

When is IQ a Major Security Issue?
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Katie Baker (August 2 Newsweek) cites a new study that theorizes that constant endemic diseases can stunt brain (and body) development in children. This explains the lowest IQ scores in the world in Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Mozambique, and Gabon. But these are not the only countries with bad numbers. The disease exposure for children in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and village India are equally bad\227and it is possible that not only disease, but other factors\227incest, malnutrition, and too many children per young mother play into it.

Joel Brinkley (San Francisco Chronicle, \223Insight,\224July 10) notes that Afghanistan suffers from widespread mental and physical stunting of young people. Afghanistan has suffered from its years of fighting the Soviet occupation, then a dreadful decade of civil war, and finally, rule by the Taliban. These misfortunes have destroyed any sort of rational civil governance\227even without the nonsense of trying to push democracy on them.

First\227a warning about statistics. I don\222t know how anybody can gather hard data in a country as backward as Afghanistan. Where are the census takers? Who dares ask such questions in a backward Muslim country? In spite of this, trained on-the-ground observers are providing what they themselves see, and these are the best we can get.

UNICEF says that 26 of every 100 Afghan children die before the age of 5. This is the worst child mortality rate in the world. Of the survivors, 60% suffer from moderate to severe physical and mental stunting, The average death age is 45, among the lowest lifespan in the world, and I suspect that this is even worse for women.

Brinkley finds it no surprise that two-thirds of Afghan adults cannot read and write. How do you modernize such a country? And since few women (outside cities) get any education at all, the national illiteracy rate is probably even worse. Illiterate women produce illiterate children.

We already know that there is no obstetrical medical care available outside the major cities, resulting in a horrific maternal death rate. I have trouble believing the population numbers we are given. Not enough young mothers and babies are surviving to produce a population explosion.

What are the consequences of these conditions in Afghanistan and Pakistan? Nobody cares about the girls since they are married off early. But for the boys, so many of them stunted and low IQ, what can they do? Parents send them to Islamist Madrassas, where they memorize the Koran in Arabic (not their language) and are brainwashed to serve as cannon fodder \223to protect Islam.\224 High IQ not required for this.

One cultural custom found everywhere in the conservative Muslim world is preference for the marriage of first cousins, repeated over generations, which produces not only the high infant mortality rate, but terrible birth defects\227especially mental ones. Nobody is taking statistics on this yet\227but observers\227many with UN aide agencies \227see the results in villages from Pakistan to Palestine.

This is not new in world history. There has always been a noticeable difference of intelligence between the well-fed city dwellers and peasant communities. Even in the early days of our own country, the jokes about the \223country bumpkin\224 were common enough to indicate this difference. During my sojourn in Iran, I also noted the flood of country people coming to Tehran for opportunity. The city people scorned them as \223donkeys.\224

We now know that problems in Afghanistan or a Palestinian village can wind up killing us. It is a serious issue. Just ask the Marines who are training Afghan police. Their trainees are often either stoned or dim-witted, a reality reported on by villagers being policed.

Sometimes, quite by chance or luck, a genius comes out of a backwater and succeeds. But we should not have to look for luck to fix this problem. Cultures cannot change overnight (short of a ferocious dictator in charge), but this should be a long-term program that we try to fix, provided we can get it past the UN\222s Muslim bloc.

675 words

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