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ARAB REVOLTS AND NATION-STATE CRISIS

The shockwaves of popular rebellion reverberating across the Arab world since the start of 2011 have put to the test the West's dominion over the region; a rule that has long aimed at securing access to the Middle East's oil and gas, while supporting Israel's ongoing colonization of Palestine. The means by which imperial control is exercised were vividly exposed to public view, as Western officials scrambled to 'stabilize' the states that had long served as their clients in the region. In Egypt, a favoured destination for CIA rendition flights, the annual subsidy of $1.3bn in US military aid since 1979 has famously bought the Pentagon a direct line to the Army high command, giving Washington a control panel from which to manage the handling of the mass protests. The US Defense Secretary Robert Gates was on the phone to Cairo 'every few hours'. Daily exhortations from the Obama Administration urged, first, 'an orderly transition' with Mubarak stepping down in September; then, as mass pressure grew, 'an orderly transition *now*', to the spymaster, Omar Suleiman; finally, a seizure of power by the Supreme Military Council (SMC), an outcome announced to Congress by Leon Panetta, then head of the CIA, on February 10, the day before it happened. All pointed to the urgency of American actions in stabilizing the 80-million-strong centre of gravity of Arab discontent, through the mechanisms of the post-colonial state.

On March 19 the SMC, under the leadership of Mubarak's long-standing Defence Minister Tantawi, rushed through a referendum on constitutional amendments judged to favour the essentially conservative forces of the Muslim Brotherhood and the still-powerful NDP in the parliamentary and presidential elections to be held later in the year. Further advances since Mubarak's ouster—the sacking of his Cabinet and dissolution of

the State Security Investigations Service, the political police, in March 2011; detention of Mubarak and other officials, and confiscation of the NDP's assets, in April—have only been wrung from an unwilling SMC by continued contestation from below. Western stabilization has been equally apparent in Egypt's post-Mubarak foreign policy. The first act of the SMC was to pledge fealty to the 1979 Treaty with Israel, abrogating Egyptian sovereignty even within its own territory. Initial moves to open the border with Gaza were swiftly reversed.

In Tunisia, responsibility for controlling the rebellion fell to the EU powers—above all the country's former colonial master, France. Again, it was the levers of the post-colonial state that were put to use, even as this was contested from below. The first move of Foreign Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie was an offer to dispatch French riot police, battle-hardened in the *banlieue*, to aid their Tunisian counterparts in crushing the mass movement. As the regime cracked, and former President Ben Ali and his family fled to Riyadh on January 14, the Army secured the streets and government buildings, but strove to keep the existing administration in place—with backing from British Foreign Secretary William Hague, who arrived with promises of aid. A stream of EU officials followed, bearing blueprints for acceptable reforms. It was left to the mass movement to maintain the momentum—fighting on to oust Ben Ali's Cabinet, on March 4, and push through the dismantling of the State Security apparatus, the dissolution of the old-regime partocracy and expropriation of its assets. Constituent assembly elections are currently scheduled for October 2011.

Stabilization, then, entails keeping the pro-Western dictatorship's state apparatus in place while removing the figurehead-turned-liability. A variant of the same policy can be seen in the bombing campaign against Gaddafi; British and American spokesmen have made clear that they are not aiming to destroy the Libyan state administration as such, 'simply'—and illegally—to take out the Gaddafis. Urged on by France and Britain, instigators of the 1956 Suez intervention, and by the most bellicose advisors of the Obama Administration (Samantha Powers, Susan Rice), NATO's aerial onslaught was launched on March 19 and continues, with mounting civilian casualties, at the time of writing. One result has been to stop any independent protest movement in Tripoli in its tracks, while subordinating the Benghazi leadership to Western diktat. The ultimate outcome remains uncertain, but the intent is obvious: by unleashing its firepower with apparent impunity, the West is out to demonstrate who holds the reins in the Middle East.

Elsewhere—Bahrain, Syria, Jordan, Morocco—Washington and its allies have largely restricted themselves to pious calls for 'dialogue' with the protest movements. In Yemen, US attempts to shore up a dictator whom the Obama Administration has been arming to the teeth have brought the country to the brink of civil war. Other rulers on the Arab peninsula are judged 'safe', for the moment. Washington's calculation seems to be that the kings and emirs may escape the fate of the region's untitled rulers and need only be encouraged to relax their hold. Cameron's February 2011 trip to the Gulf with a delegation of UK arms manufacturers, hoping to upgrade the arsenals by which Arab monarchs ensure their longer-term survival, followed by a stop-off in Cairo for a photo-opportunity with demonstrators, gives the lie to any sincere concern for the wellbeing of the Arab peoples—a cynicism only underlined by his agitation for unleashing imperial air power against Libya. The 'fight against the brutal dictator', whose stubble recently rubbed the cheek of another British Prime Minister, gives the aesthetics of politics a new twist.

Imperial gearbox

The post-colonial state itself thus provides a key 'remote control' mechanism by means of which the West can determine the direction of countries nominally emancipated from its tutelage. In general, American strategy has been to entrust a client governing class with the keys of the state, on condition that it leave the door open. Within this framework, the West will permit various gradations of popular political expression. The range runs from zero, under a dictatorship, through a middling set of pro-capital authoritarian regimes, to parliamentary representation, in which elections can replace one fraction of the governing class with another, but otherwise leave the social order unchanged. There the gradations stop. This is not to say that popular contestation plays no role: it is pressure from below that usually necessitates the transition from one category to another. In a revolutionary situation, however, this controlled, step-by-step relaxation of repression becomes unstable; at that point, other forms of imperial intervention may be necessary to ensure that democratic aspirations do not exceed the bounds set by the 'lock and key' arrangement with the client governing class—by 'military action when necessary'.[1]

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[1] In the words of President Clinton's nominee for Assistant Secretary of Defence for Democracy and Peacekeeping, Morton Halperin; see his 'Guaranteeing Democracy', *Foreign Policy*, no. 91, Summer 1993, p. 106.

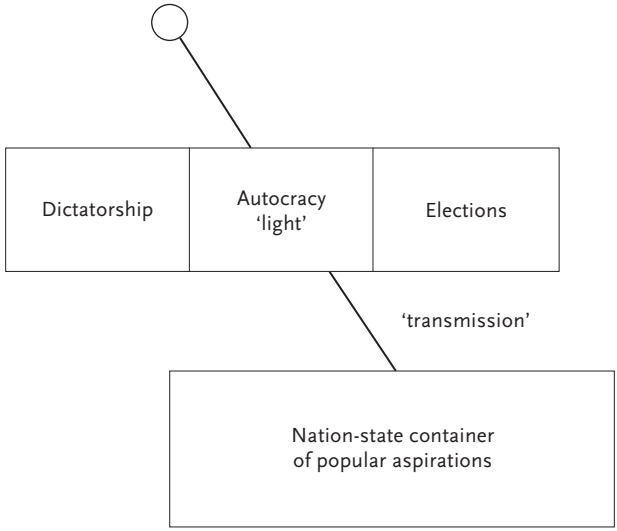
Schematically, we can represent the process by which the West has exercised its dominion over client nation-states as a 'gearbox' for managing popular demands. In conjunction with the appropriate fractions of the local governing classes, the gearbox is capable of shifting between different gradations of coercion and consent. The 'gearbox of imperial control' allows the West to adjust the compromise with the client governing class in response to actual popular pressure, in the way the Obama Administration 'switched gear' from Mubarak's autocracy to (the call for) 'open and transparent elections'. Of course this presupposes that the transmission mechanism connecting the gearbox to the nation-state container remains intact; in the case of Libya today, an often-heard complaint in the West is that such a mechanism had never truly been in place, and that intervention is therefore required in order to create an 'open door' state in the first place—regardless of the disastrous results of similar attempts in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq.

The post-colonial nation-states are themselves the products of complex sets of compromises between local ('westernizing') nationalists and forces adhering to non-Western forms of authority, as well as between the local governing class and the imperial power. Modern colonialism, it has been argued, won its victories 'not so much through its military and technological prowess, as through its ability to create secular hierarchies incompatible with the traditional order'.[2] The aspiration for national self-determination has a real popular basis, even if it constitutes only one political goal among others and is embodied in a form, the nation-state, imported from the West in the first place. Irrespective of how this compromise is shaped, however, local interests will find themselves party to a broader deal that gives the imperial power an in-built advantage: the dominated society is usually kept captive within a post-colonial state structure that is foreign in origin, at best only partially adequate to local circumstances. In most cases an awkward and ill-fitting construct, the post-colonial state has had the task of domesticating and integrating pre-existing political processes: regulating and pacifying tribal, nomadic, sedentary or religious forms of authority and community. In the process, it has helped to shape—even as it has itself been shaped by—a specific mode of foreign relations.

The dominion of the West today is often analysed in terms of transnational capital's ability to entangle prior modes of production in its

[2] Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, New Delhi 1988, p. ix.

FIGURE 1: *Gearbox of Imperial Control*



net; but it is equally urgent to analyse the structures of imperialism in terms of modes of foreign relations. Historically, the foreign relations between tribes, or the relations between land empires and the nomads roaming their frontiers, were based on entirely different principles to those that have arisen over the past two hundred years under the dominion of the Atlantic powers. The notion of the territorial sovereignty of the nation-state, based on the idea that foreignness can be fully exteriorized from the social body, is incompatible with traditional tribal or nomadic forms of authority. In the contemporary mode of foreign relations, the state is the central mechanism by means of which the directive class can both demarcate a territory in which it is sovereign and control or mobilize the 'productive power' of the population within its jurisdiction, in dealing with foreign powers. Just as the West gained a historical first-mover advantage as the original home of industrial capitalism, so it has retained the upper hand in the international state system, whereby post-colonial nation-state structures developed in the West have been fitted over societies for which that format was not necessarily suitable at all.

This raises further questions about the attempts by the US and its allies to steer or stabilize post-colonial regimes in face of the Arab uprisings. For stabilization—keeping the state apparatus intact while removing a Mubarak or Ben Ali—can only be a halfway house. A revolution necessarily involves the seizure of power from a ruling class dislodged by popular revolt. The new power need not be the self-proclaimed vanguard of the next class in Marxism's historical progression—Jacobins for the bourgeoisie, Bolsheviks for the proletariat; the 1979 Iranian Revolution was a clear break with that model.[3] But if the existing apparatus is shaken or shattered by popular revolt, yet no group is ready to establish an alternative infrastructure of rule—a task historically undertaken by the political party—then what ensues is an interregnum. Western strategists are clearly determined to prevent this happening, if they can—here with soft prodding, there with air attacks. The attempt to wrest free from oppressive regimes must at some point broaden into a challenge to the entire edifice of Western imperial control. To investigate this vector of Western power in historical perspective may then cast light on the potential and the obstacles with which the current revolt in the Middle East is confronted, and which it will have to recognize and overcome, if the popular mobilization that is currently unfolding is to evolve into a revolution.

Imperial diplomacies

The principle of national self-determination and the project of colonial imperialism developed in counterpoint to each other from the early 19th century. The Americas had seen the secession of the United States and the Haitian Revolution, following that of France. In Egypt, Muhammad Ali had challenged traditional Ottoman structures from 1805, adapting concepts of nationhood developed during the French Revolution. He dissolved the artisan and commercial guilds, the Sufi orders and Bedouin tribal structures, as well as the minority religious *millas* inherited from the Ottomans, appropriating their social initiative on behalf of a dynamic, centralizing state. These events were still resonating in 1813–15, when Europe's rulers met in Vienna to redraw the map of the Continent after Napoleon's defeat. The national question emerged here for the first time as an issue to be settled by a conclave of the great

[3] Though the spectre of class succession was clearly haunting Washington at the time of the 1974 revolution in Portugal, when the Social Democratic leader Mario Soares famously assured Henry Kissinger that he 'did not intend to become a Kerensky', to which Kissinger replied, 'Neither did Kerensky'.

powers. Most sensitive to it was Metternich, charged with running an Austrian empire composed of fourteen nationalities, and acutely aware of the destabilizing potential of the ideology of national sovereignty. He also put his finger on a contradiction in the Anglophone idea of individual freedom: 'One of the sentiments most natural to man, that of nationality, is itself erased from the liberal catechism.'[4] From a conservative viewpoint, nationality offered a way to fulfil the requirement of 'solid weight', necessary for the Continental balance of power, while defusing the demand for popular sovereignty.

The British, too, came to recognize that support for national independence might be a tool to employ as a lever in the inter-state competition against other European powers. Post-Napoleonic France and the united kingdom of the Netherlands and Belgium, both under informal British tutelage, were still attempts to restore the pre-1789 European order. When the monarchs of Europe had to concede a measure of constitutionalism later in the century, the nation-state form worked to contain the 'push from below', as the 1830 Belgian secession would demonstrate. 'The true function of constitutionalism was to protect the bourgeoisie from the princes, who rejected the revolutionary slogans, and from the masses, who accepted them.'[5]

British sponsorship of nationality, and of a measure of constitutionalism within national confines, drew on the liberal intuition that formal empire may ultimately constrain economic opportunity; Smith had already indicated, in the closing paragraphs of *The Wealth of Nations*, that losing the North American colonies could be a blessing in disguise. Burke made the case that Europe's nations should be judged on their ability to contain the precipitate extension of democracy, whilst safeguarding the hereditary right to property.[6] If class privilege was to be ensured, a balance of interests subject to flexible correction was the best way forward, in both domestic and foreign relations. With the dawn of the imperialist age, this insight began to evolve into an appreciation of how the nationality principle might be used as a tool for British interests. At the Congress of Vienna, Castlereagh made the protection of national

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[4] *Mémoires, documents et écrits divers laissés par le Prince de Metternich, Chancelier de Cour et d'Etat*, vol. III, Paris 1880, p. 431.

[5] L. C. B. Seaman, *From Vienna to Versailles* [1955], London 1964, p. 39.

[6] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* [1790], in *Works*, vol. IV, Oxford 1934, p. 67.

minority rights an instrument of London's foreign policy for the first time: while Poland was ruthlessly partitioned between Russia, Austria and Prussia, the British Foreign Secretary stipulated that the imperial monarchs recognize its identity by 'treating as Poles' the 'portions of the nation that may be placed under their respective sovereignties'. As well as allowing for the recomposition of a buffer state, this signalled that, should popular pressure ever force the empires to concede democratic demands, a Polish nation would be there to contain them—in the way a compartment in a ship's hull may contain a leak.

France under Napoleon, however, had already indicated an alternative form of national mobilization that Britain would not tolerate: a contender state, driving forward its social and economic development by stimulus or direct control, 'confiscating' its civil society and mounting a challenge to the liberal West. Of the other European powers, only Prussia would be able to domesticate its ascendant bourgeois-democratic forces in a comparable nationalist mobilization. Through a revolution from above and a set of brief victorious wars, Bismarck would weld together a united Germany that was truly sovereign, in the sense of not recognizing an authority superior to itself. But as the Napoleonic Wars had demonstrated, the British ruling class would accept the principle of national sovereignty only if actually premised on client status. Indeed, British support for national self-determination would be deployed as often to undercut the hold of modern contender states over fractious subject nations—from Napoleonic Europe to the USSR and today's PRC—as to prey on backward rivals like the Spanish or Ottoman empires.

The Ottoman Empire's European possessions were particularly vulnerable to British designs, as also to those of Austria and Russia. The capitulations regime had been instituted in the early 16th century, when the Sublime Porte was prevailed upon to grant Francis I a protectorate over French travellers; Britain's protectorate over the Sultan's Protestant subjects dated from 1580 (since there were no Protestants, the Druze became the beneficiaries instead). In the 17th century Austria and Russia made similar stipulations, the latter assuming sovereign protection of Orthodox Christian Serbs and Greeks. The Ottoman system of *millets* had long granted 'foreign' communities a measure of local sovereignty within the empire; in the 19th century, however, competing imperialist powers began to use the capitulations regime to transform the *millets* into client communities. Attempts by Serbian notables and Greek

merchants to gain control over Black Sea tax revenues triggered Russian designs against the Ottomans; for its part, Britain began to shift from balance-of-power conservatism to using national aspirations as a stratagem for gaining access.

Castlereagh's initial reaction when the Greek independence movement erupted in 1821 was the same as Metternich's: if Russia were to profit from the Greek revolt, the European balance would be thrown into disarray. But Canning, who succeeded him as British Foreign Secretary in 1822, broke with the Holy Alliance, offering tactical support to national rebellions against the European empires, where it suited British interests. Having vanquished Napoleon, Britain could 'once again lead the world along the middle path between despotism and revolution'.[7] Naturally, the new-found concern for the national rights of governing classes amenable to London's imperial aims would not be extended to Britain's own colonial subjects.

A liberal New World?

Paradoxically, it was in the Americas that the stabilization of the post-colonial nation-state under Western liberal-imperial auspices obtained its modern form. In the vast, thinly populated expanses of the New World, it was not obvious that popular aspirations for sovereignty would be channelled into nation-building, instead of creating, say, two or three large federations of 'United States'. This, after all, had been the aim of Bolívar and San Martín, just as it was George Washington's. Latin America therefore offers valuable insights into the shaping of client nation-states, in the context of the Anglo-American liberal world that was beginning to emerge. The British had been involved in Latin America since the early 18th century, both as commercial interlopers and as mediators. When the Portuguese monarchy relocated to Brazil in 1808, fleeing the Napoleonic threat, the UK secured a commercial treaty that gave British imports preference over those from Portugal. Gaining free access was a prime concern for both Britain and the US; London also floated the idea of an 'Open Door' declaration for the region, although in the end it was left to President Monroe to make the formal declaration of 1823. Canning's famous comment, the following year, that 'Spanish America

[7] Harold Nicolson, *The Congress of Vienna: A Study in Allied Unity, 1812–22* [1946], New York 1961, p. 272.

is free and if we do not mismanage our affairs sadly she is English', expressed Anglo-American alignment on a liberal grand design as much as it ruled out re-colonization of the Americas.[8]

It was, of course, Napoleon's conquest of the Iberian peninsula in 1808–10 that prompted cities in Spanish America to declare independence; but the construction of separate Latin American nation-states proceeded within a space already demarcated by British and US interests. The process built on urban nodes which, with their Spanish garrisons, had already acquired some state-like characteristics. But the incomplete colonization of Latin America left large zones uncontrolled at independence. Here, *mestizos*, Amerindians, free blacks, runaway African slaves and others, excluded from the life of property and honour associated with urban residence and legitimate titles, were involved in cattle-ranching and illegal commerce. These activities in turn were protected by armed bands of smugglers, *caudillos* and other private 'providers of violence' who often made a crucial contribution in fighting the Spanish. The exigencies of frontier life produced shifting political loyalties, with the presence of large Amerindian populations often tipping the balance.

The new governing classes faced the task of completing the colonization process under their own steam and disciplining unruly frontier populations that did not fit easily into the nation-state format. Whether in the Americas or in the Eurasian land empires, the demarcation of frontiers typically cut across economic and cultural networks with people 'on the other side'. As a result, loyalties could be split and populations might identify with either nation. Only when the struggle for independence spilled into fratricidal wars over state boundaries were territories demarcated along 'national' lines, as internal foreign relations blended into class compromises. Wars to settle matters that remained unsolved at independence were ferocious and protracted in Latin America—just as the Civil War was in the United States.

Britain's informal empire in Latin America made it a silent partner in many of these conflicts; the US was also involved early on. That the new nation-states in the south were part of an informal hierarchy was

[8] Canning cited in John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade' [1953], in E. C. Black, ed., *European Political History, 1815–1870*, New York 1967, p. 241.

never in doubt. As US Secretary of State John Quincy Adams made clear to Bolívar in 1824, the Monroe Doctrine 'must not be interpreted as authorization for the weak to be insolent with the strong'. The US refused to attend the Pan-American conference convened by Bolívar in Panama two years later. Instead, there began a long line of interventions and actual annexations (Mexico, Puerto Rico), while Britain took the Falklands/Malvinas in 1833 and tripled its Honduran territory at the expense of Guatemala in 1836. The US and Britain controlled not just the circulation of goods and capital, but also the bandwidth of popular sovereignty in each separate country. In most cases, this remained at the bottom end of the scale. Only since the 1980s, after the darkest night of state terror had passed, did the US switch to allowing 'free and fair elections'—unless the expected results were deemed incompatible with Western interests.

Flags and rights

In the first half of the 19th century, British diplomacy's use of the national question—adapting a conservative version of the French revolutionary or anti-colonial model to the requirements of global dominion—was still essentially tactical and intuitive. Yet there were also acknowledged principles involved. The natural rights-based concept of civic nationality, within which ethnic associations become secondary, had a long pedigree. The idea of innate rights was formulated by landholders against the Norman kings, and projected across England and Wales in the centuries following the Conquest. Under the Tudors, state-building and overseas expansion became part of a single process. Thomas More and Erasmus reformulated the notions of civility and Christianity in universalistic terms; the Reformation added a popular, 'national' inflection, without removing the universalistic context. In a striking anticipation of the transnational society on which the Anglophone West was to be erected, Francis Bacon compared the fate of Sparta, which had jealously guarded its ethnic purity, but whose proverbial valour had in the end been undermined by insufficient numbers, to that of the Roman empire, which welcomed foreigners and, indeed, entire nations as citizens:

> Their manner was to grant naturalization (which they called *jus civitatis*), and to grant it in the highest degree . . . Add to this their custom of plantation of colonies, whereby the Roman plant was removed into the soil of other nations . . . It was not the Romans that spread upon the world,

> but it was the world that spread upon the Romans; and that was the sure way of greatness.[9]

This was a powerful appreciation of the fact that, in projecting power over a larger, oceanic space, the ethnicities of those populating it were not necessarily of the first importance—as long as the claim to global dominion could be upheld. On the contrary, indifference to ethno-political or political-religious allegiances could lend a truly universal quality to the Anglophone liberal project. This perspective underlay the policy of creating nation-states as containers that would accommodate the demand for popular sovereignty while placing it under a specific control regime, with government devolved to friendly client elites. Inspired by the innate-rights doctrine actualized in the *jus civitatis* of the British Empire, the new nation is ideally a province of the Anglophone dominion first, and 'ethnic' or otherwise particular as a community only in the second instance.

As the Latin American experience demonstrated, 'responsible government' could be exercised by non-Anglophone governing classes, respectful of British and US interests. More claimants to self-rule were bound to arise. The English geographer, Halford Mackinder, noted in 1904 that the projection of dominion would ultimately have to adjust to a world of separate states. Unlike the empire–nomad mode of foreign relations, under which 'every explosion of social forces' is 'dissipated in a surrounding circuit of unknown space and barbaric chaos', the trend would henceforth be towards a filling up of all spaces under territorial sovereignties. Any social conflict will thus

> be sharply re-echoed from the far side of the globe, and weak elements in the political and economic organism of the world will be shattered in consequence . . . Probably some half-consciousness of this fact is at last diverting much of the attention of statesmen in all parts of the world from territorial expansion to the struggle for relative efficiency.[10]

The US, as it assumed the mantle of liberal cosmopolitanism, replicated the interpretation of rights-based nationality in an even more radical version; the particular notion of the *jus civitatis* was here intensified by the anomie that accompanies migration, as successive cohorts of new arrivals

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[9] Francis Bacon, 'The True Kingdom of Greatness and Estates' [1624], *Essays and New Atlantis*, Roslyn, NY 1942, p. 127.
[10] Halford Mackinder, 'The Geographical Pivot of History', *Geographical Journal*, vol. 23, no. 4, 1904, p. 422.

were socialized into the settlers' civic, pseudo-ethnic 'Americanism'. No doubt each was soon accumulating its own class and other experiences; yet they still shared the notion of a deterritorialized, rights-based nationality, in combination with the specific constitutionality articulated by Locke. This larger political-economic space can be understood, borrowing Mackinder's terminology, as a 'heartland' from which liberalism—and, grafted on its particular constitutionality, capitalism—would begin their spread to the rest of the globe. In the process, however, the strategy of finding and grooming client governing classes ran into a movement coming from the opposite direction, articulating popular sovereignty from below.

The nationalisms from below inevitably brought alternative interpretations of community, loyalty and citizenship. This was most obviously the case with the contender states challenging the liberal order. In France, the Revolution had proclaimed a *jus soli*, birthright citizenship or law of the soil, prefiguring similar secular-republican structures elsewhere. This Enlightenment concept had influenced the notion of citizenship in the Americas, albeit that in the United States, the individual as a bearer of rights comes first, the citizen of the republic second. In the French conception, the law prevails over individual interests because it enshrines the general interest, whereas for liberalism, 'there is a confrontation between particular interests (the dominant ones) and the collective interest'.[11] In the German lands that emerged from the Napoleonic dominion, the *jus soli* in turn was challenged by the *jus sanguinis*, ancestral belonging or law of blood. This concept of nationality, with its roots in tribal foreign relations, in combination with the sacred qualities ascribed to territory, would legitimate some of the worst excesses of 'exteriorizing the foreign'; it remains the nationality principle of Hungary, Japan and—until very recently—Germany. These different principles of nationality, as well as the uneven development generated by the spread of capital, have informed and complicated the struggle between the Atlantic ruling class and democratic forces seeking to emancipate themselves from its political-economic supremacy.

Communist contenders

Foremost among these contenders were challengers from the Marxian left. The first articulation of the principle of national self-determination

[11] Jean Liberman, *Démythifier l'universalité des valeurs américaines*, Paris 2004, p. 21.

here dates from 1865, when the London Conference of the First International adopted a resolution to counter the 'invading influence of Russia in Europe' by 'applying to Poland "the right of every people to dispose of itself"', and to re-establish that country 'on a social and democratic basis'.[12] Yet the national question always carried a certain ambivalence within Marxian theoretical analysis. Marx and Engels generally discussed the issue in terms of the broader political consequences of categorical positions. While the *Communist Manifesto* had famously proclaimed that 'the workers have no fatherland', Marx pointed out to Engels in a letter of 1866 that this cosmopolitanism could easily turn into a silently assumed hegemony of a dominant nationality.[13] The theoretical terms for analysing such an inter-state hierarchy were not developed beyond sketches and fragments, however. The appeal of the International lay in its critique of capitalist exploitation, and when subsequent generations of Marxists aimed their arrows at imperialism and militarism, they generally did so by building on that critique.

Debates focused on how national self-determination could be either neutralized or instrumentalized to facilitate a workers' revolution—if it were not altogether rejected as an issue of concern to the labour movement, as in the case of Luxemburg. The Austro-Marxists—concerned to 'solve' the national question without breaking up the Dual Monarchy's territorial integrity, so as to retain sufficient land mass for an advanced socialist economy—proposed to institute cultural autonomy, through a passport system that entitled bearers to the use of their national language and everything that flowed from that. Otto Bauer pointed out in 1907 that granting territorial self-determination to migrant workers' communities would merely set off a chain reaction of endless national struggles, as capital recruits increasing numbers of workers to be employed away from home.[14]

Against this, Lenin argued that socialists should advocate the right to territorial secession and nothing less. The Bolsheviks rejected the Austrians' assumption that national distinctions would endure. Lenin

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[12] *The General Council of the First International 1864–1866. The London Conference 1865. Minutes*, Moscow [n.d.], p. 246. Support for the Polish cause against autocratic Russia, synonymous with the suppression of democracy, had been a central theme for the European left since 1848.

[13] Karl Marx, 'Letter to Engels', 20 June 1866 in *Collected Works*, vol. 21, pp. 288–9.

[14] Otto Bauer, *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie*, Vienna 1907, p. 340.

thought them a feature of the epoch of bourgeois revolution; once their demands were met, they would lose their political salience. In order not to be outflanked by nationalist demands from other parties in countries where this was still a key issue, the workers themselves should support the right to secession. Would it not be better for Ukrainian workers to conquer power on such a programme, secede from Russia, and return into a revolutionary federation of their own will, rather than keep them 'inside' and negotiate rights that would inevitably be limited?[15]

Such radical internationalism would obviously only work in the context of an advancing world revolution. Once the Bolsheviks were forced to retreat, the right to secession was compromised, too. As a contender state facing the liberal heartland, the USSR perforce adopted aspects of the Austro-Marxist programme; the resulting blend of a restricted territorial approach with a subordinate cultural autonomy would eventually contribute to the relatively smooth dissolution of the USSR into fifteen separate nation-states, each containing sizeable minorities, after 1991. With hindsight, this reveals the contradiction at the root of the Marxist strategy. The politics of foreign relations was approached tactically and polemically, while the transformation of the capitalist economy and the transcendence of class society was theoretically elaborated in depth.

The Russian Revolution occurred just as Washington was taking over the leadership of the Atlantic heartland from London. US strategy would be sustained by a formally anti-imperialist, pro-freedom ideology. From an early date, Woodrow Wilson advocated a policy of channelling democratic aspirations into arrangements compatible with Western interests:

> The East is to be opened and transformed whether we will or no; the standards of the West are to be imposed upon it; nations and peoples which had stood still the centuries through are to be quickened, and made part of the universal world of commerce and of ideas . . . It is our particular duty, as it is also England's, to moderate the process in the interests of liberty; to impart to the peoples thus driven out upon the road of change . . . the habit of law . . . which we long ago got out of the strenuous processes of English history; secure for them, when we may, the free intercourse and the natural development which shall make them at last equal members of the family of nations.[16]

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[15] V. I. Lenin, 'The Ukraine', 28 June 1917, in *Collected Works*, vol. 25, Moscow 1977, pp. 91–2.
[16] Woodrow Wilson, 'Democracy and Efficiency', *Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 87, no. 521, March 1901, pp. 289–99.

In 1917, called upon to respond to the evolving political crisis in Europe after he had led the United States into the Great War, Wilson declared that national self-determination should be the guiding principle: 'That no nation should seek to extend its polity over any other nation or people, but that every people should be left free to determine its own polity, its own way of development, unhindered, unthreatened, unafraid, the little along with the great and powerful.'[17] Of course, as with the US warning to Bolívar 'not to be insolent with the strong', so here, too, 'the little' were not expected to challenge the overall order laid down by the great and powerful.

The Bolshevik Revolution threatened to turn this upside down. The revolutionary government declared an end to hostilities on the Eastern front, instructing Russian soldiers to fraternize with their German opposite numbers, and published the Tsar's secret treaties, exposing the machinations of the inter-state system and thereby jeopardizing popular support for the Western Allies. Tens of thousands of German-language newspapers were printed in Petrograd for distribution among the German soldiers, in the hope of kindling a revolution. As Trotsky arrived in Brest-Litovsk to discuss the terms of a peace with Germany, Lenin and Stalin, the People's Commissar for Nationalities, issued an appeal to the 'labouring Muslims of Russia and the East', annulling the Tsarist 1907 partition of Persia with Britain, the partition of Turkey and the seizure of Armenia. When the Brest conference opened, Trotsky issued an appeal, not only to the workers, but also to the 'oppressed and bled peoples of Europe'.[18]

Wilson's crusade

Yet if Marxist positions on national self-determination remained essentially tactical, the Western perspective was strategic. Indeed it was at this point that the sponsorship of nation-building by the Atlantic powers mutated from an intuitive, eclectic approach to a scientific one. In the summer of 1917 Wilson had instructed his chief-of-staff 'Colonel' House to assemble the group of experts that would be known as 'the Inquiry', to help formulate US strategy for structuring the post-war world. The President himself proposed his young advisor, Walter Lippmann, as its

[17] Wilson, address to the US Senate, 22 January 1917.
[18] Louis Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs*, abridged ed., New York 1960, p. 15.

secretary; Isaiah Bowman, Director of the American Geographical Society, and Columbia historian James Shotwell were influential members. Equipped with detailed maps, studies of Europe's national movements and demographic and economic data, the team set about sketching frontiers that would grant self-determination without creating new rivalries. The Inquiry produced its final draft on 22 December 1917, the day the Brest conference began. On 8 January 1918, Wilson gave his Fourteen Points speech, with Points 6 to 13, on national self-determination and territorial questions, adapted from the Inquiry report.[19]

Wilson's strategy put the resources of the United States behind a project of imperial global governance, in which nation-states carved from the defunct empires would operate as clients of the West against Bolshevism. This was the moment at which the US formally projected a rights-based *jus civitatis* as universal principle, laying the foundations for an 'international community', configured around the Lockean heartland, that would uphold such rights against illegitimate authority. It was this system which was to prevail at Versailles. The Soviet leadership had no difficulty highlighting the selectivity with which the Americans applied this principle, with the obvious aim of creating a *cordon sanitaire* in Eastern Europe against revolutionary Russia. 'You demand the independence of Poland, Serbia, Belgium, and freedom for the people of Austro-Hungary,' Karl Radek wrote in an exchange of notes between the Bolsheviks and Wilson in September 1918. 'But strangely we do not notice in your demands any mention of freedom for Ireland, Egypt, India, or even the Philippine Islands.'[20] Of course, the Wilsonian vision was never meant to serve the cause of genuine sovereign equality; it was intended to secure Western dominion, isolating and confronting any contenders, while opening up other societies to free access, not just economically but also politically.

The US, followed by the major European powers, now also formally subscribed to the principle of electoral representation for the large mass of the population. This was a historical turning point; Wilson's Crusade for Democracy effectively set in place the graded system of popular enfranchisement, at least in the advanced Western countries. If the actual implementation of electoral reform in Europe was soon derailed,

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[19] G. J. A. O'Toole, *Honorable Treachery. A History of US Intelligence, Espionage and Covert Action*, New York 1991, pp. 306–7.
[20] Cited in Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs*, p. 102.

as a result of the intensification of class struggles, this only confirmed that the world had not so much been 'made safe for democracy' as compartmentalized into nation-states, ideally operating on lines compatible with general ruling-class interests. This was certainly the case in the Middle East, where France and Britain carved today's nation-states from the provinces of the Ottoman Empire, recruiting new governing classes to offset the power of local Sunni notables. No concession was made to democratic aspirations, beyond playing off different elites against each other.

In Central Europe, the unstable parliamentary systems created in the revolutionary aftermath of the Great War soon collapsed into dictatorship. The hand of the West was not entirely absent from these events, but the indigenous ruling classes did not need outside support to understand the nature of the threat they faced. The prospect of socialists garnering majorities in elections inspired the organic intellectuals of the conservative ruling classes to develop ideas about restricting or manipulating democracy early on. In Italy, the neo-Machiavellians led by Gaetano Mosca advocated mobilizing mass sentiment by a language of existential struggle, an aesthetics of politics invoking civilization, destiny and war. In Germany, Carl Schmitt elaborated on the need for a state of exception to prevent general suffrage being used for a socialist transformation. But it was Joseph Schumpeter, in his 1942 *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, who formulated the notion of an electoral system restricted to a choice between trusted 'democratic elites' that would become a key element of American strategy in the post-war period.

Cold war projections

After the Second World War, the Atlantic powers faced the problem of extending the concept of rights-based citizenship to a 'global community of nation-states'.[21] The remaining European colonial empires had to be dismantled in face of the changing balance of forces, above all the potential for alternative national sponsorship by the Soviet Union and People's Republic of China. Once again, the unspoken rule of the decolonization process was one of class compromise between neo-colonial overseers and aspirant national bourgeoisies, even when masked by militant independence struggles. India offered the paradigmatic example

[21] Anthony Giddens, *The Nation State and Violence*, Cambridge 1985, p. 259.

for this process. The Congress-led agitation for independence was never intended to go beyond 'generating pressures for better and better compromises with the foreign overlords', leading to the 'most advanced compromise'—the withdrawal of British political power.[22]

The intellectual underpinning for American strategy in this period was provided by modernization theory—and, more broadly, by the mainstream disciplines of Political Science, Comparative Politics and International Relations. Before the War, Charles Merriam had engineered the marriage of American Political Science to the Rockefeller, Ford and other corporate foundations, through the structures of large-scale research projects. Merriam's work provided the blueprint for the blend of authoritarianism and minimal electoralism—without foregoing the option of outright coercion—that would guide American policy towards the newly emerging post-colonial world. In 1953 the Eisenhower Administration established the Committee on International Information Activities, bringing together the CIA, Radio Free Europe, a Psychological Strategy Board and members of MIT's Center for International Studies, a dedicated think-tank set up by the CIA and Ford Foundation, and headed by the economist Max Millikan. The Committee's aim was to coordinate the intellectual and political campaign against the USSR. Millikan and fellow economist Walt Rostow, another father of modernization theory, urged the need to 'deny the dangerous mystique' that 'only Moscow and Peking' could transform underdeveloped countries.[23] A countervailing programme was needed to help restructure them along liberal Anglophone lines, by identifying client rulers who could be trusted to 'leave the door open' and by setting the limits to legitimate political activity, outlawing or neutralizing any attempts at socialist organizing.

A vast research project, 'The Inter-University Study of Labour Problems in Economic Development', financed by the Ford Foundation, took on the task. Many of the big names in American post-war Political Science began their careers through this programme; the sheer scale of the operation was sufficient to establish its intellectual hegemony, working from the assumption that 'the ideal society was the "managed", "open", "affluent" capitalist society of the Western world which had reached its

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[22] Ajit Roy, *Contemporary India—A Perspective*, Bombay 1986, p. 29.
[23] Cited in Irene Gendzier, *Development Against Democracy: Manipulating Political Change in the Third World* [1985], Hampton, CT 1995, p. 28.

apogee in the United States.'[24] Those who would be prepared to manage the 'lock and key' arrangement from this perspective, however, would in many instances be autocrats and dictators. 'They are not the people, under normal circumstances, that we would want to support', Secretary of State Dulles confided *in camera* to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1953. 'We would be trying to get somebody else, but in times like these, in the unrest of the world today, and the divided spirit, we know that we cannot make a transition without losing control of the whole situation.'[25]

How could elections be made 'free and fair', yet nevertheless deliver secure results? Robert Dahl's 1956 *Preface to Democratic Theory* proposed the concept of polyarchy to describe a functional alternation of rule with majority voting. The parameters of a polyarchic democracy were explored in *Political Man* (1959) by Seymour Martin Lipset, one of the participants in the 'Study of Labour Problems' programme. Lipset argued that the premise for a stable democracy was a 'common value system', which would underpin the constitutionally secured alternation of legitimate elites. To qualify for electoral politics, a party must not act as the representative of any clearly defined class, for if its support base reflects 'basic social divisions' too closely, no compromise can be achieved. A country would not qualify as a stable democracy if a 'totalitarian'—i.e., Communist—party could succeed in winning 20 per cent of the vote, or had done so at any point in the past 25 years. In other words, the criterion for democracy becomes the outcome of the electoral process—a government responsive to US direction, presiding over a society compatible with Western capitalist interests—rather than popular sovereignty as such. Indeed, a stable democracy 'may rest on the general belief that the outcome of an election will not make too great a difference in society'.[26]

Democratization?

The 1960s and 70s, however, were characterized rather by a shift towards dictatorship. The Indonesian military coup of 1965 overthrew President

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[24] Anthony Carew, *Labour under the Marshall Plan*, Manchester 1987, p. 196.

[25] *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Historical Series)*, vol. 5, Washington, DC 1976, p. 387.

[26] Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man*, London 1969, pp. 32, 48. Small wonder that only the English-speaking West, Australia, New Zealand, Scandinavia, the Low Countries and Switzerland were considered stable democracies by Lipset's standards.

Sukarno and brought General Suharto to power; the ensuing massacres of Indonesian Communist Party members literally eliminated the threat of the left, in the most populous country of Southeast Asia. The US had been closely involved in grooming an alternative client elite in Indonesia, from generals and administrators down to university professors, with the Ford Foundation playing a key role. The Suharto coup was a dramatic example of how to switch back from enlightened autocracy to dictatorship, when popular sovereignty threatened to become a real force.[27] The Indonesian bloodbath was famously applauded by *Time* magazine as 'the West's best news in Asia'. The gearing back from democracy to dictatorship would continue, notably in Latin America. The Brazilian generals had already proclaimed martial law in 1964; in Chile, Allende's government was overthrown in 1973; the Argentinian Junta seized power in 1976.

This was the context addressed by William Douglas's *Developing Democracy* in 1972. It was a mistake, Douglas argued, to think that only dictators could be entrusted with tutelage of their populations. A 'regimented democracy' might remove the need for coercion, provided it was bolstered by 'transplanting mechanisms', in the form of reliable mass organizations, and the population exposed to daily information flows to shape their overall outlook.[28] The thinking of Lipset, Douglas and others contributed to the shift in policy advice that accompanied the Reagan Administration's counter-revolutionary offensive in the 1980s. This involved a move from political developmentalism, central to the discipline of Comparative Politics, to a form of 'democracy promotion' in which the West would aim to exert its influence predominantly through 'civil society' and the economy. This of course presupposes open access and a liberalized economy, maintained both by the global institutions established by the Lockean West—IMF, World Bank and so on—and by client finance ministers, usually now the product of elite American universities.

Yet the very success of the neoliberal project of the 1980s and 90s has also served to impoverish and de-legitimize the state as a structure of social protection. The unleashing of global capital, combined with post-Cold War pressure from the West to 'open up', has rendered

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[27] David Ransom, 'Ford Country: Building an Elite for Indonesia', in Steve Weissman, ed., *The Trojan Horse: A Radical Look at Foreign Aid*, San Francisco 1974.
[28] William Douglas, *Developing Democracy*, Washington 1972.

sovereignty outside the Atlantic heartlands ever more commercialized and fractured, undermining the 'national containers' that the West once fostered. The upshot has been to create a generalized crisis of the nation-state on which Western dominion has rested for so long. This loss of underlying structure has been compared to the changes that 'wracked Europe' in the 16th and 17th centuries.[29] If this is so, then the transmission mechanism that links Western influence to the operations of a client governing class risks becoming disconnected; jerking at a broken gearbox makes no sense.

Arab challenge

The Arab world, in revolt and once again under attack, finds itself in the midst of a triple crisis: the crisis of Western hegemony, the crisis of capital and the crisis of the nation-state. The Arab peoples have had to fend for themselves, in a Middle East dishevelled by creeping privatization, rampant corruption and mass unemployment, with hunger threatening if food prices increase at all. The very conditions of survival in the region are in jeopardy: the fresh water supply is being exhausted, harvest yields are falling, demographic pressures are on the rise. States are failing even in their role as containers to hold a labour reserve or surplus population. At the same time, the mantras of Pan-Arabism and, more distant already, the Islamic *Umma* and Caliphate, cannot simply be invoked to right the wrongs of post-colonial state-building under Western auspices. The mid-20th-century advocates of Islamic unity such as Sayyid Qutb or Maulana Maududi, who denounced the nation-state as a blasphemous 'idol', underrated the extent to which each of the 57 countries with Muslim majorities had been following its own path already. The catalogue of victories and defeats that shaped a national framework within each jurisdiction cannot just be wished away; they have crystallized their own historical and cultural residues.

As to Arab unity, this is also something that is not simply waiting round the corner, if only Western influence could be rolled back. Throughout their history, the Arabs have been less in contact with each other than is often assumed. As the fighting in Libya at the time of writing highlights, their living spaces tend to be separated by tracts of desert. Hence, if anything like 'Arab unity' is to be achieved at some point, Nazih Ayubi

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[29] Ronnie Lipschutz, *The Constitution of Imperium*, Boulder, CO 2009, p. 8.

has argued, 'it is more likely to be through a strengthening, rather than a negation, of the territorial states in the Arab world.'[30] Yet here precisely the current revolt intervenes by assaulting, necessarily, the state structures which have been frozen for decades into dictatorship and autocracy by a compromise between local rulers and their Western overseers. This is not, then, a revolution in which the social forces associated with a new way of life press forward to take the place of defunct governing classes, no longer able to hold the line. Instead, it may well be that the current storms raging across the Middle East are part of a planetary depression, signalling a structural weakening of the post-colonial state form through which the West has long exercised its control. This is not to denigrate the dedication and courage of those stepping forward, often at the risk of their lives. But as with the leftward turn in Latin America or the democratization of countries like Indonesia, it is hard to overlook in the struggles taking place in the Arab Middle East, not just the loosening of Western supremacy, but also the element of disintegration of the nation-state, which—once disconnected from the structures of Anglo-American and EU direction, and shorn of their client officials—would be necessary to settle in law, and defend in practice, the sovereign achievements of the popular movements themselves.

[30] Nazih Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State*, London 2009, p. 148.