

**A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE
ON THE U.S. MILITARY ACTION AGAINST IRAQ
(TEORETICKÝ POHLED NA OZBROJENÝ ZÁSAH USA
PROTI IRÁKU)**

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Anotace:

Důvody, který vedly k válce mezi Spojenými státy a Irákem, měly pramálo společné s realistickým vyvažováním. Anarchie hrála určitě důležitou roli, ale hodnoty a identita byly pro konflikt klíčové, zatímco distribuce schopností představovala mimořádně okrajový prvek. Článek analyzuje chování Spojených států z neorealistické, konstruktivistické a post-strukturalistické perspektivy, aby v rovině teorie mezinárodních vztahů vysvětlil, co bylo „opravdu“ důležité ve válce proti Iráku.

The State of Play

We are in the midst of an international debate about how to force Iran and North Korea to give up their nuclear ambitions.¹ The current debate mirrors the discussion about when states may use force to settle their international disputes, which took place three years ago with regard to the US military action against Iraq, in what it became to be known as the Second Gulf War.² As a matter of fact, it may now be the right time to analyze the causes of war against Iraq from a perspective of international political theory, an approach that would allow us to provide a compact analysis of the conflict short of normative considerations on the legal and legitimate use of force in international relations, which since then have taken much of scholarly writings on this matter.³ Drawing upon the ontologically incompatible yet irrefutably illuminating perspectives of Kenneth Waltz, Alexander Wendt and David Campbell, such an analysis would provide us with a coherent explanation of the US war prone behavior which goes well beyond the particular case of the intervention in Iraq.

Anarchy

Addressing the question of the causes of the US military action against Iraq from Waltz's perspective, anarchy is certainly an important part of the story. As the most important structural feature in the Waltz's account of international politics, the absence of central rule in international relations means that no one by virtue of its authority is entitled to command and no one, in turn, is obliged to obey.⁴ It follows that because states are the constitutive units of the system (a structure and interacting units), and there is no centralized authority in the system, states themselves are ultimate arbiters of force.⁵ The desire of states as units, at a minimum, to survive is assumed and the organizing principle of international relations in an anarchic order—self-help—is postulated: under such constellation every state will try to put itself in the position to be able to ensure its own survival by taking care about nobody else.⁶ The United States thus were entitled to take military action against Iraq, as their survival was

claimed to be at stake and,⁷ in the anarchical realm of the system, nothing could prevent them from doing that. The United States did not need to care about balancing,⁸ as they were, indeed still are, the only real great power (hyperpower)⁹ in the system, so there was nobody to balance against from their point of view. The distribution of capabilities¹⁰ is also of a minor importance in this case, as it says nothing about the behavior of the United States besides the fact that they behaved in the way they actually behaved because of their dominant position in the system.

Culture

What was of a real importance in this case were values and identity, about which Waltz has nothing to say. It makes little sense to try to understand how states behave without knowing first who (or what) they are. Such an inquiry would touch a lot more on the substance of a state than the realist vision of a state as a “black box” holding a particular quantity of power.¹¹ Realism with Waltz, as a neo-realist in the forefront, focuses on what states (are forced to) do. Constructivist and post-structuralist approaches reflected in Wendt and Campbell writings focus instead on who we are. We thus face not competing theories, but radically opposed ideas of what it is important to explain. For both Wendt and Campbell the question of identity is absolutely essential to any international analysis. In Waltz’s account identity is shaped by structure of anarchy. There is no space for functional differentiation, as states are shaped and shoved in the same way by structure.¹² Internal attributes of states are given. Changes in actor behavior, and system outcome, are explained not on the basis of variations in states’ characteristic, but on the basis of changes in the attributes of the system itself.¹³ For Wendt, identity of states is shaped by cultural selection through imitation and social learning (cognitive dimension).¹⁴ For Waltz, states either reproduce themselves or fade away in what can be called natural selection (mechanical dimension).¹⁵ In Wendt’s account states imitate those who succeed in acquiring power or wealth, or those who succeed in acquiring prestige—a passive process from the point of view of states which follow the model.¹⁶ From his perspective, states also learn through interaction with other states, making themselves through interaction with others—an active process for states participating in the interaction.¹⁷ In Waltz’s perspective, there is no space for socialization, process is a unit level and units are given.¹⁸ They are the same. For Wendt, this is also true, but he reveals some system-wide processes that can cause the structural change. For Wendt, the change of structure is the change of culture, which has many forms (Hobbesian, Lockean and Kantian).¹⁹ The change in structure and culture, respectively, changes the identity of the unit through, what he calls master variables (interdependence, common fate, homogeneity and self-restraint).²⁰ So, he can explain the change of identity of the units. Why, for example, it has come about that the France is no longer the House of Bourbon, but the house of French, and how it happened.

Identity

Campbell, drawing upon the constructivist approach, went one step further, in grasping the way how culture is fixed and contingent (constructed). As far as the identity of the United States is concerned, Campbell proposed an argument that the identity of the United States is formed and shaped by their foreign policy.²¹ Identity is product of the foreign policy of a particular state, as well as the source of its foreign policy.²² In other words, foreign policy is the production and reproduction of identity in whose name it operates. In the case of the foreign policy the United States, which is in the centre of Campbell’s investigation, he argues that the identity of the United States was not based on the ethnicity, or historical experience,

which were crucial for the creation of the identity of most European states, but on the clash with enemies.²³ As Campbell argues, the identity of the United States was created around the fear from others.²⁴ The foreign policy of the United States has redefined American values, interests and identity through the interaction with outside world, finding and defining what the United States stand for.²⁵ What Campbell demonstrated is that the foreign policy of the United States was not simply generated by identity in the sense of the traditional view, which consider foreign policy an one-way through process (inside out), but that the identity in the case of the United States was, and still is, generated by the conduct of the foreign policy and vice versa.

... and the United States

What then is the relevance of Campbell's argument for the purpose of this inquiry? In line with Campbell's line of reasoning, the United States need an enemy to be able to know who they are. Without an enemy the United States do not know who they are. In such a case, they are not sure about their own identity. During the Cold War the enemy was clear—the Soviet Union—and the identity and foreign policy of the United States were shaped accordingly, as Campbell demonstrated.²⁶ However, after the fall of the Berlin wall and the disappearance of the Soviet Union, the enemy was not clear at all.²⁷ There was no clear identity maker and shaper in this respect. But the terrorists' attacks of September 11 changed this situation substantially.²⁸ Although the civilian deaths as a result of these attacks were marginal in comparison to how many Americans are killed every year in car accidents or die as a consequence of drug addiction, the response of the United States was overwhelming, if not disproportionate. And, the reason for that? Following the logic of Campbell's argument, the era of an uncertain enemy, and the time of uncertain identity of the United States is over. The new enemy became clear: international terrorism; and the United States behave accordingly. The US response to the terrorist attacks in fighting terrorists and their protectors in Afghanistan and all around the world,²⁹ the new national strategy of the United States, articulating a comprehensive policy against the new enemy,³⁰ the change of US posture to outside world from defensive to offensive (preemptive action),³¹ to note just the most significant examples, illustrate the importance of enemy for the identity formation of the United States and their foreign policy practice.

Beyond Iraq

Why then as a target of the US action was selected Iraq, and not Iran or North Korea, other enemies of the United States, for instance? This is another question, a question of historical contingency that can be answered by an analysis of US-Iraq relations, and their relevance to the war against terrorism, the United States are now waging.

Clearly, however, Waltz's account can explain very little about war between the United States and Iraq. Anarchy is certainly an important part of the story, but values and identity are central to the conflict while the distribution of capabilities is an extraordinarily peripheral element. The main explanation for the current conflict lies in the way the identity of the United States has been shaped by facing enemies of the past and those of the present, by the interplay of the foreign policy conduct and identity formation. If Campbell is right, the United States need an enemy to be able to define themselves, to be able to know who they are. They need to face clear and present danger embodied in an enemy to be able to know upon which their "we" is based and where it comes from, and they can know this only through the clash with others. That the target of their action was Iraq, and not Iran or North Korea, is a different story.

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5. See *ibid.*, pp. 80-82, 102-107.
6. See *ibid.*, pp. 104-107, 111-114.
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9. The term coined by Michael Mandelbaum in Michael Mandelbaum, "The Inadequacy of American Power," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 81 (September – October 2002), pp. 61-73.
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