

India and China Are Not in the Same League.
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Much of our foreign policy, as well as that of Europe, has to do with the rising powers of India and China. These are two of the most populated countries in the world, and for the past few decades, they have been attempting to catch up with the developed world. China is doing better than India, and it may clarify our policies to understand why.

The late Shah of Iran once made the comment that backward countries must get their economies in line before political liberalization. This notion runs counter to the views of idealists who believe that participatory governance (and freedom) are the most important indicators of modernization. Unfortunately, we have plenty of evidence that this is not so. The Shah had it right.

We are used to thinking that dictatorships are uniformly horrible and that the only answer to happiness is voting and free speech. However, all dictatorships are not alike. The most successful modernizers in the 20th century were military dictatorships in South Korea and Taiwan, both of them morphing into vibrant democracies after their soaring economic development. Both produced middle classes, educated and prospering, who demanded participation. Both got it.

Another model of a modernizing backwater state is the unique situation of Singapore. They were lucky enough to have that rarest of blessings: a philosopher king (actually the authoritarian head of state), Lee Quan Yu. It is nearly impossible to find a dictator who never becomes addicted to power. This man is one of a kind, and the people of Singapore still do not have a democracy, but they have a vibrant and most comfortable society.

China's bumpy path to modernization did not come from their communist and crazy dictator, Mao, but from the current system of a ruling group (avoiding being in the hands of a single madman). China has benefitted from the bold initiative of President Nixon and Henry Kissinger to end China's isolation and open them to new ideas. Being pragmatic, the Chinese had already knocked out Chinese traditions (religion, superstition, fatalism) and harnessed the work ethic and entrepreneurial talents of this ancient country. It is working (not without problems, but whose system doesn't have problems).

China has produced a literate population. They have worked on infrastructure (rail, roads, dams, electric grids) and because the government does not fear public input, they get the work done. What is happening now is that their burgeoning middle class is beginning to demand more participation, and in time they will get it and know how to use it.

India, however, is like two countries: one developing and the other hopeless. They got participatory government (of sorts) well before they fixed the economy. They made the mistake of selecting the socialist model, which held them back for half a century. They only began to modernize after dropping that model and beginning to develop the intelligence and entrepreneurial skills of part of their population.

What they don't have is infrastructure (horrible railroads, roads, electric grid) and not even sewage and dependable water systems. Their corrupt democratic governance has not managed that. Also, unlike China, there has been no attempt to produce a universal educational system, nor to discard the bad values of the past: caste, religion, and disdain for women. Even 50 years ago, if I had to choose between being born female in a village, I would have selected China rather than the ultimate horror of India. China's model is better.

Once more, the late Shah was right. It is necessary to do economic development first, and to do so, the rulers must deal with cultural backwardness. They need to make sure that everybody is fed, schooled (not easy for girls in religious societies) and indoctrinated to value country more than clan or village. Don't bother with voting before you have done these things. The present Islamist government of Iran would not have survived this long without the Shah's modernization. As for the rest of the

Muslim world, until they deal with their religious culture, modernization is dead in the water.

675 words

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