

## Theory Talk #25: Antonio Marquina

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### Antonio Marquina on the Deceit of Globalization, Energy Security and Challenges to European Foreign Policy



*2009 starts out with international turmoil: a global financial crisis, war in Gaza and a gas crisis evolving around Russian supplies. Spanish professor Antonio Marquina Barrio explains how current events represent a necessary but difficult confrontation with international political reality – a confrontation challenging previously popular trust in globalization and the market. In this comprehensive Talk, he furthermore assesses the weaknesses of European international politics, explains why sound theorizing should play a bigger role in Europe; and how we can understand issues of energy security like the current crisis evolving around Russian gas.*

#### **What is, according to you, the biggest challenge or principal debate within International Relations (IR)? And what is your position in this debate / concerning this challenge?**

There are, in fact, many important debates in the field of International Relations. That is because the field has extended into very diverse subject areas, in the process of which it furthermore became multidisciplinary. So, it would really depend on who you ask. But since we're talking here, I'll indicate which debate is most significant in my opinion.

In the 90's, debates in IR centered on the magical keyword of 'globalization', due to the excitement that the end of the Cold War provoked. With the American world vision then dominating the world, many scholars – with Fukuyama – euphorically declared that 'history ended' and that the world was to a certain extent unified by capitalism. Governance was based on liberalism and focused mainly on the importance of markets (as convincingly argued by the late Susan Strange in her "States and markets"), failing states and the effects of globalization on sovereignty.

Currently, after two Bush administrations, we're gradually developing a clearer image of the failing of that image, principally because its principal protagonist and example, the United States, is victim of its own over-enthusiasm. It is important to realize the implications of this American debilitation: its decline logically induces multipolarity, and with multipolarity, competition between states.

Slowly, IR scholars start to realize that – contrary to what euphoric post-Cold-War perceptions predicted – (1) states are not simply administrative units that support markets but do not interfere, and (2) that markets won't govern themselves. In this context, the concept of 'governance' gets different characteristics, and the most important debate of the coming years will thus be how we reorganize the governance of the international system in an increasingly multipolar world.

The United States will for some time of course remain the principal great power in the system, but it will start needing agreements and real partnerships if its wants to solve much of its problems. At the core of this realization, again, is the fact that the world has had eight years to observe the Bush administration proving the U.S. is incapable to unilaterally resolve its problems. This has had and will continue to have important consequences: cooperation and coalitions between key states will be indispensable to shape the international system and to resolve not only global problems but regional ones as well.

### **How did you arrive where you are in IR?**

I have dedicated myself earlier to the studying of archives on the 2nd World War and the Cold War, but only after having completed six degrees, amongst others in International Law and Economics. After 1982, when I received the Rockefeller Fellowship in international relations, I got into contact with a number of American and European think tanks, and gradually I realized two things: firstly, that not all problems in international politics are “rational”, that is, important issues do not answer to Western logics; and secondly, that one cannot understand a local problem by solely focusing on that problem. All significant local issues have global effects or implications, and what happens in one part of the world is thus conditioned by events in other places. In that sense, I would like to emphasize that being critical of Fukuyama-style globalization does not rule out the acceptance that the world has become increasingly interconnected.

While I have great respect for a great number of people I have had the pleasure to meet throughout my career, my vision on international politics has always been conditioned by the conviction that it is my personal curiosity about international dynamics that leads to investigation and subsequently has to form the basis of my conclusions.

For me, approaches to international politics cannot be abstract, that is, they need to be based on a historical foundation. All problems have a trajectory, roots that you have to know. For me, any approach to a concrete problem in international politics thus has to be introduced expounding the origins of the problem, its trajectory and, most importantly, its dynamics. Such an approach has to be broad, in that it takes into account factors which one can only understand with a multidisciplinary training.

### **What would a student need to become a specialist in IR or to understand the world in a global way?**

One has to be open and study a wide array of issues. This multidisciplinary also implies that one has to be generalist. I would say that any good curriculum of international studies is wide, and does not allow a student to specialize until really late in their career. Take the time to enjoy reading up on such diverse subjects as the environment and common goods, economics, conflicts, political systems, international law, international institutions and organizations, perceptions and public opinion, security, decision making, new technologies and their implications, history, culture, religions... In order to be able to understand some critical issues, one also has to learn languages and try to understand cultures. We study *international* relations and thus have to be able to put ourselves in the place of someone far away, to understand the perspectives of others. Culture and religion condition how people see themselves and others, and thus condition the behavior we're studying.

### **Are states still the principal actors in International relations?**

Right now we're witnessing some events that clearly confirm states as the principal players both in terms of security and of economics. Events such as the scramble for energy security and contemporary efforts to redesign the global financial system are state-led. As a result, the fashion that held sway throughout the nineties to say that states were losing power to market actors in the context of globalization is withering away. There are, of course, other actors that come into play when studying IR but to understand international politics well one has to understand first and foremost what it is states are and do.

But that doesn't mean that states are sturdy black boxes: the international system is now filled with other different agents and factors that tend to shape it. Such factors are, for instance, technological progress, international norms and institutions, aging populations, increasing migrations flows, cultural asymmetries, strong economic competition, the search for high-quality education as a critical factor for development and success, and rapid changes in general induce or force states to change their functions, identity and behavior.

### **What is currently the biggest misconception reigning amongst IR specialists?**

The biggest misconception I recognize is actually related to what I've said before on globalization. In Europe, for example, people who deal with European security let their approaches depend on similar fashions: something happens and the whole discourse and thus the security identity of Europe changes. Take the impact of 9/11 on European security. After that date, all official documents on the subject of security mentioned terrorism on the first page, and the people behind European security completely changed their definition of what security means. Terrorist attacks are of course an important security issue, but to make it the core of the European security configuration is simply overreacting, and to change the principal goal and approach of NATO after a terrorist attack is a big mistake. It's a military security organization designed for other purposes, purposes that depend on the fifth article which only recognizes *state* threats, and 9/11, if one thing, was certainly not a clear state threat. To fight terrorism, we can dispose of police and intelligence services.

And this goes not only for security but for academic work in International Relations as well. We should really take more care in measuring the impact of certain events and ideas, because if we make a fuss and say they change our world, they will actually end up doing so. So now, almost eight years later, we find out that perhaps after all we shouldn't have changed our outlook on IR so drastically.

And not only terrorism or globalization have been such fashion items, but concepts like 'human security' are, too. The work available on the subject could fill various encyclopedias, but an operationalizable definition is still pending. Of course, it is an important concept, but before it has been aptly defined, we should not take it as a core concept of international relations. Our job is to rationalize international events in political terms, and what we say can influence politicians. So we better make sure we know exactly what the influence of events is, and how we define reality.

**In, for example, the United States or the United Kingdom, studying IR means studying loads of theory, and different departments clearly state differing theoretical outlooks on their websites. Why is this not the case in Spain?**

There are three important reasons why theory of international relations in Spain does not receive the attention it should. The first is the fact that IR is still a subsection of International Law. The second is that the selection of professors is parochial, which

implies that ‘things could be better’. The third follows from the first two and is the simple lack of interest of a number of Spanish professors to write volumes about something like ‘analyzing the international system from this or that theoretical perspective’.

The consequences of this lack of interest in theory, which is by the way not only Spanish but reigns in more European countries, are far-reaching. To give you an example: take NATO’s last [strategic concept of 1999](#). The theoretical framework is clear, almost transparent and it has clear implications for what it is NATO does. It defines the organization and makes it recognizable for other international actors. This clearness is the result of hard work by people trained in international politics – trained well to understand the importance of theory and its effects upon the political reality.

Now take a European or Spanish document on security. Generally, the theoretical frameworks of European documents are vague and eclectic, and consist of appealing quotes from one place and nice terms from another, without displaying the internal consistency that produces sound and coherent policy. If a basic document which defines the European or Spanish stance on an issue, that is, which should direct individuals to consistently behave according to policy, is vague, the resulting political behavior will be too. So a lot of the lack of a structuring backbone in our international politics is the direct result of a lack of interest for theory in our universities. A good example of this tendency is the EU document “[A Secure Europe in a Better World](#)”. A careful reading shows it doesn’t define strategy properly - the result is an inconsistent strategic document, which should be a *contradictio in terminis*.

So, theory is fundamental because it gives you the context from which a political entity operates, it situates actors and helps not only external actors such as other states recognize how one state will behave, it also helps politicians in that state to project sound policy.

**You’ve edited a book entitled *Energy Security* which is being published now by Palgrave-McMillan. How should we frame the issue of energy security and how important will it be relative to other challenges in the international system?**

It’s a fundamental problem, because without energy, we would simply not be talking here. The struggle for resources is a traditional theme within IR, but it has clearly gained a new dimension recently since what we were supposed to hold for a free energy market stopped existing – and now the media suddenly start recognizing as something alarming that 85% of oil and 70-80% of gas reserves in the world are controlled by state-owned energy companies. This has always been the case, whatever supporters of globalization and free trade might have argued. The funny thing is that energy markets in many countries are also imperfect markets (oligopolies). How can you defend current shares selling, transactions and practices invoking the market? What is worst: ‘the market’ has meant in some countries the privatization of monopolies, which in turn leads to structural energy insecurity for populations. Wonderful world!

Apart from this state control of reserves, we now face an increasing demand by big growers such as Brazil, India and China, who desperately need energy to sustainably fuel their growth. And possibly, there is simply not enough energy to fuel that demand. That not only puts pressure on prices and thus the energy market, but it also fosters increased competition between big energy consumers, reinforcing the tendency of states to tighten control over energy companies.

Then there is the tendency of some states to use this state control in the context of scarcity as a political weapon – as did Russia with Ukraine some time ago and now again, simply cutting the flow of gas. Since Ukrainian gas pipelines lead to Europe, we suffer too. Depending on unreliable suppliers doesn't fit into my image of a 'better Europe in a secure world'. And this kind of behavior is not going to stop if the situation remains the same – that is, if we don't find alternative energy sources – and at this point the alternatives are simply not economically viable.

So if we don't find a breakthrough in the medium term, which is not very likely, we'll live in a very unstable system in terms of interstate relations. Now this situation will only reinforce the increasing multipolarity of the international system we're witnessing, which already complicates cooperation. If on top of that states compete and thus do not trust one another because of the energy issue, things start to look bad.

So how do we deal with this? Through the market? I've already argued that the energy market is heavily influenced by state-interests, on both the supply and on the distribution side. So the market is highly imperfect. So the recent fuss in Spain about Lukoil, a Russian oil company, possibly taking over part of Repsol, an important Spanish oil company, is not that strange. If the majority of the supply market is already controlled by states through monopolies, oligopolies or cartels, how can the other actors play through the market? They will either be bought or pushed out of the market.

From this point of view, I heavily criticize the European Union (EU) for acting so firmly on the fashionable belief the last decade that energy is all an issue of the market and companies. We had the chance to affirm ourselves as an independent actor in the case of gas pipelines that supply us with gas coming from the East, but no. The EU acted on the belief that this would arrange itself through the invisible hand of the market and Russia happily agreed with us – Russian state-owned companies simply bought the gas from Central Asia and now has the EU in an energy-straightjacket because Russia dominates the supply – the geopolitical power Russia can now project is immense.

And who can we blame? The responsible politicians are impossible to be held accountable because all we can do is vote on election day. The European Parliament is extremely weak and lacks governance capabilities. I have not seen any politician resign on this issue, which I consider one of the most important errors in European policy to date. Nobody takes responsibility.

**In this book, you state that the competition between states for energy security in a context of scarcity will form one of the principal issues around which cooperation and possibly conflicts will arise. In [Theory Talk #11](#), Peter Haas argues we should try and avoid that themes related to the environment and resources become securitized, while promoting an international regimes approach which might foster cooperation. How does your perspective differ from that of Peter Haas?**

The basic point where we differ is that however much I would like state interests not to exist, they do. And as a professor I think it my duty to focus not on how I would like the world to work, but on how it *de facto* works. Studying international politics, one cannot talk about energy or the environment for that matter without taking into account how state interests influence what goes on. When it comes to natural resources, of whatever kind possible, while we would like them to be a big enough pie to share between all of us, we in reality have a small pie. So when I theorize about how to divide the pie and how others might react to that, I have to part from how big the pie is in reality and not from how big I want it to be.

Now that does not mean that I think that environmental issues should be securitized in general. But one has to admit that they can become trigger events, as in the case of Darfur, where the lack of sufficient natural resources was an important factor in the breaking out of conflict. However, it will never be the only reason conflict breaks out. An incidental and transitory damage to resources normally will not cause significant problems within a rich, stable country. Political stability, good management of ethnical divisions and a sound economy have a great influence. But again, one can understand neither the conflict of Darfur nor migration flows in several regions, nor the possible sustained diminution of resources in different areas without taking into consideration the limits and constraints imposed by environmental changes and their impact on security.

**The European Union is a ‘strange animal’ in a world of states, that is, a *sui generis* political institution. Do you consider the European Union a success?**

Europe is in a complicated situation right now, due to a whole specter of problems. The first one is that the United States is criticizing us for being reluctant to make some commitments while on the other hand it would distrust a politically united Europe with its own army. The US spends about 500 billion on the military, the EU together around 200 billion. Pumping that into a European army combined with the size of the European economy would make for a formidable competitor, something the US would prefer to avoid – which is the reason why the US insists in NATO as Europe’s security structure rather than for example the [Western European Union](#) or the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe ([OSCE](#)). All this will imply a new consensus in NATO.

Another, related issue is that the UE lives by the rule that international influence means pulling its wallet every time it’s negotiating, thinking that it had ‘soft’ or ‘normative’ power. And since a whole range of other countries is increasingly capable of drawing its wallet at the negotiation table, but without European conditionality (that is, insisting in good governance and human rights as a condition for trade), Europe’s ability to project influence is declining. The sad thing is that Europe at this time is unable to fix its ties with its complicated neighborhood.

A third, and less related but all the more profound challenge is that of the transfer of incomes we’re witnessing globally. In non-monetary terms, the US, representing some 5% of the world’s population, consumes more than 30% of its resources; in Europe that balance is about 22% to 30%. In terms of income and jobs, however, we’re witnessing a huge shift towards the east, amongst others because of the simple demographic fact that the European population is aging – and this crisis might well be an indication of the effort the ‘old’ political and financial structure has of dealing with that shift. It will imply a declining importance of the European Union in shaping the international system.

A fourth and the most important European challenge is the common political decision making. With 27 such diverse states now member, how can you find consensus? Impossible. So a two speed Europe will be the only solution given the fact that Europe as a mere free trade area will mean its conversion into an irrelevant international actor.

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