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NATIONALISM VERSUS INTERNATIONALISM: ANOTHER LOOK

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Will nationalism smother the emerging internationalism? Implicit in this question is the assumption that if the answer is yes, it is a result to be dreaded. Implicit in that value judgment, in turn, is a vision of the mire and brutality of Bosnia engulfing the universalist spirit of the Revolution of 1989 and the ensuing bright hopes for a new era of international organization.

There are many other images of both nationalism and internationalism, however, which give rise to different desired answers to our question. Let me offer three different ways of depicting and defining that polarity, ways that suggest that what we may ultimately need to strive for is a judicious mixture of both nationalism and internationalism.

First, we can understand nationalism and internationalism as ideologies, as sets of mental attitudes. Understood thus, nationalism often connotes particularism and parochialism, while internationalism connotes universalism and cosmopolitan sophistication. Nationalism seems to bespeak a poverty of imagination and experience; internationalism, by contrast, embodies the core and essence of the Western humanist tradition.

From another perspective, however, nationalism can represent, as it did for the great 19th century nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini, the vitality and originality of a deep-rooted and well defined cultural and historical tradition, the unique contribution of one people to a global melange. From this perspective, conversely, internationalism or universalism is synonymous with the bland homogenization of universal culture, of lowest-common-denominator ideas and a sterile harmony. Nationalism is New York City; internationalism a suburban shopping mall.

A second way we can understand the dichotomy of nationalism versus internationalism is with reference to particular

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political forms of organization. Here the dichotomy is between the nation-state and a larger regional organization. A prime issue is whether a renewed national self-interest among the member states of the newly christened European Union will besmirch and erode the goals of Maastricht. Again, however, this dichotomy is false. My favorite authority on the European Community, Joseph Weiler, argues forcefully that the supranationalism championed by the founding fathers of the EC was entirely compatible with a community of distinct nation-states.¹ Tying those states together in a larger community was an effort to temper the nationalism that spawned two wars by reminding all nations of their common heritage and common aspirations. They did not seek to transform the supranationalism of community institutions into a super-state, substituting a new nationalism for the old. From this perspective, Maastricht is a step away from the Community ideals, a distortion of the ideal balance between nationalism and internationalism. By analogy, efforts to transform regional and international organizations into tighter, more cohesive political constructs risk replicating the dangers they seek to curb at a higher level.

A third and final way we can understand nationalism and internationalism is as preferred approaches to policy problems, as unilateralism versus multilateralism. Here again, our reflexive reaction is to favor multilateralism. Nationalism is synonymous with the selfish unilateral pursuit of national self-interest; internationalism with multilateral pursuit of the collective good. But of late, the better synonyms might be action versus inaction. Multilateralism has been blind for a collective averting of eyes, closing of ears, and wringing of hands. The opposite of internationalism in this context would have been unilateral action by the United States, action that might have jogged the world awake. The name for such action is not nationalism but leadership.

Having, in good academic fashion, deconstructed and reconstructed the terms of the debate, I will let our panelists do

1. Joseph H. H. Weiler, *Europe After Maastricht—Do the New Clothes Have an Emperor?*, Paper presented at the New York University School of Law International Jurisprudence Colloquium (Feb. 17, 1994) (unpublished manuscript, on file with the *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics*).

the harder work of answering the question actually posed. But as this day's program has surely revealed, nationalism has many faces, and not all are evil.

The international system is a system of nation-states; international law was originally the law of nations. Perhaps, as Gidon Gottlieb has argued,² we need the state plus the nation. Perhaps we must prevent many nations from becoming states. We may hope to spread the spirit of internationalism to damp nationalist flames. But even now, at a time when every pundit invokes raging nationalist conflict in the former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union as evidence of a return to pre-modern barbarism, spectators ensconced in their American, British, Italian, and German armchairs should remember that nationalism has its place, and it is not necessarily one of notoriety.

2. GIDON GOTTLIEB, *NATION AGAINST STATE: A NEW APPROACH TO ETHNIC CONFLICTS AND THE DECLINE OF SOVEREIGNTY* (1993).

