

Post-Labour's New Imperialism

Ken Coates

Reordering the World, The Long-term Implications of 11 September, edited by Mark Leonard with a foreword by Tony Blair, is published by the Foreign Policy Centre. It features thirteen other papers besides that of Robert Cooper, considered here.

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Robert Cooper, who is said to be not without influence in Downing Street, is the author of what has been proposed as a keynote text for British foreign policy, published under the general title *Reordering the World*. This is presented with a foreword by Tony Blair, who thinks that it, and the essays which accompany it, add up to a blueprint 'for a more secure, prosperous and just world'. The bizarrely misnamed 'war on terror' will, while such blueprints multiply, cause disorder, civilian deaths, and general mayhem to multiply with them; but whether they will conduce to security or prosperity among the warriors remains to be seen. Justice will be nowhere in evidence. That is why this paper provokes sour responses. It has already moved Tam Dalyell to give his judgement: 'The Tsarina of Russia was better advised by Rasputin than the Prime Minister is by this maniac'. However, Mr. Cooper surely knows his Tsarina, and has had more sense than counsel her against her own ample prejudices.

Cooper identifies 1989 as the end not only of the Cold War, but also of a European state system which had endured from the time of the Thirty Years War onwards. Conveniently, he achieves topicality for this thought by claiming that 'September 11th (2001) showed us one of the implications' of this agenda.

Cooper's assumption is that international order has heretofore been based on either hegemony or balance. The two concepts have not been mutually exclusive: empires may have been 'generally static', but the more that they have established security zones within themselves, the greater has been their need to maintain balance all around them. It is not necessary to follow this argument through the detail of recent history. But most of us will recognise a degree of truth in it.

Cooper's world contains a 'pre-modern' zone of semi-anarchic states, many of them former colonies, in which the rule of law scarcely exists. He cites countries such as

Somalia and 'until recently' Afghanistan. Probably this caveat about Afghanistan will prove to be unjustified, since, in spite of noisy boasts to the contrary, there is no sign whatever of the establishment of a stable state in that unfortunate country.

The second zone identified by Cooper is that of 'post-imperial, post-modern states who no longer think of security primarily in terms of conquest'. This zone includes the European Union, Canada and probably Japan. It does not include the United States, which slips off the map altogether. This is the central flaw in Cooper's argument. Hamlet, indeed, without the Prince.

We are left with the third zone of 'traditional "modern" states'. These behave as states always have, following Machiavellian principles of *raison d'état*. Cooper thinks of India, Pakistan and China in this category, but it is difficult to see why. The Pakistan Government tumbles in and out of military dictatorship, and is now under the direct suzerainty of the United States. India is more and more openly a client of the United States. And China has the honour of being the major league enemy of the United States, insofar as the advance of trade and business permit.

The taxonomy proposed by Zbigniew Brzezinski in his book *The Grand Chessboard* locates a number of enemy states, including Iran and Iraq as well as China, which must at all costs be prevented from joining their forces. Brzezinski at any rate would not put these three states in the same category as those in the Indian subcontinent. Cooper does not explain how some states remain resolutely modern (and usually badly behaved), whilst others are mired in pre-modernism, or elevated to post-modern status. All live in one world. He will find some explanation for these inequalities if he takes himself to the reports of the United Nations Development Programme in the late years of the last century.

Imperialism or not, these reports show that the combined Gross Domestic Product of forty-eight countries is less than the wealth of the three richest people in the world. Fifteen billionaires have assets greater than the total national income of Africa, south of the Sahara. Thirty-two people own more than the annual income of everyone who lives in South Asia. Eighty-four rich people have holdings greater than the GDP of China, a nation with 1.2 billion citizens.

These inequalities were less yawning when they came to the attention of Tinbergen, who proposed a global plan to diminish them. Basing himself on the best estimates of the means likely to be available in the advanced world, he devised a redistributive plan of aid investment, which took account of the estimated capacities of the underdeveloped countries to deploy it. When his plan was launched, Tinbergen persuaded the United Nations that the aid budgets of the rich countries should be fixed at not less than 0.7% of their GDP. Some years later, I wrote to Tinbergen, who was keenly aware that almost no countries in the rich world had hit his target. He explained to me that the target could not remain static: and that to achieve the same aim of development in the underdeveloped world, it would, in the early 1980s, be necessary to seriously increase the rich world's contribution to the growth of the poor. His calculation

was that this would require tripling the input from the economically advanced countries, to 2.1% of GDP. However, rich country aid budgets made no such move: and in fact all shared in a process of attrition, shrinking to pathetic levels. Far from reflecting 'pre-modern' conditions, poor countries show the many faces of poverty, which is every bit as 'modern' or even 'post-modern' as the richer countries which share the same globe. It was the post-modern economy which rewarded the richest 225 persons on the globe with one trillion dollars in 1995, and shared the same sum of money between the poorest 47% of the entire global population. (That is to say, 2.5 billion individuals.) The haves and the have-nots cohabit, and if there is any truth behind the myths of globalisation, the lines which the powerful draw on maps in order to assist the movement of their policemen and soldiers are secondary phenomena, not primary causes. For these, we might enquire at the offices of the IMF or the World Bank.

However, in what Cooper regards as the post-modern world, there has been a degree of transformation in the state system.

Already in the early years of the new Soviet Union, Bertrand Russell had perceived the need for a balancing force to hold the ground between the Russians and the Americans. Hence the political call for a United Europe. Twenty years later, too late to bypass Hitler and the Second World War, Jean Monnet and his colleagues were able to take the first giant steps in this direction, in order to overcome the prolonged conflict between France and Germany.

The establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community pooled the resources of military preparation, and was designed to create an alternative to a renewed arms race between France and Germany. Quite typically, advisors to the British Prime Minister do not choose to emphasise this experiment, which still has residual power and magnetism in the European Union. It has encouraged thoughts about federalism, and developed a working political consensus which until recently remained rather strong, basing itself on the interplay between Social and Christian Democracy. Britain was outside this consensus, and the British establishment loathes it. British participation in the European Union has thus been for the most part reluctant, and apt to call on American support to maintain a pretence of autonomous behaviour. But the development of the European Union has itself been hesitant, and hedged about with difficulties.

Cooper thinks that the peace in Europe is not primarily attributable to responses to the European Union, nor even to Nato. But the European Union was simultaneously an effort to establish pacific co-operation between Europe's main military competitors, and to secure a social balance which could offer an economically workable and electorally viable alternative to Communism, for the great majority of European working populations. The great foreign policy question in all European chancelleries at the end of the Second World War was the 'problem of Germany'. Cooper cuts his teeth in an age when this problem has apparently disappeared: but for a historian with instant recall of the Thirty Years

War this reveals an interestingly patchy amnesia. True, Cooper is interested in the conditions which were propitious for German unity, after the collapse of the Berlin Wall. But the essential, and shaping, initiative which made peace both possible and inevitable in Europe took place fifty years earlier, with the formation of the Coal and Steel Community.

The essential Englishness of Cooper's model is betrayed in one instant flash of perception. 'But if the nation state is a problem then the superstate is certainly not a solution.' This is a reaction against the British travesty of a united Europe, which in truth never sought to create a superstate, but which has always been blackguarded in the British press as a more or less failed attempt to do precisely that.

Federal Europe was an attempt to transcend statehood by opening space for federal democracy. Such space could be assured by varying kinds of confederal relations, and could generate, and hopefully resolve, endless disagreements within the democratic balances that opened up. But it did not constitute a plan for a superstate.

The Christian/Social Democratic social model has been seriously undermined by neo-liberalism during the decade since the end of the Cold War, and its political expression is therefore weakened. The result of the onslaught of liberal reforms, highly satisfactory as it has been to Mrs. Thatcher and Mr. Blair, with his new *entente* embracing Berlusconi and Aznar, has for the time being put paid to Jacques Delors famous promise to the TUC in Britain that Europe was now 'socialism by the backdoor'.

At its height, the European achievement was to hold out a prospect of co-ordinated social development, setting standards which might be extended across the Union. For those who wish to cut back on welfare expenditure it was simple to argue that this betokened an extension of state power. But for the recipients of pensions and welfare support, this was seen as an extension of their human rights, and the state would seem an almost invisible partner. The rules and regulations which were agreed in the heyday of this Europe did not strengthen the state power so much as the principle of individual entitlement. For this reason, there was a great deal of chatter about social Europe, and some progress towards it: but over many years there was scant progress indeed towards the integration of European foreign and security policy.

European convergence has more recently moved into areas which do involve military and diplomatic decision making. These have not served to reinforce popular support for the development of European Union, which has instead been to some extent undermined by the weakening of the social dynamic. Where ten years ago ardent Europeans wished to bring about a standardisation of pension entitlements, and joined us in convening a Pensioners' Parliament, or a European Parliament of Disabled People, now pensioners can happily be left to the mercies of the more parsimonious Member-States, while military policy is supposed to push up to the forefront of the action.

In spite of this, the advance to military Union falters, since parsimony rules

there, too. There is no European will to pay for the expensive equipment which would be necessary for the armament of a superstate, especially while neo-liberalism seeks to cull basic social spending.

However, there *is* a superstate, but it is firmly established on the other side of the Atlantic, and it enjoys unparalleled hegemony, with strong economic influence and overwhelming military muscle. The United States of America is the preponderant military power in the modern world, and until this power implodes, it seems set upon flexing its muscles all around the entire globe. Now it asserts itself in Afghanistan, the Philippines, Georgia, Somalia, and Yemen. Tomorrow it is poised to attack Iraq. Iran and North Korea are inscribed on the candidate list for imminent attention. For the time being, however, it is enough for the 'Allies' to be obedient.

Robert Cooper tells us about a gradual breaking down, in Europe, of many of the elements which used to be deemed inseparable from the idea of sovereignty. For sure, he presents us with an idealised picture, but because of the advance of the European idea, this is not completely without reference to reality. However, this picture is achieved by attempting a doctrine of American exceptionalism, since 'it is not clear that the US Government or Congress accepts either the necessity or desirability of interdependence, or its corollaries of openness, mutual surveillance and mutual interference, to the same extent as most European Governments now do'.

This is a prudent admission. The United States confronts and denounces any notion of interdependence. Its openness is for internal consumption, and any surveillance in which it engages is the very opposite of mutual. The United States is number one, and none dare gainsay the fact.

So, the United States defied the International Court of Justice at The Hague, and refused to accept its jurisdiction in the case which was brought by Nicaragua against American piracy, and intimidation. Ever since that time, the United States Government has refused to admit almost all responsibility to international juridical institutions, and has directly rebelled against and rejected the proposals for an International Criminal Court.

In the field of co-ordinated state action, things are no different. The United States has done all it could to wreck the environmental accords of Kyoto, and has shown how skin deep is its commitment to the World Trade Organisation as soon as it began to encounter undesirable implications for American steel policy. Most recently we have seen a series of purges in international organisations, culminating in the dismissal of Ambassador José Bustani, the Brazilian, from the Directorship of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

If the United States can present a terrible punishment to all who threaten its perceived interests, where its own sovereignty is absolute, its view of the sovereignty of others is less dogmatic. Norman Lemann (*New Yorker*, April 1, 2002), in a perceptive account of 'The Next World Order' believes that the Bush Administration may have a 'brand new doctrine of power'.

'I asked Haass [Director of Policy Planning for the State Department] whether there is a doctrine emerging that is as broad as Kennan's containment. "I think there is," he said. "What you are seeing from this Administration is the emergence of a new principle or body of ideas – I'm not sure it constitutes a doctrine – about what you might call the limits of sovereignty. Sovereignty entails obligations. One is not to massacre your own people. Another is not to support terrorism in any way. If a government fails to meet these obligations, then it forfeits some of the normal advantages of sovereignty, including the right to be left alone inside your own territory.'"

It is above all in the military field that the United States has staked its claim to be the sole protagonists of the New World Order. The doctrine of Full Spectrum Dominance has now been reiterated across the military community in the United States, in one sententious document after another. 'For the joint force of the future' they tell us in *Joint Vision 2020*, 'Full Spectrum Dominance' [will be achieved, that is] 'the ability of US forces, operating unilaterally or in combination with multinational and interagency partners, to defeat any adversary and control any situation across the full range of military operations'.

Full Spectrum Dominance is not mainly about crushing enemies. Of course, enemies have to be crushed, and the technology has been developed to destroy them utterly. But the political system does not revolve around dead enemies. The major problem is, how to control live allies. Zbigniew Brzezinski summed all this up when he identified the domination of the Eurasian block of states and territories as the necessary first step to global domination. Here are the golden rules:

'The three great imperatives of imperial geostrategy are to prevent collusion and maintain security dependence among the vassals, to keep tributaries pliant and protected and to keep the barbarians from coming together.'

Thus, with the declaration of the unfortunate war on terrorism, Nato rushed to report for duty. Reeling from the shock of the atrocity at the Twin Towers, it was perhaps not surprising that Nato allies instantly agreed to invoke the article in the Nato Treaty which treats an attack on one Member as an attack on all.

With this catch-all declaration of support for the new 'alliance', what did the Americans do? They instantly sidelined Nato altogether from the future action. The war in Afghanistan was not conducted under joint Nato command, but under exclusive American proprietorship. Favoured allies were invited, selectively, to discharge subordinate roles which the Americans deemed appropriate for them. Nato might just as well have not existed, so undeveloped was its joint involvement in the ensuing operations.

If it was perfectly able to ignore an actual alliance, life proved somewhat more difficult in the case of the Arab world, which had been thought to be largely composed of subordinate and compliant states owing fealty to the United States. In fact, the Arab world is in no mood to attack Iraq or even to observe an American attack on that country.

The state system of the Middle East is undoubtedly long past its sell-by date, since it was fashioned out of the collapsing Ottoman Empire by the competing imperialisms of France and England. The advent of the Americans transformed all the dependencies, but resolved none of the inherited problems which arose when the imperial powers drew lines across the map, and fashioned protectorates according to what caprice they fancied.

The large Kurdish population in that post-First World War settlement had no state, but was dispersed across several. Yet another full-scale war against Iraq would be bound to reawaken Kurdish discontent with this unsustainable situation. But the victims of this discontent would include many former allies of the United States, who would find the resultant chaos painful to bear. In the same way, all the fractures in the Muslim world, all the ancient grievances of Sunnis and Shiites, would be forcefully recalled.

All this implies that unchallenged military power is no golden key to the future. Although they can vaporise the entire Middle East, the Americans are in grave danger of losing any vestige of influence over it.

This just makes matters worse. The more insecure they feel, the more the Americans look for security in weapons. Now it becomes necessary to jump the barriers and go nuclear.

The January 2002 United States Nuclear Posture Review reaffirms the centrality of nuclear weapons in US national security policy. Its basic thrust is to attain maximum flexibility with regard to nuclear arsenal size and capabilities, with minimum treaty limitations. Essentially, the Review relocates nuclear weapons within a broad spectrum of warfighting capabilities. The review fundamentally contradicts US commitments and obligations to non-nuclear signatories of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). It also calls into question the commitments under the NPT of the six European Nato members, including the United Kingdom, who share in the use of United States nuclear weapons based in Europe.

Does this mean, then, that we should follow Robert Cooper in his elaborate model of post-modern imperialism? Not if Occam's razor still exists.

The simple map of the modern political world charts American power and its influences. If there are derelict areas in which 'pre-modern' rules apply, that is because the United States had found no use for their resources, and no strategic advantage from bombing them or exacting tribute from them.

Many strategic uses have been propounded for contested areas such as Afghanistan, most of them involving resources, whether oil or water. But the initial attraction of Afghanistan for the United States was almost purely geo-strategic, since the Soviet influence over Afghanistan and subsequent invasion of that country provided a golden opportunity to humiliate the Soviets, and 'avenge the Vietnam war'. This, indeed, was Brzezinski's stated reason for investing so much effort in the Afghanistan mountains. This was also the reason for inventing and honing the lawless legions of Osama bin Laden, who was patented in the United States and designed to bring tribulation to its enemies.

Indeed, was not Saddam Hussein also a creature of the United States and its most intimate allies, when he was encouraged eastwards into war with Iran? The war against terrorism is largely designed to liquidate the unforeseen consequences of American policy on terrorism, always capricious, never influenced by conscience, and ever likely to go wrong.

Precisely because Europe is in a ghostly 'post-modern' state, it is not a state, and is acutely ill-designed to pretend to be an imperial power. Cooper thinks that membership of the Union may create some sort of analogue to the British Commonwealth. But unless the rules of the Union are changed, membership entails rights and duties, the so-called *acquis communautaire*.

Already, the attempts at enlargement are deeply troubled by this problem, because free movement of capital, without concomitant free movement of labour, will create powerful tension in the old Community heartland. The more that the constitution of the European Union is tampered with and subverted, to the disadvantage of consistency and principled action, the greater the jeopardy in which the Union will find itself. Freedom of movement of capital, but not of labour, may solve some diplomatic problems with the Poles, but the problems which it will create will not be simply diplomatic, but will engender real economic conflicts. How could this problem be overcome by creating client states for Europe's Member-States? The idea is unlikely because it will constitute a complete reversion to what Cooper thinks of as imperialism, abandoning all the virtues which he associates with post-modernism. Much though the Emperor Blair might relish the opportunity to wear funny hats around his part of Afghanistan, any more fundamental economic relationship will prove impossible to fix, because the conquest of territories is liable to settle on the rule of a single power. What to share with others? The benefits or the bills? The European Union as a collective imperial power would be in no better case: a permanent quarrel between the Member-States, in which the colonies would always be free to play their Lords and Masters off against one another. This invention won't run.

Robert Cooper's elaborate picture of the preconditions for a new kind of 'benign' imperialism will not persuade any of the victims, and will rapidly prove impractical for those who might temporarily lay claim to this or that piece of empire. He is drawn into the attempt to theorise all this out of the chaos which has been generated by Full Spectrum Dominance. Full Spectrum Dominance is the residual half of the Cold War couplet, founded on an incredible arms race, and able to build monstrously swollen military machines. The Russian half of this competition collapsed because the Soviet economy was too feeble to sustain it. The Americans have commanded larger resources, but their half of this military monster is surely also likely to implode.

Security will surely be difficult to find in the only place in which it can reside, which is, Full Spectrum Democracy. Had we been wiser, we might have been able to state the case for Full Spectrum Democracy before the end of the Cold War, and to create a basis for the approach to it. Now we are compelled to suffer from our oversights during those days, and there will be more fraught and

perilous times as the domination syndrome continues to work its way through the political system. Yes, this could kill us all, since there are those with great power and influence in the United States who are concerned to make their most efficacious weapons more effective by giving them a nuclear bite.

But this map of power which is grandly and boastfully charted by Mr. Blair's advisers, is a map of the road to nowhere. Only by setting ourselves the agenda of Full Spectrum Democracy, by asking what it entails and bringing its goals within our sights, will we ever become able to visualise a world in which our children will find it fit to live.

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