

The

“Failed States”

Doctrine

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The “Failed states” doctrine

“Solomon Islands, one of Australia’s nearest neighbours, is a failing state”, declares the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) in a report to the Australian Government. For the sake of Australia’s interests and the interests of regional and global security Australia must intervene, says the ASPI report. Australia must take over and reconstruct the institutions of governance and the economy of the Solomon Islands.

On what basis does the report decree the Solomon Islands a “failed state”? The list of indictments includes: “weak institutions, corrupt government, criminalisation of politics, poor law and order, insufficient revenue, economic stagnation, social dislocation, disaffected and alienated youth, a growing culture of violence, international neglect, collapse of government services, disillusioned and passive populations, and a plentiful supply of guns.”

The Solomon Islands is “fatally damaged”, in a “classic vicious circle ... from which there appears no escape”.

What’s more, the Solomon Islands are not alone, “most countries in the Southwest Pacific face major problems of political and economic viability, and some of them could go the way of Solomon Islands”. (ASPI report)

The Australian Government has sent troops, police and administrators to take over the institutions of government and the economy. There is no time limit on the occupation.

“... the rest of the world expects Australia to shoulder a lot of the burden because this is our part of the world, this is our patch”, said Prime Minister

John Howard, arguing for Australia's right to intervene in the affairs of another sovereign country and take over its government.

According to the ASPI report there is a "more or less universal pattern of post-independence state failure around the world".

Using this and similar arguments the US, Britain and Australia are preparing to stage pre-emptive strikes in other countries. Many more wars and interventions are being prepared.

The wars already waged in Afghanistan, Yugoslavia and Iraq and those threatened against Syria, Iran and North Korea are only the beginnings.

These interventions are nothing short of occupations and re-colonisation so that US, British, Australian and other transnational corporations can take over the governments, plunder the resources and exploit the people of these countries.

Features of globalisation

There is nothing new about wars, the occupation and colonisation of foreign territories, the installation of puppet governments, the carve-up of territories and the rearranging of state borders. They are the defining features of imperialism or what is now commonly referred to as globalisation.

The theories used to legitimise imperialism's aims and the methods used to achieve them, however, do change according to historical circumstances.

The big picture

The outcome of World War II saw the defeat of Nazi Germany and its allies, Italy and Japan. They were knocked out for a time as imperialist countries, and stripped of all their former colonies. Fascism, a monstrous political manifestation spawned by monopoly capitalism, had been

repelled, its drive for world domination brought to a grinding halt when the Nazi war machine was smashed by the Soviet Union.

National liberation movements swept the world and almost all the former colonies won their independence. A number of new socialist states emerged following the war. Industrial development in many countries meant that the working class became more numerous on a world scale. Trade unions emerged in most countries as did strong and influential communist parties.

However, capitalism and colonialism did not give up the fight. While most former colonies gained their **political** independence many remained under the **economic** domination of the developed capitalist countries which imposed their economic policies through the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and by their discriminatory trade policies.

The main capitalist countries continued their struggle against socialism through the cold war and by way of trade boycotts and political destabilisation.

Setback

The break-up of the Soviet Union and overthrow of socialist governments in Eastern Europe changed the balance of forces in the world in favour of imperialism. The imperialist powers were freed to focus on their global ambitions and emboldened Western leaders, particularly those of the US whose military might surpasses that of all other world powers, launched a campaign for world domination.

As the British and US Government leaders and their advisers see it, there is nothing to stop them from openly re-colonising and re-ordering the world under their domination. And the Howard Government is happy to assist and pick up some crumbs for Australian corporations.

While the language of the political leaders of the capitalist countries has changed their objectives remain the same. There is one major difference, however. Instead of attempting to enforce the direct political and

economic rule of the imperialist country as was the case in the colonies of the former British, French, Portuguese and other empires, one of the methods today is for “regime change” so that a local government subservient to the ruling power is established. This form of control is known as neo-colonialism.

A new kind of imperialism

In a book entitled *Re-ordering the World*, Robert Cooper, a former diplomat and adviser to the British Labour Government of Tony Blair, gives expression to imperialism’s new forthrightness, confidence, arrogance and racist views:

“Empire and imperialism are words that have become terms of abuse in the post-modern world. Today, there are no colonial powers willing to take on the job, though the opportunities, perhaps even the need, for colonisation is as great as it ever was in the 19th century.

“Those left out of the global economy risk falling into a vicious circle. Weak government means disorder and that means falling investment...

“All the conditions for imperialism are there ... the weak still need the strong and the strong still need an orderly world...

“What is needed then is a new kind of imperialism, one acceptable to a world of human rights and cosmopolitan values.” (Cooper, *Re-ordering the World* p.17)

Cooper explains what tactics are to be employed: “The challenge to the postmodern world is to get used to the idea of double-standards. Among ourselves, we operate on the basis of laws and open co-operative security.

“But when dealing with more old-fashioned kinds of states outside the post-modern continent of Europe, we need to revert to the rough methods of an earlier era – force, pre-emptive attack, deception, whatever is necessary to deal with those who still live in the 19th century world of ‘every state for itself’.” (pp.15-16)

Think Tanks

Joseph Nye, from Harvard University, points out that “in modern democracies ... the use of force requires an elaborate moral justification to ensure popular support” and “Power is the ability to effect the outcomes you want, and, if necessary, to change the behaviour of others to make this happen”. (*Re-ordering the World* pp.2-3)

For this purpose a number of “think tanks” have been created to help governments plan and justify their operations. They work out what has to be done and how it should be done. They may also work out costings. Above all, they work out how “pre-emptive strikes” and outright wars are to be “sold” to an increasingly sceptical and resisting public.

The Australian Strategic Planning Institute (ASPI), the Sydney Institute, the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), the British Foreign Policy Centre are among a number of such bodies. Even Australia’s new Governor-General established his own conservative institute – Future Directions.

It is these “think tanks” that have come up with the concept of “failed states”, “rogue states”, “new imperialism”, the “civilising” and “modernising” mission of the developed capitalist countries, etc.

“In the wake of 11 September, the Arab and Muslim worlds confront a civilisational challenge unlike any they have faced since the fall of the Ottoman Empire.” (Kana Makiya, a professor in Near Eastern and Judaic Studies at Brandeis University, California, “A Civilisational Challenge”, *Re-ordering the World* p.48)

There are also the policy directions handed down by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), IMF, World Bank and WTO.

The leading corporate powers and their governments pay think tanks and consultants hundreds of millions of dollars to develop these theories and the associated propaganda to sell their policies to the people.

Failed states

“The Cold War dichotomy of freedom versus communism has been replaced with a new organising principle: order versus disorder”, writes Mark Leonard, Director of The Foreign Policy Centre. This is a British think tank backed by Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair. Leonard’s remarks were made in the introduction to *Re-ordering the World* (p.xi).

“The Arab world today comprises a veritable cauldron of collapsing economies and mass unemployment overseen by ever more repressive regimes”, writes Kanan Makiya. (*Re-ordering the World* p.50)

Makiya refers to a “constellation of ultimately failed states” in the Middle East and attributes the terrorist problem to “the mess that the Arab part of the Muslim world is in”. (*Re-ordering the World* pp.52-3)

These “failed” or “pre-modern” states as Robert Cooper also calls them – former colonies – pose a threat internationally. We are told they can be used as a base by terrorists, drug rings, etc, “for attacks on the more orderly parts of the world”.

Jack Straw, the British Foreign Secretary in the Blair Government, adopts a similar approach: “Only ten out of roughly 120 wars in the 1990s were between states”, he said. “... when we allow governments to fail, warlords, criminals, drugs barons or terrorists fill the vacuum.”

Straw cites as examples Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo. He fails to mention that in the case of Yugoslavia it was the Western imperialist states that fomented and armed the separatist movements that launched wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and in Kosovo to break up the unified Yugoslav republic and defeat a legitimate and well-functioning government.

They are labelled “failed”, “uncivilised” and “chaotic” and it is the duty of the “successful states” to intervene and restore order and impose good government.

Reasons for failed states

It is no coincident that the “failed states” are former colonies. Straw, Blair, and others prefer not to discuss the history of colonisation – invasion, occupation, wars, slavery, exploitation, seizure of the land and resources of “their” colonial possessions, the imposition of Western religions, culture, languages, individualism, corruption, capitalist morality and distorted economic development.

The very imperialist powers that are using the social, economic and other problems of former colonies as an excuse to intervene, created those problems. They have a responsibility to assist and make reparations, but that is not the purpose of their intervention.

They are not about to give land back, nor do they intend giving the people control over their own resources. Quite the contrary. Their aim is to re-open mines that were closed by the people (as in Bougainville), plunder forests (as in PNG and the Solomons), take over oil resources (as in Iraq), take over government and public services and re-colonise in the name of carrying out a law and order mission and creating “global security”.

The ASPI reports does acknowledge the colonial past of the Solomons: “Recent events are in many respects the culmination of many years. In the South Pacific, the introduced institutions of the modern nation-state have been overlaid on top of a multiplicity of indigenous political structures.

“The latter have proven to be remarkably adaptable and their resilience in the face of colonial and post-colonial transformations provides the broader basis for the continuing weakness of the state.”

So it’s all the people’s fault for not completely abandoning their traditions and their indigenous political structures!

“The crisis in the Solomon Islands is less about the collapse of a coherent, functioning state, and more about the unraveling of the apparatus of colonial rule.” If they had not achieved independence and had remained a colony, all would presumably have been well.

Reasons for failure obscured

The description of states as successful or failed, as modern, post-modern or pre-modern, as “good” or “evil” hides the important class questions behind the actions of the US and British ruling classes. “Chaos”, “failed”, “rogue”, “unstable” are posed as a “threat to security”. All suggest questions of organisational and managerial skills which may be learnt with some assistance from the better educated and more experienced “civilised” states.

They hide the reality of imperialism and colonialism and its consequences. They cover up the manoeuvres of the main imperialist states as they interfere in the affairs of nation states, occupy them and take over their governments.

Nowhere in these theories is there mention of the real objectives for the West’s involvement in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone, or any other “failed state”.

Post-modern states

According to the British theoreticians the post-modern state, that is, the developed capitalist countries, have given up their national sovereignty for international sovereignty and globalisation. It has good governance, is civilised and pursues WTO and IMF policies. It accepts interdependence and globalisation with the breakdown of borders and adoption of universal values.

The post-modern state must open itself up to foreign investment and the “the interference of international organisations and foreign states ...”, says Robert Cooper, advisor to British Prime Minister Tony Blair. (*Re-ordering the World* p.18)

Having painted a picture of “failed” states that pose a threat to the orderly, civilised, successful world, the task is for the “civilised” states to intervene.

If these failed states become too dangerous, “the organised states may eventually have to respond”, says Cooper. He gives Afghanistan as one such instance.

“What form should intervention take?” Cooper asks and answers his own question:

“The most logical way to deal with chaos, and the one most often employed in the past, is colonisation. But colonisation is unacceptable to post-modern states”, he claims. “It is precisely because of the death of imperialism that we are seeing the emergence of the pre-modern world.” (*Re-ordering the World*, p.17)

Despite Cooper’s reservations, re-colonisation is the course now being taken by the imperialist powers. They assert that it is the way to stability and order.

Terrorist threat

Mark Leonard, director of the Foreign Policy Centre, speaks in terms of “an exciting political project”, a “global community project”, based on “the values of liberal democracy”. He claims that “11 September [2001] offers new hope in achieving this”.

The September 11 attacks and the Bali bombings are being used systematically by the leaders of the imperialist countries to argue that the world faces the threat of “terrorism”.

Tony Blair asserts in justification: “In this globalised world, once chaos and strife have got a grip on a region or a country, trouble is soon exported. Such regions and countries can become centres for trafficking in weapons, drugs and people; havens for criminal organisations; and sanctuaries for terrorists.” (*Re-ordering the World*, p. 119)

“... terrorists are strongest where states are weakest”, says Straw. (*Re-ordering the World*, p.98)

In today's globalised world says Blair, "tackling terrorism in the USA means dealing with issues on the ground in the mountains of Afghanistan; bringing economic security to just one town in northern England means addressing the international machinery of global finance. The international has become the domestic and the domestic international." (*Re-ordering the World*, p.120)

Old wars and new wars

Having raised the threat of terrorism globally, there is the question of how to deal with it. "Endless war", of a "new type" is the response.

Old wars were wars between states, "in which the aim is to inflict maximum damage on an enemy, and in which the decisive encounter is battle". (Mary Caldor, "The Power of Terror", *Re-ordering the World*, p.21)

Now, we are told that the key question is internal rather than external security. Successful states have a responsibility to not only maintain their own internal security but to ensure "failed states" are also internally secure and stable.

They must take pre-emptive action to prevent states failing, to prevent terrorism and impose universal humanitarian values.

Out with the United Nations

This theory raises the question of the relevance of the United Nations and international law which govern relations between states, and proscribe interference in the internal affairs of other nation states.

The idea that it is the responsibility of the UN Security Council to authorise the use of force has been thrown out by the US, Britain and the Australian Governments.

"Effective international action often requires leadership – the willingness of one country, or group of countries, to take primary responsibility for action", says Professor Malcolm Chalmers, whose vision is one of shared

responsibility with the US, “the ultimate security guarantor”. (*Re-ordering the World* p.82)

Mary Kaldor argues for an “alternative cosmopolitan politics”, one “based on tolerance and inclusiveness...” Ironically, her “alternative cosmopolitan politics” has to involve “military action in order to protect civilians and create secure areas where cosmopolitan politics can develop. But it is military action that is more like law enforcement than classic war...” (*Re-ordering the World* p.24)

New swing to fascism

Western governments are using these arguments to not only justify wars and occupations but also to impose fascist-like repressive laws on their own civilian populations.

In the USA it is the Patriot Act. In Australia it is the ASIO Bills, which give various agencies the right to incarcerate indefinitely almost any member of the community. These laws were passed in the name of anti-terrorism, but their real intention is for use against communists, trade unionists, peace activists, and the many others who question and take action against the policies of conservative governments and transnational corporations.

These policies not only pose a serious threat to the long held democratic rights to free speech and assembly but also threaten the concept of elected governments that are open to scrutiny and are accountable to the people.

“...the boundaries between states are of decreasing legal and moral relevance”, writes Professor David Held, from the London School of Economics. (*Re-ordering the World* p.61)

He suggests that the legal power and the powers and functions associated with a sovereign state are moving beyond national borders, permitting intervention in the internal affairs of other states, a process well advanced in the economic sphere by the IMF, WTO and World Bank. Now it is being extended to the political and military spheres.

Redrawing the map of the world

As quoted earlier, one of the aims is to redraw the map of the world, to re-carve the territories of the world among the imperialist powers.

There are differences between the European Union and the USA over how it should be divided and also within their governments, over the strategies and tactics to be used. Above all, there is serious concern that the objective of one of the imperialist powers, the United States, world domination, even overrides the interests of other imperialist powers.

These divisions and emerging tensions may provide opportunities for the anti-war and anti-globalisation movements to make gains.

Class struggle hidden from view

Besides the labels used to demonise the states of former colonies - “failed states”, “pre-modern states” – language is also manipulated in order to sell intervention and occupation to the people of the aggressor nations. Thus we have “security”, “national interests”, “peace”, helping the people of “failed” state, etc (the Solomon Islands occupation is titled in pigen “Operation Helpem Fren”).

The intention is to not only cover up the real purpose of intervention but to hide the class nature of the “war on terrorism”.

The struggle between labour and capital, between communists and capitalists, between imperialism and the people is dressed in new clothing.

There are baddies and goodies, but these are not defined in class terms, although in practice the outcomes are very much along class lines.

Hypocrisy abounds. The demand for “regime change” by whatever means (a former CIA operative defined “regime change” as assassination) is dependent on the government’s attitude to US and European investors, on its willingness to privatise government services and banks i.e. the provision of a stable investment environment for foreign capital.

Likewise the presence of terrorists is not evil when these terrorists are trained, armed and funded by the US, so long as they are serving the interests of the US and its closest allies.

It is the politics of the government being targeted that determines which governments will be toppled, which countries will be invaded.

If a country being targeted is not in chaos, does not already have a law and order problem or a crisis in government or a despotic dictator at the helm, then the first step is to create such a situation to justify a pre-emptive strike and invasion.

This was done, as already mentioned, in Yugoslavia and in Chechnya, is being arranged in Iran, in Indonesia, Zimbabwe, Liberia, and elsewhere. Race, religion and nationality are all being used to foster divisions.

The euphemisms abound, twisting the meaning of language on its head, all part of the attempt to present imperialism as acceptable and humanitarian.

The struggle for sovereignty and independence

As already mentioned, the defeat of fascism in WW2 led to the smashing of the colonial empires of Britain, France, Portugal, Germany, Italy and Japan. It resulted in the emergence of a number of socialist states.

With the breakup of the Soviet Union and the overthrow of socialist governments in the USSR and in eastern Europe imperialism was free to continue its drive to re-colonise the former colonies and to take back the many economic and political conditions and rights won by the working class throughout the world.

None-the-less, the socialist example survived and many lessons were learnt. The Third World countries, comprising those countries that had been former colonies, resisted the discriminatory policies being foisted on them by the IMF and the World Bank.

Today Third World countries continue their struggle for economic and political independence and to overcome the colonial legacy which has had devastating consequences on their people, economies, culture and environment.

Today, there is a world-wide anti-globalisation movement which is linked with the equally strong and active world peace movement.

War is an essential hand-maiden of imperialism and opposition to war is an essential part of the movement against capitalism and imperialism.

The world has never before witnessed such massive and world-wide demonstrations as took place against the war on Iraq. Although this movement, together with the refusal of many countries to bow to the dictates of the US in the United Nations, did not succeed in stopping the US, British and Australian aggression, it signalled a new level of consciousness and determination to act.

There is stubborn opposition among Third World countries to the economic policies which the developed capitalist countries are attempting to impose in the World Trade Organisation.

A number of new progressive governments have been elected – in Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, South Africa, the Democratic People's Republic of the Congo, Namibia, Cambodia, and in some Indian states, for example.

These governments face enormous economic and political pressures and destabilisation by the imperialist powers. Their election shows a new level of consciousness on the part of the people in these countries.

Despite its military superiority, the US war machine is becoming bogged down in Iraq as it faces massive rejection on the part of the Iraqi people who are strongly committed to the independence of their country and demand that the occupiers get out. Their resistance illustrates the point that while military technology creates the illusion of limitless and unstoppable power, people remain decisive.

Another factor is the endemic economic and social crisis of the developed capitalist countries. And although capitalist states still control enormous resources and political capital among the people in the capitalist states, the economic difficulties and the inherent drive of capitalist employers to intensify the exploitation of the working people, is driving down living standards and generating resistance.

Furthermore, the social and political policies of the political leaders in these countries have led to a widespread understanding of their class commitment to the interests of the transnational corporations. Their massive lies over the objectives of the war against Iraq are also becoming a major factor in the disillusionment of many in their political and moral integrity.

It is on this background of growing opposition that the imperialist powers are intensifying and speeding up their pre-emptive strikes against so-called “failed states”, using this excuse to re-impose their colonial domination and occupation of other countries with rich resources, particularly oil, or which occupy strategic positions, in their drive for world domination.

However, it is the consciousness of the people and their acts of opposition that will eventually stop this new imperialist drive to war and domination in which the sovereignty and independence of other countries would be destroyed.

It is the millions upon millions of ordinary people who have in their hands the real security and the real interests of the people of the whole world.

***Reordering the World*, edited by Mark Leonard, foreword by Tony Blair, published by The Foreign Policy Centre, London, 2002. J**

