

Writing Security:

United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity

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Lida Bteddini

THE AFFIRMATION OF THE "OTHER" IS A significant component of the realization of the self, since identity is realized insofar as one can determine those elements which comprise the foreign. David Campbell's assessment of the philosophical and political implications of the establishment of U.S. Foreign Policy is an intriguing analysis of the role of identity in the shaping of international relations. Rooted in the human security paradigm, which asserts that the individual should be the key referent to security rather than the state, Campbell's *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* provokes a compelling inquiry into the very nature of identity, focusing primarily on how difference, danger, and otherness play a significant role in constituting the identity of the United States as a leader in international politics.¹ This review aims to provide a thorough analysis into the philosophical arguments of

David Campbell, focusing specifically on the notion that the creation of identity is dependent on the securing of national boundaries. Theoretical underpinnings of the human security paradigm will be connected with the philosophical notions presented in Campbell's book in order to illustrate the tangible and pertinent nature of both of these arguments, as well as the validity of the claim that identity comprises the very root of U.S. foreign policy.

THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH

Analyzing the relationship between the nation and the state is a vital component to better understanding the nature of the human security approach to international relations, as well as the way in which such views contrast with traditional and state-centric approaches to national security. In accordance with the traditional approach to

Lida Bteddini has a dual-Bachelor's degree in International Relations and Philosophy as well as a Master's degree in Ethics, Peace, and Global Affairs, from the American University of Washington D.C. She also studied political science at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon. She is currently working as a consultant in international development.

national security, the state is the ultimate referent and therefore, security is defined in terms of the ability of the state to defend itself against external threats.² The underlying implication of such a theory is that the demands ascribed to the state precede those regarding individuals within the state. Therefore, other interests ascribed to entities such as individuals, or sub-national groups, are subordinate to state-interests.³ Furthermore, the 'other' in traditional security terms, may pose a threat to a state's boundaries, people, institutions, and values.⁴

The most important aspect of traditional approaches to national security is rooted in the theoretical framework of state-centric realism. It is ultimately *foreign* aggressors that pose a security threat to the existence of the state. In *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic*, Walter Lippmann asserts that,

"[...] without the controlling principle that the nation must maintain its objectives and its power in equilibrium, its purposes within its means and its means equal to its purposes, its commitments related to its resources and its resources adequate to its commitments, it is impossible to think at all about foreign affairs."⁵

The state is, therefore, the *sole* actor. It is the means by which security is achieved, and the entity upon which security depends. The emphasis on the state is primarily stemming from the concept of the international system as anarchic, where the 'other' is a direct threat to the state's stability and order. A prime representation of the traditional approach to national security can be illustrated through acknowledging the extremely securitized foreign policy initiatives undertaken by the United States after the events of September 11, 2001. This example alone helps to highlight the "rhetoric of *insecurity*" emphasized within the work of David Campbell. According to this rhetoric, the legitimizations of state policies are justified through the attempt to instill notions of insecurity. In turn, a strong sense of national identity is established, which ultimately allows the American public to feel secure and defended by the policies of the state. The emphasis of analyzing identity in international relations is linked to social

constructivist theory. Alexander Wendt, one of the most influential social constructivist scholars, proposes two key tenets of constructivism: (i) that shared ideas form the basic structure of human association over material forces and, (ii) that these shared ideas represent the identities and interests of 'purposive actors' and are not given by nature.⁶ For Campbell, the issue of identity comprises the very root of U.S. foreign policy. Similar to Wendt, he argues that, in challenging traditional conceptions of theoretical foundations of international relations, state identity can be better solidified and understood as being defined through human associations instead of material forces.

THE REDEFINING OF NATIONAL SECURITY

THE "UNFIXED" NATURE OF IDENTITY

Identity, to Campbell, is a vital dimension of being. It is both inescapable and necessary for the existence of any notion of the self. Nonetheless, the conceptualization of identity proposed within the work of Campbell is "constituted in relation to difference," and "not fixed by nature, given by God, or planned by intentional behavior."⁷ In other words, the problematic of identity contains "no foundations that are prior to, or outside of, its operation," and therefore, the identity of every entity is "performatively" constituted.⁸ Thus, it is the 'stylized repetition of acts' that should act as a referent for the identity of a state, rather than a specific "founding act."⁹

In connection to this idea is the claim that boundaries define "an 'inside' from an 'outside,' a 'self' from an 'other,' and a 'domestic' from a 'foreign,'" thus further reinforcing the limiting nature of identity and the relationship between the self and the 'other'.¹⁰ When connecting this theory to that of foreign policy, it is evident that the state's identity is secured primarily through a "representation of danger."¹¹ Thus, the ability of the state to define its boundaries on the basis of those entities which comprise the foreign is a definitive measure of its capacity to exist as a state. More importantly, Campbell stresses the

the significance of acknowledging the grounds for “an interpretation of danger.”¹² The mere existence of an external entity or being is a sufficient representation of otherness needed to secure the conception of “the true identity.”¹³

Historical sociology purports that it is not the nation which precedes the state, but rather the state that precedes the nation. The weight of this statement lies in the suggestion that “nationalism is a construct of the state in pursuit of its legitimacy.”¹⁴ Therefore, the power of nationalistic sentiments to secure a state’s identity is primarily rooted in the ability of that state to enforce and legitimize an “imagined political community” that exists only insofar as it is a cultural artifact that is represented textually.¹⁵ This contrasts with conventional literature regarding the relationship between the nation and the state which usually envisions the nation as the force behind the actions of the state. More clearly, it is the identity of a ‘people’ that provides the basis of legitimacy for “the state and its subsequent practices.”¹⁶

Another key aspect of Campbell’s philosophical argument is that the focus is not the nation-state, but rather the national-state, whose “sovereign territorialization is perfectly aligned with a prior and primary form of identification, such as region, language, or symbolic sense of self.”¹⁷ This theorization is important because it allows one to understand national-states as inherently paradoxical. The paradox lies in the inability of states to exist as complete and stable identities. More clearly, such entities exist in ultimate dependence on the practices of representation necessary in order to secure their existence. “Should the state project of security be successful in the terms in which it is articulated, the state would cease to exist.”¹⁸ What Campbell articulates is a compelling argument regarding the way in which societal and political constructs subconsciously define the way in which people interact and relate to one another across borders. Evidently, the *individual* is a significant component of the writing of national security, and acts as a key referent in the theoretical underpinnings of the human security approach.

Human security involves a people-centered approach to understanding the nature of international *insecurity*. It exists in stark contrast to traditional approaches to national security because the defense of the individual replaces concerns of protecting state-interests. Human security approaches focus not only on protecting the state from external aggression, but more importantly, emphasize *internal* threats to security, such as “environmental pollution, infectious diseases, economic deprivation, and transnational terrorism,” which all play a significant role in fostering internal instability and, in turn, cultivate an environment of insecurity for nation-states.²⁰

According to the human security approach, the ‘other’ is not as defined and external as is proposed by traditional state-centric approaches to national security. Hence, the implication of this theoretical proposition is that the self and the ‘other’ are very much intermingled and interchangeable in an era of globalization and modernization. Therefore, the realization of human security involves a much broader participation of various actors, such as international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and civil society itself.²¹ The idea of human security is undoubtedly an attempt to reconcile changing notions of security with the ever-changing nature of the international system. In recognizing the importance of the connection between insecurity of the individual with the insecurity of the state, the human security theory presents a more holistic approach to the importance of national defense, not just militarily, but on a social, economic, and political level.

Similarities exist between David Campbell’s re-conceptualization of identity and the role it plays in the writing of national security, with that of the human security approach to understanding the very nature of conflict. Cornelio Sommaruga’s *The Global Challenge of Human Security* helps to better conceptualize the foundation upon which human security is based, and describes this concept as encompassing “education and health, democracy and human rights protection against environmental degradation, and the proliferation

of deadly weapons.”²² In re-theorizing the implication behind the word ‘security,’ it becomes easier to understand the “definitional expansiveness and ambiguity” that comprises a significant aspect of human security approaches and proves beneficial to the facilitation of *collective action*.²³

THE LEGITIMIZATION OF STATE IDENTITY

As Campbell writes, it is the identity of a ‘people’ that comprises and legitimates the identity of the state.²⁴ Taking this into consideration, the human security approach is a step towards the integration of the individual into the definition of national security. Thus, the legitimization of state identity has become an integral part of the international security paradigm. In re-identifying the ‘other’ and creating a sense of communal identity, the parameters of security are redefined. As Campbell emphasizes, it is the “reproduction of a standard, an optimal mean, around which those modes of being considered ‘normal’ could be organized” which manifest themselves in the creation and establishment of a set notion of identity and ‘otherness.’²⁵ Once this “optimal mean” is challenged and the standards of normality are restructured around the notion of humanity instead of state-centrism, the boundary of identity becomes broader and the capacity to work towards the security of humans all over the world is made more tangible.

According to this concept, “boundary-producing practices that instantiate the identity in whose name they operate” and which are inherent in the creation of identity, become less restrictive. Thus, the “axiological level that proffers a range of moral valuations that are implicit in any spatialization,” is no longer defined in terms of the foreign, but instead, incorporate acknowledgments of the internal threats that pose security dilemmas to individuals both within and across borders.²⁶ The United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) Human Development Report of 1994 can even be considered as the very origin of the recent debate on human security, which equated security with people rather than with territories,

and with development rather than with arms. This report stated that:

“[...] the concept of security has for too long been interpreted narrowly: as security of territory from external aggression, or as protection of national interests in foreign policy or as global aggression, or as protection of national interests in foreign policy or as global security from the threat of nuclear holocaust...Forgotten were the legitimate concerns of ordinary people who sought security in their daily lives.”²⁷

The incorporation of the acknowledgment of the individual in defining the very nature of global security is a crucial factor in the determination of both state and interstate identity.

CONCLUSION

The ultimate objective of Campbell’s analysis is to present a viable and concise analysis of the representation of fear that is instilled in the creation of national security. The role that ideology, symbolism, and terminology play in constituting the material practice of national identity and policy can be better understood as are vital to the creation of a viable foreign policy for any state.²⁸ The most intriguing aspect of Campbell’s argument is that the crisis of representation is at the root of modern-day dilemmas dealing with ideology and “crimes of belief.” Therefore, the ability of a community to exist as a state is possible “only by virtue of their ability to constitute themselves as imagined communities.”²⁹ What the human security approach to the security dilemma offers is a re-conceptualization of the “imagined community.” It is an attempt to redefine the parameters of ‘otherness’ that constitutes state identity, thus allowing for a more viable means towards the attainment of substantial security measures providing beneficial for both the individual and the state.

Campbell’s argument is well-articulated through the examination of the way in which “the (United States of) America” has developed its foreign policies under its very name, and offers a

breakdown of the various components of identity, such as danger, fear, and ‘otherness’ that all play a part in the creation of state identity. The book introduces a very timely argument insisting on the need for an ‘unconventional analysis’ of global political transformations that have taken place over the past decades. The human security approach is but one of the many global ideological transformations that are attempting to reconcile the urgent need to redefine traditional notions of security with the insecurity of the world’s impoverished and vulnerable populations. It is the ‘globalization of contingency’ that Campbell argues to be the most challenging and transformational development of modern times, since it invokes “the increasing tendency toward ambiguity, indeterminacy, and uncertainty on our horizon,” which thus require revolutionary modes of thinking.³⁰

What is thus implied is that the theoretical foundations upon which the world is viewed are insufficient to accommodate for the globalized contingency that renders “all established containers problematic.”³¹ *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* is a timely book that emphasizes the importance of inquiry, and provides the reader with an insightful outlook on the very root of standard conceptions of nationalism and state identity. In turn, these philosophical arguments help to problematize established and unquestioned societal modes of understanding, and help to re-contextualize an otherwise abstract and conceptual debate regarding the human security approach, in its attempt to reevaluate the very nature of ‘security’ in a time of interdependence and globalization.



Notes

¹ David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pg. ix.

² Arnold Wolfers, "National Security as an Ambiguous Symbol", *Political Science Quarterly* 67. 4, 1952-12: 494-495.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Walter Lippmann, *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic*. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1943), 9-10.

⁶ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*. (Cambridge University Press: 1999), 1.

⁷ David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 9.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 3.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 11

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 12

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Alkire Sabina, "A Conceptual Framework for Human Security", *Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security, and Ethnicity (CRISE), Working Paper 2*, (London: University of Oxford, 2003): 2.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "The Concept of 'Human Security'" Centre for the Study of Global Governance. 20 Feb. 2007. London School of Economics and Political Science. 25 Apr. 2007 <<http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/humanseconcept.htm>, 25, April, 2007>.

²² Cornelio Sommaruga, "The Global Challenge of Human Security" *Foresight: the Journal of Futures Studies, Strategic Thinking and Policy*, 2004: 6, 4; Social Science Module, 208

²³ "The Concept of 'Human Security'" Centre for the Study of Global Governance. 20 Feb. 2007. London School of Economics and Political Science. 25 Apr. 2007 <<http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/humanseconcept.htm>, 25, April, 2007>.

²⁴ David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 11.

²⁵ Ibid, 156.

²⁶ Ibid, 73.

²⁷ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report*, 1994 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 22.

²⁸ David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 138.

²⁹ Ibid, 170.

³⁰ Ibid, 17.

³¹ Ibid, 18.