
The New Age of Myth: Political Narratives and the Reconstitution of World Order

C. Nicolai L. Gellwitzki  and Jeremy F.G. Moulton* 

Department of Politics and International Relations, University of York, UK

*Corresponding author. Email: jeremy.moulton@york.ac.uk

Abstract Political myths, the sacred narratives that legitimize power, are at the core of all political communities and organizations. In the post–World War II era, clear myths emerged around the ordering of the world, placing democracy, order, and peace at the idealized heart of global governance. Today, the international order is markedly changed. Previously dominant myths are routinely questioned and the international order that was built on these myths is beginning to fragment. Myths traditionally change with institutions. At this unique inflection point in the 2020s, however, this is no longer the case—myths crumble while the institutions they once supported persist, creating a vacuum in which novel myths must emerge in what we refer to as the new age of myth. We argue that the global order is in a transitional moment in terms of its governing mythologies. The myths that are born out of this age will underline the institutions, ideas, and ideologies that will shape the trajectory of the international order in the coming decades. In this essay we therefore argue that the study of political myths should be central to future approaches to international relations. Such an emphasis not only provides insight into the pathways of international cooperation and politics that may emerge from the contemporary shattering of the global political order, but also highlights how these sacred narratives will shape its future trajectory.

“Your ‘order’ is built on sand,” Rosa Luxemburg once warned, underscoring the inherent fragility of political organization, authority, and hierarchy. One might extend her critique: political orders are founded not only on the shifting sands of socio-historical contingency, but are stabilized through political myths—stories that bind loose grains into surfaces that appear firm. Such political myths do not resolve instability; however, they are the sacred, widely resonant narratives, treated as morally compelling if not empirically true, that confer legitimacy, coherence, and purpose upon power. They form the symbolic architecture of political communities, international institutions, and the global order. International Relations (IR) is composed not merely of states, institutions, norms, and orders, but more fundamentally of stories that render the international intelligible.

After World War II, myths of peace, democracy, and institutional cooperation were cast as universal, constituting the normative bedrock of global governance. These were not merely aspirational ideals but foundational stories that structured and legitimized the postwar order. Today, while many of the institutions of that order remain, the myths that once legitimized them have become increasingly hollow. Indeed, the political myths of the so-called liberal international order (LIO) are violently unravelling: Trump's tariffs shred the sanctity of free trade, Russia's invasion of Ukraine obliterates the myth of sovereign inviolability, and Israel's brutal occupation of Gaza, with Western powers complicit, strips bare the supposed universality of international norms. The result is a mythological vacuum—an interregnum in which old myths lose their force before new ones cohere. This is unprecedented in recent history, where the death and birth of myths typically coincided with geopolitical “big bangs” such as the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the World Wars.¹

Critical perspectives compel us to ask whether the myths of the LIO were ever as universal or benign as they purported to be.² For much of the Global South, these narratives concealed histories of violence, racial hierarchy, and epistemic domination. The myth of the rules-based LIO has too often served as a moral alibi for interventionism, marginalizing non-Western voices and legitimizing asymmetries in global governance. From this perspective, the current rupture may not appear as a crisis, but rather as a long-overdue revelation—welcomed by some, feared by others.

Where does that leave us? We argue that we are entering a new age of myth: a transitional period in which the global order is being re-imagined not merely through shifts in material power, but through a profound reconfiguration of its symbolic foundations. The myths born out of this age will underpin the institutions, ideas, and foreign policy practices that will shape international politics for decades. So if political myths are foundational to the organization of international life, then their transformation and birth necessitates close theoretical and empirical attention. What will the political myths of this brave new world be? What types of global governance will they explicitly and implicitly legitimize, advocate, and normalize? What horizons of possibility and political imaginaries will they engender? What international “narrative alliances”³ will emerge, and what stories will they propagate and seek to transform into political myths—those foundational metanarratives that come to function both as background conditions and as benchmarks against which international relations are conducted?

Later, we explore the concept of political myths, before examining how the current mythology of international relations and political order is being dismantled. We will then discuss what we term the “new age of myth” and its implications for both the practice and theory of international relations.

1. Ikenberry 2019.

2. Parmar 2018.

3. See Homolar and Turner 2024.

Political Myth

Myths have long been recognized as a foundational aspect of human life within anthropology,⁴ sociology,⁵ political theory,⁶ philosophy,⁷ as well as religious⁸ and nationalism⁹ studies. Across these fields, there is a consensus that myths should not be measured against veracity and accuracy or dismissed as “mere fiction.” Instead, they demand attention for how they organize, legitimize, and give coherence to social, cultural, and, above all, political life. In this, we can see how myths can be inherently political—providing justification for power within, and even the existence of, a given political order—even if not reflecting actual political realities. For instance, the myth of the imagined community of a nation remains pervasive and nearly universal across the world, as do individual nations’ foundational myths, irrespective of how accurately they depict the past, present, or possible futures.¹⁰ The example of the nation is perhaps the most potent illustration of futility in defining myths by their accurate representation of reality, for political myths cannot be falsified: whether their content has been realized or not makes no difference to their power.¹¹ Myths resonate widely and are acted upon as if morally, if not empirically, true. Indeed, myths assert authority, a form of legitimacy that arises from their capacity to convey a *paradigmatic* truth.¹²

In this essay, we draw on insights from political theory and existential philosophy to conceptualize political myth in a way relevant to contemporary IR in the 2020s. Following Bottici,¹³ we isolate three elements that distinguish political myths from ordinary political narratives. First, myths are processes enacted across multiple sites of reproduction and reception. They are sustained through repetition, re-enactment, and circulation across multiple sites, which gives them a durability that transcends their immediate context. Unlike narratives produced by political actors for strategic purposes that shift as circumstances change, myths are embedded in the fabric of collective life. While narratives may aim to persuade, justify, or promote particular policies, myths perform a deeper function: they sacralize and naturalize, turning contingent events into seemingly inevitable foundations. In this sense, myths do not merely come from above. They exist within communities and gain authority because they appear to speak from beyond politics and define the community’s place in history and the world.

Second, myths assume narrative form, yet their stories proliferate in countless variations around a basic, central narrative core or *mythologem*. In IR terms, they

4. Lévi-Strauss 1978.

5. Meyer and Rowan 1977.

6. Bottici 2007.

7. Blumenberg 1988.

8. Eliade 1963.

9. Smith 2003.

10. See Bouchard 2013.

11. Bottici 2007, 148.

12. Lincoln 2014, 23.

13. Bottici 2007.

resemble an empty signifier: endlessly invoked across disparate contexts, adaptable enough to encompass contradictions without disintegrating. Where narratives tend to be bounded and particular, myths generate universality by virtue of this malleability. The *mythologem* “never again” exemplifies this, adapting to numerous historical traumas while projecting a universal claim whose indeterminacy, whether calling for the end of war, the prevention of genocide, or the repudiation of atrocity, allows it to resonate across contexts.¹⁴ Because of their narrative form, the study of political myth is closely aligned with the constructivist research agenda on narratives in IR.¹⁵ Yet to date, few scholars have engaged with the concept, leaving substantial scope for further investigation.¹⁶

Third, myths address the existential human need for *significance*. This significance is crucial, Blumenberg argues, for mediating the “absolutism of reality” and confronting existence’s overwhelming totality.¹⁷ Myths provide a bulwark against this abyss, imposing order upon experience and transforming *chaos* into *cosmos*. Put differently, they explain the origin and purpose of institutions, norms, and political orders, while simultaneously performing a cognitive function: the systematic ordering of experience that renders human life meaningful.¹⁸ In short, while all narratives convey meaning, only myths convey significance.¹⁹ Through this significance, political order is not only explained, but also presented as natural, proper, and destined, transforming “what is” into “what must be.” This significance is always *pluralistic* and *particularistic*, depending on sociohistorical conditions and contexts.²⁰ What resonates with one community of actors may not resonate elsewhere. While national myths may provide near-universal significance within nation-states, the international realm does not easily generate such widespread significance, as evidenced by the widespread discontent with the current international order and its liberal mythology.²¹

Political myths may also be discerned in terms of their content. Tudor contends that they unfold along two axes: the cosmogenic and the eschatological.²² While analytically distinct, these dimensions are elements of a single whole, in which one grounds and sustains the other for it is “the mythical narration of the past which serves as a discursive and moral resource for the contemporary formulation of a utopian vision.”²³ Cosmogenic, or foundational, myths are those stories that, as the name implies, relate to the foundation of a polity or political order. These are the sacred narratives explaining how and why a political community came into existence, an

14. Davidović 2025; Gallagher et al. 2024.

15. See Hagström and Gustafsson 2019; Homolar 2023; Holland and Mathieu 2023.

16. For notable exceptions, see Eason 2023; Gellwitzki and Houde 2025; Steele and Kirke 2023; Turner 2022.

17. Blumenberg 1988.

18. Kirke 2015.

19. Moulton 2023.

20. Bottici 2007, 126, 178.

21. Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2021.

22. Tudor 1972.

23. Kølvråa 2016, 170.

explanation which, in turn, justifies its continued existence. For nation-states, these foundational myths, often linked to cultural and ethnic histories, can be the strongest of myths.²⁴ For example, in the United States, narratives of the War of Independence and the Founding Fathers are taught to citizens from a young age and used to justify contemporary political action, for example, the legitimization of the War on Terror.²⁵ Importantly, these myths constitute shared narrative cores across politicians of differing persuasions—malleable, empty signifiers carrying multivocal meanings, through which actors invest their narratives with significance. So while it was the Republican George W. Bush, who used the stories of America's foundation to justify the War on Terror, just a few years later the Democrat Barack Obama referenced the same Founding Fathers in his inaugural address, justifying the United States' new political direction.²⁶ To have this wide-ranging applicability, foundational myths still need to speak to contemporary audiences. The story of the United States' Founding Fathers can be contrasted with the United Kingdom's story of the Magna Carta—once a political myth, today it is regarded as antiquated.²⁷ With antiquation, a narrative loses its capacity to speak to, and justify, contemporary political action—thereby losing its classification as a political myth.

Eschatological myths, by contrast, articulate narratives of the end of the world as it is known, projecting closure both backwards and forwards in time. They depict existence as moving inexorably toward a final horizon, whether imagined as utopian fulfilment or catastrophic ruin. This is significant because, as Eliade²⁸ observes, eschatology is the prefiguration of a new mythology to be borne, because for “something genuinely new to begin, the vestiges and ruins of the old cycle must be completely destroyed . . . to obtain an absolute beginning, the end of a world must be total.” For example, the birth of the European Union or the United Nations, together with their foundational myths of peace among nations, rests upon the premise that the preceding European and international orders had been utterly destroyed. In this sense, their resonance, legitimacy, and significance emerge *ex nihilo*, fashioned out of the void created by collapse, where the very absence of order becomes the ground for a new beginning. Somewhat ironically, and pertinent to this special issue, both the burgeoning literature on the decay of the LIO and this essay itself can be understood as sites contributing to the eschatological myth-making surrounding the purported end of that very order, clearing the ground from which new cosmogenic myths may emerge.

We are concerned with a particular type of political myth that revolves around political organization and international order(s). In this context, political myths are collectively fashioned narratives that legitimize the existence of a given political order, and that endow them with significance. They are integral to international relations, serving as both cognitive and normative maps²⁹ that shape domestic and

24. Smith 1992.

25. Esch 2010.

26. Obama 2009.

27. Kumar 2013.

28. Eliade 1963.

29. Della Sala 2017.

foreign policy as well as international society. Notably, political myths that transcend state boundaries such as “never again” are often entangled with national myths or appropriated by governments to justify and advance their own political agendas.³⁰ A crisis of international mythology, therefore, inevitably exerts pressure on states to reaffirm or reconstruct their own sacred national narratives. In an age of shattering global myths, such a relationship between foundational mythology and the newly emerging narratives coming from a fragmented global order makes for a vital source of future study.

The Shattering of Mythology

At this historical juncture, we may be witnessing an irreparable rupture—even a shattering—of previously dominant international political myths. This is not simply the unraveling of individual myths, but of the entire system of mythology, a multilevel process unfolding amid geopolitical tensions and realignments. From this will come a new era of myths—one that will set the course of international order for years, even decades, to come. This historical moment therefore provides a unique opportunity for the field of IR. In this section, we provide a few short examples of how previously persistent myths are beginning to shatter.

In the formation of the European project (today’s European Union—EU), a foundational myth took root—that Europe must be unified to provide Europeans peace and prosperity.³¹ While there were competing narratives and motivations, including the continuation of European nations’ colonial projects,³² the foundational myth of peace and prosperity became synonymous with the EU’s *sui generis* model of supranational governance. However, after decades of integration, this myth began to stall and fragment—leading to European disenchantment.³³ The EU’s 2012 receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize was registered by many as a “surprise,” so far removed was the peace-driven mission from the lives of contemporary Europeans.³⁴ Meanwhile, with the Eurozone crisis and financial contagion in Europe, the foundational promise of prosperity was one that also seemed distant. The political ramifications of this loss of foundational mythology took grip on European politics, with rising Euroskepticism and calls for independent national sovereignty amplified across the continent. In 2016, the EU received a major blow—with the United Kingdom choosing to leave the Union. Here, we see a clear and early example of how international governance, built on post–World War II mythology, has faltered. Mythological decay led to the questioning of the EU as apolitical, natural, and a bringer of peace on the continent, contributing to its politicization and polarization,³⁵ and ultimately prefiguring institutional erosion.

30. Gellwitzki and Houde 2024.

31. Della Sala 2010.

32. Hansen and Jonsson 2014.

33. Kølvræa 2016.

34. Manners and Murray 2016.

35. Gellwitzki and Houde 2022.

The United States has also seen its foundational mythology begin to be questioned and to fragment. The mythology America was built on, of a “natural paradise where democracy could take root,”³⁶ is one that has run, sometimes violently, into contemporary political realities. Trump, in his second term, has said he wishes to be a dictator (if only for one day), has shared images of himself online through the official White House account wearing a crown with the caption “Long live the king,”³⁷ and has presided over an increasingly authoritarian governing style. This is a record built on declining internal and external trust in the United States’ democratic health—*The Economist*’s Intelligence Unit downgraded the United States’ ranking from “Full Democracy” to “Flawed Democracy” in 2010, a ranking the country has held at since.³⁸ Meanwhile, the country’s international partnerships (and ensuing myths of global cooperation and leadership) have markedly changed over recent years. While the myth of the “Special Relationship” between the United States and the United Kingdom had been long assailed,³⁹ the sidelining of NATO and of global cooperation, as well as the cosy up to contemporary Russian politics, mark a decline in the mythology of the United States as a global partner and leader of the free world.

This change in mythology is not a phenomenon limited to liberal democracies or to the West. China has seen significant narrative re-invention over the last two decades. The country, experiencing slowing growth but also the environmental devastation of its role as the “world’s factory” has shifted from economic-focused mythology to the more nebulous but all encompassing mythology of the “China Dream.”⁴⁰ Simultaneously, under Xi Jinping, perhaps marking the retreat of the United States and the worldwide faltering of democracy, China has taken on a more globally ambitious role, and built with it mythology as a globally powerful and exceptional actor.⁴¹ This global ambition sees China abandoning its previous internationally oriented mythology of “peaceful coexistence” in favour of a more assertive stance, one that seeks to not only extend Chinese power through economic flagship projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative but also through a direct challenge to the postwar mythology of global democratic expansion, as the country seeks to export the “China model” of authoritarianism.⁴²

This sharp shift in post–World War II mythology is not confined to individual polities. The LIO relies on myths that sustain its authority and legitimacy, including the universality of liberal values, de jure equality of states, the sanctity of sovereignty, the benevolence of Western leadership, and a rules-based international system. While myths are always particularistic, significant to some and not others, the LIO represents something of an historic anomaly—a mythology significant to varied political communities. Institutions such as the Security Council, with permanent

36. Bottici 2025.

37. Feinberg 2025.

38. *The Economist* 2025.

39. Eason 2023.

40. Li 2023.

41. Noesselt 2021.

42. Economy 2020.

positions for the World War II's victors, deeply resonate with those great powers for whom that victory is central to national myth making. The myths of the LIO remain important to many Western states because it enshrines their worldview as universal and depicts them as global order's bastions. That many commentators and governments continue to invoke these myths when assessing events such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine or Israel's war on Gaza highlights their enduring significance in certain parts of the world, even though the actions of many of these governments simultaneously undermine these myths and provoke widespread criticism and disillusionment elsewhere. More generally, the lack of incentives for or enforcement of strategic restraint, institutionalized inequalities, and the *de facto* selective enforcement of international law have long produced widespread disenchantment in other parts of the world. Even in the United States, an especial beneficiary of these myths, their appeal and resonance is diminishing, as epitomized by Trump-era policies, such as unilateral trade measures, skepticism toward the UN, and withdrawal from the WHO and UNESCO.

These are striking instances of mythological decay, with formerly powerful myths questioned, politicized, and ultimately undermined. This represents a crisis of global governance's mythology, opening space for something new to emerge. We argue that this erosion of myth constitutes an eschatological shift, creating the conditions for a cosmogenic moment in which new political myths will redefine the principles, authority, and structure of the international order.

The New Age of Myth

With the shattering of previously dominant international political mythology, we must ask what might emerge from the ashes. Will the institutions of global governance and their proponents seek to construct a new mythology to renew their legitimacy and reconstitute the existing international order? What form might the new mythology of global governance take? Or will they fade into historical irrelevance now that the credibility and efficacy of their mythological foundations have been so profoundly undermined? Can global governance function if it is not sustained by a mythology that holds significance for the majority of states within the international system? Will we ever again witness a singular, central mythology, supported by the institutions of global governance, akin to the LIO mythology, or is it destined instead to fragment into regional variants—"Western," Chinese, BRICS, and others? Who will the key actors in these processes be, and what stories will they propagate? It is too early to offer definitive answers, but future research in IR must examine this quasi-experimental moment in which new political myths are being articulated.

This raises unique methodological challenges. Scholars must identify the actors involved in constructing, disseminating, and legitimizing the myths underpinning global order. Political myths are, partly, performative and self-fulfilling; once accepted, states, institutions, and individuals act in accordance with them. It is therefore essential to distinguish between descriptive narratives, which explain or

interpret events, and prescriptive political myths, which are so sedimented that they are accepted as natural truths and actively shape both the global order and state behaviour. Descriptive narratives may be intentionally (re-)constructed by governments, often drawing on prescriptive myths, but the latter remain beyond the control of any single actor. Identifying actors is important, as myths can be (re-)produced both deliberately⁴³ and inadvertently,⁴⁴ yet it is equally vital to examine the multiple sites of myth (re-)production and reception. These include official discourse, broader political and media narratives, cultural representations in high and popular culture from film to memes to music, and the everyday, micro-level of politics. A research agenda on myth must recognize that myths exist, resonate, and (re-)produce in manifold ways and contexts. Here, we suggest two possible trajectories for the new age of myth: one concerned with an example of potential myth development, and the other with the possibility of a sustained mythological void at the international level.

There is an abundance of speculative narratives about the future of world order. We do not propose a single “most likely” future myth. Rather, we focus on one example of a recurring narrative holding mythic potential: that of a new age of empires.⁴⁵ This narrative has clear eschatological dimensions, declaring the death of the LIO while simultaneously providing a cosmogenic foundation for the (re-)birth of imperialism. Its *mythologem* is reproduced in variants worldwide, including in government speeches, wider political discourses, and media outlets. From Trump’s fantasies of territorial expansion by annexing Canada, Greenland, the Panama Canal, and even Gaza, to Putin’s invasion of Ukraine and China’s desire to conquer Taiwan, we see increasing popularization and normalization of imperial fantasies and actions. Notably, these differ from previous neo-imperial ambitions through military interventions, as we now witness the incorporation of foreign territories into the invading polities, rather than merely exercising indirect control and influence over contested states and territories.

This emerging narrative not only implicitly legitimizes and normalizes territorial expansion as a foreign policy goal but also invokes nineteenth-century spatial imaginaries, including zones of influence and buffer zones. Such imaginaries were central to the imperialist policies of major powers during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and their resurgence today signals a shift in global power dynamics. For example, some journalistic and academic debates have suggested that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is justified due to Russia’s security interests, irrespective of international law. In this narrative, imperial great powers are assigned different and greater rights than smaller powers. This is not so much a break with political practices of hierarchical ordering,⁴⁶ but rather a shift in how we collectively discuss and even implicitly condone imperial ambitions. The narrative of an “age of empires” takes disparate developments, Russian aggression, Chinese influence building, and renewed Western interventions, and weaves them into a meaningful whole, presenting imperial rivalry as global politics’ defining horizon. This then naturalizes

43. Moulton 2023.

44. Gellwitzki and Houde 2025.

45. See, for example, Hadavas 2024.

46. See Bially Mattern and Zarakol 2016.

a particular reading of world politics and legitimizes certain responses (balancing, containment, bloc building, etc.) while marginalizing others (multilateralism, pacifism, global solidarity, etc.). Thus the mythic potential lies not in the veracity of the claim but in its elevation into a world-defining framework, one that grounds political imagination and action much like earlier myths of the Cold War or of liberal progress.

Another troubling possibility is that no new myths about the international realm will take hold. In the algorithmic environment of postmodern social media, narratives struggle to cohere, and myths face even greater obstacles. The speed, fragmentation, and instantaneity of global information flows make it nearly impossible to construct stories with lasting significance for the international community. The very conditions that dismantled the “old myths” of the post-1945 LIO may also prevent the emergence of new, cohesive myths of any future world order. The result would be a mythological void in international politics. This is not to say that political myths will disappear entirely, since myths are intrinsic to human life and political organization. What may occur, however, is a fragmentation of international mythology. In this scenario, multiple competing regional or even national myths about the international order may coexist. This possibility takes us into largely unexplored territory. It may prefigure existential crises since significance would need to be constantly renegotiated—foreign policy decisions would need to be much more debated if there is not simply a myth to follow and, as existential IR has foregrounded,⁴⁷ such decisions are deeply anxiety inducing. It may also generate friction between what might be called different “mythological blocks,” which disagree over what global governance ought to be, how it should operate, who or what holds legitimate authority, and what constitutes appropriate or “moral” behaviour, both implicitly and explicitly. Such fragmentation may render multilateral institutions increasingly ineffective, as competing mythological frameworks erode consensus on norms and rules.

Yet there is also transformative potential in a global governance without a hegemonic mythology. The coexistence of competing myths may foster pluralism in how the international community imagines governance, allowing alternative models and perspectives to emerge. While the shattering of liberal mythology is accompanied by renewed nationalism, economic protectionism, and widespread backlash against liberal internationalism, it also opens the possibility for a reconfiguration of global governance, including global economic principles and the breaking of the neoliberal consensus. In the absence of prescriptive myths, actors may become more reflexive, questioning assumptions and exploring alternatives, potentially leading to different and more adaptive forms of global governance.

Conclusion

It is tempting to compare the current political moment with the end of the Cold War. At that time, narratives with the potential to transform into political myths also

47. See Hom and O'Driscoll 2023.

proliferated. Indeed, in the 1990s scholars (in)famously predicted a “clash of civilizations,”⁴⁸ the “end of history,”⁴⁹ and a “coming anarchy.”⁵⁰ Yet the “prophets” of the 1990s operated in a markedly different environment. During that period of geopolitical upheaval, the fundamental principles underpinning global governance were not in question, nor were the political myths established at the end of World War II that sustained them. It would therefore be a mistake to draw too many parallels between the 1990s and the 2020s, at least in regard to the changing foundational narratives underpinning global governance. We are in uncharted territory, facing an unprecedented horizon of possibilities and a radically uncertain future.

To date, IR as a field has failed to properly utilize the framework of political mythology in its analyses and conceptualizations of international order. We argue that this is a vital moment for change. As the myths formed in the era after World War II begin to fragment or become antiquated, it is a vital moment for IR scholars to embrace the political mythology framework to understand the key actors and narratives that will become sacred in this new age of myth—an understanding that will help set the guidelines for explorations into international order for years to come.

References

- Adler-Nissen, Rebecca, and Ayşe Zarakol. 2021. Struggles for Recognition: The Liberal International Order and the Merger of Its Discontents. *International Organization* 75 (2):611–34.
- Bially Mattern, Janice, and Ayşe Zarakol. 2016. Hierarchies in World Politics. *International Organization* 70 (3):623–54.
- Blumenberg, Hans. 1988. *Work on Myth*. MIT Press.
- Bottici, Chiara. 2007. *A Philosophy of Political Myth*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bottici, Chiara. 2025. Rethinking Political Myth, Unpacking the Settler-Colonial Dream of an “American Arcadia.” *Constellations* 32 (2):321–29.
- Bouchard, Gérard, ed. 2013. *National Myths: Constructed Pasts, Contested Presents*. Routledge.
- Davidović, Maja. 2025. *Governing the Past: “Never Again” and the Transitional Justice Project*. Cambridge University Press.
- Della Sala, Vincent. 2010. Political Myth, Mythology and the European Union. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 48 (1):1–19.
- Della Sala, Vincent. 2017. Homeland Security: Territorial Myths and Ontological Security in the European Union. *Journal of European Integration* 39 (5):545–58.
- Eason, Thomas. 2023. Introducing Myth to Foreign Policy Analysis: The Blair Poodle Myth and Its Impact on Constructions of the “Special Relationship.” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 19 (4):orad021.
- Economy, Elizabeth C. 2020. Exporting the China Model. Testimony before the US–China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing on the “China Model.” 23 March 2020. Available at <[https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/testimonies/USCCTestimony3-13-20%20\(Elizabeth%20Economy\)_justified.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/testimonies/USCCTestimony3-13-20%20(Elizabeth%20Economy)_justified.pdf)>.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1963. *Myth and Reality*. Harper & Row.
- Esch, J. 2010. Legitimizing the “War on Terror”: Political Myth in Official-Level Rhetoric. *Political Psychology* 31 (3):357–91.

48. Huntington 1996.

49. Fukuyama 1992.

50. Kaplan 1994.

- Feinberg, Andrew. 2025. Trump Insists “Not a King at All” as He’s Pressed on Abuse of Power Concerns over Tank-Adorned DC Birthday Parade. *The Independent*, 12 June. Available at <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-king-birthday-military-parade-b2769063.html>>.
- Fukuyama, Francis. 1992. *The End of History and the Last Man*. Free Press.
- Gallagher, Adrian, Richard Illingworth, Euan Raffle, and Ben Willis. 2024. The Permanency of Mass Atrocities: The Fallacy of “Never Again”? *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 27 (1):310–30.
- Gellwitzki, C. Nicolai L., and Anne-Marie Houde. 2022. Feeling the Heat: Emotions, Politicization, and the European Union. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 60 (5):1470–87.
- Gellwitzki, C. Nicolai L., and Anne-Marie Houde. 2023. Narrative, Ontological Security, and Unconscious Phantasy: Germany and the European Myth During the so-called Migration Crisis. *Political Psychology* 44 (2):435–51.
- Gellwitzki, C. Nicolai L., and Anne-Marie Houde. 2024. From Realpolitik to Gefühlspolitik: Strategically Narrating the European Union at the National Level. *Journal of European Public Policy* 31 (2):403–27.
- Hadavas, Chloe. 2024. A New Age of Empires: What Makes a Modern Empire, from Russia to Cyberspace. *Foreign Policy*. Available at <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/05/05/modern-empires-imperialism-colonialism-internet-china-russia-us-history/>>.
- Hagström, Linus, and Karl Gustafsson. 2019. Narrative Power: How Storytelling Shapes East Asian International Politics. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32 (4):387–406.
- Hansen, Peo, and Stefan Jonsson. 2014. *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Holland, Jack, and Xavier Mathieu. 2023. Narratology and US Foreign Policy in Syria: Beyond Identity Binaries, Toward Narrative Power. *International Studies Quarterly* 67 (4):sqad078.
- Hom, Andrew R., and Cian O’Driscoll. 2023. Existentialism and International Relations: In It Up to Our Necks. *Review of International Studies* 49 (5):783–94.
- Homolar, Alexandra, and Oliver Turner. 2024. Narrative Alliances: The Discursive Foundations of International Order. *International Affairs* 100 (1):203–20.
- Homolar, Alexandra. 2023. *The Uncertainty Doctrine: Narrative Politics and US Hard Power After the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press.
- Houde, Anne-Marie. 2025. Emotions, International Relations, and the Everyday: Individuals’ Emotional Attachments to International Organisations. *Review of International Studies* 51 (3):504–22.
- Huntington, Samuel P. 1996. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Simon and Schuster.
- Ikenberry, G. John. 2019. *After Victory*. Princeton University Press.
- Kaplan, Robert D. 1994. The Coming Anarchy. *The Atlantic Monthly* 273 (2):44–76.
- Kirke, Xander. 2015. Violence and Political Myth: Radicalizing Believers in the Pages of *Inspire Magazine*. *International Political Sociology* 9 (4):283–98.
- Kirke, Xander, and Brent J. Steele. 2023. Ontological Security, Myth, and Existentialism. *Review of International Studies* 49 (5):905–23.
- Kølvræ, Christoffer. 2016. European Fantasies: On the EU’s Political Myths and the Affective Potential of Utopian Imaginaries for European Identity. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 54 (1):169–84.
- Kumar, K. 2013. 1066 and All That. In *National Myths: Constructed Pasts, Contested Presents*, edited by G. Bouchard, 94–109. Routledge.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1978. *Myth and Meaning*. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Li, X., 2023. The Chinese Dream As Cultural Myth: A Narrative Analysis of President Xi Jinping’s Speech. *Western Journal of Communication* 87 (5):879–97.
- Lincoln, Bruce. 2014. *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*. 2nd ed. Oxford University Press.
- Manners, Ian, and Philomena Murray. 2016. The End of a Noble Narrative? European Integration Narratives After the Nobel Peace Prize. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 54 (1):185–202.
- McKiernan, Jennifer. 2025. Globalisation Era Has Ended, Says Treasury Minister. BBC News. Available at <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ckg10yjp7meo>>.

- Meyer, John W., and Brian Rowan. 1977. Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structures as Myth and Ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology* 83 (2):340–63.
- Moulton, Jeremy, F.G. 2023. Myth of the Near Future? Assessing the European Green Deal's Potential to Become a Political Myth for the European Union. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 32 (3):758–71.
- Noesselt, Nele. 2021. *Visualized Narratives: Signs, Symbols, Political Mythology in East Asia, Europe and the US*. Tectum Verlag.
- Obama, Barack. 2009. President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address. 21 January 2009. Washington, DC.
- Parmar, Inderjeet. 2018. The US-Led Liberal Order: Imperialism by Another Name? *International Affairs* 94 (1):151–72.
- Smith, Antony D. 1992. National Identity and the Idea of European Unity. *International Affairs* 68 (1): 55–76.
- Smith, Antony D. 2003. *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity*. Oxford University Press.
- The Economist*. 2025. EIU's 2024 Democracy Index: Trend of Global Democratic Decline and Strengthening Authoritarianism Continues Through 2024. 27 February 2025. Available at <<https://www.eiu.com/n/democracy-index-2024/>>.
- Tudor, H. 1972. *Political Myth*. Macmillan.
- Turner, Oliver. 2022. Frontiering International Relations: Narrating US Policy in the Asia Pacific. *Foreign Policy Analysis* 18 (2):orac009.

Authors

C. Nicolai L. Gellwitzki is Lecturer in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of York. He can be reached at nicolai.gellwitzki@york.ac.uk.

Jeremy F.G. Moulton is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of York. He can be reached at jeremy.moulton@york.ac.uk.

Acknowledgments

We express our thanks and gratitude to the editors of *International Organization* and to the two anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this essay.

Key words

Political myth; mythological decline; international order; political narrative; International Relations theory

Date received: June 16, 2025; Date revised: September 16, 2025; Date accepted: September 22, 2025