

# THE BREAKING OF NATIONS

by Jeppe Juul Petersen (Copenhagen)

Review of: Cooper, Robert  
The Breaking of Nations-  
Order and Chaos in the  
Twenty-First Century  
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(2<sup>nd</sup> revised and updated version).

1 Cooper, p. x (preface) The  
discussion of the meaning of »post-  
modernity« is not for discussion within  
this book, but rather serves as an  
indication of today's complexity, not  
only of the post-modern state, but  
also of individual identity.

In his latest book, *The Breaking of Nations - Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century*, Robert Cooper elaborates on the consequences of the breakdown of communism and the last decades developments in international politics. The purpose of the book is to conduct a comprehensive reflection to enable the reader to better understand the geopolitical landscape. The author differentiates between three types of states; pre-modern, modern, and post-modern, each having a different stage of development and following conflicting logics with respect to their political behaviour.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, Cooper declares in his book that civilization and order is founded on the control over violence. However, he also argues that the stage of a states development determines how the monopoly of violence is addressed. The author describes the kind of dangers which lie ahead if the monopoly of violence is lost. One reason for this threat is that some parts of the world are placed on a higher level of development, making those parts of the world more desirable than others. In addressing what can be done, Cooper declares that the EU and the US have a prominent role to play in bringing about either chaos or order within the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The book consists of three interdependent essays which can, however, be read independently. Each part seeks to address different issues, offering different insights into international politics. In the first essay, the author gives an analytical framework with a focus on Europe. Coopers retrospective interpretation identifies how states have emerged and the consequences which this has had on the international political system. Through the identification and classification of various organizational structures, the author explains how the evolution from strong nation-states to a new political system has produced conflicting and overlapping roles, with new responsibilities for governments and international institutions, etc. Cooper argues that a new order emerged after the collapse of Communism. Previously, the Cold War was an ontological war over hegemony and two competing domestic policies. The Cold War, however, unified most foreign policy issues into: »Was it good for Us or Them, for the West or the Soviet Bloc, capitalism or communism?« These changes turned twentieth century domestic matters into issues of foreign affairs.

Cooper argues that, within the pre-modern state, the balance-of-power was based on empires maintaining order; culture and civilisations was to be found inside the empire, what was found outside the empire was barbarism. The pre-modern empires gradually lost their legitimacy either because of the industrial revolution, secularisation, or military defeats. Additionally, Cooper elaborates on the books analytical framework, describing how the modern state replaced the pre-modern state, and how this new system differs from the previous system of hegemony and balance-of-power. The modern state had the legitimate monopoly of political system; moreover, political actions were in compliance with the moral constraints of individuals. Unlike the pre-modern states, morality could not be restricted to a duke, king or emperors ability to thwart hegemonic aspirations in order to legitimize their position. The change from the pre-modern state to the modern-state affected the intermediate relationships in international politics. Moreover the context of pre-modern empires and the national modern-state are in some respect opposites. Empires are diverse and can easily absorb new poles of identity, whereas modern states are culturally and geographically limited, which create a certain paradox. On the one hand, this facilitates balance-of-power; on the other hand, this creates the conditions for competition among the small nation-states. Notwithstanding, as the modern states accept the balance-of-power on their own continent (as has previously been the case in Europe), the competition for overseas empires, which suppress nationalism, increased. According to Cooper, the modern states are hostile to pluralism of identity, and he distinguishes between the possessions of an empire and the modern-state. Cooper mentions the British empire where Britain was the nation state, and the empire consisted of the overseas colonies.

Cooper argues that post-modern states can no longer rely on the unities that have characterized the political order. This is, according to the author, a significant change between the recognition of national sovereignty and the separation of domestic- and foreign

affairs as counted for the pre-modern and modern states. The post-modern system no longer depends on the previous goals of hegemony and balance-of-power, and therefore the demarcations seem to vanish. The essential difference between balance-of-power and the three disparate states draws, according to the author, on the fact that countries, which were once conquering each other, have become honest. However, these changes in balance-of-power illustrate a major challenge in international politics that needs to be resolved. The post-modern agenda is centred on international bodies, international agreements, and national sovereignty therefore becomes a matter of having a seat at the negotiating table and reaching common agreements.

Additionally, openness and mutual interference makes the post-modern states more vulnerable. Given that the monopoly of state forces is often absent in the de-colonized world, the respect for human beings is lost, leading to human trafficking, prostitution and criminal gangs. The author recalls the axiom of Thomas Hobbes and the consequences of the absence of an infinite and controlling Leviathan. The lack of sovereignty produces new balances-of-power, which result in contests between non-state actors, leading to the above-mentioned outcome. The author claims that de-colonized countries, as a result of their loss as imperial and overseas territories, no longer represent any particular interests for western countries (although oil producing countries such as Nigeria and Sudan still command some interest). Nevertheless, criminal non-state actors with terrorist syndicates in pre-modern states can become so powerful that those local terrorists can expand their interests through branch offices within the transparent western world. Cooper illustrates this scenario with the terrorist attacks of 9/11. This catastrophe made it clear to the Western World that potential terrorist can not be allowed to be hosted by the regimes of pre-modern states.

Cooper argues that pre-modern regimes cannot be disregarded since they may either sympathise with or protect such groups. This implies for the need of interventions which can undermine national sovereignty, and therefore pose questions which are difficult to answer. However there is a distinct difference between the interventions of post-modern states compared to the invasions of modern states. Traditionally, imperialism satisfied the modern states national desire for winning overseas territories, in order to gain in wealth and power. Post-modern imperialism can be viewed as a defensive imperialism. However, the national consciousness awakened in former colonies has not forgotten previous colonial exploitation, and so limits the legitimacy of interventions by the post-modern countries. Nevertheless, by using international institutions and engaging reforms, the author describes how post-modern imperialism is based on voluntarily compromises and negotiation.

The European states are post-modern states living on a post-modern continent as a result of the reforms and institutional changes prompted by the EU. In comparison with the US, this gives a more legitimate impression to non-western countries. However, the US has supported this philosophy and the institutional development of the European project since the genesis of the EU. Even so, after the end of the Cold War, the US turned into a kind of empire, »Pax Americana«. Nevertheless, as Cooper claims, Pax Americana differs from other former empires and imperialistic patterns. There is a certain dedication to the use of military power to generate peace and security. Revolution and regime changes are in their nature violent, but cannot rely solely on military capabilities. The assumption that democracy brings peace seems reasonable; however, intruders cannot create trust, which is a basic element of democracy.

In the second essay, the author puts forth a number of disparate maxims, which can be fruitful to reflect upon in the context of international diplomacy. Reaching consensus and mutual agreements can be time consuming and sometimes the European/Atlantic relationship creates reluctance for persuading pre-modern states to transform their regimes. Often they make plans based on incongruent interest rather than coordinated strategies. According to the author, this has its genesis in historical and identity characteristics. The US identity is embedded in its constitution, whereas the EU draws upon a painful history of warfare on the European continent.

With a realist approach towards order or chaos in the twenty-first century, the author examines the complexity of diplomacy, and it appears to be a pragmatic approach, which could be a reflection of the authors experience as a diplomat. Cooper does not neglect the complexity of international diplomacy; however, he seems to be short on details when it

2 One could mention the Danish newspaper *Jyllandsposten* and the drawings of the Prophet Muhammad. Despite the diplomatic attempts and persistence to solve the diplomatic disagreements, the politicians seemed out of reach with the reality because they did not have the ability to control what the agenda should contain. Several of organisational movements took place based on different expectation, which seemed to be legitimised through the media and by incongruent discourses from the political establishment. Naturally, the politicians were an active part in the conflict; however, they had no opportunity to manage the disagreement.

3 One can recall Nietzsche's sister and the Nazi's misinterpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy.

4 Jessen, Keld B.: *Filosofi- Fra antikken til vor tid*. Århus: Forlaget System A/S 1999.

comes to affairs that transcend the nation state and explaining how consensus is reached. The author seems confident in the way the political establishment handles and reaches consensus. However, what happens when organisational systems with multiple contextual expectations and diverging interest cannot reach consensus? Furthermore, where do consensual borders reach legitimacy when the political establishment does not have the ability to set the political agenda?<sup>2</sup>

Since the third essay is rather short, the content of this essay will not be explored in full detail. However, despite the essays shorter length, this part of the book contains some important concluding remarks. The essay discusses the European/Atlantic relationship, their future relations, and how they have the ability and responsibility to prevent chaos from emerging. In this third essay, Cooper recalls his indebtedness to Carl Hallergard, whom he also mentions in the books acknowledgements. Hallergard draws attention to Nietzsches concept of the will to power. The authors main assertion is that Europe is not showing a »will« when it comes to employing its military capabilities. This assertion is, however, partly incorrect. While it is true that there is a general unwillingness to use military solutions and see the world through a military perspective, it seems inappropriate to make a direct link to this Nietzschean concept.

Regrettably, there is a tendency to equate Nietzsches philosophy with the use of military capabilities. Cooper discusses the EU-US relationship based on an inappropriate interpretation of Nietzsches conceptions because Cooper tends to legitimise the military solutions deployed by the US.<sup>3</sup> Currently it appears that the EU is searching for a common identity, and in doing so, the EU will hopefully formulate a more coherent foreign policy. This implies the deconstruction of the present concepts, which dominate the European nation states. However, it seems the author has forgotten his previous argument that Europe is the very symbol of attractive post-modern states. Furthermore, Europes representation of its post-modern values, such as transparency, respect for human rights and the deconstruction of the military forces, are forgotten. Consequently, this is done with support from the US; however, it cannot be denied that Americas will is a combination of a respectively modern and post-modern state. The United States relations to its immediate neighbours are post-modern, although its focus on the US Constitution can be considered from a modern perspective.

Nietzsches concept of the will to power gives can explain developments which occur after the previous social order has been replaced by a new social order. And it is the replacement and definition of new values, which generates the will of power. The US pole of identity is positioned between the modern and post-modern state, and therefore the Nietzsches concept is inexpedient. Solely depending on Pax Americana as a unilateralist would probably generate the most chaos, which the US should avoid. As Robert Cooper argues, Europe and America need a continuous and solid collaboration in order to address chaos. And this requires military power. More importantly, however, it requires multilateral legitimacy.<sup>4</sup> Beyond a doubt, national, regional or local beliefs transcend affirmative truths. However, the missing coherence can also facilitate chaos. One could be in opposition to Coopers philosophic determinism and claim that the constructions of moral concepts and the use of international institutions be based on a normative approach. Notwithstanding, this poses significant challenges for international diplomacy, although consensus and mutual agreements provide for multilateral legitimacy.

The content of *The Breaking of Nations* gives the reader the impression that Robert Coopers political and historical understanding is remarkable. The historical development and the consequences of the fall of the Iron Curtain addressed in the first essay provide the reader with a comprehensive analytical framework. The authors description of pre-modern, modern and post-modern states provides the reader with an understanding of how balance-of-power has evolved from a matter of national sovereignty to a matter of international concern - though these inquiries should, from an academic point of view, be perceived as general intellectual knowledge. The academic reader and the trained political analyst, therefore, will not benefit greatly from this book, as the book is targeted towards the mass audience, rather than the political analyst. The books inquiries are general in nature and, consequently, do not produce new assumptions.



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Furthermore, although each essay is interconnected, the essays origins are from different contexts. Although the author knowledge and insight appears remarkable, the interesting analytical comments are never awe-inspiring for those who have an academic familiarity with the subject. From an academic and political point of view, the last essay appears to have the most interesting comments and where the conflict between Europe and the US tend to most evident. Cooper never really discusses how and who ought to take on the responsibility, and tends rather to elaborate on the differences between Europe and the US.

