

Empire and Nation State Transcript

US Ambassador Jackson McDonald

Well, my first theory has to do with the whole concept of empires and how they have impacted on the world. If you go back over a hundred years in history you'll realize that the world was dominated by ten great empires. Today they have all disappeared. They've all collapsed. So, at the end of World War I, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the German Empire, and the Ottoman Empire disappeared. At the end of World War II was the Japanese, and then in the next 20 to 25 years, there was the British, French, Dutch, Belgian, Portuguese, and finally in 1991 there was the Soviets. Now why is that important in the state of the world today? In 1945 there were 51 nations in the world, and they all signed the UN charter. Today, there are 192 nations who have a part of the United Nations system. So from 51 to 192 nations. So that means that basically two thirds of the nations of the world are less than 45 years old. That's a very short time spent in history, 45 years. So the problems that are coming out of this collapse of the empire is that there are many countries still struggling to find their path.

My second theory I tried out at Moscow in 1989 when I was invited by members of the Supreme Soviet to come and talk about the phrase they'd heard about conflict resolution and didn't know what it was. And I learned when I was there that there was no word in the Russian language for conflict resolution. They had the gulags and they had Siberia and they didn't need anything else. So I came up with a word "conflictology." And that has been adopted and conflictology is conflict resolution in the Russian language, and I've actually lectured at the institute for conflictology in St. Petersburg and also in Georgia. Well, once we've gotten together with the members of the Supreme Soviet, they asked me in my first two minutes to sell them at Nagorno-Karabakh problem, which is the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan which Stalin set in the early 20s. And I laughed, and I said I can't do that. I said well you can't either because nobody outside of Moscow trusts you yet. What you need to do is to find a neutral third party, who can be helpful. And they finally asked the OSCE, the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe, to take on this task and unfortunately they are still working on to this day with no resolution. But I had their attention.

And I said I estimate there are 70 conflicts below the surface of your empire that you're responsible for because you've violated three nonnegotiable issues and the first is language. You've required everybody in your empire to speak Russian, and it's a crime if you don't speak Russian. In fact I learned in the last few years one of the young people working at my institute is from Azu Ajong and she said when she was growing up, as soon as she left the house in Baku, she could only speak Russian. That sounds strict that was. So I told politicians why don't you loosen the rules a bit and allow people to speak whatever language they want to speak.

The second nonnegotiable issue is about religion. You probably don't know this but the Soviet Empire was an atheist Empire for 70 years. No religion of any kind was allowed in the whole empire. Atheist. If you practice any other religion and you are caught, you went to jail. And I said people have practiced their own religions since time again. Why don't you relax the rules and allow them to do what they really want to?

The third nonnegotiable issue is about culture. I said you try to destroy the ethnicity of these people. You've taken away their birth and marriage and death ceremonies. You've taken away the food they eat, the clothes they wear, their art, their dance, their music, their literature. You try to destroy this ethnicity and every culture wants to maintain those basic things. And so when you put all three of those together and you deny language, religion, and culture, you're 100% guaranteed to have violence. And these are all man-made laws made by your predecessors. All you have to do is change the laws and you'll have a more peaceful society.