

## Superpower Without a Mission?

by Michael Cox

Having outlasted the Soviet Union and won the Cold War, the US is now, more than ever, the most critical actor in the international system. For this reason, if no other, it is vital to survey the its role in the modern world.

Clinton, the first post-Cold War US leader, is one of the most criticised of modern Presidents. His foreign policy in particular has been subject to much abuse: he is uninterested in international affairs; he is leading the United States nowhere; his policies are incoherent; some believe Clinton doesn't even have a foreign policy. But he *does*; or, at least, he has pursued policies that sit comfortably in the American mainstream.

*The world economy.* The implosion of the Soviet model of socialism eliminated the only serious alternative to market capitalism. In Clinton's view it also created major opportunities for the US: above all, the possibility of establishing a more open world economic system. This system would reduce the likelihood of international conflict; enhance global prosperity; and, given the US's huge economic stake in the world economy it would also work to the US's advantage.

The US has taken a series of measures with the longer-term aim of effecting the fuller integration of an expanding world economy. These include encouraging the creation of NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement), an economic zone that unites the US, Canada, and Mexico, and breathing new life into APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) with the aim of creating a free trade and investment zone in the booming Pacific region by the year 2020.

*Defence.* By the year 2000, US military strategists are planning to spend over \$250bn a year to ensure America's global

dominance. A 1996 defence review specified four tasks which US forces must above all be able to accomplish: deterring potential enemies - usually found in the Third World; defeating them in war if necessary; providing a credible overseas presence; and making good on US promises to contribute to multilateral peace operations in conflict areas like ex-Yugoslavia. This military power (which includes nuclear weapons) is not merely symbolic, nor does it just frighten enemies or win wars. It also helps ensure, as the review states, that the US retains an 'influential voice in international affairs'.

*Arms control and nuclear proliferation.* The main thrust of the US's active, and relatively successful, arms control strategy has been to control nuclear weapons proliferation. It aims first, to prevent potentially threatening states such as Iraq, Iran, and North Korea from acquiring a nuclear capability; and, secondly, to ensure that the disintegration of the USSR does not lead to rogue powers outside the former communist empire acquiring nuclear material.

The most significant advance was the 1995 extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), as a result of which most nations agree not to acquire nuclear weapons. But it is unlikely that the US will get rid of its own nuclear weapons: in an uncertain international environment, it is not convinced it should 'disarm' itself.

*Europe and Nato expansion.* Since 1992, the US has supported the eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation to include some states in Central Eastern Europe (for example, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary). Opponents of the proposal insist that expansion is both unnecessary - there is no real threat to Eastern Europe - and more likely to provoke than reassure democratic Russia. But the US looks determined to push ahead. Expansion, it argues, will bring stability to Europe as a whole and will accelerate European unification. Moreover,

the US says, unless Nato expands, it will become irrelevant and wither away: this would be bad for Europe and for Russia. It would also be very bad indeed for the US, which continues to regard Nato as its main source of influence in European affairs.

*China.* Having encouraged the growth of China as a counterweight to the Soviet Union since Nixon's famous 1972 Beijing visit, the United States finds itself dealing with an increasingly assertive and self-confident nation. The US's approach to China has been somewhat contradictory. On the one hand it has attempted to 'tame' China through economics - primarily by supporting market reforms and encouraging China to become more closely associated with the capitalist world. On the other, it has sent warning shots across China's bows (for instance, during the 1996 Taiwan crisis) to prevent China deploying its new found weight to intimidate its neighbours. This twin track approach has had some success. But the US's pursuit of constructive engagement with China has been much criticised, especially by those who think the US has turned a blind eye to China's human rights abuses. US policy-makers defend their position with the argument that China, a rising power with economic potential, is too important to be ignored. Perhaps also, having just emerged from a long and costly Cold War with the Soviet Union, the United States is not keen to become involved in another one with China.

It is easy to refute the argument that Clinton has no foreign policy, or that it lacks direction. Indeed, the President is pursuing traditional US goals. Much has changed since the collapse of Soviet power. But much has not, even under the leadership of a President who has been accused of being 'all at sea' in the new world order.

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## Aestheticist Politics and Deliberative Democracy

by Judith Squires

Contemporary feminist discourse is characterised by two dominant schools of thought: the cultural/radical and the postmodern; these focus on the notions of 'caring' and 'alterity' respectively and adopt correlative expressive and aesthetic conceptions of the political. They share a critique of the liberal or procedural conception of the political: the caring perspective of expressive politics emphasises particularity and contextuality; the alterity perspective of aesthetic politics emphasises the semiotic and the pre-discursive. Both challenge the conception of the political which assumes that abstract individuals have pre-formed preferences which they seek to realise through institutional mechanisms.

What might a transformation of our understanding of the political to fit in with feminist experiences and analyses imply for conceptions of the political and models of democracy?

The procedural model of the political developed by advocates of deliberative democracy necessarily excludes both the expressive and aesthetic, and thus distinctly feminist conceptions of the political. One must, therefore, question whether this model is able to recognise political participation, and ensure the institutional presence of those (notably women) most closely associated with these more extensive cultural conceptions of the political.

Jürgen Habermas - whose model of deliberative democracy is the most favoured form of procedural politics and is winning the interest of feminist theorists - offers a critique of the metaphysical and individualistic aspects of Enlightenment thought, whilst providing a basis of universal morality and constitutional democracy. He takes a socially constructed notion of the self and

yet derives a universal cognitive formalism from the structures of interaction, allowing us critically to evaluate existing moral and institutional practices from a universal standpoint. He distinguishes his model of democratic politics from the liberal one - characterised by public discourse - and from the republican one - which privileges justice over ethics. This privileging is significant. If politics is about justice, not ethics, then both the expressive and aesthetic politics of recent times, most clearly manifest in women's and sexual politics, are post-politics, non-politics, lacking claims to universal validity.

According to the Habermasian schema there are three distinct sphere of values:

1) i) Cognitive; ii) Objective; iii) Natural world; iv) Strategic; v) Truth.

2) i) Normative; ii) Social; iii) Intersubjectively constituted world; iv) Communicative; v) Rightness.

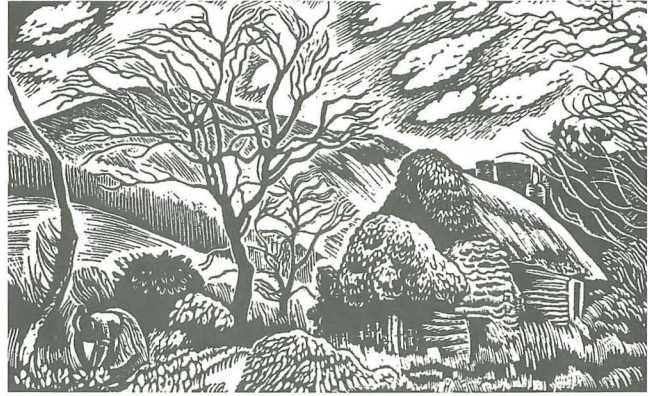
3) i) Expressive; ii) Subjective; iii) Inner world; iv) Aesthetic; v) Sincerity.

For advocates of the deliberative democracy model, politics is characterised by the second group of values. According to Habermas, the twin forces of modernist scientisation and pre-modernist mysticism have worked to engulf these values and rob us of a space for truly political deliberation. The Habermasian project is to carve out public spaces in which these values might once again be adopted and articulated. In order to do so, one must challenge and repudiate both positivistic and 'postmodern' understandings of the political.

Habermas does argue that the women's movements 'must be counted amongst those great mass movements which take up

universal principles of equality'. So what would he make of the fact that gender politics has by-and-large shifted from pursuit of equality to assertions of difference? What are we to make of actions that 'simply express identity disturbances'?

Feminist theory has above all worked to establish the political



significance of the expressive, subjective, inner, aesthetic, and sincere. In rejecting them as proper forms of articulation for emancipatory struggle, advocates of deliberative democracy not only fail to recognise this significant development made by gender theory, but also diminish their own understanding of what contemporary politics might encompass. Given the number of feminist theorists who now seem to be adopting precisely this deliberative democracy, this failure is of no small consequence. Of political significance is the fact that Habermas's politics, formulated in the name of critical theory and an emancipatory project, excludes otherness and thereby particularly affects groups who are associated with it, or who forge their identities and life-forms along these lines: groups marginalised by pre-discursive processes. But, once we allow the aesthetic or the caring as a valid mode of political articulation, must we relinquish our appeal to the standards of reason and impartiality?

Iris Young's work tries to hold onto the commitment to caring and alterity whilst negotiating issues of constitutional and procedural guarantees of participation within policy formation processes. As such her writings might offer a basis for