

The Uses of the Network Commonwealth  
James C. Bennett  
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On Thursday, April 29th, a seminar entitled "Networking Nation-States" was held in Washington, DC under the auspices of The National Interest. It centered around my article of the same title published in the Winter 2004 issue of The National Interest. Participating in the seminar, in addition to me, were a number of distinguished participants, including Walter Russell Mead of the Council on Foreign Relations, Prof. Charles Kupchan of Georgetown University, Gerard Baker of the Financial Times, international law expert David Rivkin and Nikolas Gvosdev of The National Interest.

The seminar began with a presentation of the concepts of the "network civilization" and "Network Commonwealth", which, for those not familiar with them, are laid out in my articles "An Anglosphere Primer" and "Networking Nation-States". Very briefly, I have come to the conclusion that one of the under-appreciated changes underway in the world today is that the plummeting of transaction costs in international communications is impacting the world asymmetrically; or to put it another way, as oceans, rivers, and mountains cease to be as big an obstacle they were in the past, the world will contour itself around the next most significant set of obstacles, which are socio-cultural ones. One might very well prefer to travel an extra three or four hours in flight to do business if the barriers to participation when you get off the plane are less.

Meanwhile, the flat cost of worldwide communications on the Internet is gradually linking all the posted documentation in any given language into a seamless web, essentially one big and almost infinitely complex artifact. This artifact forms the core of a new cultural form, which I have termed the "Network Civilization". Just as the cultural commonalities of the pre-modern cultural-linguistic group became the raw material from which the modern nation-state was formed, so I believe the network civilization can be the raw material from which a new political form is evolving, which I have termed the Network Commonwealth - a loose league of states cooperating on defense, trade, and other issues, serving to extend civil society across national borders.

Many people are most (or only) familiar with the Anglosphere aspect of my work, and some seem to have gotten the idea that it is about a vision of what might be dubbed Anglo-triumphalism. Yet the Anglosphere network civilization as it is emerging into being, and the Anglosphere network commonwealth that I believe could be a useful tool for organizing its internal relations, are only specific cases of a more general phenomenon. Since much of what I have written over the past four years has concentrated on the Anglosphere example (naturally enough, as I was writing for the English-speaking audience), I and the people at National Interest felt that it was important to look at other emerging network civilizations through the lens of this analysis; one of the purposes of the seminar was to permit area experts to do exactly that. Another purpose was to invite critiques of the wider set of ideas by a range of commentators with varying degrees of pre-existing agreement or disagreement with the premises of the Network Commonwealth idea.

The seminar was a success in fulfilling both purposes. In regard to the first point, useful discussions were given of the potential for emergent network civilizations in the Russian-, French-, and Arabic-speaking areas of the world. Nikolas Gvosdev gave a particularly useful and informative discussion of the

emerging Russosphere and its implications. He described the ongoing transformation of the cultural and political life of the Russian-speaking world due to the advance of information technology, and particularly the flourishing of the Russian-language World Wide Web, now generally termed the "runet", after the ".ru" suffix on Russian email addresses. He made the point that much of the emerging independent civil society in Russia and other Russian-speaking areas is articulated around the Internet, to a much greater degree than in older civil societies. For instance, although print and broadcast media in the Russian Federation has become increasingly consolidated under state control, Internet media continues to be diverse and uncensored, and has played a significant role in uncovering governmental abuse. It is also significant that intra-Russosphere publication via Web has permitted such journalism to be undertaken with less risk of reprisal. He also pointed out the extensive use of Web media by the Russian Orthodox Church, which may have the effect of loosening its traditionally tight connection to the Russian state.

Of particular interest was the discussion of the emergence of the "Euro-Russians" - the several million persons whose first language is Russian and are residents of European Union states. This includes the two million Russian citizens of the newly-acceded Baltic states, the several hundred thousand long-term Russian residents of Cyprus, and the sizeable Russian diaspora in Western Europe, 70,000 of them in London alone. It is largely thanks to the Russosphere that the Baltic Russians can remain connected to Russian civilization without nursing a desire to return to control of the Russian state. Upon Baltic independence, it was widely feared that these people would form a modern equivalent of the Sudeten Germans in inter-war Czechoslovakia. Instead, it may be more likely that as the EuroRussians develop a stronger civil society their influence will flow back to the rest of the Russosphere, with interesting long-term consequences. East Germany and mainland China were strongly affected by the visible example of freer, more prosperous societies with their own languages and cultures; perhaps the example of a strong Russian-speaking civil society may have the same effect over time on the weaker sectors of the Russosphere.

All in all, Gvosdev's presentation was exactly the sort of use of the network civilization concept as an analytical tool that I had hoped would emerge.

The two other network civilization discussions, Claude Salhani's tour of the Francosphere, and Jeffrey Kemp's discussion of the prospect of an Arabosphere, gave a useful tour d'horizon of these areas, respectively. Salhani's review of the Francosphere made the useful point that the distribution of population and financial clout within linguistic areas has an effect on the potential for cooperation within those areas; in the French example, the preponderance of population, wealth and power within France itself created an greater imbalance than that existing in other areas, and thus intra-Francosphere structures (such as the Francophonie organization) tended to be primarily arenas for France to project its influence to dependents.

The example of the Arabic-language satellite and Web news services, such as al-Arabiya and al-Jazeera, indicate that the network civilization phenomenon is emerging in different linguistic-cultural areas independently from what is happening in the English-speaking world, and that such developments are not automatically pro-American.

Is the Anglosphere Converging or Diverging?

Gerard Baker (now of the Times of London) raised a point that is raised from time to time in discussions of the Anglosphere: given the widespread unhappiness in parts of the British population, and particularly the media and intellectual classes, to Tony Blair's support of the US in the Afghan and

Iraqi wars, is there not more of a division rather than a convergence between America and Britain? In particular, given the rise of subcontinental Muslim immigrant populations in Britain, and of Hispanic populations in the US, is not the old link becoming more diluted, perhaps to the point of irrelevance?

Regarding convergence/divergence of attitudes and perceptions between the UK, UK, and other Anglosphere countries: I believe the "Anglosphere social model" I described, once further researched, will confirm what anecdotal and partial evidence suggests; that rather than each Anglosphere nation occupying a discrete position upon some spectrum of opinion, there are within each nation blocs and classes of people each more aligned with other such blocs throughout the Anglosphere than with some of their own countrymen. The differences between Anglosphere nations have more to do with the different proportions of various blocs from nation to nation. For example, approximately a quarter of all Americans have some British Isles ancestry tracing back to Ulster Protestants; Ulster-bred attitudes are at the core of the Jacksonian mindset. I suspect that if Ulster's Protestant population formed 25% of the UK today, its attitudes, values, and policies would be even more similar to those of the US. Conversely, London and New York social-political attitudes are similar to each other and at odds with the rest of the nation, but greater London is a tenth of the UK electorate while greater New York City is perhaps three percent, and its influence even more diluted by the nature of the electoral college and the Senate. If New York were a tenth of the US electorate, the US would look more like the UK politically.

One of the principal effects of the current information/network revolution is the disintermediation of communications. One of the effects of the previously-existing intermediation of communications has been the creation of classes of gatekeepers in the media who have tended to filter the views that get presented. The UK media, because of the traditional social structure of that nation, has had a particularly tight gatekeeper effect. The values and attitudes chosen to represent British opinion have been somewhat different from those chosen by the looser but still effective US gatekeeper class to represent their nation. This has heightened and sharpened the distinctions between perceptions of the two nations. It has been my observation that "Middle Britain" -- middle class, Midland England, quite often dissenter and (once) Liberal in background, is much closer to the Middle American mentality (Midwestern, middle-class, politically moderate, non-fundamentalist Christian) than either are aware. Yet the urban, London and New York-based media persist on portraying Americans as nouveau-riche vulgarians, cowboys, and rednecks, while showing Brits as either aristocratic degenerates or soccer thugs. Disintermediation, whatever else it does, will probably change this pattern.

What is needed is a values and attitudes analysis that breaks responses down to at least the county level throughout the core Anglosphere -- the US, UK, Ireland, Anglophone Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the Anglo-Caribbean states. By extending the "red-state/blue-state" analysis that has become popular in the US following the 200 election, and by further refining it to distinguish "blue" from "purple" states (the latter sociologically more conservative, but tending to vote Democrat for class or economic reasons), I believe we would see an Anglosphere model showing an archipelago of blue areas in the great metropolitan centers -- New York, London, Toronto, Vancouver, San Francisco, Sydney, Auckland - embedded in a set of purple areas, consisting of Britain outside London, the Northeast US outside the urban cores, eastern Canada, the West Coast outside the urban cores, and the Australian Golden Crescent and New Zealand, also minus their urban cores. The Red Anglosphere would consist of the "Republican L" -- the southern and Plains/Mountain states -- but extending north into the Canadian Prairies, especially Alberta, and south through the Anglo-Caribbean states, which despite their economic populism tend to be religious and socially conservative. Some other areas of the Anglosphere, such as Northern Ireland and Queensland, would also likely show as red.

Various implicit or explicit mental models of the English-speaking nations have existed - the classic one

being a sort of post-Roman model, seeing the divergence of the various Anglosphere countries as a modern parallel to the gradual devolution of the Western Roman Empire into various cognate but distinct nation-states speaking Latin-derived languages. A variant of this sees them as falling out along a right-left spectrum, an "American/European" spectrum, or sometimes a religious/nonreligious spectrum, with the US (and Red America) occupying the rightmost position, and Britain the leftmost, most European pole. Sometimes the US is granted exceptional status as an ideological, rather than blood-and-soil nation.

One of the values of an Anglosphere social model is that it would permit us to ask, and answer a number of interesting questions about the nature and character of the nationhood of the various countries of the Anglosphere. One question should be, "Are the national labels of the Anglosphere nations a more useful predictor of attitudes, values, or behaviors of random individuals from those nations than some other set of indicators? Or is a red, blue, or purple label a more frequently or consistently valid indicator?" On a wide variety of issues the latter would seem to be the case: knowing that the individual in question is an American, Briton, or Canadian is less useful than knowing whether they are from Plano, Texas or Madison, Wisconsin; from Islington or from York; from Toronto or from Edmonton.

This suggests we must conclude that the independent states of the Anglosphere, although sovereign nation-states for the purposes of international law, do none of them meet the sociological definitions of nation-states. Rather, we must see the Anglosphere as a diverse but related common cultural area, divided by history and happenstance into what are better thought of as state-nations: human communities that see themselves as nations because they are states, as opposed to nations that have gradually acquired state forms.

Few of the inner-Anglosphere demarcation lines make sense on purely economic terms -- North America divides through the middle of its historical industrial heart and lungs, the Great Lakes zone, because it formed a convenient border for the negotiators of the Treaty of Paris. If the British Isles were divided into nations on economic grounds, surely lowland Scotland, Ulster, and northern/midlands England would be one state, and southern England another. Eastern Australia and New Zealand together make a more natural unit than do Eastern and Western Australia, linked across a wide desert only by an economically insignificant railway line. Auckland is as close to Canberra as Kalgoorlie, and substantially closer than Perth or Darwin.

This economic incongruity is sometimes recognized, but it is then argued that cultural commonalities make the lines significant. Yet the Anglosphere social model also argues against this. If the proverbial creature from Mars were to be given the sociological data from such an Anglosphere social model in a blind form, and were told to divide this area into several independent entities, it is very unlikely that it would run a border along the 49th parallel, while leaving the Mason-Dixon Line unmarked.

What is left is the stuff of state-nations: those artifacts that emerge from actions of governments. Frenchmen and Germans know what distinguishes their nations: different languages, foods, architectures, values, behaviors, ways of thinking. Each nation has experienced several radically different styles of government and political institutions over the past two centuries, but throughout that time, the underlying national characteristics have remained remarkably similar.

Americans, Canadians, Australians, and Britons have the opposite experiences: their political institutions have evolved steadily along parallel lines of continuity, while their material cultures have had substantial (and increasingly converging) commonalities. When asked what distinguishes them from the other

Anglosphere nations, usually the answer points to a state institution or politically-sponsored custom: the Crown, the Flag, the Constitution, the US Marines or the RCMP, established Church or First Amendment, the NHS or the public school district. What holds each Anglosphere country together is, ultimately, their willingness to believe that, for example, a Maine-stater has something in common with a Texan that he do not have in common with a Nova Scotian. Because they believe this, they do, and therefore over time the people of Maine have acquired one set of associations, memories, and identities while the people of Nova Scotia have another. Rather than having national characters, we have national narratives: the stories we tell each other about why we're like each other and unlike the others. In many cases, these stories are themselves the principal difference between us.

Thus the perception that the various English-speaking nations are diverging or converging at any particular time has been more a case of media self-selection and the vagaries of the political process. The current estrangement between the White House and substantial portions of the British media and public is paralleled by the estrangement of "blue state" America and its institutions. Much of this is due to President Bush's red-state roots, and his difficulties in reaching across that cultural divide. The next time he does an overseas tour, he should visit Belfast, Calgary, or Brisbane, where he might find a more congenial reception.

But such a gap should not be understood as part of a "national" divergence between America and Britain. In the coming years, the accelerating institutional disintermediation is likely to further the convergence of these two (and other English-speaking) nations, particularly with the new emerging Britain of high-tech and service entrepreneurs, often including substantial numbers of Commonwealth and Continental immigrants, in the exurban clusters along the M4 corridor, out of sight of tourists and visiting journalists, and far distant politically from both the old Tory country set and the old Labour mine-and-mill union machines.

Finally, it is likely that the old reliance upon the "special relationship" -- an informal network of elites sharing similar attitudes and interests and collaborating on an ad-hoc basis -- will have come to the end of its road. Just at the time that disintermediation will be breaking down the political alignments that have kept Britain and America politically apart and increasing the prospects for integration, its more general effect in loosening the reins of power in both countries will make the old collaborative mechanism of the Special relationship less and less workable.

The Blair-Bush relationships illustrates the limits of the current system: although it delivered British help at a critical time for America, it did so at the price of mediating all serious policy relations between the two nations through the lens of Tony Blair's perceptions. Thus, American policy toward the European Union continues to buy into Blair's confidence in Britain's ability to manipulate European politics toward favorable ends, just as the accelerating structural and demographic problems of continental Europe require a more skeptical US attitude.

Ironically, although Blair is commonly labeled "Bush's poodle" in the anti-war segment of British politics and media, it is Bush who has become Blair's poodle in all policy areas having to do with European integration. Meanwhile, the most telling domestic criticism of Blair is one that is conspicuous by its absence: that Blair, having gained Bush's favor, is squandering the goodwill he has thus gained through blind pursuit of a self-defeating European policy. (Had Blair been more successful earlier in his European agenda, his hands would have been tied after September 11th on his Atlantic agenda.) Rather than relying any further on the Special Relationship, it is time to replace the assumed goodwill and chummy personal relationships with a set of collaborative structures that are negotiated, permanent, accountable, and serviceable in good times and bad.

There has also been speculation (and has been for a hundred years, in fact) that the increasingly non-English and now non-European character of American immigration will destroy the Special Relationship, and replace the current white "Anglo-Saxon" Protestant elite that still disproportionately administers American foreign policy. That is not an argument for ending a special Anglo-American (or Australian-American) relationship, but it is an argument for institutionalizing it.

In fact, so long as the Anglosphere engine of assimilation continues to work, the new character of immigration will make intra-Anglosphere relations easier, not harder. The time of maximum difficulty lay in the years before World War One, when the immigration contained many first- and second-generation Irish and Germans, neither of whom were anxious to see America allied to England. Today's Mexican or Filipino immigrant may have no inherent warm feelings for England, but he has no historical grudge against her either. Meanwhile American generals like Sanchez and Takuba have come to respect cooperation with Britain because they have seen it work in the field. And in many cases, the new immigrants are likely to have human ties elsewhere in the Anglosphere: Colin Powell is not the last, but the first American Secretary of State to have close blood relatives in London.

In the final analysis, the endurance of the Anglo-American relationship, and other intra-Anglosphere relationships, will depend not upon the DNA of the populations of the nations, but on the values and ideals they hold. This, in turn, is dependent upon the success of assimilation of these immigrants. America, Canada, and Australia experienced substantial Italian immigration in the past, but the political ideals of Mazzini or Mussolini have no purchase on our public life. The challenge of the Anglosphere is to see that the South Asians and Latin Americans who come to us come to learn and respect the values that made these countries their destinations of choice.

#### Community, Entrepreneurship, and Political Coherence.

Some of the most interesting critical points were raised by Charles Kupchan of Georgetown University, author of the recent *End of the American Era*. These points were plausible and deserved a response.

As the Network Commonwealth concept is among other things driven by the effects of the Information Revolution, it is fair to ask, as Kupchan did, whether that revolution is not simultaneously destroying the fabric of civil society that engendered it in the first place. Are the new media narrowing rather than widening the scope of public discourse? When one's civic debate occurred primarily within the bounds of one's physical community, it could only be expected that a handful of people who felt exactly alike could be found. To achieve anything, a coalition had to be formed, and compromises made. Even the opposed side had to be argued with face-to-face in the neighborhood, the church, and the workplace. One's political opponents could also be one's employers, employees, customers, service providers, bowling-team members, or fellow communicants, and all of these ties encouraged a modicum of civility and restraint. Occasionally, repeated exposure to contrary argument could produce a change of opinion.

Today, the trend is to associate virtually with the like-minded and avoid political debate with the opposing side. People log on to [moveon.org](http://moveon.org) or [freerepublic.com](http://freerepublic.com), where the mutual reinforcement of the like-minded validates the most extreme forms of expression and penalizes the voices of moderation. Soon one finds people who appear to believe that Hillary Clinton and Janet Reno plotted the Oklahoma City bombing, or that Bush and Cheney flew airliners into the World Trade Center by remote control. These same people might even work beside each other and never mention their political beliefs -- they are so extreme that no dialogue between them would be possible, and mostly they don't bother. Meanwhile

bowling leagues decline while the sort of people who once participated in them now cocoon in far-exurban homes with no city centers at all, and are probably in bed by 9:30 in order to arise in time for their 90-minute commute to work.

There is of course some validity to this argument. All of the trends presented above have some reality to them. However, two points bear mentioning. One is that political polarization and isolation are nothing new to America. Our perceptions may be biased by the fact that the unusual unanimity and sense of shared purpose caused by World War Two are still fresh in generational memory. Yet it is likely that the social cohesion of that era was a transitory phenomenon, and that political and social fragmentation is the natural state of such a diverse and heterogeneous state-nation as the USA by a single ethnic group and a single religious denomination.

Historically, most states and regions have been dominated by a single political party. The partisan press from the founding of the Republic onward has been frequently extreme, vicious, slanderous, and highly lacking in objectivity. The lurid details of Clinton's sexual escapades on right-wing websites is not much more salacious than the pamphlets detailing Jefferson's alleged trysts with Sally Hemmings. The accusations of tyranny, deceit, and simian backwardness directed to George W. Bush, the "chimp", are hardly more vicious in tone than the Copperhead press's denunciations of Lincoln as "Old Ape". Plus ça change...

The other point is that the same trends that feed division can also serve community. Public access to records via Internet has raised the effective level of transparency of government operations, which has been an encouragement of citizen activism, and ultimately should strengthen civil society. Internet and other new media have similarly made the mobilization of community groups and the education of citizens on civic issues easier and has raised the breadth of participation in such groups. Of course this has caused discomfort to some, as the comfort of dealing with a smaller range of people and opinions has been replaced by the need to deal with a wider set. However, there has been an ongoing process of widening and opening participation in civic life throughout American history; this may become merely an acceleration of that process.

In truth, we do not know what the effect of the next stages of the Information Revolution will be on our civic life and civil society. If past technological developments have any value in prediction, we will experience some benefits and some detriments, and intelligent adaptation will probably help maximize the benefits and mitigate the detriments thereof. In the long run, the disintermediation of public opinion is more likely to strengthen civil society, because it will minimize the marginalization of opinions of outlying social groups. It is tempting to ignore the people who do not fit neatly into the mainstream social consensus, but also dangerous. As unpleasant as some may find it to have to include such views in the calculus of social consensus, it is more unhealthy to allow such people to become entirely alienated from peaceful political participation.

The other point of Kupchan's to which I had wished for more time to address was the question of the relative scope for entrepreneurship in Anglosphere versus Continental European societies. Kupchan questioned the equation of civil society as one with a strong entrepreneurial nature. His argument was that the strong social-solidarity institutions of continental European social democracies could also be an expression of civil society, and showed a civic solidarity in dimensions other than the economic.

On the former aspect -- that social solidarity can be a value of civil society -- there is obviously some evidence. Scandinavian societies are by any standard strong civil societies, and have most of the characteristics -- social cohesion, broad radius of trust, social peace -- associated with such.

However, the latter aspect deserves clarification. Some discussions of entrepreneurship concentrate primarily on the business aspect of the phenomenon, and some people seem to equate entrepreneurship entirely with profit-seeking activity. My understanding of entrepreneurship, and the underlying assumptions of my writing, use a broader definition. Entrepreneurship in the broader sense is the process by which one person, or a small group of people, generate and share a vision of an enterprise -- and it can be an enterprise in any field of human endeavor -- and themselves mobilize the people and resources to bring the vision to reality. It is not impossible that the process can function within government, but due to the nature of intragovernmental processes it is not the easiest environment in which to operate.

Profit-seeking business is the most usual home for entrepreneurship. This is because in order to mobilize resources, it is necessary to motive resource-holders, and hope of gain is both widely present in people and fairly easy to demonstrate a potential to satisfy. The widely-understood conventions for showing cashflow projections give entrepreneurs a readily-available language in which to make the case for resources. However, the same entrepreneurial process can also be observed in nonprofit organizations, religious communities, and even the military, with the substitution of charitable and humanitarian motivations, religious motivations, or patriotism and duty as equally strong or stronger drivers. It is further the case that even in the world of business entrepreneurship, visionary entrepreneurs are more often than is generally appreciated driven by transcendent values as well as economic motives.

Most people are familiar with Columbus's mixture of religious and economic motivations for his project of a western route to the Indies; his very name Christopher -- Christ-bearer -- he interpreted as a sign of his destiny to bear the word of God. Yet after him a surprising number of the visionary entrepreneurs who remade the world between his day and ours were driven by a mixture of motivations.

The fluid conmingling of economic and transcendent motives that has marked the Anglosphere's particular version of civil society can be seen in every era. The story of the "Lunar Men" (as Jenny Uglow dubbed them in her book of that name) -- the Lunar Society of Birmingham, which included such people as Erasmus Darwin, Josiah Wedgewood, Joseph Small (Jefferson's teacher), and occasionally Benjamin Franklin shows this confluence at one particular time in history, where technological entrepreneurship, scholarship, political and religious reform, and the humanities were shared among a circle of extraordinary people; the era of the founding of the Royal Society was another.

For better or worse, this sort of wide-ranging entrepreneurship has made our world, and if it is to be remade again, it will likely be by more such entrepreneurship by more such people. The English-speaking nations have in their culture and institutions been more open than most to such activity, and I believe that is why so much has happened here. My next book project will allow me to expand in depth on this theme.

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