

Pinpointing America’s biggest challenge *in the world* is a daunting task. At first thought, I could not help but think of the nuclear cold war with North Korea, or the influence of ISIS in the Middle East, or the ever-rising income gap. It is true that America has some ways to go in recovering the idealistic, Shangri ’la American Dream that used to have a real backbone. Yet, America’s biggest challenge today lies first on the global scale. The root of instability in the Middle East comes from America’s lack of a secure policy in terms of post-crisis, post-conflict, or post-war states. The vacuums in failed states such as Afghanistan are the fetuses of terrorism and insurgency groups. Yemen today is facing a humanitarian crisis that is just as significant as the Saudi Arabia-Iran proxy war that is being fought there. The two main reasons that post-conflict policy in the Middle East is America’s biggest challenge is because America has a history of neglecting this type of policy and because the policies taken in the Middle East are critical to the United States’ security.

The reason that post-conflict policy is America’s biggest challenge is because America has been historically absent or weak in terms of generating a stable policy, so progressing from weak policy structures to strong policies will be a challenge. The Iraq invasion in 2003 is an important contemporary decision to analyze, as well as Afghanistan. *Plan of Attack* by Bob Woodward highlights the lack of preparedness by the Bush administration in terms of governance in post-invasion Iraq. Additionally, notes by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said that “Unlike in Afghanistan, important to have ideas in advance about who would rule afterwards.”¹ Afghanistan itself has taken the place of Vietnam as the infamous never-ending war. President Barack Obama hoped to reach a political settlement with the Taliban and the current Afghani government as his administration’s post-conflict policy, but the Taliban heavily oppose US presence in the state. Terrorist attacks continue to occur frequently in Afghanistan, most notably in Kabul. Even after killing Osama bin Laden, the United States has entrenched itself in a state with a poor post-conflict policy. By propping up a weak Afghani government for over a decade via foreign funding, the government is now de-legitimized in the eyes of its people and lacks institutions and resources.

Secondly, Middle East post-conflict policy is America’s biggest challenge today above even the nuclear cold war with North Korea or domestic issues because the Middle East represents one of the most influential regions of the world today in terms of security. Yemen and Syria highlight America’s need for post-conflict policies. The Syrian re-building effort is next to none. An article from November 15, 2017, by *Time*, stated that the Raqqa Civil Council had a team of only 10 members in October to go into buildings and recover bodies. After ISIS was vanquished near the end of 2017, the towns have been left destroyed. This leaves millions displaced around Europe. The high stream of refugees into Europe are one factor for Britain’s decision to leave the European Union and for the surge of conservative anti-immigration movements, such as those in Germany. Yemen is also facing one of the most severe famines and humanitarian crises in the world. Besides the humanitarian needs, Yemen highly risks becoming a failed state and serving as a harbor for terrorists in the same way that Afghanistan has. United States’ policy in Yemen is especially key as it represents a feud between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The US currently wants to curb Iran’s nuclear program and its influence in the region, so paying attention to Saudi’s role in the crisis in Yemen is essential.

Overall, America’s biggest challenge is developing a constructive and efficient post-conflict strategy in the Middle East. In the past, America has had weak policies, resulting in failed states such as

¹ The National Security Archive. September 22, 2010. <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB326/print.htm>

Afghanistan. It will be a challenge for America to develop a competent Middle East post-conflict policy, specifically in Syria, as it has little precedent of doing so. President Trump has stated that he desires minimum involvement in the Syrian re-building process as well. The second reason that this is America’s biggest challenge is because of the consequences of failure – the most imminent being a failed state that engenders terrorists with anti-West sentiments, further threatening America’s security. I believe the first step for conquering this immense challenge is cultural perspective to drive innovative policies.