

**An Interview with Francis Fukuyama:
Dealing with the Decline of American Dominance and the Future of the End
of History**

By Jennifer Good

On Wednesday, April 6, 2011, at the Marian Minor Cook Atheneum, Dr. Francis Fukuyama gave a speech entitled, “Government in Asia, Then and Now.” Dr. Fukuyama is a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Institute at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) of John Hopkins University and the Olivier Nomellini Senior Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University. His most recent book, and the basis for his Atheneum talk, is entitled *East Asian Multilateralism: Prospects for Regional Stability*. Fukuyama has published many other books, including *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy*, *The End of History and the Last Man*, and *Falling Behind: Explaining the Development Gap Between Latin America and the United States*. Before his talk, we had the opportunity to interview Dr. Fukuyama.

Billiard Balls, the Decline of American Hegemony, and Critical Miscalculations

Q: What advice do you have for International Relations majors?

A: You’ve got to read the newspapers. We’re living through one of the most momentous periods in history with the Arab Spring. You don’t want to look back twenty years from now when you read about it in a history book and say “Was all this going on while I was an IR major and I just wasn’t paying attention?”

You also have to ask yourself why this is important. You don’t want to do IR just because you don’t want to do accounting or apply to medical school. You need to be constantly asking yourself, “Is what I’m doing going to matter to the public, to America, to society, to the world?”

You also have to understand comparative politics. In classical international relations, you treat the states like billiard balls: they bump into each other and you don’t care what’s inside. That’s not the way our world is today. You have to see what’s in the inside. For example, the conflict in

Libya involves the Arab League and the United Nations on the one hand, and on the other it is an internal civil war. The outcome is neither going to be purely domestic nor purely international.

Q: Do you think that the US is in decline?

A: The period of US hegemony is unusual; it had to do with the momentary weakness of other countries. So the shift away from US power is normal. America overshot. On the security front, the mistake was intervention in Iraq. In the economic realm, we were pushing a particular form of capitalism: free trade, very low regulation in the finance sector, openness to foreign capital. In retrospect, this was the source of our financial crisis. The heart of our power in the period from 89-2008, is that we were big exporters of ideas. People don't believe our ideas anymore. Meanwhile, China and India are growing rapidly. This shift in the relative distribution of power is dangerous because that's when people may make miscalculations and wars break out.

Q: What can be done to decrease the threat of these miscalculations?

A: The world needs better international institutions. There are relatively strong institutions within each country, but weak institutions internationally. We haven't made very much progress with security. Colonel Qaddafi managed to be so hated by everybody, including all of his Arab neighbors, that for the first time, the Arab League and the UN Security Council approved intervention. This will not happen again in the future.

Q: Do you believe that there is an obligation to intervene in cases of humanitarian crisis?

A: Ethically speaking, there is a responsibility for powerful countries to protect the weaker countries. This must be subject to rules of political prudence: you should not make things worse than they were before the intervention. You need to have a long term exit plan. We did not have this when we went into Iraq. As a result, it was extremely costly for both us and the Iraqis. If your only goal was to protect the Iraqi people from Saddam Hussein, you never would have invaded the country. I don't have any problems with the international community intervening to protect populations, but it has to be subject to prudential calculations as to whether you can do it effectively.

Q: Is state building possible? If so, how?

A: Under timeframes the American population is willing to tolerate, it is very hard to do any kind of nation building. We get involved with something, don't stick with it, and then the whole thing collapses. This is what arguably happened in 1930s Nicaragua, Vietnam, and what would have happened in Iraq if we'd withdrawn before the surge.

The End of History, Nowadays

Q: Are the revolutions for democracy part of trend towards liberal democracies as predicted in The End of History and the Last Man?

A: The revolutions reflect the Arab world catching up with the rest of the world. The Arab world was the only area that did not participate in Samuel Huntington's "Third Wave of Democratization." People argued that there was some type of Arab or Muslim exceptionalism. Now we see that the Arabs don't like living under stagnant authoritarian regimes any more than anyone else does.

Q: Do you think these revolutions will be successful in creating liberal democracy?

A: Whether they can build functioning institutions is a separate question. Democracy requires institutions, and they are very hard to create. I guarantee that we're going to be disappointed a year or five years down the road. You've now unleashed popular mobilization. The genie is out. You're never going to go back to old style authoritarianism, but whether you're going to get liberal democracy at the other end is must more questionable. It's harder to create institutions than it is to overthrow dictatorships.

Q: Do you think that capitalism will eventually lead to democracy in China?

A: Since Nixon, all administrations have had a similar, pragmatic relationship with China: we want to do business with them, we want a stable Asia. We justified this type of pragmatism by saying that China will grow, develop a middle class, and then they'll get democracy. I think that may happen, but I wouldn't hold my breath. We have to cope with the fact that we're dealing with a competent Authoritarian regime and continue to do business with them.

Q: Does continued lack of democracy in China and backsliding of democracies in Latin America pose a threat to liberal democracy?

A: There are still a very small number of successful authoritarian states. The Chinese model is not up for export the same way the old Communist model was. Given that it's hard to duplicate, democracy will remain the default state for legitimacy.

A lot of Latin American democracies didn't manage to solve the problem of inequality. Formal democracy in highly polarized, unequal societies is not conducive to stable democracy.

Redistribution and sustainable social policies are necessary to create democracy. The chief trick is to redistribute in a way that is economically sustainable, otherwise you could bankrupt your country.