb 2011 at 22:11 hours appears to be approaching danger close. After analyzing the 'data content' of the 360 degree return fire on Feb 8 2011 at 06:35 hours let's start off by paraphrasing those big pharma ad's, 'perhaps it's time to talk to your health care provider about the benefits of that little blue pill'.

Engagement throughout local vertical and horizontal and power structures, aka - having a broad contact base, is not limited to 'KLE's' conducted by USG entities with 'the populace' of nation X. The quick ratios which I ran point towards where the majority of these engagements are actually occurring; interest groups within nation X are more often engaging with NGO and Corporate types than with Government types.

Presumably these engagements are substantive and beneficial to both parties or they would not be occurring. Nor does the apparent opacity to some necessarily mean that what is occurring consists of, or merits, 360 degree fire to the 'opposition'.

Engaging brain before engaging mouth can prevent over-reactions and counter reactions ;)

Steve

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Bob's World

Tue,
02/08/2011
- 7:35am

[Permalink](#)

Trying to sort through the "so what" of the numbers. "Size matters," perhaps?

I would just add, that just because one can measure something does not mean they know where to put it or how to properly employ it. U.S. military HQs love to sit around and measure their tools of engagement to impress their boss with; and has led to a default of overemphasis on using the tools that are the most objectively measured.

Time to stop measuring our tools and thinking "any thing this big and magnificent must be effective!" and evolve to actually picking up on the subjective feedback from the object of our attentions...and that is the populace. As it stands, we just keep pounding away at the problem without really getting anywhere and only stop once we are either exhausted, or feel good about ourselves and go home leaving a dissatisfied mess behind.

(any double entendres are purely incidental...)

Bob

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Surferbeetle

Tue, 02/08/2011
- 1:37am

[Permalink](#)

Simon,

No worries, I like your presentation.

Your method is:

Australians: AS Govt 21,237,681/155,482 = 136.59 = 137

Iraqis: AS DIME 31,494,287/200 = 157,471

Iraqis: NGO 31,494,287/201,400 = 156.38 = 156

Iraqis: Oil Workers 31,494,287/67,165 = 468.91 = 469

My method is:

AS Govt : Australians 155,482/21,237,681 = 0.01

AS DIME:Iraqis 200/31,494,287 = 6.35036E-06

NGO:Iraqis 201,400/31,494,287 = 0.006

Oil Workers:Iraqis 67,165/31,494,287 = 0.002

Lets look at US ratios (limited to federal employees which includes the military)

Americans: US Govt 300,000,000/6,000,000 = 50.00 = 50

Iraqis:US DIME 31,494,287/50,000 = 629.89 = 630

Dont claim to have all the answers, plus my numbers are estimates and a snap shot in time, but I do believe in the saying 'if you cant measure it, you cant manage it.

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SJPONeill

Mon,
02/07/2011 -
11:57pm

[Permalink](#)

Steve

Like the model and agree with the logic behind it...declaring that my total score for math in my last year at school was in single figures, I think the math here is slightly out...or might be clearer if you used a ratio of agency:population e.g.

AS Govt : AS Pop 1:140 i.e. one government employee for every 140 Australians. This figure doesn't take into account state government so the ratio is probably even lower?

AS DIME : Iraqi Pop = 1 : 157,471 Iraqis

NGO : Iraqi Pop = 1 : 156 Iraqis

OIL : Iraqi Pop = 1 : 468 Iraqis

Someone smarter than me could probably do some interesting stats analysis with his figures and mix them into GDP, employment rates, crime rates etc...Possibly the first thing that might fall out is the critical mass required to get traction in various environments...

One of the things I have always liked about the contemporary US approach to the COE is that right from the release of FM 3-24, it has strived to develop a cross-government approach to the issues. If nothing else it has produced 'doctrine' for agencies other than Defence and has slowly been forcing the issue of inter-agency cooperation and collaboration. I'm not confident other governments in the Anglosphere could say the same...

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Surferbeetle

Mon, 02/07/2011
- 11:19pm

[Permalink](#)

My oil industry figure of 665 is actually a 1% SWAG of the MOI figure used....

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Surferbeetle

Mon, 02/07/2011
- 11:11pm

[Permalink](#)

Simon,

I am totally on board with avoiding the whole "soul crushing tyranny of corporate interests" thing, whenever possible ;) and of course I am also for avoiding the whole "Hi my name is Bob, Big Government Guy, and I am here to help you blow your nose and wipe your... ." thing. The space between these two extremes is where many of us inhabitants of the world have an opportunity to survive and perhaps thrive.

As a result of my travels it appears to me that the trinity which comprises the business model for foreign contact/engagement/influence seems to rest upon Governmental Agencies (Diplomatic, Intelligence, Military, and Economic), NGOs, and Corporate Interests. So, let's run some quick (and rough) numbers and see if they can provide us with some perspective as what is actually happening out on the ground.

According to Wikipedia the Australian Government had 155,482 government employees in 2007 with populations of 19,169,100 (per the 2000 Australian Census) and 21,828,704 (per the 2009 Australian Census). Using an approximate Australian population figure of 21,237,681 for 2007, I get a ratio of 0.01 Australian Government Employees to Australians.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian_Public_Service

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_of_Australia#Demography

The 'interweb also tells me (... use The Google Luke!) that the Australian Embassy in Iraq is run by HE Robert J Tyson who employs a staff of approximately 200 (my SWAG). I am using this number as the Australian DIME figure for Iraq. The population of Iraq was estimated at 31,494,287 people (in 2009 by the World Bank). Running the numbers, **I get a ratio of 6.35036E-06 Australian Government Employees to Iraqi Citizens.**

The AusAID website tells me that the Australian Government works with NGOs to include the Red Cross/Red Crescent and World Vision. There are many more NGOs working in Iraq than just these two, but for ease of calculation, let's just look at their numbers with the understanding that we are probably under estimating the actual ratio. Red Crescent has approximately 1,000 salaried workers and 200,000 volunteers in Iraq while World Vision has approximately 400 (estimated from ~40,000 staff in 100 countries). 201,400 NGO members in Iraq to a population of 31,494,287 people (in 2009 by the World Bank). Running the numbers **I get a ratio of 0.006 NGO workers to Iraqi Citizens.**

Keeping in mind that the oil industry generates most of Iraq's hard currency, I am estimating that the current combined employee count for Royal Dutch Shell, British Petroleum (BP), China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), and Petronas is 665 salaried, non Iraqis (my SWAG is 10% of the Iraqi Ministry of Oils 66,500 employee count - and the MOI figure is taken from a Case Study on Iraq's Oil Industry by Amy Myers Jaffe, the Wallace S. Wilson Fellow for Energy Studies at the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy presented during Conference on "The Changing Role of National Oil Companies in International Energy Markets" March 12, 2007). **Running the numbers I get 67,165 oil sector workers in Iraq to a population of 31,494,287 people (in 2009 by the World Bank) with a resulting ratio of 0.002.**

<http://www.rice.edu/energy/publications/docs/NOCs/Presentations/Hou-Jaf...>

The ratios which I just ran do not address effectiveness and are very rough, however, they are interesting to think about when considering the resourcing trends of foreign contact/engagement/influence by Governments, NGOs, and Corporate Interests in a conflict environment.

Steve

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SJPONeill

Mon,
02/07/2011 -
8:13pm

[Permalink](#)

Sorry, that was me above...

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Anonymous (not verified)

Mon,
02/07/2011 -
8:12pm

[Permalink](#)

"...A government and populace of Lebanon that is held to task for the actions of Hezbollah is a tremendous restraint on Hezbollah. Once the people who support such groups, or governments who allow such groups are held to task, it in turn holds the non-state actor in check..."

"...More likely the segment of the populace that supports Hezbollah will become less aggressive to outsiders due to the respect granted to their concerns and will in turn put pressures of Hezbollah to act more appropriately so as to not bring the consequences of inappropriate actions back onto the people..."

Unfortunately, that's neither the reality nor actually engaging the 'populace' - it's just changing who you recognise as the actual governing force. Raining CBU's and LGBs on Lebanon and Gaza neither discouraged Hezbollah's daily rocket attacks nor did it encourage 'the people' to moderate Hezbollah behaviour in any way and certainly did not lead to the grassroots uprising to toss them out...

Ultimately, it all still comes down to engaging the three members of the popular Clausewitzian Trinity: the leadership, the action arm, and still a slow third, the people...in the end in most such incidents, it is when the leadership on one side of another makes a decision that leads to a cessation of attacks or whatever. The will of the people does work that well in democracies (except for every four years and even then not always) and in nations where that whole democracy thing never really got going, wearing a '[insert bad guy here] Out!' T-Shirt is just an invitation for a burst of 7.62 Short in the face at best, or having one's limbs removed on live screaming internet at worst...

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Bob's World

Mon,
02/07/2011
- 9:18am

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One key point is small states are no real threat to the U.S.

Seriously. Does anyone believe North Korea, or Iran or Venezuela; or even a coalition of all three could defeat the US?? Besides, the standard kitbag of deterrence works with states because they have liabilities that are always at risk.

Popular power is a totally different matter. Non-state actors have no such liabilities and are therefore provided with a functional sanctuary consisting of their legal status and the support of populaces who buy into their causes. Physical sanctuary for such an organization can be found almost anywhere due to the networked operations our current information age allows.

So, "Hezbollah" can attack Israel with little risk; but "Lebanon" is deterred because they appreciate full well that they would lose in such a match of weak state vs. strong state.

One component of becoming more "populace-centric" in our foreign policy is coming to grips with the populace aspect of sanctuary as a critical component of deterrence of irregular threats. This must also be coupled with changing our perspectives to deal more effectively with the legal status component of such groups, but by combining the two we begin to evolve the tools of diplomacy beyond "statecraft."

Currently we continue to cling to statecraft tools and force state-based solutions to work. Thus our attacking of the "space" of the FATA in Pakistan and our demands on the Government of Pakistan to "secure" their borders and "enforce the rule of law" and to stop being a "failed state" that is unable to uphold its sovereign responsibilities.

By weaving populace-centric thinking into the mix it allows us to step back and look more pragmatically at the other components of sanctuary. Something as simple as bringing an organization back "inside the law" goes a long way toward disempowering them. Shredding the ridiculous list of "terrorist" organizations and recognizing that many of these groups are an emerging informal component of governance. A government and populace of Lebanon that is held to task for the actions of Hezbollah is a tremendous restraint on Hezbollah. Once the people who support such groups, or governments who allow such groups are held to task, it in turn holds the non-state actor in check.

So, for example, the US takes Hezbollah off the terror list and announces that we recognize Hezbollah as part of the governance of Lebanon, we welcome their participation in formal diplomatic processes, and will also hold the people and state of Lebanon responsible for their actions.

The knee-jerk counter is "But Lebanon's government cannot control Hezbollah." If that is the case, then Hezbollah is perhaps the defacto government of Lebanon and if so it should be recognized as such. More likely the segment of the populace that supports Hezbollah will become less aggressive to outsiders due to the respect granted to their concerns and will in turn put pressures of Hezbollah to act more appropriately so as to not bring the consequences of inappropriate actions back onto the people.

But who at State deals with Non-state actors as a formal portion of our foreign policy and diplomacy?? State does not have a major "non-state actor" division; but they do have a major "counterterrorism" division. This is what I mean by our being too government-centric and threat-centric; but not being very populace-centric. I don't need a State Department that does counterterrorism. I need a state department that is missioned, trained, organized and equipped to deal more effectively with the growing challenge of engaging with and deterring non-state actors.

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SJPONeill

Mon,
02/07/2011 -
7:43am

Steve

[Permalink](#)

Totally agree re the application of a broader-than-government comprehensive approach but, to avoid some of the excesses and abuses by that sector (mainly the corporate, I guess, not sure there are that many malevolent NGOs out there?) that we may have seen in places like East Timor, Bougainville, Iraq and Afghanistan, there needs to be an element of control/guidance/leadership that harnesses such efforts towards national interests and not just those of a spreadsheet bottom line...

Simon

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Dayuhan

Mon,
02/07/2011
- 2:24am

[Permalink](#)

I've nothing against trying to build a better sense of the range of popular opinion out there and using that knowledge to craft policies and statements that are less likely to piss people off. When we start trying to actively engage populaces, still more when we decide of our own accord to act on their behalf, we start skating on very thin ice, and if we try to appoint ourselves as champion of any other populace we might as well be trying to walk on water... especially when the populace in question doesn't want us messing in their affairs anyway.

On a few specific points...

<i>Current policy is based on not really caring much what the populace of some other country thinks, or even how the government of that country governs and treats their populace so long as that government is on board as an "ally" and willing to support U.S. interests.</i>

Allies aren't necessarily countries that "support our interests". Allies are simply countries with whom we have interests in common on given issues at given times. This means that at many points we will have allies whose governments may be distasteful to us. There's no reason to think that we have the right, obligation, or capacity to re-order the internal affairs of every nation or any nation that happens at some point to have interests in common with ours. Seems to me we should be ready to work with, trade with, and deal with any nation that isn't actively opposing our interests. How they manage their internal affairs is not ours to decide. Of course if we are actively installing or sustaining oppressive governments, that's a different story, but an ally isn't necessarily a dependency and alliance doesn't mean we have the influence to dictate such matters. Politics has ever made strange bedfellows; those we find in our bed on any given morning are not necessarily subordinate to us, and we haven't the right or ability to follow them home and try to sort out their domestic affairs.

<i>People notice the double standard. (As an example, we ride Iran hard about wanting to develop a nuclear weapon, but how hard do we ride Israel to get rid of theirs? Why one and not the other?)</i>

Because one is seen as a threat to us and the other isn't. I don't see how this has anything to do with how they treat their populaces.

My assessment is that this approach has enabled many of these governments to act with growing impunity toward their own people, rolling back civil liberties, denying a voice in government, and enriching an elite few in the process.

Here I think you overreach, sometimes badly. These countries don't ask or need our opinion before they oppress their populaces; they would do it no matter what we said. It's how they govern. In most of these cases civil liberties were not "rolled back"; there weren't any to roll back. There are very few cases out there where we can actually, credibly be said to be "enabling" impunity: it's built into the political culture of these nations, we didn't create it or enhance it.

Personally, I think the US should co-opt 90% of Bin Laden's message and there by put him out of the influence business.

We could certainly co-opt much of bin Laden's message by not occupying Muslim lands. His efforts to overthrow the "apostate" governments haven't achieved any popular traction anyway, so that hardly seems worth trying to co-opt.

We then apply our tools of statecraft with these governments to avoid the "impunity effect" that is so damaging to us today in the Middle East.

Again, we have to accept that impunity is not ours to grant or refuse.

This is why it is the children of our friends who egg our house and throw rocks at our car when we drive down the street.

Is it the "children of our friends", or is it the deranged uncle in the back room who wants to take over the wife-and-kid beating role for himself? It's a fair stretch to assume that the people who attacked us represent any populace, anywhere.

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Bill M.

Mon,
02/07/2011
- 1:58am

[Permalink](#)

Steve,

You must be a Steeler's fan :-)

Your point is well taken, but I think what we're seeing now is largely populace and NGO driven. I think Bob's point is for our government to find a way to participate in this process. The government isn't a NGO or Corporation, so that still leaves the question, how does our government participate (or should it) in foreign populace engagement?

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Bob's World

Sun,
02/06/2011
- 2:48pm

[Permalink](#)

Guys, I'll try to clarify.

First, clearly every "populace" is mix, the nature and degree of that mix varying by country.

Second, and equally clearly, the U.S. cannot, and should not, run around by-passing governments and seeking to work deals with some mix of interest groups in a manner that seeks our fancies (or interests)

What I am proposing is no more, and no less, than a shift in our thinking as to what is most important. Current policy is based on not really caring much what the populace of some other country thinks, or even how the government of that country governs and treats their populace so long as that government is on board as an "ally" and willing to support U.S. interests.

We are quick, however, to judge and sanction governments that treat their populaces poorly who are not such allies; but when they are we typically just make speeches and encourage them to do better. People notice the double standard. (As an example, we ride Iran hard about wanting to develop a nuclear weapon, but how hard do we ride Israel to get rid of theirs? Why one and not the other?)

My assessment is that this approach has enabled many of these governments to act with growing impunity toward their own people, rolling back civil liberties, denying a voice in government, and enriching an elite few in the process. During the Cold War this was tolerated, as it was better to be oppressed by a friend of the US than to be potentially oppressed even more under Soviet control.

So I believe that the end of the Cold War ended popular tolerance of such US control measures. In Western Europe they wanted us to reduce our military so we did; same in the far East. In the Middle East we sat fast, actually increasing our presence. This was complicated by the growing information age which connected these populaces to the world and to each other, creating a synergy of popular sovereignty as well. Then AQ and bin Laden came along and leveraged all of this to their own ends with their UW campaign to bring down the Saudi royals and similar governments in bed with the West ("apostates"), to break over Western influence over the region, and to build a greater synergy among the Muslim people to better prevent such outside manipulations in the future. Personally, I think the US should co-opt 90% of Bin Laden's message and thereby put him out of the influence business.

So by a "Populace-Centric Approach" I recognize that we will still work through governments, though we will have to deal more effectively with powerful non-state actors as well. The major shift is the recognition that understanding and respecting what the populaces under these governments is thinking and feeling about the nature of our relationships with their government is critical. This can be assessed in many ways; indirectly through indicators, or directly through polling and the use of sophisticated software designed to pick up key words in open source communications that can be tuned to assess key indicators as well.

We then apply our tools of statecraft with these governments to avoid the "impunity effect" that is so damaging to us today in the Middle East. Become a champion of the people through our example and by not looking the other way when our friends act in ways to abuse their own people. Clean the hypocrisy out of our foreign policy.

Putting this at the neighborhood level, we cant just call the cops on the people we do nt like when they abuse their kids or beat their wife; we need to call when an old friend does as well. Perhaps that old friend gets some special consideration, but that does not mean just looking the other way and allowing crimes against humanity to occur just so that hell let us borrow his lawn mower or invite us over for his 4th of July BBQ. This is why it is the children of our friends who egg our house and throw rocks at our car when we drive down the street.

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"MAC"
McCallister
(not
verified)

Sun,
02/06/2011 -
5:45pm

[Permalink](#)

I believe I am witnessing an attempt to turn common sense into a science... The admonition to be more population centric (as if warfare isn't and that soldiers and politicians don't know that it is) is akin to telling us to buy low and sell high... you can't go wrong with that advice. How about when we peddle "smart power"... Smart power according to Professor Nye is a judicious mix of soft and hard power... why don't we just say that we seek a judicious mix of carrot and stick... something that we should have learned already from Thucydides ...

I am not buying it... I just can't bring myself to buy the same old product wrapped in the latest whistles, bells and a flashy sticker that tells me, the potential customer, that it is new and improved...

Become a champion of the people through our example... really? Not so sure if "our example" is such a beacon of hope... Riddle me this... how much truth in advertising in our current American political discourse? Anyone wish to converse on the reaction of our political elites when the "plebes" finally decide to get involved in politics? It is what it is and no amount of political propaganda is going to change the muckraking that is American politics and popular culture. To believe that our themes and messages are different overseas is just silly. Our way of life is American... not Iraqi, Egyptian, Afghan, etc, etc, etc...

... but then... what do I know... I am not a recognized academic, or published in the popular press nor asked to sit at the adult table when they decide what's good for the locals ... but then why should I... being home-schooled and all... ;-)

r/

MAC

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SJPONeill

Sun,
02/06/2011 -
6:15pm

[Permalink](#)

Not only were the dead Greeks on top on this but also at least one of the dead Germans...

In the popular interpretation of Clausewitz' Trinity there are three elements (funny that in a trinity!)...the government/leadership; the military/action arm, and the poor old people/the poor old people...in targeting audiences, the most influential would seem to be the leadership, the military and finally as a very slow third, the poor old people...

I say 'a very slow third' because, as much as the popular media would like to have us believe otherwise the number of instances where 'the people' has risen up to throw off the shackles of an oppressor (i.e. someone who doesn't think like us) is not that many at all...and even of those instances, it's arguable how many were actually that spontaneous outburst and how many were still being driven and influenced by their own internal leadership and action arms...

If you really want to try to influence 'the people' make another couple of series of JAG, Vampire Diaries or Extreme Makeover: Home Edition...DON'T try and make it foreign policy...

Bottom line is that we should be looking to 'influence' target those that can make and enforce decisions, and who have the necessary influence to support our aims and objectives...that is only very rarely 'the people'...

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Morgan

Sun,
02/06/2011 -
1:52pm

[Permalink](#)

Perhaps I'm not fully understanding the argument here but in order to better engage with the populace of country "X" don't we, the US, need more people to do this? If we are going to deal with the populace of multiple countries/ regions, won't we need a far greater amount than what we have now?

Currently, we engage with a particular group of people via USAID or through/ with NGOs, and with the military. Getting DOS to shift their focus away from governments and onto the populace would require not just one ambassador dealing with Prime Minister "John Doe" but lots of ambassadors dealing with various groups among the populace that we want to influence, help, empower, etc. Where would these guys/ gals come from?

Would this require some kind of major shift in our own governmental agencies that deal with foreign affairs.....a merging of DOS and DOD perhaps? A creation of a what Thomas Barnett calls a "department of everything else" that deals with areas that DOS and DOD do not when it comes to foreign policy?

Am I way off here? Just wondering.

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Bill M.

Sun,
02/06/2011
- 6:16pm

[Permalink](#)

Mac, I would offer the old adage that common sense isn't that common, and agree with Bob's ideas on this topic. He writes that globalization is giving raise to non-state actors and empowering the populace to a much greater extent than the recent historical norm(I would add information technology should also being due credit). While some will make credible arguments that these powers have always existed, I think it is also true that we're witnessing unprecedented people power (though I wouldn't yet put my money on the people prevailing in Egypt), and as a nation we don't fully understand this nor have the mechanisms to effectively engage these populations (without appearing to subvert the governments we're conducting State diplomacy with). I don't think Bob offered any answers, nor intended to, but rather identified a serious foreign policy capability gap.

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SJPONeill

Sun,
02/06/2011 -
8:09pm

[Permalink](#)

"... nor have the mechanisms to effectively engage these populations (without appearing to subvert the governments we're conducting State diplomacy with..."

Since that 'unprecedented people power' is generally directed against said government, I'm not sure you can have both engagement with these populations AND subverting/undermining 'the overnments we're conducting State diplomacy with'. Even to support those governments by directly engaging the population would undermine the government, even IF the engagement was done subtly and was successful. Would the US (or the UK, CA, FR, AS, NZ, etc) feel kindly towards any other government meddling/engaging in a like manner with US people power...?

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Dennis M. (not verified)

Sun,
02/06/2011
- 12:59pm

[Permalink](#)

Sawbuck speaks the truth. It will likely take a lot of time to figure out the different parts that make up the "populace" and figuring out the different agendas and constituencies that they represent. Such an effort is important for merely its intelligence value. But for the purpose of formulating an approach to developing our relationship with a nation, it is invaluable. It allows us deepen our relationship with the entire nation and to understand the political forces at work within it. We can work with the government of this nation with an understanding of the political situation with which they are dealing, and be in a position to work with a new government should there be a regime change.

Yes, a "populace-centered" approach to foreign policy would be more difficult and could be tremendously more complex in many circumstances, but the payoffs would be well worth it.

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Sawbuck
(not
verified)

Sun,
02/06/2011 -
12:46pm

[Permalink](#)

Mac hits the nail on the head.

The term Populace as it is used here sounds like an organism made up millions of cells to perform one function.

In reality, a populace is made an unknown number of unrelated organisms (groups and organizations) if you will; that all have different functions (agendas.)

A populace is a can of worms, and the problem / challenge of foreign diplomacy is deciding which worms you want to back.

In a country wrapped around the axle about "Diversity" this worm hole should be easy to see.

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Bill M.

Sun,
02/06/2011
- 9:49pm

[Permalink](#)

SJPONeil, this of course is the challenge, but the alternative to not engaging may be sitting on the side lines after the regime change in some cases. I am not claiming to have the right answer to this, but agree with Bob that it is an area that needs to be explored. I think it is fair to say we sided with the people of Poland when they pushed for a change of government (but their government wasn't an ally). We also to some extent supported the people when they ousted Marcos from the Philippines (even if our support was offering Marcos and family safe passage out of the country to facilitate the regime change). Every case needs to be evaluated on its own merits.

Now if the Packers can just maintain their lead against the Pirates.

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Dennis M. (not
verified)

Sun,
02/06/2011
- 12:32pm

[Permalink](#)

As with everything in dealing with people, every situation is different and there is no one way to deal with them. In some cases, there may be some identifiable group that we can deal with. In some cases, the U.S. would be better served by working through international organizations. And in some cases, the best way to work with a nation is to work through its government.

Every nation has a different social structure, and every population has a different relationship with its government. I think the point that Mr. Jones is trying to make is that our relationship with the population -- all of it, however diverse and multifaceted in its political interests -- should be an important factor in how we develop our relations with a nation. We should not be driven solely by our relationship with the government and our own interests. We need to also consider our relationship with the people.

Of course this can be very complicated. There can be lots and lots of varied groups within a country, each with a unique set of interests/gripes, etc. And yes, we have a history in many parts of the world that has caused the people to distrust us, with good reason in many cases. But we have to start somewhere.

Recent events have shown that populations, no matter how autocratic and repressive the regime, can shape events on their own. If we can develop some type of relationship with the population, we will at the very least not be caught flat-footed if things change rapidly. We might be able to figure out who to talk to. We might already have developed a relationship with the political faction that gains power. They may still not trust us, but at least they will know who we are.

Besides which, defining our relationship with a country by our relationship with its autocratic leader may not exactly be living up to our own values. Our interests are important and we should work to protect them, but I am not sure that they are always best protected when we sacrifice our moral authority for the sake of stability. There are a lot of ways to skin a cat.

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Surferbeetle

Mon, 02/07/2011
- 12:02am

[Permalink](#)

SJPONeil and Bill M. (Bill aka let's build a school?:)),

Who says that things are limited to USG (or any Gov for that matter) involvement with 'the people'? That particular lens is limiting. I would argue that Corporate and NGO interaction is a broader based one than that of USG involvement. USG interaction seems to often be focused upon 'elites' and the democratization of information and interaction is a rip-tide running counter to this particular model.

Bill, the ads were pretty good this year, as well as the half-time show. :)

Steve

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Bill M.

Sun,
02/06/2011
- 11:17pm

[Permalink](#)

O.K. during the 2d half Pittsburgh actually showed up with their football team instead of their baseball team. Incredible game this year, but the Packers were destined to win.

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"MAC"
McCallister
(not
verified)

Sun,
02/06/2011 -
11:56am

[Permalink](#)

Apologize ahead of time for the sarcasm... but here goes...

Who are these "people" you all keep referring to... could we narrow the abstractum absurdum we label "the people" down a bit? Reminds me of the great exchange in the movie "Time Bandits" when our heroes meet Robin Hood (played by John Cleese of Monty Python fame) who insists that the bandits must "simply meet the poor... lovely people" who will be receiving the riches the time bandits had stolen from Napoleon.

Are we to engage the literati, glitterati, or the great unwashed and uneducated masses? What about all the other types of peoples and personalities in-between? While I understand that we must simplify the categories to engage in intelligent conversation, too much simplification is simply misleading and wrong... Much is lost in simple abstractions and generalities...

In the end... it's all about picking sides and maybe holding our collective noses... is it not?

Happy Super Bowl Day...

Go Steelers!

r/
MAC

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Dayuhan

Sat,
02/05/2011
- 10:10pm

[Permalink](#)

It's certainly a good idea to be aware of populaces and their interests and desires. It's also a good idea to remember that populaces are rarely singular and never monolithic, and that a variety of popular desires and interests, often conflicting, are generally present in any nation or area. Speaking or thinking of "a populace", "the populace", or any other singular construct takes us down a dangerous road.

A populace-centric policy would also have to recognize that in many conflicted areas of the world there are populaces who do not generally like or trust the US. That's not going to be reversed by an announcement that we are now behind "the populace": it will take as long to reverse that perception as it took to build it, possibly longer.

In many of these cases it will be more considerate of popular preference to work through multilateral bodies, even when this restricts our ability to pursue courses that are in our interests or in what we believe to be the popular interest. It's not only about trying to give populaces what they want: it's also about proceeding in a way that they do not see as intrusive or threatening.

I can see the appeal of a sovereign or partially sovereign Pashtunistan, just as I can see the appeal of a unitary Kurdistan, and any number of other rearrangements. I see no appeal at all in the thought of the United States trying to achieve any of these goals: seems to me a way to create a huge unholy mess, and make a whole lot of enemies and no friends at all.

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Bob's World

Sat,
02/05/2011
- 12:51pm

[Permalink](#)

Dennis,

Exactly.

As the US began to expand into foreign matters more, it began initially with a Colonial mindset, though with an emphasis on protected harbors to serve as coaling stations and safe havens for an expanding maritime economy (Thus Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam and Manila for their harbors, and why we still cling to the same); then the Post WWII Cold War era required a system of controls on peripheral countries and populaces to contain larger threats.

Now it is time to get back to our roots, seek to become less controlling, and become more supportive of the will of people still seeking to escape from under centuries of European and US manipulations. Such change is hard. But its harder still when you don't think you've done anything wrong...(Or that any wrongs are far outweighed by the great good that one has brought).

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Dennis M. (not verified)

Sat,
02/05/2011
- 11:53am

[Permalink](#)

There are no easy answers. But this seems like an interesting way to approach some of the problems inherent in protecting our interests around the world. Too often, we have focused on our relations with states and not with their people. But if we really take the time to understand what a state actually is, we would realize that the populace is an important (of varying degree depending on the society we are talking about) of the equation -- obviously, the people are a part of the state with interests that do not always perfectly align with their government's.

It seems to me, if I am reading this correctly, that a populace-centric foreign policy does not always mean working to undermine the government or by doing an end-around to get past the government and deal directly with the people (though in some cases, that might be the best course of action), it may simply mean trying to understand the needs/hopes/desires of the populace in our dealings with their government (where the long sentence!). I think that is an idea long past due.

Foreign relations should not be limited to relations with foreign governments, but should be about our relations with foreign nations which is much about the populations as the governments.

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Bob's World

Sat,
02/05/2011
- 7:10am

[Permalink](#)

Dayuhan,

All good comments. This paper is more to ask the question than it is to provide the answer. I put this out originally to expand the discussion a bit. State guys are drilling down on states; Defense guys are drilling down on threats; who is focused on the people? The closest organization we have to that USAID, but is much more of coming in behind the first do and administering pain management operations.

Foreign intervention is a tricky business and should never be undertaken lightly, but as you say, always with a light hand. I am exploring that idea now with a piece I am writing regarding FM 3-24.

We've gotten ourselves into some tricky situations around the globe. Too many places where the status quo cannot stand (and attempting to prop it up is burning our national influence as well as lives and treasure), but to simply walk away opens the door for all manner of chaos to fill the void behind us.

We need to change the way we think about these problems; and becoming more populace oriented in our thinking is one way to lend greater balance to how we look at these things. USAID's role is changing, perhaps this is a role they grow into, as equals at the table with Defense and State. But they are no way ready to step into that role today.

As to a "lesser included" Pashtunistan? That is a debate for another forum, but yeah, I stand by the merit. For Americans think of it like an Indian reservation that extends from Montana up into Canada, with the members of the tribe being self-governing within the reservation, yet sharing rights of citizenry with both nations. Such a concept could indeed resolve the arguments of the Durand line, border security, Pakistan concerns about strategic depth, Pashtun concerns over respect and honor; and besides, neither Kabul or Islamabad wants to extend governance to those spaces or populations anyway. Ending the fiction that they do would be a long way to ending the friction from us demanding that they do so.

Anyway, just something to think about as we look at events unfold across the Middle East and ponder how to play this so that no one suffers more than they need to, and the US reputation is included in that.

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Dayuhan

Sat,
02/05/2011
- 5:10am

[Permalink](#)

My objection to this lies less (predictably) in the "populace-centric" aspect than in what seems to be a very aggressively interventionist interpretation of what is "populace-centric".

For example, this sequence:

A way must be found to build strong states while at the same time recognizing distinct populaces. For example, the problems in Afghanistan and Pakistan will be far more likely to see a successful conclusion by recognizing and unifying the Pashtun populace with some lesser form of embedded sovereignty than by enforcing a Westphalian border through the center of that population's traditional homeland.

As the U.S. prepares to shift emphasis from Iraq to Afghanistan and Pakistan, such a change of perspective would set a new tone for that operation. Instead of a focus on preserving the current governments of both states by attempting to make them "more effective," while suppressing the Pashtun populace to make them less resistant to the course the U.S. has plotted out for them, a populace-centric approach would seek to understand and address the root causes of Pashtun popular discontent. Brokering a new form of sovereignty for this important regional populace, while at the same time working to strengthen and enable good governance on both sides of the border would perhaps bear more enduring results.

I don't see that the US has any brief go about building strong states anywhere else, still less to think about trying to unify the Pashtun populace and providing them with sovereignty. Attempting to do so would step all over the sovereignty of two existing nations and wreak all kinds of havoc on our relations with other populaces in the area. It would likely not get rave reviews even from the Pashtun, who to the best of my knowledge have never expressed any desire to be unified and granted sovereignty by America.

Any desire to benefit populaces has to be tempered by recognition of certain realities.

First, populaces may be empowered, but governments still exist. Many governments, even those we dislike or think despotic, still retain support from a substantial portion of their populaces, especially in nations with ethnic, sectarian, or tribal divisions. If we try to do end-runs around government to work with one populace we're likely to violently antagonize both government and some other sections of the populace, often with adverse consequences.

Second, we should not embrace the delusion that we know what the diverse populations of other countries want. We don't. We are generally pretty clueless, and when we stumble around we the assumption that all populations want what we think they should want we make a bull in a china shop look lithe and graceful. Energetic intervention in the misplaced belief that we are working for "the populace" is as likely to make a mess as any other kind of energetic intervention.

Third, not all fights are our fights and not all situations demand our intervention. Do these populations want us involved? Do they trust us? Do they actually believe that we are working for their interests? If the answer to any of these questions is "no", might be better just to stay out.

When I see this:

It behooves the United States to be clearly viewed as being on the side of the populace.

I have to respond that nobody will ever view us as "being on the side of the populace". No matter what we do or say, we will be viewed as being on our own side. That's not always a bad thing: it's expected. Might be best for us to simply accept that and acknowledge that, and instead of pretending to "support the populace" just try to pursue our interests with a lighter hand, a bit more restraint, and a longer-term view of our own interests.

I have no problem with the general idea of "populace-centric foreign policy". I just think it has to be tempered with recognition that governments exist and must be reckoned with, populations are diverse, fickle, and have all manner of conflicting and inconsistent desires and interests, and we have neither the obligation nor the capacity to re-order government-populace relations in other countries, especially where neither government nor populace wants us involved.

A populace-centric foreign policy, like any foreign policy, will require a light hand, flexibility, realism, subtlety, and the wisdom to know when to stop and when not to dive into other people's problems. Without those features it could make as big a mess as any other sort of foreign policy.

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SJPONeill

Sun,
02/20/2011 -
9:07pm

[Permalink](#)

Bill

Yes, if done poorly, (or as well as some government or threat-centric approaches!!) However if done well, which might be the slow long haul, perhaps it can be done very well...without endorsing any of the hair-splitting above, perhaps Bob's example of Israel does fit the bill as it takes time (generations) to bring people, in this case on both sides around...Taiwan may be another...perhaps the whole Cold War (big kids toys aside) culminated when the populations of a number of Eastern Bloc

nations went 'enough!' in 1989, as the Poles had done in 1980...as South East Asia did when it acted in 1999 to create Timor Leste...if it's all about recognising the wants and needs of the populace...

Simon

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Bill C.
(not
verified)

Mon,
02/21/2011
- 10:26am

[Permalink](#)

SJPONeil:

And what if the wants and needs of many population groups is to be left alone -- and to be, or to remain, fundamentally different from the West, et. al., -- and to be separate, distinct and in no way (or in only a very limited way) connected to it? What then? These "please just leave us alone" desires clash with America's missionary-like belief that (1) our way is the only true way and that, accordingly, (2) we must (using force when necessary) bring everyone under the United States way-of-life tent.

Thus, would an American foreign policy best characterized as a "less is more" approach provide greater legitimacy for the United States; rather than continuing with -- or expanding -- our current legitimacy-destroying "more is more" methods; which, by their very nature, continue to antagonize and divide various populations and to, thereby, have the potential to destabilize countries and regions.

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Bob's
World

Mon,
02/21/2011
- 10:41am

[Permalink](#)

The challenge for the U.S. will be to manage the evolving status of Geopolitics around the globe in such a manner as to promote our own national interests, while at the same time preventing any coalition of regional powers from rising in a manner that could truly challenge us; all while learning how to deal with the new reality of how the information age is empowering populaces and non-state actors as the new jokers in the deck of this old card game.

George Friedman's latest book, "The Next Decade" does a good job of laying out the geopolitics between states; but it is my belief that he does not give nearly the attention to the rise of empowered actors outside the state construct. He essentially argues that the US must learn to act as Rome and Great Britain did. There is a lot of truth in that. The trick is that just as populaces brought down Rome and Great Britain's empires; it is populaces that pose the greatest challenges to the US as well. Strong states are good at defeating and controlling weak states. Smart strong states are good at preventing coalitions of weak states from joining and rising against them. Ignoring the populaces within such states is typically the area of downfall.

The US so far has not been nearly as savvy as those other two empires in dealing with states, and is currently flailing around at the problem of being a "reluctant empire." We tend to take half-measures.

I think we need to get a bit more empirical in our geo-politics, while at the same time becoming more populace centric in how we shape our approaches. I recognize the schizophrenia of that statement, but it is in recognizing the need for and mastering such a balance that I think carries us forward.

Bob

[Log in](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Bill C.
(not
verified)

Mon,
02/21/2011
- 12:49pm

[Permalink](#)

A different view:

Possibly the greatest challenge to the United States in the coming decade will be whether it will continue to view, and treat, populations -- both inside the United States and elsewhere -- as pagans and heretics, unless and until these population groups adopt and abide by certain specific socio-political-economic beliefs.

Such an approach, now beginning to be recognized as being practiced in both the domestic and foreign environments, has the potential to continue to damage the legitimacy of the United States -- both in the eyes of its own citizens -- and those of the rest of the world.

Herein, (treating those of differing ideas and beliefs more as pagans and heretics and, thereby, causing them to become the subject of various forms of prosecution, correction and "rehabilitation") may lie the cause of America's greatest difficulties in the next decade.

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G
Martin

Mon,
02/21/2011
- 1:30pm

[Permalink](#)

Ignoring the argument about whether or not a U.S. "population-centric" foreign policy (and what that would actually entail: do we give them what we think they want, what they say they want, or what we think they need?) would be effective in making the world better for the Average human or American- I think the more prescient subject is what the American people will support.

I view most Americans today as being mostly concerned with the current American standard of living- and not much else. Sure our elites and some of our middle and upper classes are different- but the majority don't seem to be concerned with sacrificing

oday for gains tomorrow. That kind of thinking was what was really behind (and paradoxically the eventual undermining of) the "Greatest Generation" in my opinion- and it has been out of vogue since they came back from overseas.

So concerning ourselves with people around the world who are living in substandard political conditions (from our perspective) or about issues which may affect us tomorrow if we don't act on them now don't play really well to the electorate. If we rock the cheap energy boat in order to support the "will of the people" in the Middle East and elsewhere- I don't think the politicians in power here will stay in power for long.

If I'm a betting man- we'll keep on doing what we have been since we became a world power: cutting deals with the powers that be who lean our way while sending a broad message to the world that we support the spread of our own ideals. Before that we could afford to be self-righteous: our people had tasted the ugly reality of true poverty and understood what "sacrifice" meant and we weren't running things. Today we think it is a sin to miss one meal and what happens here affects many others. How can that in aggregate lead a heterogeneous world?