

Are state leaders nationalistic? Do they consequently presume human nature to be essentially „bad“, refer to their politico-strategic policies as realistic and value mercantilism higher than politico-economic alternatives?

The reality, even though a quick glance at models of international relations would allow such premature conclusions (Pettman), differs. The quoted model of general international relations is more of a rough guideline than a fixed framework, where people could be pushed and nailed into their subcategories. The model is still highly helpful in explaining predominating links, as truly nationalistic state leaders, extremes such as Adolf Hitler come to mind, appear to fall quite neatly into the corresponding categories, and successful state-leading always incorporates realistic and mercantilistic features. Previous briefing papers have highlighted these links. Of course, not every state leader is as nationalistic as Hitler, in whose case nationalism had turned into fascism, but the extreme ought to highlight that the term itself has to be treated carefully, as being nationalistic is not being nationalistic.

Consequently, there are various degrees of nationalism, and it seems safe to proclaim that all state leaders have climbed onto the ladder of nationalism, even though not all wish to climb as high as Stalin or Hitler did. As a saying goes, „the higher you walk, the further you fall“. The formulation „so nationalistic“ implies that all state leaders have reached at least a certain rung of the ladder of nationalism, but in regard to state leaders, there is no clear „so nationalistic“. Just as you have to be „so“ good to make the All Blacks roster, not all Blacks are „so“ good. There are stars, starters and reserves, and even though they have all mastered the game of Rugby to a certain degree (being „so“ good enough to make the roster), they are not all „so“ good. If all rugby players were „so“ good though and nothing else, the 2005 Lions tour would be more exciting.

But why are state leaders nationalistic in the first place? Or are they? On the one hand, state leaders tend to get elected by a franchise living within certain borders. Ignoring the franchise's fears, hopes and interests is a first stepping stone towards sufficient time to spare for an autobiography. Truly acting in the interest of one's franchise is a completely different story, which is why the icon of contemporary, western nationalism, often labelled as patriotism, George W. Bush, spends as much time waving little star-spangled banners as he does undermining the franchise's true long-term interests.

State-leading is thus as much about acting nationalistic as about being something completely different, even though this is no automatism. Not all state leaders really are on the above mentioned ladder of nationalism, but claiming to be there suffices. Critics of contemporary democratic practices often claim that the „system“ is abused by the elites. Basically, democracies today resemble what E.H. Carr refers to as „the second period of Nationalism“, the critique goes. We live in a period in which nationalism (as a rhetoric facade by politicians) goes hand in hand with unfettered internationalism in the economical sphere and a rollback of socialist measures. Property is once again a condition for political rights, as the current bourgeoisie controls the puppets' dance. The puppets are the politicians, and as all politicians are basically equally bad, the theoretically democratic system gives the franchise a choice between „A“ and „A“ (US-example) or „A“, „A“, „a“, „a“ and several systematically discredited „b“, „c“ and „d“ (German-example). The work of decial is handled by the bourgeoisie, which owns all media channels and portrays its flag-waving idiots, or puppets, in the right light.

Of course, this criticism of democracy is overly simplistic, but nevertheless persuasive, even more so when current developments such as „globalization“ (whatever it really is) scare the franchise. At the end of the day, most of the voters are also not as disillusioned by politicians as conspiracy-theorists would prefer, and the nationalism of state-leaders is not as hollow as unchecked elitist-representation, the capital's dictatorship, would imply.

Just as Stephen Gerrard, the captain of Champions-league-winning Liverpool FC, is expected to stand up for his team's interests by his formidable squad and its numerous fans, a state leader is expected to stand up for his nation's interests. It is his job. Promising to work in the name of its franchise was the ticket to his mandate. Consequently, a state-leader has to be, or successfully claim to be, on the ladder of nationalism, but if he has not climbed too high, politico-economic philosophies such as liberalism and socialism can be incorporated in an elegant act of balancing. Nationalism does not have to go all wrong, and just as all state leaders are economic nationalists, almost all state leaders are also liberals, working towards a liberalization in favour of their countries' terms. The same truth holds for politico-social alternatives or understandings of human nature.

Of course, not acting in the franchise's interests can still be acting in the franchise interests, if questionable state-making succeeds and the franchise fears a nuclear-weapons swinging Saddam Hussein teaming up with Air Bin Laden just as much as massive unemployment if a „harmful“ Kyoto protocol gets ratified. Standing up for unjust wars and unsustainable development then becomes representing and preserving the nations' interests. In such cases, nationalism and patriotism are not nationalism and patriotism, but it is also not automatically what fans of conspiracy-theories make out of it. Instead, it might just be an ill-advised, but honestly pursued ideology.

In conclusion, an un-nationalistic politician risks shorting his mandate or might not obtain it in the first place, at least in democratic societies. Dictatorships work different, but the propaganda machinery tries to convince that national interests are prioritized, which might even be the case. Some claim that the same is true for democracies, which are then pseudo-democracies representing elitist interests. By definition, a leader of „something“ has to lead „something“, therefore [if something = state > then leading = nationalism]. Nationalism is not nationalism and state leaders are not „so nationalistic“, but neatly placed on different rugs of the ladder of nationalism. State-leading, thus state-making, without nationalistic elements is impossible, as the artificial concept of the nation-state with its increasingly individuated franchise requires a constant dose of nationalism. Creating a supra-unit out of a multitude of increasingly independent units, constantly forming various sub-units on their own, thus state-making, requires a constant appeal to the unifying supra-unit, the nation.