By George Friedman

Geopolitics is central to STRATFOR's methodology, providing the framework upon which we study the world. The foundation of geopolitics in our time is the study of the nation-state, and fundamental to this is the question of the relationship of the individual to the nation-state. Changes in the relationship of the individual to the nation and to the state are fundamental issues in geopolitics, and thus worth discussing.

Many issues affect this complex relationship, notable among them the increasing global trend of multiple citizenship. This is obviously linked to the question of immigration, but it also raises a deeper question, namely, what is the meaning of citizenship in the 21st century?

Nation vs. State

It is difficult to make sense of the international system without making sense of the nation-state. The concept is complicated by a reality that includes multinational states like Belgium, where national identity plays a significant role, and Russia or China, where it can be both significant and at times violent. In looking at the nation-state, the idea of nation is more complex, and perhaps more interesting, than that of state.

The idea of nation is not always clear. At root, a nation is a group of people who share a fate, and with that fate, an identity. Nations can be consciously created, as the United States was. Nations can exist for hundreds or thousands of years, as seen in parts of Europe or Asia. However long a nation exists and whatever its origins, a nation is founded on what I've called elsewhere "love of one's own," a unique relationship with the community in which an individual is born or to which he chose to come. That affinity is the foundation of a nation.

If that dissolves, the nation dissolves, something that has happened on numerous occasions in history. If a nation disappears, the international system begins to behave differently. And if nations in general lose their identity and cohesion, massive shifts might take place. Some might say it would be for better and others for worse. It is sufficient to note here that either way would

make a profound difference.

The state is much clearer: It is the political directorate of the nation. How the leaders are selected and how they govern varies widely. The relationship of the state to the nation also varies widely. Not all nations have states. Some are occupied by other nation-states. Some are divided between multiple states. Some are part of an entity that governs many nations. And some are communities that have developed systems of government that do not involve states, although this is increasingly rare.

The relation to the nation is personal. The relation to the state is legal. We can see this linguistically in the case of the United States. I can state my relation to my nation simply: I am an American. I cannot state my relationship to my state nearly as simply. Saying I am a “United Statian” makes no sense. I have to say that I am a citizen of the United States, to state my legal relationship, not personal affinity. The linguistic complexity of the United States doesn’t repeat itself everywhere, but a distinction does exist between nationality and citizenship. They may coincide easily, as when a person is born in a country and becomes a citizen simply through that, or they may develop, as when an individual is permitted to immigrate and become naturalized. Note the interesting formulation of that term, as it implies the creation of a natural relationship with the state.
In the United States, the following oath is administered when one is permitted to become a citizen, generally five years after being permitted to immigrate:

I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.

I should say I took this oath at the age of 17. Although I became a citizen of the United States when my father was naturalized years earlier, receiving my own citizenship papers involved going to a courthouse and taking this oath personally. Being confronted with the obligations of citizenship was a sobering experience.
The American oath is one of the most rigorous; other nations have much simpler and less demanding oaths. Intriguingly, many countries with less explicitly demanding oaths are also countries where becoming a naturalized citizen is more difficult and less common. For the United States, a nation and a state that were consciously invented, the idea of immigration was inherent in the very idea of the nation, as was this oath. Immigration and naturalization required an oath of this magnitude, as naturalization meant taking on not only a new state identity but also a new national identity.

The American nation was built on immigrants from other nations. Unless they were prepared to

“absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen,” the American enterprise could fall into chaos as immigrants came to the United States to secure the benefits of full citizenship but refused to abandon prior obligations and refused to agree to the obligations and sacrifices the oath demanded. The United States therefore is in a position shared only with a few other immigration-based nations, and it has staked out the most demanding position on naturalization.

## The Dual Citizenship Anomaly

It is therefore odd that the United States — along with many other nations — permits nationals to be citizens of other countries. The U.S. Constitution doesn’t bar this, but the oath of citizenship would seem to do so. The oath demands that the immigrant abandon all obligations to foreign states. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Afroyim v. Rusk in 1967 that revoking citizenship on grounds of voting in foreign elections was unconstitutional. The ruling involved a naturalized American who presumably had taken the oath. The Supreme Court left the oath in place, but if we are to understand the court correctly, it ruled that the oath did not preclude multiple citizenship.

It is impossible to know how many people in the United States or other countries currently hold multiple citizenship
, but anecdotally it would appear that the practice is not uncommon. Not being required to renounce one’s foreign citizenship verifiably obviously facilitates the practice.

And this raises a fundamental question. Is citizenship a license to live and earn a living in a country, or is it equally or more so a set of legal and moral obligations? There are many ways legally to reside in a country without becoming a citizen. But the American oath, for example, makes it appear that the naturalized citizen (as opposed to just the legal resident) has an overriding obligation to the United States that can require substantial and onerous responsibilities within military and civilian life. An individual might be able to juggle multiple obligations until they came into conflict. Does the citizen choose his prime obligation at that time or when he becomes a citizen?

The reality is that in many cases, citizenship is seen less as a system of mutual obligations and rights than as a convenience. This creates an obvious tension between the citizen and his obligations under his oath. But it also creates a deep ambiguity between his multiple nationalities. The concept of immigration involves the idea of movement to a new place. It involves the assumption of legal and moral obligations. But it also involves a commitment to the nation, at least as far as citizenship goes. This has nothing to do with retaining ethnicity. It has to do with a definition of what it means to love one’s own — if you are a citizen of multiple nations, which nation is yours?

It is interesting to note that the United States has been equally ambiguous about serving in other countries’ militaries. John Paul Jones served as an admiral in the Russian navy. American pilots flew for Britain and China prior to American entry into World War II. They did not take the

citizenship oath, having been born in the United States. While you could argue that there was an implicit oath, you could also argue that they did not compromise their nationality: They remained Americans even in fighting for other countries. The immigration issue is more complex, however. In electing to become American citizens, immigrants consciously take the citizenship oath. The explicit oath would seem to create a unique set of obligations for naturalized immigrants.

## The Pull of the Old Country

Apart from acquiring convenient passports on obscure tropical islands, the dual citizenship phenomenon appears to operate by linking ancestral homelands with adopted countries. Immigrants, and frequently their children and grandchildren, retain their old citizenship alongside citizenship in the country they now live in. This seems a benign practice and remains so until there is conflict or disagreement between the two countries — or where, as in some cases, the original country demands military service as the price of retaining citizenship.
In immigrant countries in particular, the blurring of the line between nationalities becomes a potential threat in a way that it is not for the country of origin. The sense of national identity (if not willingness to sacrifice for it) is often stronger in countries whose nationhood is built on centuries of shared history and fates than it is in countries that must manage waves of immigration. These countries have less room for maneuver on these matters, unless they have the fortune to be secure and need not ask much of citizens. But in those countries that are built on immigrants and that do need to call for sacrifice, this evolution is potentially more troublesome.

There are those who regard nationalism as divisive and harmful, leading to conflict. I am of the view that nationalism has endured because it provides individuals with a sense of place, community, history and identity. It gives individuals something beyond themselves that is small enough to be comprehensible but far greater than they are. That nationalism can become monstrous is obviously true; anything that is useful can also become harmful. But nationalism has survived and flourished for a reason.

The rise of multiple citizenship undoubtedly provides freedom. But as is frequently the case, the freedom raises the question of what an individual is committed to beyond himself. In blurring the lines between nations, it does not seem that it has reduced conflict. Quite the contrary, it raises the question of where the true loyalties of citizens lie, something unhealthy for the citizen and the nation-state.

In the United States, it is difficult to reconcile the oath of citizenship with the Supreme Court's ruling affirming the right of dual citizenship. That ambiguity over time could give rise to serious problems. This is not just an American problem, although it might be more intense and noticeable here. It is a more general question, namely, what does it mean to be a citizen?