



# The state of future in international relations



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## ABSTRACT

This paper elaborates the state of Future in International Relations from a comparative theoretical perspective with regard to the selected methodological tools of Futures Studies. It, first, looks into the development of International Relations and Futures Studies to point out, how their contextual, conceptual and epistemological similarities and dissimilarities emerged in due course. It, then, analyses to what extent the methodological differences between selected Futures Studies techniques (e.g. forecasting, trend analysis, Delphi, backcasting, causal layered analysis and integral futures approach) intersect with the conceptual and normative differences between contemporary theories of International Relations stemming from Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, Post-structuralism, Normative Theory and Critical Theory. The paper characterizes the relevant futures techniques with reference to the theories of International Relations, and scrutinizes selected futuristic narratives of International Relations from a methodological perspective. It, then, elaborates how Futures Studies and International Relations can benefit from each other's strengths in terms of their methodologies and assumptions. The article finally explores to what extent the promises of Futures Studies techniques conjure up a convergence between different theories of International Relations.

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## 1. Introduction

This article elaborates the link between International Relations (IR) and Futures Studies (FS) with two main goals.

First, and with reference to IR, the paper points to a contrast between the use of future techniques in policy making processes of international relations, and the very limited role attributed to FS by the theories IR. The gap between policy and theory aspects of IR deserves a further scrutiny as to point out whether the use of FS tools within IR may encourage a further compromise between the theory and practice, and conjure up a convergence among the theories of IR.

Second, and with reference to FS, it explores to what extent IR and FS promise practical and academic commons. Contemporary FS methodology supports the use of scientific techniques that embrace normative and/or empirical criteria. And yet institutional and practical expansion of FS necessitates “critical consideration and further engagement of theories from other fields – as well as building upon – its methodological tools through further conceptualization (Laurent, Fuller, & van der Helm, 2009, 69).”

IR and FS entail a broad interaction in terms of three aspects:

First, there appears a similar historical track with regard to the progress they paved after the World War II. They gradually became independent, confronted the atomistic structure of the Cold War era, and benefitted from multiplication of dependent and independent variables throughout globalization (Morgan, 2014, 8). There emerged a divergence between the

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expansion of IR as an academic discipline and the rise of FS as an academic field. The term discipline would imply the presence of conceptual and propositional structure, skills, methods, attitudes and values, as well as their extensive use for university and school units of teaching and research (Manzon, 2011, 14). Its material object, phenomena of study, or its practical pursuit may be the unifying epistemological element of an academic field (Manzon, 2011, 19). FS stems from a very well defined material object and phenomena of studying futures concerning its academic and practical pursuits. In turn, FS emerged as an academic field with methodological utility and innovative techniques. Discreteness and autonomy, which are becoming more apparent in case of FS, are important; and yet an academic discipline requires not only a systematic body of theory, appropriate methodology, and a distinct subject matter, but also a widespread expansion at universities and other institutions. FS did not acquire the characteristics of a popular academic discipline, for at least its development lacked the institutional expansion aspect, since there are only few institutions that teach and research FS at the university level. FS exists as an identifiable sphere of intellectual activity that offers practical tools and concrete ways to understand probable and desired futures not only for scholars particularly interested in FS, but also for those interested in different areas such as technology, business, society, economy, politics, history and IR (Bell, 1997). It is, therefore, possible to identify FS as an academic field that covers distinct methodology, original conceptualizations and innovative techniques. Unlike FS, IR is not only extensively institutionalized, but also widely accepted, and appears capable of meeting these criteria to exist as an autonomous discipline (Puchala, 2003, 3). “Most important, IR flourishes intellectually as a result of having formulated a distinct and recognized body of theory that describes and explains phenomena in the relations of states and peoples that are of preeminent interest to students of the discipline” (Puchala, 2003, 8–9).

*Second*, FS concerns with individuals, societies, institutions, concepts, territories and spatial structures at sub-national, national, inter-national and supra-national levels, along with relevant state and non-state actors (Fuller & Loogma, 2009, 71–79; Glenn & Gordon, 2009; Inayatullah, 2014; Slaughter, 2008). Wide-ranging choice of actors and levels of analysis helps FS adopt diverse perspectives in scrutiny of the concerned issues. This is an important methodological advantage because a myriad of FS techniques can be used from different perspectives, and theoretical stances, at individual, societal, institutional, territorial, conceptual and spatial levels of analyses. On the contrary, the choice of actor in IR discipline appeared as a complicated, and a controversial, theoretical issue that decelerated the likelihood of a common conceptual compromise of different theoretical approaches. There are lingering contradictions mainly between various types of Realism (Gilpin, 1984; Mearsheimer, 2001; Morgenthau, 1948; Rose, 1998; Waltz, 1954), Liberalism (Keohane, 1990; Nye, 1988), Constructivism (Katzenstein, 1996; Wendt, 1999, 2003), Critical Theory (Ashley, 1984; Cox, 1983; Linklater, 1990) and alternatives. These theories stem from different assumptions on the type and nature of the actors that are assumed to be effective in international relations. It is, however, possible to underline that starting from the nation-state, the discipline of IR broadened its scope of analysis by embracing more actors and types of relations at different levels of analysis (Alker, 1996; Alker, Gurr, & Rupesinghe, 2001). The increasing quantity of actors, and the web of relations they construct, emerged in conformity with the theoretical enrichment of the discipline, from a relationship between idealism and realism, towards a multilateral interaction in between idealism, realism, institutionalism, critical approaches and alternative theories (Brecher & Harvey, 2005). “More generally IR donates interactions between state-based actors across state boundaries, among them a variety of non-governmental or non-state actors or organizations” (Lawson, 2012, 5). Today, both IR and FS deal with a variety of actors and a myriad of issues at sub-national, national, supra-national and trans-national levels of analyses although the choice of actors from FS perspective proves a wider degree of applicability beyond ideological or theoretical odds.

*Third*, and the most importantly for the motive of this article, contemporary IR and FS benefit from actors, concepts and theories with similar fragmentations in terms of the way they prioritize facts; conceive variables and propose hypotheses concerning issues of interest. The discipline of IR deviates from the field of FS, as well as from many other sciences, as it is much more responsive to changing independent and intervening variables, and yet with the fewest possible changes in basic assumptions. Theoretical perspectives, stemming from original variations of Realism, Idealism, Liberalism, Constructivism, and their alternative presuppositions, adapt to changing dynamics, and prove a certain degree of validity, depending on the characteristics of the case analyses. On the one hand, this responsiveness is useful because theories of IR can be considered as means to be chosen from a tool kit. This approach helps in designing methodological frameworks at regional level of analysis regardless of the peculiarities of the chosen topic. On the other hand, this responsiveness causes difficulty of building a reliable methodology when it is about the futures in general; or the evolution of international relations in particular. A wider and deeper use of FS techniques may help IR enrich its methodological toolkit and ease ideological or theoretical odds that impede a conceptual compromise on policy matters.

This paper acknowledges the significance of conventional FS techniques in study of international relations and refers to actual methodological innovation to identify the likelihood of reliable use of FS tools within the discipline of IR. This mutual potential does not mean that IR skipped FS thus far, and *vice versa*. FS scholars elaborated the course of futures in international relations from conceptual and critical (Morgan, 2010; Sardar, 1993, 1997), as well as trend analysis perspectives (Glenn & Gordon, 2009). The use of FS within IR, however, indicates idiosyncratic characteristics. There are, of course, certain IR institutions such as, but not limited to, Rand, Hudson Institute and Stratfor, which frequently use FS tools, much more from foresight perspective, and propose alternative visions of the futures for the purpose of policy making (Andersson, 2012, 1411–1430). In the mean time, IR scholars, from well-defined theoretical stances, proposed alternative futures in their analyses of the future of international relations (Fukuyama, 1989; Huntington, 1993; Mearsheimer, 1990). Many policy makers of IR engaged in FS as in the case of Bush, pioneering the Bush Doctrine (Bush, 2012) that appears as a case of

backcasting based on a particular foresight. Recently have certain scholars, with policy experience in military, business or diplomacy, adopted FS methodology in their analysis of the futures as in the case of the Complexity Theory (deB. Mills, 2016). There may be, and will be, other examples that show how scholars, policy makers and institutions from IR discipline can use different futures techniques for particular concerns. And yet, this article suggests that the discipline of IR is in need of FS tools not only to consolidate data and come up with different scenarios on the future from policy perspective, but also to sustain a breakthrough in its theoretical and methodological development.

So to state in particular, policy makers and certain theoreticians benefit from FS techniques such as trend analysis, anticipatory surveys, Delphi method, environmental scanning and forecasting. Nevertheless, this paper suggests that conventional FS techniques and recent innovation in Causal Layered Analysis (CLA), Integral Futures Approach and Global Trend Analysis intersect with actual developments not only in expanding the scope of analysis while policy making, but also with reference to theories of IR. Hence, this paper points to the general role that may be played by the methodological tools of FS, and the particular significance of selected techniques such as forecasting, backcasting, Delphi and CLA concerning the policy and theory aspects of IR.

Following a conceptual analysis, the article elaborates how FS and IR can benefit from each other's strengths in terms of methodology and assumptions, and discusses to what extent the promises of FS techniques conjure up a convergence between different approaches of IR.

*The second section*, following this introduction, under the title "Conceptual and institutional tracks of IR and FS" makes a summary of the historical tracks of IR and FS with a particular focus on their development after the World War II.

*The third section*, under the title "Theory, future techniques and the study of IR," looks in to the conceptual and theoretical enrichment of the theories of IR and FS with regard to their similarities and dissimilarities concerning the selected cases. It elaborates relevance of selected FS techniques (foresight, Delphi, backcasting and CLA in particular) with regard to selected theories of IR originating from Realism, Liberalism, Marxism, Post-Structuralism, Normative Theory, Constructivism, Feminism and Critical Theory.

*The fourth section* under the title "Do theoretical differences really matter in analysis of the future(s)?" elaborates to what extent it may be possible to ease methodological and theoretical odds when it is about outlaying and designing multiple futures from IR perspective. It elaborates the most known futuristic narratives that have been developed and proposed from the theoretical perspective of IR as in the cases of "Socialism", "Capitalism", "Back to the future", "The end of history" and "Clash of Civilizations."

"Conclusion" brings out the way IR discipline can build upon its methodological structures by benefitting from FS tools; and discusses to what extent the proposed interaction between IR and FS promise further academic gains in terms of theory and practice.

## 2. Conceptual and institutional tracks of IR and FS

International relations started thousands of years ago. The relations between Sumerian city-states (3500 BCE) appear as a classical example to be given since they included war, peace, trade, transit and transportation (Westenholz, 2002, 23–42). Political written history of international relations can be traced back up to Thucydides narrating the conditions of war and peace in Hellenistic cultures (Price, 2004, 7–11). It is, however, necessary to differentiate international relations representing the condition of peace, conflict or war in between societies (represented by an authority), from the academic discipline of IR that theorizes, studies and applies findings *vis-à-vis* concerned actors. Despite long history of international relations, the academic discipline of IR is quite new. The first Chair in IR (the Woodrow Wilson Chair) was established in 1919 at the University College of Wales (Aberystwyth University) "symbolizing the optimism and brave new world idealism of the immediate post war period focused on the creation of new League of Nations at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919" (Morgan, 2014, 8). Since then, IR turned into one of the most studied field by leading to a widespread institutional expansion.

Similarly, "looking into the future" proves to be an important part of the human history, but the systematic and scientific study of futures is a recent breakthrough. It is of course possible to talk about the use of techniques at individual and societal level in terms of early versions of foresight. Futuristic techniques can be traced back in history with the very first coin describing a desirable or undesirable picture of futures including inter-religious identifications, such as depictions of Sumerian Goddesses, dating back thousands of years up to the first visionary descriptions of desirable or undesirable futures. Political visions of Sumerian or Hellenistic city-states, their conflicts and cooperation; the peace and war periods they looked for cannot be detached from the very early use of FS techniques to characterize actual conditions, identify trends and take pro-active measures to affect, shape or change the course of history.

Unlike IR, FS studies inherited a conceptual complexity because the early academic use of the notion differed from its latter connotations and conceptualizations. The contextual essence of IR remained its quintessence since the early use of the term international relations referred to relations between groups, societies, nations and other societal structures represented by, the presence or absence of, an authority. On the contrary, historical connotations of the terms that describe futures may be blurring in certain cases. For instance, utopianism and futurism deserve a brief conceptual elaboration in order to indicate why they should not be misidentified with contemporary FS. The very first conceptualization of Utopia by Thomas More (Utopia, originally published in 1516) appears as a good futuristic example that describes a fictional society prospering as Island in the Atlantic Ocean (More, 1737). Utopianism emerges as ultimate idealism wherein idealism goes far

beyond the connotation in IR by embracing fiction, or revealing an assumed breakthrough that is not expected in foreseen future. Idealism in IR is much more policy oriented and refers to achievable goals with reference to defined norms and criteria, and sometimes appears as the original archetype of modern liberalism.

It is also necessary to differentiate contemporary FS from the primordial use of methodology as well as from the phenomenon of Futurism. The latter was introduced as a perspective in poetry and then gained popularity throughout different countries including Europe, America and Japan after being attributed a new connotation embracing social, political, economic and technological aspects (Perloff, 2012: 9). To start from the beginning, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism (Le Figaro, February 1909) introduced and labeled Futurism "not only an artistic but also a social and political force of innovation" (Berghaus, 1996, 47). Today, it is possible to talk about a sharp difference between the term Futurism and FS where the latter focuses on normative, epistemological and positivist analysis of trends and possibilities of futures in contrast to the first which combines aesthetic, political and social innovation to sustain one desirable course of history (Poggi, 2009). In short, Futurism necessarily refers to preferred images of the future as Dator states: "FS is interested not in itself furthering any particular view of the future, but rather in furthering both narrowly professional as well as broadly participative inquiry into the future; understanding the roots and consequences of each of the manifold images of the future that exist in people's minds and in support of people's actions" (Dator, 2002, 7).

The end of the World War 2 accelerated not only the study of FS from scientific perspective but also the development of IR as an independent discipline. To start from the second, the concept and contingency of War, and therefore Realist theory, extensively dominated the academia and policymaking processes until late 1960s. "The 1960s and 1970s were characterized by the rise of different perspectives of IR: "1-The 'arch realism' of Churchill, Kennan, Morgenthau and Niebuhr; 2-The 'neo-realism' of Waltz; 3-Decision making approaches; 4-Systems Approaches 5-Self-reliance models for development; 6-Revolutionary Anti-Imperialist Theories; 7-Non-taxonomical arguments of National Security Council 68; 8-Behavioral Approaches; and, 9-Ecological Approaches." (Knutsen, 1997, 257). 1970s were characterized by normative and conceptual counter arguments challenging Realism. Theories of IR enriched throughout 1980s and 1990s with alternative arguments from the perspectives of Liberalism, Neo-liberalism, Constructivism, Feminism and Environmentalism in partial response to the issues delivered by globalization and post-modernization after the demise of Socialism. Normative and Critical Approaches, in the mean time, became more concerned with conceptual aspects of IR.

Historical development of FS entailed phases that corresponded to its methodological and conceptual progress at individual, institutional and organizational levels (Son, 2015, 120). Within a similar historical track to that of IR's; FS turned into a well-defined scientific field with original concepts, theories and methodologies following the end of the World War II. System analysis, within this phase, would be influential to develop and expand FS tools to a broader spectrum from central planning to institutions, governments, states and societies. Kahn (1962, 1965) would lead not only the establishment of Hudson Institute, but also tailor an early appearance of FS as we understand nowadays (Kahn & Wiener, 1967). The establishment of RAND in 1946, The Society for General Systems Research at Stanford in 1955 (ISSS since 1988), Association Internationale de Futuribles (by Bertrand de Jouvenel and Helene de Jouvenel) in 1960, WFS in 1966, WFSS in 1967, Yale Collegium on the Future (by Harold Lasswell and Wendell Bell) in 1967, The Club of Rome (by Aurelio Peccei and Alexander King) in 1968, the Institute for Alternative Futures (by Clement Bezold, James Dator, and Alvin Toffler) in 1977, The Santa Fe Institute in 1984 would be referred as the institutional millstones of FS (Anderson, 2016).

FS accelerated its institutional expansion and internationalization at the university level starting in early 1970s. FS at the University of Houston-Clear Lake (established in 1971), Hawaii Research Center for FS at the University of Hawaii at Manoa (1971), Institute for Futures Research (IFR) at the University of Stellenbosch (1974), Department of FS at the University of Kerala (1990), Finland Futures Research Centre at University of Turku (1992), Regent University MA in Strategic Foresight (1996), Australian Foresight Institute at Swinburne University of Technology (1999), The Graduate Institute of FS at Tamkang University (2002) and The Futures Academy at Dublin Institute of Technology (2003) can be named as the most pioneering university institutions specialized at teaching and research of FS in due course.

Although the institutions, which primarily teach and research FS, have been increasing since 1970s, the current picture is far behind the number of IR departments and centers. Unlike IR, it is possible to talk about an inconformity between methodological and technical development of FS, which gained it the privileges of an academic field, and its relatively low level of institutional expansion that did not allow it flourish as an independent discipline. This gap, first of all, arises as the consequence of the methodological applicability of FS tools to a wide-ranging area that embraces business, states, governments, organizations, individuals, societies, groups and other institutions and structures. The methodological applicability, and relevant innovations, gained FS popularity, and yet, decelerated its institutionalization as a discipline. On the contrary, the theoretical and methodological scope of IR is relatively limited, in comparison to FS, within its own discipline. Only very rarely would an economist, manager, sociologist, environmentalist, or any other individual from any other discipline, benefit from the theoretical debate of IR to support reliability of a research or facilitate teaching out of IR. FS from this perspective emerges as a multi or trans-disciplinary field with extensive applicability to other disciplines.

### 3. Theory, future techniques and the study of IR

Since foresight is compatible with strategic thinking, the method proves a great deal of harmony with decision-making or policy-making processes in IR. “The role of decision making and decision makers is a vitally important factor in foresight and futures thinking, as critical policy decisions often prove essential in moving toward future goals” (Godet & Mack, 2011, 74). Thorough foresight helps in proactive strategies that make the concerned actors become ready for future changes before they happen, achieve desirable futures or avoid the undesirable ones.

The use of foresight in IR gained strategic significance, since the very beginning of the rise of Realism, as to consolidate gains, and minimize losses. Foresight and backcasting from a Neo-realist perspective would differ from this connotation as well as other uses of FS with reference to other IR theories. A Neo-realist perspective would be interested in foresight to forecast relative differences in gains and losses, within different scenarios comprising different types of conflict. So to exemplify; one of the actors may be interested in less cooperation with other actor, or actors, and decide to confront absolute short-term losses, if the expected gains are relative, and favor the power of “the Other” in the long run. In this case, the concerned actors would be interested in trend analysis, emerging issues analysis, cross impact analysis, forecasting, Delphi method and scenario building to indicate the extent and type of cooperation with similar relative gains, and the threshold point which is expected to result in a growing difference between the gains of the actors. A Liberal or Neo-liberal perspective would convey the use of similar FS techniques when it is about identifying possibilities about the mutual gains, losses, risks, threats and opportunities. Since the choice of actors to be made from Liberal or Neo-liberal perspectives would imply a broader selection; gains and losses would go beyond State’s long-term goals, as presumed in Realist and neo-Realist theories, with the assumption that cooperation between individuals, groups, firms and organizations would ease the negative connotation of the relative or absolute gains by decreasing the contingency of conflict or War, on behalf of cooperation varying from trade to neo-functional integration.

Some foresight analyses from the perspective of Realism and neo-Realism, (Huntington, 1993; Mearsheimer, 1990) employ FS tools, and yet acknowledge the clash of interests and vested interests of the States as of utmost significance regardless of the socially constructive processes that are thought to be of less interest; with the partial exception of neo-Classical Realism (Rose, 1998). FS studies from liberal and neo-liberal perspectives adopt foresight to come up with visions of futures as in the case of Fukuyama (1989, 1992). Scholars combining the premises of FS with political processes would point out how the outcomes of foresight methodology carries out socially constructed processes that are highly linked to the legitimacy of the social good (Fuller & Loogma, 2009, 71–79). This perspective would fit both the basic premises of Constructivism (Wendt 1999, 2003) and Critical Theory of IR (Ashley, 1984; Linklater, 1990) since each socially constructed process would embed not only relations of wealth but also hegemonic power (Cox, 1983) indicating the correlation between the desired futures of different actors and the way how hegemonic relations are supported, or being challenged, to sustain present time facts with visions of futures. Feminist theory of IR, stemming from postmodernism, identifies given sexual roles in terms of being legitimizers of actual masculine hegemony from a similar perspective (Sylvester, 2002). Foresight from Feminist Perspective uses FS tools to draw the futures stemming from the masculinity of actor-object-subject relationship of Realism and neo-Realism (Runyan & Peterson, 1991, 67–106).

Epistemologically, there exist important common points between post-structural (der Derian, 2009) and post-colonial (Chowdhry & Nair, 2004) theories of IR on the one hand, certain FS scholars who point out how actual use of FS support dominant Western structures at the detriment of disadvantaged regions, religions and marginalized groups, on the other (Collier & Fuller, 2005, 111–116; Sardar, 1993, 1997). While discourse theorizing in IR crosses over and mixes divisions between poststructuralists, postmodernists and some feminists and some social constructivists (Milliken, 1999, 225–254), CLA moved on from the idea of discourse analysis as it took place within the IR theory, and transformed textual structural scrutiny into future oriented structural analysis of institutional and narrative layers to find out origins of undesirable tracks of futures to resolve them (Inayatullah, 2009, 2014). Integral Futures Approach, in the mean time, adopted a holistic perspective, close to normative approach of IR (Brown, 1992), and embraced intersections between the subjective factors at the individual level and the objective ones at the contextual level (Slaughter, 2008). The main idea was to analyze the processes and outcomes of the reciprocities between the Self and the environment comprising of structural, cultural, conceptual and social factors to identify and ease obstructive flaws towards a better future (Slaughter, 2008).

FS, therefore, considers IR as a field of analysis for which a myriad of theoretical perspectives, conceptualizations and techniques may be functional. IR, scholars or policy-makers, benefit from FS techniques not primarily from theoretical perspective, but from policy perspective concerning the goals of an initiative. There is, indeed, a huge gap between how the theories of IR refer and use conceptual and methodological outputs of FS, and the way IR scholars and policy-makers benefit from certain FS techniques.

An important reason, which may elucidate the background of this gap, comprises of epistemological characteristics of the knowledge in FS. Contemporary FS indispensably benefits from forecasts, scenarios, expert opinions, visions and other methodological tools. “Forecasts and visions are themselves epistemological activities – in the sense that they are based on some theory of knowledge – but they do not yield knowledge of the future itself. All they do is to provide us with manufactured knowledge of restricted number of possibilities (Sardar, 2010, 178). The policy aspect of IR benefits from the fabricated knowledge of the futures. IR theories, in the mean time, benefit from conceptualization, particularization and generalization by using the knowledge of past and today as input variables that are expected to be suitable for teaching and research. The gap between policy and theory, in terms of the way they employ FS, makes IR deviate from other disciplines



that prove more theoretical relevance to analysis of futures. This is why it may be possible to point out that the distance between IR policies and FS tools is much closer than the one between IR theories and epistemological FS. This characteristic can be considered as one of the main reasons that result in the controversial gap between rhetorical IR theories, which remain distant from the theoretical development of FS, and actual IR policies that frequently benefit from FS tools such as foresight, scenario building and backcasting.

So to exemplify; Delphi method, which was extensively used by Rand Corporation starting in 1970s, depends on the consensus or alternative visions of experts obtained out of an interactive meeting to propose a common (or alternatives) foresight on a particular issue or topic. The success of Delphi in IR relies on foresight, and it deviates from positivist foresight because it includes expert opinions and expert discussion as a coefficient that is expected to minimize the risk of uncertain or unexpected independent or intervening variables. Delphi appears as a frequently used technique especially in policy-making processes of IR with regard to short, medium and long terms. In cases, which are supported by expert competence, reliability and visionary thinking, the Delphi method may lead to, or build upon, scenarios or visions. In certain cases tangible results of foresight may become more precise with support from Delphi. In other cases, the outcome of Delphi may necessitate the use of FS techniques based on tangible variables. Strategic Think Thanks specialized at IR, diplomatic working groups and practitioners adopt this kind of approach and extensively use Delphi as a means of policy building (Graphic 1).

CLA and Integral Futures Approach deviate from other futures techniques for their normative closeness to alternative theories of IR such as Constructivism, Discourse Analysis and Post-Structuralism. CLA appears as a new technique to cope with the complexity of issues in given cases by deepening the analysis structurally to come up with a clear insight on the real causes and barriers of an undesirable situation or problem from different perspectives and at multiple levels (Inayatullah, 2009, 2014). It may result in the need for change by dominant actors involved in the process. But not necessarily, because it goes in a deeper structural analysis and transcends involved actors, processes, norms and principles. It then identifies problems. Within this perspective, normative issues of IR theories may be conceived 'as they are' with reference to what extent they contribute to problem solving. Important theoretical differences of IR on the choice of dominant actors, vested interests, rational or irrational behaviors, Wild cards (Force Majeure in IR language), positive and negative externalities, absolute and relative gains are treated not from a theoretical perspective as understood in IR; but simply as obstacles and incentives of possible solutions. Within this sense, CLA promises an extensive adaptability to the study of IR (Table 1).

The use of these and other FS techniques are common in the field of IR much more from policy perspective. What about the link between practice, methodology and theory? In other words how would differences between these techniques converge with conceptual, assumptive and hypothetical differences between the theories of IR? So to exemplify; there would appear quite differences depending on the choice of actors, processes and issues between Realism and Neo-realism on the



**Graphic 1.** Foresight Methodology and International Relations.

Source: Illustrated by the author.

**Table 1**  
Theories of IR and Futures Methodology.

Theory	Future	Narrative	Relevance
Realism	Linear	Metanarrative	Foresight (H) Delphi (H) Backcasting (H) CLA (L)
Liberalism	Linear/Non-linear	Metanarrative	Foresight (H) Delphi (H) Backcasting (H) CLA (M)
Marxism	Linear	Metanarrative	Foresight (H) Delphi (H) Backcasting (H) CLA (M)
Post-Structuralism	Non-linear/Multiple	Micro and macro-narrative	Foresight (M) Delphi (H) Backcasting (L) CLA (H)
Normative Theory	Non-linear/Multiple	Micro and macro-narrative	Foresight (M) Delphi (H) Backcasting (M) CLA (H)
Constructivism	Non-linear/Multiple	Micro and macro-narrative	Foresight (H) Delphi (H) Backcasting (H) CLA (H)
Feminism	Non-linear/Multiple	Micro and macro-narrative	Foresight (H) Delphi (H) Backcasting (H) CLA (H)
Critical Theory	Non-linear/Multiple	Micro and macro-narrative	Foresight (M) Delphi (H) Backcasting (M) CLA (H)

CLA: Causal Layered Analysis, \*(H) High, (M) Moderate, (L) Low. Source: Author.

one hand, Liberalism and diverse types of Neo-liberalism on the other. A Realist perspective would prioritize the variables that are expected to give ideas about absolute shifts in military, economic and technological powers of selected countries with a special focus on the States. Scenarios on different conditions describing the state of War and Peace would be popular because they are expected to help the concerned actors take relevant measures before “it is too late.”

For example, the preemptive strike doctrines of 1945 and 2011 (which was proposed by President Bush in 2011 published and in 2012), look like each other as they both legitimized the use of massive force against defined potential threats which were expected to drastically affect the course of history, had no change occurred (Maszka, 2014, 27–28). Both of the doctrines would represent classical cases to be interpreted within the basic assumptions of Realist theory of IR. There would, however, emerge important differences between them from comparative IR theories perspective. The type of the actors involved in action, changes in legitimization processes and provoking circumstances, masculine characteristics of war propaganda, correlation between the use of force and public opinion, can be named as of utmost significance for IR study, particularly for Post-structuralism, Constructivism, Feminism, Critical Theory and Normative Theory. FS, in the mean time, would identify the process of policy-making from another angle. Accordingly, the concept of pre-emptive strike doctrine, for instance, would be considered as an outcome of forecasting study, supported by Delphi method, which resulted in a sort of backcasting by legitimizing the use of force to attain a desirable future and avoid the undesirable ones. From this sight, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 would be conceived as preemptive strikes that had been legitimized by undesirable scenarios obtained from forecasting and Delphi. Atomic bombs were considered to be the intervening variables (Wild Cards) to change the course of history towards a desirable track, assumed to be compatible with the vision that had already been obtained out of backcasting. Similar perspective would argue that the Bush doctrine legitimized preemptive strike with reference to the urgent need for such a backcasting that appealed the use of force as the intervening variable.

#### 4. Do theoretical differences really matter in analysis of the future(s)?

Theoretical premises of IR and policy oriented methodological tools of FS result in an idiosyncratic characteristic so far as they intersect with each other for policy or strategy building purposes. Different theoretical perspectives of IR refer to similar mechanical use of FS techniques, although with conflicting and contradictory metanarratives about the course of history (Lyotard, 1984). This does not simply arise from the historical tracks they share; nor does it solely stem from a simple polarization between normative and positivist approaches as generally argued within the discipline of IR. Contextual and normative features affect the motives to use FS for different purposes in IR. This is for sure. There is, however, a methodological aspect, which deserves a closer look since the technical features may be encouraging the use of the same mechanism for different purposes, by different actors, and with different assumptions and expectations, all explicable with reference to diverse theories of IR (Graphic 2).

To start from the first; the context definitely plays an important role. For instance, contextual ideology played an important role in the use of FS by IR in the aftermath of the World War II. From IR perspective, systemic dichotomies between Capitalism and Socialism made a great deal of sense while analyzing issues of this era. The role played by ideology is also noteworthy from FS perspective. Marxism appears as a good case for both of the disciplines. From IR perspective, Marxism led to an impact within the international system by differentiating Socialist economies from the Capitalist ones. The systemic characteristics would be highly linked to the capacity building potential and strategy making ability of these two poles. In turn, actors from both poles used FS techniques to attain competitive advantage. From FS perspective; there would appear a different explanation and an implicit critique. Accordingly, it would be argued that contextual ideology caused two linear constitutive outside histories, heading in parallel. They tried to change the other with few possible counter influences. They,



**Graphic 2.** Ideology, Theory and International Relations.

Source: Illustrated by the author.

unexpectedly, engaged in growing systemic interaction because each of the move was not about the common futures, but rather an outcome of assumptions (most of which were obtained through trend analysis, forecasting, scenario building and Delphi method) over the contingent affect of the other track (Table 2).

Within the theoretical stance of IR; the demise of the Socialist Block can be interpreted as the victory of Capitalism, democracy and the concept of open society. This IR based interpretation led, indeed, to new theories and visions over future as in case of Fukuyama's argumentation much more from a controversial liberal perspective (Fukuyama, 1989, 1992). The End of History normatively universalized Western type of democracy as the ultimate destination toward post-ideological future. From "IR" perspective; the conditions allowing the concept of the End of History would identify a new context with additional actors and processes trying to influence others and the system.

Many scholars, as mentioned in the previous section, from Neo-realist, Neo-classical realist, Neo-liberal, Constructivist, Feminist and Environmental perspectives would criticize Fukuyama's understanding of a linear future, based on Western universalism. These critiques were not only based on normative differences between theoretical stances. They were also about the multitude of uncertainties that were expected to decelerate the rise of Western idealism, or the idealistic description of the Western universalism, over alternative scenarios.

Mearsheimer's Back to the Future (Mearsheimer, 1990) adopted a combination of classical, structural, defensive and offensive Realism while explaining Future scenarios and possibilities at the beginning of 1990s. Mearsheimer acknowledged the ideological conflict, material problems, the non-existence of an international superior authority and the anarchic environment in which the states were seeking to survive as the basic characteristics of the 1990s. He suggested that the end of the Cold War would result in multilateral balance of power which had characterized the international system from the 17th Century to 1945. Having defined contextual characteristics with reference to past and present from a trend analysis

**Table 2**

Futuristic Narratives from IR Perspective.

Narrative Author	Future	Ideology	Methodology
Socialism Various	Linear	High	Foresight, Backcasting
Capitalism Various	Linear	High	Foresight, Backcasting
Back to the future Mearsheimer	Non-linear	Moderate	Foresight, Expert Opinion, Scenario Building
The end of history Fukuyama	Linear	High	Foresight, Backcasting
Clash of civilizations Huntington	Linear	High	Foresight, Backcasting
Global homogenization Various	Linear	High	Foresight, Delphi, Backcasting
Global heterogenization Various	Non-linear/Multiple	High/Moderate	Foresight, Delphi, Backcasting, CLA

Source: Author.



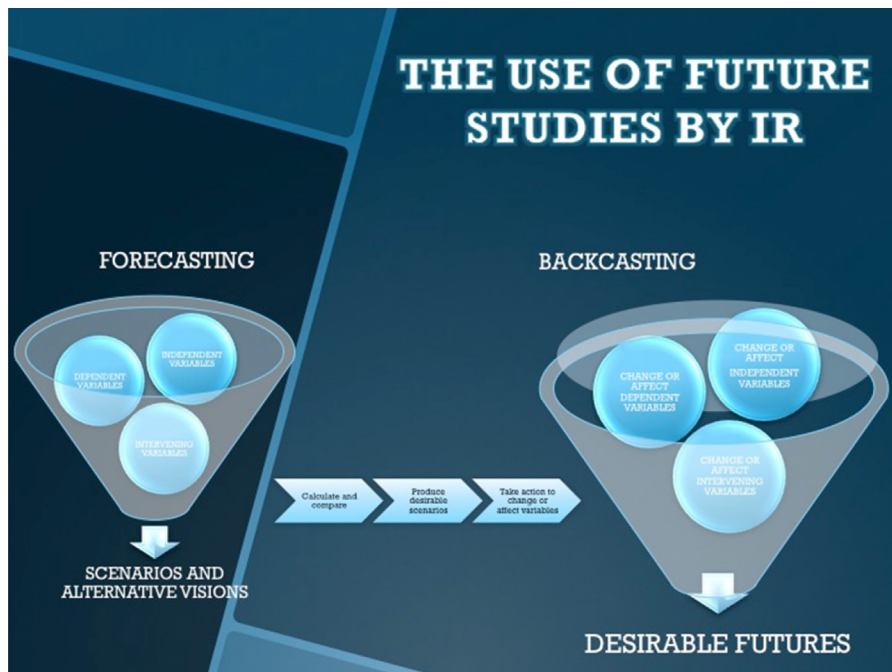
perspective, Mearsheimer's Back to the Future would then put forward four scenarios of futures, stemming from the features and contingent priorities of the concerned actors (mainly the States).

Mearsheimer's trend analysis and contextualization can be found sound from IR Theories perspective, although his assumptions on the States (as the most important actors), motives (State's survival) and the context (anarchical environment of the international system) appear vulnerable to critiques from Liberal, Constructivist, Feminist, Post-Structuralist and Critical perspectives. From FS Perspective; there would emerge other issues worthy of discussion. First of all, although Mearsheimer's Back to the Future is about foresight based on trend analysis, forecasting and scenario building; the article does not mention these tools within its methodology, nor is there any reference to FS. The dominant vision brought out by the article evokes a linear understanding of history despite the fact that the content appears as a non-linear reading of the futures since it develops four scenarios and refers to alternative predictions of the future under the title "Alternative Theories that Predict Peace."

Huntington's Clash of Civilizations (Huntington, 1993) made a remarkable influence by describing the state of nature at the time from normative perspective. The theory, from a linear understanding, would suggest that ideological and economic concerns would not be the primary source of conflict in the future. Cultural differences, on the contrary, would prevail as the main source of conflict by resulting in conflicts of global politics mainly between nations and groups of different civilizations. He would even suggest, "The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future" (Huntington, 1993, 22). Huntington's choice of actor ("nation-states will continue to be the main actors," and his basic assumption on the conflict based nature of relations between different cultures) would definitely prove more conformity with Realist and Neo-realist Theories of IR than Constructivism, Post-Structuralism, Feminism, Normative and Critical Theory so to give examples.

Having acknowledged the significance of the context and the interaction between normative and positivist approaches, it may now be useful to elaborate the methodological promises of FS that facilitated the use of similar techniques within contradictory visions. Mechanical use of variables would rarely change according to the aims, ideological concerns or vested interests of the relevant actors had they shared a common vision. An ongoing debate within FS would criticize this awkward situation from theoretical perspective (Morgan, 2009, 2010). Accordingly, the use of trend analysis is the most common way of identifying where the concerned actors, factors or issues have been heading.

There emerges an important problematic that is unique to *the use of FS techniques in IR*. A methodological flaw, indeed, emerges as an outcome of the inter-connectedness between foresight and backcasting in case of IR. To identify step-by-step: theoretical, ideological, contextual or normative differences would make less sense at the very first step in which a myriad of variables are used as inputs to come up with a clear foresight. Theoretical, ideological, contextual or normative differences play efficient roles at the second step in which priorities are defined. Differences, however, become highly efficient at the third step, if the concerned actors engage in backcasting to attain the most desirable scenario produced with reference to particular needs, fears, desires and aims of certain actors (Graphic 3).



Graphic 3. Forecasting and Backcasting in IR.

Source: Illustrated by the author.

This mechanical use of foresight, scenario building and backcasting from IR policy perspective, fundamentally deviates from the use within FS that would primarily be concerned with the proper input of the variables and the applied methodology. Ideological differences, vested interests and the type of the primary actors of policy-making processes would be more influential from IR perspective. Accordingly, foresight, scenario building and backcasting from IR policy perspective can be practically adopted by a myriad of actors with different motives and interests. In this case, contradictions are likely to arise not only from actual material or normative differences related to wellbeing and identity, but also from concerns over the future. Here appears a question that deserves further elaboration: do current clashes emerge as simple outcomes of material differences or identity conflicts; or do they come into life as policies stemming from the incompatibility between the backcastings of the concerned actors. If the second is the case, as this article argues, this indicates that IR is in need of a broader and deeper use of FS methodology beyond the mechanical use of foresight, scenario building and backcasting.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper designated historical, conceptual and theoretical similarities and dissimilarities between IR and FS. It, furthermore, elaborated the connotation and use of FS techniques within the policy and theory aspects of IR.

Theoretical perspectives of IR adapt themselves to changing contextual parameters and sustain validity with different degree of applicability depending on the characteristics of the case analyses. This responsiveness proved to be useful because it allowed a correlation between various theories of IR. However, the same responsiveness caused the difficulty of building a reliable methodology when it was about understanding the course of the futures and building desirable scenarios and strategies from IR perspective.

The use of FS techniques was found to be more common in policy-making processes of IR, in contrast to the theory aspect, that had inexplicit interaction with FS other than some futuristic grand-narratives. The gap between the policy and theory aspects of IR had already resulted in a self-critique of the discipline that had prevailed for the past three decades. This paper indicated that one of the reasons, which may have broadened the distance between the policy and theory aspects of IR, stems from the status of FS within IR discipline. Relevant use of FS tools within IR discipline promises to help in overcoming this contradiction between the theory and practice, and conjures up a convergence between various theories of IR.

Diverse actors and institutions interested in visualizing the futures, concretizing scenarios, and/or developing policy measures, suffered from a common flaw of broadly implementing a peculiar methodological approach comprised of an integrity between “foresight, scenario-building and backcasting” which in certain cases have been supported by trend analysis, qualitative and quantitative surveys, Delphi or expert opinion. This type of futures analysis appeared accurate in terms of FS criteria, and yet entailed the risk of promoting antagonistic relations, conflicts or clashes between various actors at sub-national, national, inter-national and supra-national levels of analysis so far as it generated idiosyncratic meta-narratives of the concerned actors. This very mechanical use of foresight, scenario building and backcasting, from IR policy perspective, has been adopted by a myriad of actors with different motives and with different concerns about the futures. Antagonisms, conflicts and clashes thus tend to arise not only from actual material or normative differences related to wellbeing and identity, but also from the contradictions between the policies, or concerns about their outcomes, stemming from the backcastings of different actors. Within this context, clashes at sub-national, national, inter-national and supra-national levels emerge not only as simple outcomes of material differences or identity conflicts but also as the results of “the clash of backcastings.” A broader and deeper use of contemporary FS techniques including, but not limited to, CLA, Integral Futures and Global Trend Analyses, seemed to be convincing as to transform the mechanical use of foresight, scenario building and backcasting into inclusive implementation of FS techniques within IR.

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