



Keith Pattison

effectively as the guarantor of a law-bound international order, with the United States acting as its enforcement arm against aggressors. A new world order, indeed. A less hopeful view is that the United States will now be able to use force, if necessary, to apply its national interests throughout the world without fear of challenge, and to tow the United Nations obediently behind it. Backyards, incidentally, remain backyards. Few can seriously suppose that removal of the Soviet 'threat' in Latin America will lead to a fundamental revision of American policy and behaviour in that part of the world, whatever slogans will now be used to justify armed interventions and de-stabilisations. The feebleness of American reaction to the terrible events in the Baltic republics, moreover, relates as much to an unspoken compact about backyards as to concern to retain Soviet support for the anti-Saddam coalition.

But of course, this 'new order' may not be monopolar at all. There are new analyses - German and American - which suggest that we are now leaving such a world, not entering it: that the

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cold war, falsely represented as a balance of terror between two super-powers, was in reality the period of almost challenged American global dominations. The United States, in economic decline, will now retire into isolation leaving an increasingly chaotic 'world disorder' to its own devices. If this hypothesis is true then the enormous international coalition against Iraq, under American leadership, is the end of an epoch not the beginning of a new one.

In one view, the 'imaginary war' must continue, substituting new adversaries for the cold war enemy and in this sense the Gulf war would be compared to the Korean war - as the conflict which defines the new world order. But the cold war's neat polarities can hardly be carried on: it takes two to make a war, hot or cold. The 1980s suggested that new scarecrow-targets were being constructed to take the place of the Soviet Union. 'Fundamentalism', Islamic and otherwise, has been one of these. A more likely and lasting target, however, will be a demonised view of nationalism. If it is true, as I believe, that nationalism in its variety of forms remains the main political dynamic of the human race, then it is disconcerting that we hear little but wholesale condemnation of it. Nationalism was, is and will be: it is, as Tom Nairn put it, the Janus-face looking at once forward to liberation and progress and backward to reactionary and often mythical notions of the past; it is a force which should never be identified with the nation-state, a concept which nationalism has for a time inhabited, as a hermit crab inhabits a shell, but is evidently beginning to evacuate as the sovereign nation-state shows clear sign of obsolescence. How is it possible that the distinction between nation and state still escapes intelligent people on the British Left? To hear Scotland, for example, referred to as 'England' is a venerable howler which does at least represent the unequal nature of a relationship. But there is no excuse for those who confuse 'England' (nation) with 'Britain' (the multi-national state).

In the new world order, it may well be that nationalism functions as the opposition to that order, the main source of resistance and challenge to large and more or less integrated blocks of power. Masked by the cold war, it has in practice fulfilled that function for a long time. But the matter is more complicated. There is a sense in which the existence of nationalism, or more accurately, of old-fashioned nation-states on the periphery, can be convenient to hegemonic power-blocs.

The 'Bantustan effect' is a system by which a developed and dominating core area surrounds itself by poor and backward 'sovereign' states. They are used as reserves of migrant labour and raw materials, to which the developed centre can export its unemployment when

necessary: the importance of sovereignty is that a Bantustan carries political responsibility for handling the consequences of economic downturn, while the developed centre carries little or none. In South Africa, the satellite states had to be created. In the European Community, during the boom years of the 1960s and 1970s, they already existed in the Balkans and elsewhere, as they exist for the United States in Latin America.

In other words, the West has an interest in the maintenance of nationalism, but only in its most backward form: the sovereign nation-state, so long as it is powerless, dependent and relatively small. The engine of these systems is the 'labour pump', the device which South Africans used to call 'influx control', which ensures that migrant labour circulates and can be pumped out back to its Bantustan when no longer required.

But the pump leaks. Germany, which hoped to keep all its immigrant workforce as contract labour, has acquired a huge Turkish settled population. The same has happened in the white urban areas of South Africa, and in many regions of the United States. The project of exporting social responsibility across frontiers is rapidly breaking down, and immigration from the Third World, from eastern Europe and possibly the Soviet Union will be the major phenomenon of the next quarter-century and a central problem for any new world order.

In the longer term no effective barriers can be devised. Tighter immigration controls, visa restrictions, a shrinking of the right of asylum, cannot do more than reduce the rate of immigration. The idea that immigration can be discouraged by investment programmes paid for by the West and intended to make poor countries worth staying in cannot possibly work, given the inconceivable sums of money which would be required, except - maybe - in eastern Europe. Meanwhile, the attractions of North America and western Europe as a destination will increase. The price of a ticket, not by direct purchase, but as part of some loan - deal struck with small charter airlines or labour contractors, is beginning to be accessible to millions of small peasants or urban workers in Asia and Africa.

As this inflow increases - a population movement which can only be compared to the millennial westward movement of peoples into Europe which ended with the defeat of the Mongols - a final answer will be given to our absorbing little debate about European identity. The nation will certainly survive longer, as an enduring but Protean idea. But to visualise the nation stripped both of its territorial significance and of its ethnic assumptions is to ask too much of the imagination. We will have to wait and see.#

Neal Ascherson is a columnist for the Independent On Sunday