

The Public Interest and the Global State

by William B. Dickinson

Viewed from space, a TV anchor recently gushed, only “imaginary lines” separate nations from one another. Imaginary? On the ground, the borders that demarcate sovereign nations are real enough and likely to remain that way, globalist hoopla notwithstanding. But one does not need to be a survivalist scanning the skies for black helicopters to worry about the spread of such notions.

Yes, national economies are increasingly intertwined. Yes, the information age brings us all in closer contact via computers, wireless telephones and the Internet. Every week I e-mail greetings and gossip to friends I made in Romania. I push the “send” icon and milliseconds later the transmission is completed.

But I have never doubted that even the poorest nations cherish their separateness — the cultural, historical and ethnic distinctiveness that led to those boundaries in the first place. Perhaps this is a generational thing. A college student told me that he sees himself as a “citizen of the world” rather than as a citizen of the United States. I replied that if he got arrested in Singapore on a drug charge he would be wise to call the U.S. Embassy rather than the United Nations.

Those who see a seamless world filling with market-driven, benign democracies have had quite a run. Economist Paul Krugman believes (*New York Times*, Jan. 2) we are now living in an era of what he calls the “Second Global Economy” — a world economy reconstructed largely under American leadership. But he worries that the global idea is “very much a minority

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persuasion, all too easily portrayed as an ideology of and for a rootless cosmopolitan elite that is out of touch with ordinary people.” He may be onto something. As protests at the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle demonstrated, blue-collar workers see the “free trade” mantra as a cover for another kind of trade: the unrestricted import of cheap foreign-made goods without reciprocal concessions on the sale of U.S.-made goods abroad. The relentless U.S. trade deficit confirms the fear.

Nor is free trade restricted just to goods and raw material. Labor is now seen as fungible, human currency whose migration among nations must be unimpeded. Skilled labor has little trouble getting a green card to work in the United States. The resulting brain drain from poorer nations condemns those countries to a future as providers of plush dolls and tennis shoes. Even where unskilled, uneducated workers are concerned, the globalists are equal-opportunity employers. Cheap labor keeps inflation in check. Skilled workers fly into JFK; the uneducated cross borders in the dead of night or in cargo containers on freighters.

Eight-plus years of economic expansion mask the strategy’s downside. Unless economic cycles have been repealed by Alan Greenspan and Goldman Sachs, the next recession will strew the landscape with jobless immigrant workers. Will they want to go back to the countries they fled in search of a better life? How many Americans have absorbed the fact that, due primarily to immigration, the population of the United States is projected to grow from today’s 274 million to 404 million by 2050?

Not to worry, say the globalists. The Information Age is the new paradigm and will carry all problems before it. Prosperity will spread to most nations, reducing the likelihood of war. This is an old theory. Historian John Keegan points out (*The First World War*, 1998) that the interdependence of nations was accepted as a necessary condition of the world’s life in the first years of the 20th century. The revolution in communications — by railway,

telegraph and stamped postage — was seen as requiring international cooperation. Norman Angell, an advocate of economic interdependence, told a bankers' meeting in 1912 that "enlightened self-interest" was moving the world toward "a consciousness which must make for more efficient human cooperation, a better human society." European harmony would end with the guns of August 1914.

If this is a lesson of history, it is lost on some opinion-makers. In *The Rise of the Virtual State: Wealth and Power in the Coming Century* (1999), Richard Rosecrance argues that our world will become steadily more peaceful because nations will no longer need additional territory in order to thrive. And global capital markets will transfer money to poor nations. The rise of the virtual state, Rosecrance believes, will inaugurate "a new epoch of peaceful competition among nations, promising a cooperative transition to the new millennium." So much for worrywarts concerned about overpopulation, environmental degradation or the nuclear-war musings of Vladimir Putin.

Instead of waxing eloquent on the virtues of globalism, candidates for office in Election Year 2000 would better serve the public interest by addressing problems facing the sovereign nation called the United States. Urban sprawl, for example, is emerging as a major issue in the public mind. Sprawl devours the nation's countryside, and the solution will force an examination of U.S. population growth, immigration policies and environmental safeguards. And spreading contamination and depletion of major aquifers is a hidden crisis that needs addressing lest our groundwater supplies no longer support the life above for future generations. (See "Water Shock: A Global Report on Groundwater Safety," *WorldWatch*, Jan./Feb.) Not to mention global warming.

Human and ecological costs must be considered in the formation of public policy. Pie-in-the-sky globalists aside, solutions for a future that features 2 billion more human beings on the planet in the next half-century must begin at home, nation by nation.

