

A SECOND STRATEGIC FAILURE

I'm more and more convinced this is Dick Cheney's design. Failure in Afghanistan, which might lead to the collapse of Pakistan's western-friendly government, which might lead to a regional war between Sunni and Shiite.

Ashdown told The Observer that Afghanistan presented a graver threat than Iraq.

'The consequences of failure in Afghanistan are far greater than in Iraq,' he said. 'If we fail in Afghanistan then Pakistan goes down. These security problems for Britain would be massively multiplied. I think you could not then stop a widening regional war that would start off in warlordism but it would become essentially a war in the end between Sunni and Shia right across the Middle East.'

'Mao Zedong used to refer to the First and Second World Wars as the European civil wars. You can have a regional civil war. That is what you might begin to see. It will be catastrophic for Nato. The damage done to Nato in Afghanistan would be as great as the damage done to the UN in Bosnia. That could have a severe impact on the Atlantic relationship and maybe even damage the American security guarantee for Europe.'

What other logic is there—besides pure stupidity—for ignoring nuclear-armed and increasingly extremist Pakistan—while ratcheting up war against Iran? Wasn't this whole Middle Eastern fuckup supposed to be designed to prevent Al Qaeda from getting nukes? But here we are, ignoring the events in Pakistan, treating them as a PR offensive rather than a military one, so as to drum up further war? And if

Afghanistan fails, as the British generals fear it might—then all of a sudden the Europeans are worried about their own security, not just bringing stability to the Middle East and South Asia.

Frankly, the internal debates on Iraq are even becoming a distraction. We've got to start solving Afghanistan and Pakistan—or else Iraq won't matter, whether we're there or gone.