The End of History? Not Quite, Analyzing Francis Fukuyama’s Argument

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Abstract

The aim of this essay is to evaluate and reframe the article, “The End of History”, by American economist, Francis Fukuyama, which appeared in The National Interest in 1989. He applies Hegel's theory, the idea of freedom as the absolute and final aim of society, to argue the worldwide triumph of economics and political liberal democracy has resulted in the end of history. My question is whether it is actually happening or not. Fukuyama focuses on the fall of Marxism-Leninism. To the contrary, though, I discuss the rising militaristic autocracy in African countries and strong nationalism which has been seen in Southeast Europe. Today’s political regimes in undeveloped countries are often unstable; therefore, it seems premature to accept Fukuyama's thesis "The End of History."

Keyword: Africa, Autocracy, Bosnian War, Cold War, Congo, Democracy, Dictator, End of History, Fukuyama, Gorbachev, Gnassingbe, Kosovo War, Leninism, Liberal, Marxism, Nationalism, Political Regime, Russia, Serbian, Soviet, Socialism, Yugoslavia.

Introduction

The American economist, Francis Fukuyama, published a short article “The End of History” in The National Interest in 1989. Fukuyama applies Hegel's theory “the idea of freedom as the absolute and final aim” of society [1]. Humanity has experienced many different types of state regimes, such as feudalism, absolutism, fascism, socialism, and communist totalitarianism; however, today, for Fukuyama, no other political regimes can be serious competitors against the popularity of liberal democracy. As a result, Fukuyama decided the worldwide triumph of economics and political liberal democracy as “The End of History” (Lawler). The question is whether it is actually happening or not. In this paper, I will review his article which focuses on the fall of Marxism-Leninism in the former Soviet Union, and I will, to the contrary, discuss the rising militaristic autocracy in African countries and the strong nationalism in Southeast Europe to reframe his argument.

To begin with, the term history is often misunderstood and arguable by his readers. From Fukuyama’s view, the definition of history is “a coherent and directional transformation of human societies that affects the whole, or nearly the whole, of mankind” [2]. Hence, history in this paper, regards the political and economic regime only.

Fukuyama discusses the failure of socialist regimes and discredits the concept of socialism, especially in the Soviet Union, which used to be the leader of socialism inside of the iron curtain. The former leader of Bolsheviks, Vladimir Lenin, combined “Marxist theory and Russia's reality” to develop Marxism-Leninism for his country [3].

During the middle of the cold war, it was inadequate to even imagine the strongest socialist country, the Soviet Union, would soon collapse, since they maintained the largest military power of all socialist regimes, including nuclear weapons. How did the Soviet Union collapse? It did not happen from outside, but it failed from the inside. Former statesman and the last leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, proposed various reforms through policies of glasnost and perestroika. According to Fukuyama, “nobody in the country truly believed in Marxism-Leninism any longer,” so Gorbachev supported free markets and the cooperative movement to modernize his country to compete in the international market [2].

For Fukuyama, socialism contains a false idealism, like utopianism, which opposes the free development of human liberty and state prosperity [2]. The revolution in 1989 shows that human beings favor the democratic societies of
the United States, Canada, and other developed countries. From this perspective, the former socialist countries appear to be coming to an end since they no longer are pretending to support the distorted ideology inherited, wed from Lenin.

On the other hand, The Wall Street Journal on December 7, 2014 shows empirical data for various African countries, such as Nigeria, Uganda, and Burundi, returning to militaristic autocracy from democracy [4]. For them, the military, not democracy, is the most reliable power to keep their countries in safe. This disposition goes against Fukuyama’s end of history argument. Why are the political regimes of Africans proceeding backward? There might be three possible historical reasons. 1) European Imperial Colonialism: European countries, such as France, England, and Belgian, established local military and trained them to fight against rebellions to protect the ruling country’s privileges (Hinshaw). 2) Cold War: The U.S. and the Soviet Union created strong military systems in Africa to protect their own influence (Hinshaw). 3) Tyranny of Democracy: Even though a majority votes for a wrong position, it is valid because it is supported by constitution. For example, Congo elected an ex-military leader’s son, Faure Gnassingbe, as leader, because of name recognition. (A similar result was seen in France in 1852. Napoleon III was elected because of his grandfather’s popularity.) Now, Gnassingbe is seeking a third term and trying to change constitution, which limits him two terms. For those reasons, even though the direction of state political regimes in Africa is liberal democracy, they still have a long way to go.

Moreover, misguided nationalism undermines liberal democracy. This appeared to be the case for different ethnic groups in Southeastern Europe in the 1990s. According to the lecture by Professor Kim on December 4th, 2014, Czech (now the Czech Republic) and Slovakia were separated due to different histories, customs, and social traditions in 1992. More tragically, Yugoslavia exploded into two brutal wars: The Bosnian War of 1995 and The Kosovo War from 1998 to 1999. Serbian and pro-Serb nationalists were involved in genocide by pursuing ethnic cleansing against non-Serbs [5]. As a result, peaceful co-existence was completely destroyed, and Yugoslavia fragmented into eight countries. This is a particularly negative example of the threat of misleading nationalism.

Lastly, one might argue there is a possibility of the sudden appearance of a new superb ideology or political regime, which would replace liberal democracy. For Fukuyama, it is an event unlikely to happen since no fundamental principles of new organization are established at this moment. Moreover, in Lecture on the Philosophy, Hegel (129-30) says the development of a new idea must be gradual, and “the history of the world accordingly represents the successive stages in the development of that principle,” so the sudden appearance of a new political regime, most likely, can be ruled out.

In my opinion, today’s political regimes in undeveloped countries are often unstable, and so it seems slightly premature to conclude the end of history is happening. Even though socialism and Marxism-Leninism have vanished from most countries, there are still numerous states, especially in Africa and Southeast Europe, battling for stable democracy. They need a systematic economic plan and international relationships to promote liberal democracy. At this moment, the end of history is not happening. It might happen in the future. For Africa’s sake, I hope it will happen soon [6-8].

References