

The Kin-Country Thesis Revisited

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KIM RICHARD NOSSAL, APR 22 2018

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One of the key features of Samuel Huntington's world of clashing civilizations was the phenomenon of 'kin-country rallying'. States that were part of the civilization, Huntington argued, were like kin, and, more importantly, behaved like kin. Kin-countries, he argued, were a crucial part of the 'remaking' of global politics in the post-Cold War era. Indeed, the introduction of 'kin' relationships in international relations was a novel feature in a broader idea that was already widely seen as 'novel and jarring' (Betts 2010, 188). The purpose of this chapter is to revisit the idea of kin-country in contemporary international relations. I argue that the novelty of kin-country rallying in the 1990s when Huntington first outlined his 'new' approach to world politics (Huntington 1993, 35–39) was largely because his identification of the dynamics of kinship in world politics challenged the core assumptions of international relations theory that was so dominant in the American academy at the time. By contrast, for those outside the United States, the phenomenon of kin-country was historically familiar, even if, like Molière's Monsieur Jourdain, who was delighted to discover that he had been speaking prose all his life without knowing it, they had not been using the language of kin-country. I conclude, however, that while Huntington's kin-country approach provides a much clearer way to understand the relations among some countries than orthodox international relations theory, it is unlikely to be used, since it is so intimately identified with the broader civilizational clash thesis.

The Kin-Country Syndrome

When Huntington was writing his *Foreign Affairs* article in late 1992, an article in the *Boston Globe* caught his eye. H.D.S. Greenway, at the time the senior associate editor of the newspaper, noted that the war that was raging in Bosnia was having ripple effects far beyond the Balkans. Greenway was reporting on an emergency meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation was known before 2011), being held in Jeddah. The OIC was seeking to redress the military balance between the Bosnian Serbs and the Bosnian Muslims by having a United Nations arms embargo lifted. Greenway noted that this was a good example of the 'complicating factor' of the relationship between 'an ethnic group and its kin country' (Greenway 1992).

Greenway provided a number of other examples. He argued that the Russians had on numerous occasions intervened in the Balkans to protect Orthodox Christian Slavs, going so far as to suggest that 'if the Russians had not mobilized to stop Austrian bullying of Serbia in 1914, World War I might have been prevented'. He noted that both Greece and Turkey were deeply engaged with what he called 'their kinsmen' in Cyprus. Britain found itself similarly engaged in Northern Ireland. Russians continued to be engaged in the politics of the former Soviet republics over mistreatment of Russians in those countries. Serbia was a 'hostage to the Serbs in Bosnia', with the government of Slobodan Milošević manipulating the Bosnian Serb minority 'as Berlin manipulated the Sudetan Germans in the 1930s'. Greenway had a catchy phrase for what was going on in Jeddah, a phrase that appeared in the headline of the article: the 'kin-country syndrome'.

Huntington took Greenway's phrase and expanded on the idea of family, and built kinship relations into his civilizational argument. However, it should be noted that unlike many of the other elements of his civilizational argument, which were often well-grounded in theoretical and empirical works in the field, Huntington did not explicitly

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ground his discussion of kinship in either the original *Foreign Affairs* article, or the 1996 book that flowed from it, in any of the huge extant literature on kinship (for a review of late-twentieth century theoretical literature on kinship, see Peletz 1995). Instead, he just used the terms kin, kinship and kin-country without further elaboration; no doubt he assumed that his readers would use their own understandings of what kin, kinship and kin-country might involve. As a result, without a theoretically-grounded understanding of kinship, it is never precisely clear what drives the ties that create the kin-country syndrome. Using Greenway's example of the Jeddah meeting of the CIO in December 1992 that so inspired Huntington, it is not clear whether the 'kinship' observed there was driven by descent, religion, culture, identity, nationality, national interest, or a shared membership in a common civilization. Huntington, needless to say, would have argued the latter, but, as critics note, that is precisely one of the enduring flaws of the civilizational argument: actually defining those civilizations.

Huntington, however, seemed untroubled by this lack of definitional and theoretical rigor. Clearly working on the assumption that readers would know kinship when they saw it, he sketched out the essence of the kin-country syndrome and how it would affect global politics in the future. Central to the discussion was, of course, the identification of civilization as the core focus of global conflict after the end of the Cold War between competing ideologies. And while Huntington (1996, 44) averred that civilizations were cultural rather than political entities, he nonetheless argued that what he called 'core states' within civilizations played a central political role:

In the emerging global politics, the core states of the major civilizations are supplanting the two Cold War superpowers as the principal poles of attraction and repulsion for other countries.... States in these civilizational blocs often tend to be distributed in concentric circles around the core state or state, reflecting their degree of identification with and integration into that bloc (Huntington 1996, 154).

In a world of civilizations, Huntington suggested, 'the core states of civilizations are the sources of order within civilizations and, through negotiations with other core states, between civilizations' (1996, 156). Within civilizations, order is created because of ties of kinship:

A core state can perform its ordering function because member states perceive it as a cultural kin. A civilization is an extended family and, like older members of a family, core states provide their relatives with both support and discipline (1996, 156).

Huntington argued that the kinship felt by people in different nations within a civilization has significant political effects. In particular, 'in civilizational conflicts, unlike ideological ones, kin stand by their kin' (1996, 217). This leads to 'kin-country rallying' (1996, 20) – or as he called it in the *Foreign Affairs* article 'civilization rallying' (1993, 35) – which is marked by 'efforts by a state from one civilization to protect kinsmen in another civilization' (1996, 208). This rallying involves both governments and peoples: in some cases, diasporas will take the lead in organizing support – financial, military, and political – for their civilizational 'kin'; in other cases, governments will be the prime movers.

Such kin-country rallying, Huntington contends, will have a critical impact on contemporary global conflict. In a world of nation-states, Huntington contended, conflicts between states will be largely limited to the protagonists, or those with a deep and direct interest in devoting blood and treasure to the cause. Nations X and Y might go to war with each other, but the likelihood of widening that conflict is highly limited. In a world of civilizations, by contrast, the dynamics of kin-country rallying have the effect of widening wars. When wars break out on what Huntington called the 'fault lines' of civilizations (1993, 29–35; 1996, 207–208), local groups A1 and B1 will fight each other, but each will seek 'to expand the war and mobilize support from civilizational kin groups, A2, A3, A4, and B2, B3, and B4, and those groups will identify with their fighting kin' (1996, 254). Moreover, contemporary transportation and communications make the internationalization of kin-country support easier to accomplish: money, goods, services, arms, and even people are moved effortlessly across national boundaries.

Huntington sought to provide evidence for his kin-country rallying thesis in both the *Foreign Affairs* article and his book. Following the lead originally provided by Greenway in 1992, he examined the war in Yugoslavia, and the willingness of groups and states to rally around the different warring parties during the course of the 1990s. He was able to point to numerous diasporas, particularly those in Western countries, that rallied to support their 'kinfolk' back

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home. In the 1990s, ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, the former Soviet Union, Indonesia and the countries of the Middle East appeared to confirm the thesis, at least superficially.

But on closer examination, it is clear that there was in fact not as much civilization rallying as Huntington asserted. In a critique written two years before the book appeared, Richard E. Rubenstein and Jarle Crocker noted just how selective Huntington was in the cases of rallying he presented, ignoring the ethnic and national conflicts that had raged in the Soviet Union for two decades before the end of the Cold War, or choosing to focus only on those ethno-national conflicts in the Middle East or Africa that proved his thesis while ignoring others. As Rubenstein and Crocker put it crisply, 'that selectivity will not wash' (1994, 121).

Moreover, because of the wonky way that Huntington defined the eight major civilizations that are supposed to comprise contemporary global politics, it is not at all clear that transnational conflicts, even at the so-called 'fault lines' between civilizations – fault lines that run suspiciously along the borders of sovereign nation-states – were inter-civilizational conflicts. However, while Huntington's claims of kin-country rallying were clearly overstated, it can be argued that his identification of kinship as a factor in global politics – even if under-theorized – was a novel departure from the dominant orthodoxies of international relations theory in the 1990s.

Kin-Countries in World Politics

Huntington's identification of sentiments of 'kinship' across national borders – and in particular the existence of 'kin-countries' – stood in stark contrast to the orthodox theorizing in international politics about the relations of independent political communities dominant at the time that Huntington was writing – realism. While there were – and are – different strands of realism, all variants share a common assumption that independent political communities are atomistic, self-regarding, and fundamentally selfish in their relations with all other political communities.

The most durable realist is Hans J. Morgenthau (1948; 2005), whose path-breaking work in the late 1940s was so dominant during the Cold War era that it was still being revised and used as an IR text in 2005, fully 25 years after his death in 1980. Morgenthau's classic conception of international relations was that world politics was little more than the endless struggles of self-interested units seeking to avoid domination by others in an environment that is fundamentally anarchic and comparable to a Hobbesian state of nature, where there was no government, and thus where everyone treated one another as an enemy. In this view, the units may take different forms over time – since 1648, they have predominantly been sovereign nation-states – but the essence of their interaction is unchanging over time: they define their interests in terms of power and struggle with each other to seek a balance of power.

There were critiques of Morgenthau's classical realist perspective. For example, Keohane and Nye (1977) argued that the classical realist portrait did neither describe nor explain the relations between the United States and its European allies in the 1970s. That relationship, they argued, was not determined by raw power politics; rather, they argued that there was a 'complex' degree of interdependence between the US and Western Europe, and this changed the nature of their relationship: their economic and security relationship altered the way that power was exercised across the Atlantic. Likewise, English School theorists like Hedley Bull (1977) argued that classical realist theory did not capture the degree to which politics between independent political communities invariably sought to establish a social order, and that while sovereign nation-states in the contemporary system may be self-seeking, global politics was far removed from the kind of grim Hobbesian state of nature painted by classical realists.

Another important strand was the elaboration in the late 1970s and early 1980s of a 'new' realism (Keohane 1986), purporting to offer a more theoretically rigorous version of classical realism. 'Neorealists' (or, more correctly, structural realists) argued that world politics could be best understood by its structure. In this version of realism, states were led to dominate others by the anarchic structure of the system in which they found themselves. Structural realists like Waltz (1979) and Walt (1986) argued that the only way to avoid domination by others was by seeking power, either singly or in combination with other states. The apogee of this view of the impact of structure was reflected in the theory of 'offensive' realism, which asserts that every great power is forced by the nature of the system, as Mearsheimer (2001, 29) put it, to search 'for opportunities to gain power over their rivals, with hegemony as their final goal'.

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In turn, neorealism (or structural realism) and offensive realism spawned the emergence of a neoclassical realist school that argued that the structure of the system, while important, does not necessarily have such overweening deterministic power. Rather, other factors, such as perception and misperception of others, a country's domestic politics, including the capacity of state leaders to mobilize a state's power or generate domestic support, all contribute to a state's foreign policy behavior (for example, Rose 1998).

For all their differences, however, what unites the strands of realist thought is the belief in the atomistic existence of states – even if they do exist in a 'social' context, as English School scholars suggest; the importance of selfishness based on materialist conceptions of interest; and the importance of power to advance those interests.

While the tenets of realism are continually challenged by alternative theoretical approaches, it is important to recognize the degree to which the tenets of realist thought remain strongly entrenched, not only in the academy, but also in policy circles. Consider the perspective of H.R. McMaster, the U.S. National Security Advisor in the administration of Donald J. Trump, and Gary D. Cohn, Trump's chief economic adviser. In an op-ed written after Trump's first foreign trip in May 2017, they wrote that the president had:

a clear-eyed outlook that the world is not a 'global community' but an arena where nations, nongovernmental actors and businesses engage and compete for advantage... Rather than deny this elemental nature of international affairs, we embrace it (McMaster and Cohn 2017).

Needless to say, an interest-based, atomistic view of world politics will have important implications for how one understands how foreign policy is made, how alliances and coalitions work, why states will intervene in some conflicts and not in others, and whether non-material factors will shape foreign policy outcomes. Fouad Ajami put the interest-based argument succinctly in his response to Huntington's 1993 article: 'States avert their gaze from blood ties when they need to; they see brotherhood and faith and kin when it is in their interest to do so'. He went on to remind us of the lessons of the Melian dialogue:

Besieged by Athens, [the Melians] held out and were sure that the Lacedaemonians were 'bound, if only for very shame, to come to the aid of their kindred'. The Melians never wavered in their confidence in their 'civilizational' allies: 'Our common blood insures our fidelity.' We know what became of the Melians. Their allies did not turn up, their island was sacked, their world laid to waste (Ajami 1993, 9).

The problem with the orthodox realist theories of international relations, however, is that they cannot account for those international relationships that are patently *not* marked by the atomism and selfishness predicted by the orthodox theory. For there are a number of international relationships where there is a rather different political dynamic at work, one that does not conform to the predictions of any of the realist perspectives. On the contrary: in some international relationships, ties of 'sentiment' – in other words, kinship – must form much of the explanation for the relationships of these countries (and indeed their governments and peoples). These are not atomistic units, always seeking self-interest pure and simple, with outcomes determined by power differentials. Rather, they are linked by ties of different sorts: economic, commercial, familial, political, diplomatic, strategic, language, and culture. And power, when it is exercised, tends to be exercised in a less brutal fashion than predicted by realist theory.

Importantly, there is an 'insider' element that comes with such shared attributes as language, culture, institutions, and history that provide crucial commonalities for peoples of different and independent political communities. Such shared attributes provide the basis for widely shared cultural understandings that tend not be present when such critical elements are absent. In short, there are some international relationships that simply cannot be understood through a realist lens.

One could point to the former communities of the British Empire – Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States, and post-imperial Britain itself – as prototypical kin-countries. The relationships between and among these five countries are fundamentally different than relations among most other states, and certainly do not conform to the way that realists describe and explain international relations.

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First, there is a sense of commonality, shared identity – the ‘we-feeling’ identified by Deutsch (1957) that is so necessary for the establishment of a security community (Adler and Barnett 1998). To be sure, that shared identity is stronger in some cases than others: the strong ‘we-feeling’ across the Tasman Sea between Australia and New Zealand does not compare, for example, to feelings between Americans and Australians. But there can be little doubt that in all five communities, there is a sense of exceptionalism that means, for example, that the use of force between these countries as a means of securing national objectives has become unthinkable. In this, these five countries constitute an unambiguous security community (Adler and Barnett 1998) that is also a zone of democratic peace (Roussel 2004); their relationships among each other exhibit the dynamics predicted in cases of complex interdependence (Keohane and Nye 1977).

Second, there is a deep culture of interconnectedness between these communities. These connections are not just driven by material factors such as trade and investment, but in people-to-people links between families, students, and tourism. Of particular importance are the connections at the transgovernmental level that we simply do not see in many other international contexts (Fox, Hero and Nye 1976; Thompson and Randall, 2008). Relations are marked by a complex institutionalization that binds these separate and independent communities. The Five Eyes (FVEY) intelligence alliance is one manifestation of that close relationship. The ease with which government officials are exchanged in some of these dyads (in particular Australia-New Zealand, Australia-Canada) is another. Likewise, the willingness of the United States to give the command of units of its armed forces to Canadian officers on secondment speaks to a culture of closeness that is not to be found in other dyadic relationships.

Third, there are strong links that manifest themselves in military terms. In a historical context, the kin-country relationships of some of these dyads featured that most basic feature of kinship in a social context: the willingness of members of one political community to put themselves in harm’s way to protect the interests of another community. Consider the case of Australia, Canada and New Zealand during the Imperial era. Australians, Canadians and New Zealanders fought in the Boer War in 1899, and in 1914, by which time all three countries were self-governing dominions within the British Empire. Hundreds of thousands of Australians, Canadians and New Zealanders were willing to put themselves in harm’s way in defence of a wider political community (Nossal 2004).

While in a post-Imperial context there is little that remains of those earlier sentiments – during the Falklands/Malvinas War of 1982, for example, none of the former dominions offered to assist Britain in its war against Argentina – there is nonetheless a continued willingness to commit the nation’s resources to the defence and assistance to a cause that might be objectively ‘foreign’ and ‘alien’, but which one believes to be (or constructs as being) one’s own, and hence in one’s self-interest. Thus, for example, Australia and New Zealand both contributed troops to the American war in Vietnam in the 1960s. And Australia, Britain, Canada and New Zealand all responded by sending troops to Afghanistan after the attack on the United States on 11 September 2001.

One small, but telling, indication of the nature of the relationship has been the tendency to use the language of family to describe others in the community. In the Imperial era, for example, it was common for Australians, Canadians and New Zealanders to refer to Britain in national discourse as the ‘mother country’. Today, ‘cousins’ tends to be the preferred familial metaphor (Patten 2006; Blaxland 2006), though the language of family and kin continues to be used in official discourse. For example, when Donald J. Trump met Theresa May, the British prime minister, on 27 January 2017, he began his remarks by noting his own family connection to the United Kingdom; and May, for her part, noted that the US-UK relationship was ‘based on the bonds of history, of family, kinship and common interests’ (White House 2017).

But to what extent are these kin-countries connected to Huntingtonesque civilizations? The analysis above suggests that civilization – as defined by Huntington – has very little to do with the kinship ties between these five countries. To be sure, they are all part of the ‘West’, as broadly defined by Huntington, but the particular kinship links that continue to bind Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand and the United States together cannot be explained in the kind of ‘civilizational’ terms that Huntington uses.

On the contrary: as Srdjan Vucetic (2011) has shown, the construction of a larger ‘kin-country’ community between these countries was racial rather than civilizational. The key, he argues, was the idea of an ‘Anglo-Saxon’ *race* that

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identified a commonality between Britain and its 'white dominions' (in order of seniority, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) on the one hand and the United States on the other that was racial, even though it was often referred to in linguistic terms by such enthusiasts as Winston S. Churchill as the 'English-speaking peoples'. To be sure, that definition of 'race' did not mirror objective reality: there were French-speaking Canadians; indigenous peoples in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States; a 'Celtic fringe' (Vucetic 2011, 28) in the United Kingdom (and Australia); and, in the United States, a large African-American population and a Hispanic population that grew over the course of the twentieth century. But as Vucetic shows, constructions of Anglo-Saxonism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries finessed and marginalized these groups. Instead, the 'race patriotism' (Vucetic 2011, 29) of the era stressed the superiority of Anglo-Saxons over others. Indeed, what British leaders, such as Arthur Balfour and Joseph Chamberlain, openly called a 'race alliance' lay behind the rapprochement between the British Empire and the United States at the turn of twentieth century. And this, in a path-dependent way, set the stage for the consolidation of a security community between countries that evolved in the post-Imperial (but not post-imperial) order of the twentieth century, a security community that continues in the twenty-first century.

Importantly, this racialized construction of Anglo-Saxonism, bounded as it was with a linguistic fence, was purposely designed to exclude others who might nonetheless have been part of a broader Western civilization. The 'West' as a Huntingtonian civilizational group might have grown from the British-American rapprochement and the Entente Cordiale across the English Channel in the early twentieth century to the expansion of both NATO and the European Union after the collapse of the Soviet Union at century's end, but the kind of kin-country relations that developed between the United States, Britain and the three former dominions never developed with any other countries within the Western alliance.

Moreover, it is clear that the kin-country relationship that developed between these countries is a *cas unique* in contemporary global politics. While we can find patterns of friendship between countries developed on numerous bases – language (*la Francophonie*, *Cumbre Iberoamericana*, for example), religion (Organization of Islamic Cooperation), or even former colonial membership (the Commonwealth or *La Francophonie*) – there simply is no comparable grouping of states that have the same kind of relationship as these five countries.

Conclusion

I have argued that Huntington was right to call attention to the phenomenon of kin-countries. To be sure, most students of international relations and foreign policy in the smaller kin-countries explored in this chapter were already aware of the phenomenon, even if, like Molière's Monsieur Jourdain, they were not using the language of kin-country in their scholarship. But they fully understood that there are certain international relationships that are simply not well explained by orthodox international relations theorizing, particularly not realist theories.

But, paradoxically, the idea of kin-country can only be made useful if it is stripped of its 'clash of civilizations' baggage. In other words, looking at some international relationships through the lens of a sense of kinship – whether defined, as Vucetic does, as a racialized identity, or focusing on attributes such as politico-strategic or economic interests, language, common historical origins or political institutions, culture, religion, or 'way of life' – makes considerably more sense than trying to understand those relationships using the precepts of realism. But those kinship ties, it is clear, have little to do with 'civilization', as Huntington was using the term. Likewise, the 'rallying' that was so central to Huntington's conception of kin-country is not only problematic more generally – as widely noted by critics – but makes no appearance in the relationships of the kin-countries looked at in this chapter.

In short, the concept of kin-country remains too closely identified with Huntington's broader civilizational argument to be able to enjoy anything but a tadpole existence, and certainly will never be able to develop autonomously from the project that spawned it 25 years ago. Kin-country seems doomed to be an analytical category that is useful but, sadly, unusable.

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