

“National Security: Global Hotspots and Blind Spots”

By

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Based on 30 years of experience as overseas correspondents, Ms. Griffin and Mr. Myre set out to show how *blindspots* (i.e. absence of U.S. engagement and communications with other countries) become *hotspots* (e.g. chaos and civil war).

- The best example of this is Afghanistan during the 1990s. After the Soviets pulled out in 1989 Afghanistan devolved into anarchic civil war being fought out by various warlords. Amidst such instability, the United States did not maintain an embassy in Kabul. U.S. inattention and lack of understanding paralleled the Taliban seizing power in the mid-90s.
- Similarly, after the Mujahedin bested the Soviets, Pakistan’s importance along with Afghanistan’s receded dramatically in Washington. Therefore we were caught by surprise by Pakistan’s first nuclear test in 1998.

How do we recognize a blindspot becoming ripe as a hotspot? Rarely is there a functioning US embassy in such a locale – witness Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. Iran and North Korea might fit this pattern as well.

- The U.S. needs representation by experts, journalists, aid workers, and businesspeople in order to get a relatively full picture of an overseas setting.

Obtaining this level of representation may be somewhat more difficult. There have been some 200 cases in Europe, Asia, Australia and the Americas of *Havana Syndrome*, where U.S. officials lose cognitive function from bombardment by some kind of wave energy. Terrorized diplomats are frequently sent home, with an attendant loss of their ability to monitor and report.

Another pattern observed by Griffin and Myre is that once Washington gets sucked into overseas turmoil, it tries to solve things by remaking local players in the U.S.’s own image.

- Commenting recently on why Afghan forces fell apart so rapidly as the U.S. withdrew in 2021, CJCS Milley said that we tried to build the Afghan Army in our own image. Operating and maintaining high-tech weapons requires the ongoing presence of military trainers and civilian contractors.
- Another example they offered is Russia. After the end of the Cold War, Americans assumed that Russia would become a free-market liberal democracy. This blinded us to the shock, resentment and humiliation that many Russians felt. The result was that by 1999 Russia had a former KGB agent as President.

Griffin and Myre posited that U.S. national security affairs tend to swing on inflection points such as 9/11. After 9/11 Washington spent the next 20 years highly focused on counterterrorism, and this in turn created a blindspot. They suggested that we were slow to awaken to Beijing's steady chipping away at U.S. and Western interests. China will be Washington's premier challenge of the 21st century. Managing the relationship will be an intricate mix of cooperation, competition, but hopefully not confrontation.

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