

Missionary zeal

Despite its own historical origins, Kurdish nationalism has been exploited in several superpower gameplans. To support the shah of Iran (right) in a dispute with Iraq, the CIA in 1974 and 1975 encouraged the Kurds to revolt against the Iraqi government, providing them with arms and other resources. When the shah struck a deal with the Iraqis, the support was abruptly cut off, leaving the Kurds at the mercy of fierce reprisals. Former US secretary-of-state Henry Kissinger's subsequent comment during testimony became infamous: 'One must not confuse the intelligence business with missionary work.'



macro-social and -economic forces.

We have a lift-off

Keynesianism emerged as a new, dominant form of statehood after 1945. It was developed in a variety of forms, in different parts of the world, in response to the global crisis triggered by decades of intense struggle, revolution and war.

At its most sophisticated, the Keynesian state integrated the popular classes into a comprehensive social compact. The process was never complete, and relatively large social or national minorities were left out. But it nonetheless built statehood that was solid enough to sustain nationhood.

The state became the central pillar of "development" (read "capital accumulation"). It did not substitute itself for the private sector — the bourgeoisie still dominated the economy. But the regime of accumulation required a central

"regulating" role from the state.

Thanks to the extension of the social wage, and other co-opting measures, the bulk of the popular classes came to locate their interests within the ambit of the state. As an historic compromise between the dominant classes themselves, Keynesianism offered the popular classes some stability and a slow growth in standards of living — in exchange for basic obedience to the capitalist state. Opposition was permitted by legalising leftwing parties; but on condition that they agreed, in principle, to respect "the rules of the game".

The same applied to most of the minorities. They could organise, agitate, demand reforms and, in many cases, win substantial changes. The French-speaking minority in Quebec in the 1960s entered a social, political and economic renaissance known as the "quiet revolution". Of course, this did not rid the system of gross injustices. But the majority of the popular classes (also within the national minorities) came to understand that change lay within the system, not outside it.

In the East, the social deal took another form, though it arose from similar strategies. During the 1950s and

epoch.

Although such interpretations are useful when analysing specific situations, they rely on an overtly political interpretation of this upsurge of nationalism.

After decolonisation in the 1960s, African states seemed to be viable entities despite ethnic and linguistic differences. In the west, the aspirations of national minorities like the Quebecois in Canada or the Basques in Spain did not translate automatically into separatist struggles. The Left, with a strong presence in these struggles, proposed strategies that combined national and social demands. Their aim was to challenge the hegemony of the bourgeois centralised state, and develop forms of popular power within a decentralised state system.

Polarisation within these central states tended to occur more in terms of political options — more democracy, social justice, respect for minorities. There was no rupture, no drive to create a new state.

This suggests that the current march of neo-nationalism is grounded in processes that lie beyond the question of the state, processes that refer to

ern Sudanese are leaning towards secession. Unita might push the Angolan Ovimbundus along a similar route. The list goes on.

Then one finds arguments, following on Benedict Anderson's path-breaking work *Imagined Communities*, that ascribe the rise of neo-nationalism to global political upheaval.

In the ex-Soviet Union, with its over-centralised and fragile "nation-empire", nationalisms coalesced to create new independent states. In the Baltic states these nationalisms were always resilient, and had remained low-key under the rule of empire. They were dormant, though, in ex-Soviet Asia, where nation-states had never existed. Amid the convulsions of political crisis, "imagined communities" leapt to the fore.

Elsewhere, a similar pattern of destruction / reconstruction occurs. Traditional identities — based on clan (Somalia), ethno-linguistics (Ethiopia), or religion (Sri Lanka) — become stronger because they enable people and communities to survive in the midst of economic and political collapse.

Neo-nationalism, in this view, serves an ideological function. It creates or imagines new "essential" identities that have little substantive historical basis, but nevertheless do bond communities in their struggle for survival.

Related to this are the geo-politics of the "new world order", where splitting nations into micro-states is seen as a desirable way to contain or discipline troublesome third world states.

Iraq is an example. The destruction of the Iraqi state, with its weak historical foundations (it never existed as a state before the British and the French carved up the Middle East in the 1920s), appeals as one way to strike back at an "insolent" Arab nationalism (see box).

But different contexts will produce different strategies. US imperialism now opposes — for geo-strategic reasons — neo-nationalist movements in Russia, much as it opposed them in Ethiopia during the Haile Selassie