

Review of: "Geopolitical constructs of international politics - their cultural & ideological roots"

Eric Sheppard¹

¹ University of California, Los Angeles

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The premise of this paper is an important one: International relations theory is heavily influenced by Westfalian norms, which are overly limiting. This critique places it within the broader emergent literature on theorizing from the south (discussed also in IR?). As it stands, however, the paper proceeds more by assertion than analysis. The arguments needs a far more detailed analysis of the existing IR literature to document the critiques made and the historical developments presented (see my comments on the attached pdf). Many of the contradictions of Westfalian principles listed here have been discussed in those literatures, and the author needs to acknowledge and critically discuss these. See also the extensive geographical literature on geopolitics, already predating much of that in IR, which is less beholden to the notion of autonomous state actors (John Agnew etc.).

The paper concludes with the dilemmas of the current geopolitical situation (without, oddly, any discussion of the climate change-related aspects, a domain where inter-state negotiation is by now more common than around trade or migration). Here, while the author makes the case that non-Westfalian alternatives are needed, I felt the opening premise of the paper was not brought home. What are some such alternatives, either historically or in the present-day (e.g., Russia, China)? What new insights could they bring that would make them viable alternatives to consider? Beyond the interesting historical examples presented earlier, the paper is more a (legitimate) complaint about the limits of Westfalia than a compelling analysis of alternatives. This leave a big hole in the argument: Yes, Westfalia is European/colonial/limited, but what else is possible?