

By Dr Robert Crowcroft

Predicting the future is usually a mug's game. Trying to discern what will, and will not, happen is not a profitable activity. Fortunately, however, the outlines of the international order over the coming decades are already there, at least for those who want to see them – because, in a very real sense, the 'future' is happening now. And that future is dystopian.

Definitions of 'dystopian' yield phrases like 'grim' and 'as bad as can be'; there is widespread 'human misery' and 'repressive social systems' under the guise of idealism, as well as 'poverty', and a 'constant' state of warfare and conflict. To those willing to recognise it as such, a new international political order has been emerging since the 1990s, gathering force by the year, and extending ever wider. This is a dystopian order, and, in short, is a very bad thing for humanity. Seeing the world in this way offers a far more realistic framework for understanding contemporary events and international dynamics than the unfounded dreams of an approaching golden age of co-operation forced down our throats by shrill Western leftists.

What makes the new international system qualify as dystopian is a convergence between the near-universal utopianism that marks political language in today's world with the increasing prevalence of violence, the impact of ethnic tensions, unprecedented global population growth, resource shortage and climate change, and the way in which technological advance facilitates police states. The strength of these forces is striking. Take Africa. In the last two decades the 'dark continent' has been exceptionally violent. Warfare has occurred virtually everywhere in Africa, both within and between states. There are precious few polities that function even adequately, let alone well. Tribal loyalties remain a powerful call on loyalties, and where ethnic tensions occur they ripple across national borders. In Central Africa, for example, in 1993 Tutsis in Burundi staged a coup and slaughtered around 100,000 Hutus. In 1994 the Hutus struck back with a coup in neighbouring Rwanda, overthrowing the Tutsis and celebrating the victory by instigating a genocide that left up to one million Tutsis dead. The effects rippled out across the geopolitics of the Great Lakes region: Uganda, Tanzania, and Sudan all felt the impact, as did the Democratic Republic of Congo, essentially a huge ungoverned space for several decades. But this is just one example; indeed the African states system has essentially collapsed. External states display only a fleeting interest in the region, and the two Sub-Saharan powers of any significance, Nigeria and South Africa, are both unwilling and probably unable to do much about it. This, surely, is 'as bad as can be'. During the football World Cup, when South Africa scored in the opening match of the tournament the BBC commentator – obviously brainwashed with comforting liberal assumptions about Mandela and so on – couldn't wait to exclaim that 'It's a goal for South Africa! It's a goal for all of Africa!' Presumably someone had written the line for him, but I wonder how the Hutus and the Tutsis feel about being lumped together, by the ignorance of the white man, into an imaginary emerging multicultural paradise? The arrogance is outrageous. When Germany defeated Uruguay in the third place play-off, was anyone stupid enough to yell that 'It's a victory for all of Europe'?

Ethnic tensions, and the attendant human misery, remain as potent as ever in the Balkans despite the NATO military interventions. At the moment Albanians are a major problem in the region: ninety percent of Kosovo is Albanian, while parts of western Macedonia and southern Serbia are majority Albanian. In 2001 an Albanian insurgency in Macedonia necessitated NATO involvement. Kosovo, meanwhile, has no army and its borders are undefended; and Serbia retains its regional influence via Serbian minorities in Kosovo, Bosnia, and Macedonia. Whatever some may hope, nationalism in the Balkans is plainly not in decline, and indeed the nationalists are in power throughout the region. The future is not promising either. Might the Bosnian Serbs open their border with Serbia and seek unity? They have already hinted at a unilateral referendum, which could bring about the disintegration of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Might the Serbs in north Kosovo go for partition or unity with Serbia? Or the Macedonian Muslims seek autonomy or unity with Kosovo? All of this poses the same problems of cross-border loyalties that bedevil ethnically combustible areas and weak states. At some point, the players in this Balkan chess match will see it as being in their interests to act to stop the behaviour of the other groups; this will precipitate a crisis. As Serbia is the strongest regional power, Belgrade must either be permanently restrained or the international community accept that, over the long-run, it will win.

Moreover this state of affairs is the norm, rather than the exception, in contemporary international politics: recent days have seen a surge of tensions between Hindus and Muslims in India; while Indonesia – with its vast numbers of island and competing identities – has long been a classic dystopian state, now ripe for dissolution and held together only by the military forces in Jakarta.

But these tensions are not confined to traditionally volatile regions of the world. They are spreading across the West too, largely due to mass migration and the resultant crisis of 'identity'. And this connects to a central problem in the public life of these states: the huge democratic deficit between the utopian, moralistic, and exhibitionist language of political elites and the more sceptical attitudes of their populations. Politicians speak a language of harmony that is a million miles away from the daily life experiences of normal people: violent crime is rampant, and communities are visibly broken. And to put it bluntly, most people in Britain would withdraw from the European Union, reinstitute capital punishment, seal the borders, and assert their cultural primacy over minorities of all kinds. Is there any chance of these things happening? Definitely not. Unrepresentative 'democratic' governments extend their control over ever more aspects of our lives at the same rate as their legitimacy declines. That is not a coincidence. Russia's future is worrying given the nature of its polity and, still more so, its bitter internal ethnic relations.

For decades, elites in states like Britain, France, and Germany have disparaged patriotism and national pride to the point that immigrants were not assimilated; this has created a dangerous situation in which huge un-integrated communities of minorities on one side face the indigenous majorities on the other. Tensions run high and suspicion is rife, particularly regarding Islamic extremism. In the Muslim diaspora, the principal loyalty is not to the nation state but to one's 'brother' Muslims. And that generates hostility from the rest of the public. During the recent cricket match-fixing scandal, news reporters interviewed both England and Pakistan fans around the cricket grounds. What struck me as remarkable was the fact that most of the

Pakistan supporters I saw were British – English in fact – and yet they were supporting a foreign country over their homeland. What was even more remarkable is that no-one else deemed this statement of instinctive allegiance – and there are few things more instinctive than sporting competition – to be worthy of public comment.

Similar problems can be seen in the United States. The rapidly growing Hispanic community – with its Catholic and pro-Latin American orientation – poses major challenges of identity to a country that is majority Caucasian, Protestant, and European in culture. There are calls to build a fence to seal the US-Mexican border in order to come to grips with the Hispanic problem. The very character of the United States of America as we know it will be contested in the twenty-first century. In short, if there is one thing that ethnic minority groups in the West are good at, it's playing the grievance game. American politics have long been a racial minefield; the same is slowly becoming true of Western Europe.

Therefore although many commentators chose to argue that we are today living in a world in which old enmities are vanishing, and where people are moving together, unfortunately this claim is laughable. In reality, the basic instincts and loyalties of human beings remain as potent as ever. The fact that we no longer know where we stand relative to our fellow citizens is not something that human beings react positively to. As a result the shrill idealism of the Guardianistas looks less credible by the year. Rather than global peace and co-operation, the future is likely to be marked by increasing competition over dwindling resources. This will see great power tensions rise as major states seek to protect their supplies; new centres of wealth like China and India will pose challenges of access and affordability to the West that cannot go unanswered. Conflicts over simple essentials like food and water will wrack the Third World. If global warming does generate the kind of worldwide changes some fear, then desertification, deforestation, and rising sea levels will greatly exacerbate all of these problems. Population movements will further increase ethnic tensions, making for volatile societies and internal war.

Now all of this is, of course, just a guess. But what makes this vision of the coming decades more persuasive than the alternatives is this: these things are happening already. The world has been shaped by them since the 1990s. And there is no evidence whatsoever to think that any of them are going to be put into reverse gear. Most of humanity adheres firmly to the instincts of the fictional Venetian demagogue in Michael Dibdin's novel *Dead Lagoon*: 'There can be no true friends without true enemies. Unless we hate what we are not, we cannot love what we are'.

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