

# Were Fukuyama, Mearsheimer or Huntington Right about the Post-Cold War Era?

Written by Benjamin Smith

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In this essay, I will argue that three prospective claims by Francis Fukuyama's, John J. Mearsheimer's and Samuel P. Huntington are insufficient to adequately describe the nature of post-Cold War international relations. This is because all three claims assume actor interest to be atomistic yet when analysing empirical evidence, it is demonstrated that actor interest is socially constructed. Hence, this essay's analysis will concentrate on causal actor interest and consequential behaviour. This analysis will follow a three-section format. First, I will examine the underlying liberalism and realism theories of each claim. Then, I will utilise relevant empirical examples to identify whether or not these claims were accurate. Finally, I will analyse said empirical examples as per a constructivist lens. This will allow me to determine whether constructivism is a more valid means of understanding actor behaviour in post-Cold War international relations. This is because both liberalism and realism propose that the interests of actors are defined prior to social interaction, while constructivism claims actor interest is shaped by social interaction[1]. Therefore, comparing and contrasting these three theories in reference to empirical examples will justify my argument that a constructivist lens more accurately describes actor causation.

Prior to my analysis, I will first define this essay's discussed causal theories and provide justification for their selection. This essay will make use of both relative and absolute gains theories as methods for analysing the accuracy of each prospective claim. Neo-realism dictates that actor interest comprises of relative gains. Relative gains refer to gains relative to immediate security or power, without regard to long-term interest[2]. Comparatively, neo-liberalism claims actor interest comprises of absolute gains. Absolute gains are defined as gains with consideration to long-term interest and other factors. Neo-liberalism advocates that the consideration of long-term economic interests in absolute gains encourages cooperative behaviour[3].

These theories were selected as they articulate and reflect the theoretical basis of each claim. To counter these atomistic theories, this essay will make use of two constructivist theories when examining empirical evidence. The first, is Alexander Wendt's theory that the absence of a centralised sovereign in the international system is not casual for actor interest or behaviour. Instead, actor interest is constructed by social interaction and that anarchy is determined by states[4]. The second, is Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sirkikk's theory of regulative norms. Regulative norms refer to the causal norms that regulate actor interest and subsequent behaviour of adhering to socially constructed appropriate behaviour[5]. These theories were selected as they differ fundamentally from liberalist and realist assertions of atomistic actor interest. This is important because if atomistic actor interest of either relative or absolute gains are not a sufficient causal explanation, it is necessary to utilise other theories. These stark differences regarding whether actor interest is either atomistic or socially constructed, which cannot be truly empirically verified, demonstrate that said theories cannot be objective. Hence, these theories of actor interest are constructed by preceding interpretation or knowledge derived from social interaction. As this is the fundamental basis of constructivism, this further reinforces the relevance of constructivism in the following cross-theoretical analysis.

### The End of History

Francis Fukuyama claimed that the collapse of the Soviet Union marked the end of ideological conflict between states and designated liberal democracy as the apex of sociological evolution and government[6]. This claim was

# Were Fukuyama, Mearsheimer or Huntington Right about the Post-Cold War Era?

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named The End of History (EoH), which refers to history culminating in a universal adoption of Liberal Democracy as a governmental model. Although Fukuyama asserted in his claim that political events would continue to occur, any threat to liberal democracy would be temporary and ultimately result in further reinforcement. The theoretical basis of EoH can be specified to neoliberalism. This is due to EoH's prediction of economic interdependence and cooperative behaviour within the constraints of the anarchic system[7]. This correlates to neoliberalism's assertion that absolute gains are causal to cooperative actor behaviour. As economic interdependence is a defining trait of post-Cold War world politics, EoH was proven accurate in this prediction.

EoH's prediction of a culminating universal history originates in Alexandre Kojève's interpretation of George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel[8]. In his interpretation, Kojève claims that Hegel's theory of a universal history that will eventually culminate in a political climate devoid of conflict[9]. Hence the absence of conflict between rival superpowers is somewhat a manifestation of this theory. However, China's simultaneous rejection of liberal democracy and rapid growth into a rival superpower defies EoH's prediction of a singular ruling ideology[10]. If this prediction were correct, the presence of a rival superpower with a different ideology would not be possible. The causal interests resulting in China's rival ideology can be contributed to regulative norms. This is because despite a rejection of liberal democracy, China has followed the post-Cold War norm of embracing a capitalist economic system. This in turn has led to an ideological synthesis of China's longstanding aversion to Western democracy and the international expectation of adherence to a capitalist economic system. As this international expectation of appropriate behaviour has regulated China's economic system, regulative norms can be contributed as causal. Hence, regulative norms as causation is a more accurate explanation than EoH's atomistic claims of either absolute gains or the culmination of universal history.

## Clash of Civilisations

Written as a response to EoH, Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilisations (CoC) rejects Fukuyama's claim of universal history culminating in the victory of a single ideology. Huntington instead claims that civilisations, in the form of states, will engage in conflict to assert their culture[11]. As CoC predicts that the dominance of a civilisation will decide the form of government, this opposes EoH's claim of a constant form of government and a singular ruling ideology. To understand its views on actor interest, CoC can be interpreted as arguing from a classical realist perspective. This is because both CoC and classical realism attribute atomistic causation of conflict to human nature [12][13].

While correctly predicting that Middle-Eastern and Western states would be the predominant actors of state conflict, CoCs claim that actor interest consists of cultural dominance is clearly incorrect. This is demonstrated by economically and politically interdependent behaviour between states of opposing cultural values. This is exemplified in the Iran Nuclear Arms Framework (INAF) preliminary agreement reached between Iran, P5+1, and the European Union. If cultural conflict were a dominant actor interest, as Huntington predicted, these empirical instances would not have occurred. This is because Iran is a self-described Islamic nation, yet engaged in cooperative behaviour with an array of nations of varying cultures. This defies Huntington's claim that Islamic and Western states will inevitably enter conflict[14]. This demonstrates that if actors did follow an atomistic interest of cultural conflict, this could not have resulted in this international cooperative behaviour. Therefore, Huntington's classical realist perspective offers an insufficient explanation.

A more accurate analysis would be that regulative norms are causal to the international cooperative behaviour of the INAF. This is because the involved international organisations dictate a certain behavioural appropriateness regarding transparency and inspection. This behavioural appropriateness was demonstrated by the INAF's regulative requirement of Iran providing access to the International Atomic Energy Agency[15]. As this is a clear demonstration of a socially-constructed appropriateness, regulative norms can be attributed as causal. Therefore, despite accuracy in predicting Middle Eastern and Western states as predominant actors, CoC's claim of atomistic actor interest offered an inadequate explanation.

## Back to the Future

John J. Mearsheimer's claim Back to the Future (BttF) predicts that the absence of rival ideologies and superpowers in Europe will result in a reversion to a multipolarity[16]. BttF theoretical basis is in Offensive Realism, being

# Were Fukuyama, Mearsheimer or Huntington Right about the Post-Cold War Era?

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Mearsheimer's idiosyncratic variation of neo-realism. As per their shared realist perspectives, both Huntington and John Mearsheimer assert that actor interest comprises of atomistic self-perseveration. However, while classical realism asserts that human nature is causal to aggressive state behaviour, offensive realism dictates that the anarchy of the international system is causal to aggressive state behaviour[17]. Hence, this correlates to actor interest of relative gains, in which interests of immediate security or survival results in aggressive behaviour.

Due to the continual presence of America as a unipolar superpower, it would be incorrect to assert that the international system has truly reverted to a multipolarity[18]. However, as BttF predominant prediction is centred on a European multipolarity, this analysis will look solely at Europe. Europe is a clear manifestation of a multipolar anarchy because there is no centralised European superpower and the de-facto government of Europe, in the form of the European Union, is inherently multipolar. Thus, it can be concluded that BttF's prediction of a European multipolarity was accurate.

However, this absence of European state conflict clearly defies offensive realism's assertion that anarchy necessitates aggressive state behaviour. Instead, the behaviour of European states is in accordance with the constructivist notion that anarchy is constructed by state behaviour and that actor interest is socially constructed[19]. The social construction of European actor interest can be attributed to a mutual acknowledgement of the devastation of prior major state conflicts (in the form of World War II). By deterring from this mutual acknowledgement, this can be interpreted as a manifestation of regulative norms. This is because, as demonstrated by this absence of conflict, these regulative norms socially construct causal actor interest and consequently dictate actor behaviour. Therefore, BttF offensive realist claim, that anarchy necessitates aggressive behaviour, was inaccurate regarding Europe.

## Conclusion

Following this analysis, it is evident that all three claims correctly predicted the absence of conflict between rival states as superpowers. However, this analysis has revealed that each claim was insufficient in predicting and explaining either actor interest or behaviour. EoH predicted that the absence of both rival ideologies and consequential conflict would be the result of absolute gains as actor interest and the culmination of universal history. EoH correctly predicted the absence of major state conflict and absolute gains as causal to cooperative behaviour. However, EoH was shown to be limited as my analysis identified regulative norms as causal to China's emergence as a rival ideology and growing superpower. CoC predicted that atomistic actor interest of cultural conflict would negate cooperation between Islamic and Western states. This was disputed due to the empirical presence of cooperative behaviour between Iran and a variety of Western nations. Despite correctly predicting multipolarity in Europe, BttF's claim that anarchy necessitates aggressive state behaviour and interests of relative gains offered a limited explanation. Instead, my analysis attributed regulative norms as causal to this absence of conflict. This reiterated the relevance of Wednt's theory that anarchy does not necessitate a specific actor behaviour and that actor interest is socially constructed. In conclusion, each claim failed to sufficiently account for the socially constructed nature of actor interest. This led to the three claims being unable to accurately encapsulate post-Cold War world politics.

## Notes

[1] Christian Reus-Smit, *Theories Of International Relations*, 3rd ed. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 193.

[2] Robert Powell, "Absolute And Relative Gains In International Relations Theory", *The American Political Science Review* 85, no. 4 (1991): 1301.

[3] Powell, 1304.

[4] Alexander Wednt, "Anarchy Is What States Make Of It: The Social Construction Of Power Politics". *International Organization* 46, no. 02 (1992): 395

[5] Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics And Political Change", *International*

# Were Fukuyama, Mearsheimer or Huntington Right about the Post-Cold War Era?

Written by Benjamin Smith

Organization 52, no. 4 (1998): 891.

[6] Francis Fukuyama, *The End Of History And The Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012), 48.

[7] Fukuyama, 283.

[8] *Ibid*, 206.

[9] Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction To The Reading Of Hegel: Lectures On The Phenomenology Of Spirit* (New York City: Basic Books, 1969): 159.

[10] Cheng Enfu and Xie Chang'an, "American Democracy, World Peace And The China Model—A Critical Analysis Of Francis Fukuyama's "At The 'End Of History' Still Stands Democracy"", *International Critical Thought* 6, no. 1 (2016): 9.

[11] Samuel Phillips Huntington and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Clash Of Civilizations And The Remaking Of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011) 150.

[12] Huntington and Brzezinski, 44.

[13] Jack Donnelly, *Theories Of International Relations*, 3rd ed. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 31.

[14] Huntington and Brzezinski, 212.

[15] Fredrik Dahl, "IAEA Now Has More Inspection Powers In Iran, Increased Knowledge Of Its Nuclear Programme – Director General", *iaea.Org*, 2017, <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/iaea-now-has-more-inspection-powers-in-iran-increased-knowledge-of-its-nuclear-programme-director-general>.

[16] John J. Mearsheimer, "Back To The Future: Instability In Europe After The Cold War", *International Security* 15, no. 1 (1990): 6.

[17] Peter Toft, "John J. Mearsheimer: An Offensive Realist Between Geopolitics And Power", *Journal Of International Relations And Development* 8, no. 4 (2005): 383.

[18] Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment", *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 1 (1990): 24

[19] Wendt, 395.

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# Were Fukuyama, Mearsheimer or Huntington Right about the Post-Cold War Era?

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