



BOOK REVIEWS

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Ideological Argumentation of the United States' Foreign Policy Identity

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Abstract. Using the categorical apparatus created in Russian Political Science, the author describes the ideological argumentation of the US foreign policy identity. The works by American and Russian authors published in 2024 that examine concepts about the status, role, and place of the United States within the political debate on American identity provide the empirical data. The author claims that these publications offer analytical and factual support for the development of identity issues in the foreign policy context.

Keywords: identity, ideology, politics, USA, foreign policy identity

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Идеологическая аргументация внешнеполитической идентичности Соединенных Штатов Америки

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Аннотация. Идеологическая аргументация внешнеполитической идентичности США может быть проанализирована с опорой на разработанный в отечественной науке категориальный аппарат. Эмпирический материал представлен опубликованными в 2024 г.

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работами российского и американского авторов, которые анализируют представления о роли, месте и статусе США в контексте политического дискурса об американской идентичности. По мнению автора, эти публикации дают аналитический и фактологический материал для разработки проблематики идентичности во внешнеполитическом контексте.

Ключевые слова: идентичность, идеология, политика, США, внешнеполитическая идентичность

Заявление о конфликте интересов. Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

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Introduction

In Political Science, ideological argumentation is the process by which elite groups build a set of beliefs and viewpoints for a regime's self-legitimization based on the status of the general populace [Soloviev 2007]. "Since researchers of international relations still consider states to be the main subjects of world politics," notes I.L. Prokhorenko, "then ideas and representations... about the place, role and status of a state in the world... shape its foreign policy identity" [Prokhorenko 2017].

To understand the ideological argumentation of the US foreign policy identity, the author presents an analysis of two studies that, at first glance, do not have much in common: I.I. Kurilla's monograph "The Americans and Everyone Else. The Origins and Meaning of US Foreign Policy" [Kurilla 2024] and Henry Kissinger's book "Leadership" [Kissinger 2024]. Although the latter is designated as a popular science publication, it has the categorical and reference apparatus of a serious scientific work; and Kurilla's monograph is addressed to the general reader, therefore it combines scientific thoroughness and journalistic presentation of the summary parts. Though Kissinger only chooses one American political leader — Richard Nixon — for analysis out of six, his 600-page work fully presents the US foreign policy identity in terms of beliefs and views regarding the country's position, role, and standing in the world.

Competing political discourses of American identity: an outside view

Kurilla chooses a narrative style that draws on classic studies of "what American civilization has done to Americans and for Americans" [Boorstin 1993] (but does not copy it) in order to convey to the modern Russian reader "how Americans created a nation", "invented foreign policy", "tried to recreate the world", "won the Cold War", and "lost their peace" [Kurilla 2024]. He notes: "The outside world's and Americans' own ideas about America have never coincided" [Kurilla 2024]. This is true, but is generally characteristic of all countries and peoples (it is no coincidence that the concepts of auto- and hetero-stereotypes are widely used in the social sciences).

The author tells "how Americans built their identity at every stage of their history", and sets an analysis of "the role of foreign policy in maintaining internal unity and

influencing the American example on the rest of the world” as his goal [Kurilla 2024]. As the narrative progresses, a description of the “identity crisis” repeatedly appears — from the value conflict of the late 1870s to modern “culture wars”. Kurilla suggests abandoning stereotypical judgments about the causes of American expansionism, offering his own explanations of how the “integration of imperialism into the ideals of freedom” and the search for ideological foundations for the new foreign policy role of the United States took place [Kurilla 2024]. He sums up: “If in the 1880s and mid-1890s, talk of expansion beyond the American continent was a means of restoring American faith in its own destiny, then at the end of the century this set of ideas resulted in a break with traditional foreign policy” [Kurilla 2024].

He explains the rejection of isolationism after World War II not so much by the economic power of the United States, but by the ideological competition with the USSR [Kurilla 2024]. He provides evidence that “the situation of the Cold War with its binary confrontation best coincided with the mythological consciousness of the masses” [Kurilla 2024].

An important element of the next identity crisis of the mid-1970s is characterized in the monograph through the search for the return of faith in Americans in themselves on the basis of real achievements in the country in the field of civil rights, which allowed Americans to criticize other countries for failure to respect human rights [Kurilla 2024]. The “mobilization identity” formed by Ronald Reagan “was built on opposition and confrontation to the Soviet Union as an “evil empire”: a rethinking of the role of the United States in the world was based on the fact that “they (the Americans. — *L.F.*) are on the side of light, and their mission is to fight for a just cause” [Kurilla 2024]. The author considers the victory in the Cold War to be a turning point towards realism in foreign policy: since American values have already won, one should be guided by interests. The “new existential enemy” was recognized after the events of September 11, 2001.

Kurilla contrasts conservative and progressive (preferring to use this term instead of the term “liberal”) America of the 2010s–2020s and competing political discourses regarding the place and mission of the United States in the world — global dominance, engagement policy, etc. Given the attention the author pays to identity, his poor awareness of the results of the work of Russian scientists in the study of identity, primarily reflected in two encyclopedic publications “Identity. Personality. Society. Politics” [Semenenko 2017; Semenenko 2023], appears to be an unfortunate omission. It is also difficult to agree with the thesis about the weak use of social constructivism in the theory of international relations in terms of the study of identity. The concept of state identity has become a permanent element of constructivist discourse in theory of international relations. Constructivists have argued that states comply with norms not only because of their own interests but also by internalizing them into their identity [Semenenko 2017].

In relation to the topic outlined in this article, the characterization of the cyclical nature of US foreign policy as an alternation of options based on values (ideologically argued) or based on interests raises questions. After reading Kissinger’s work, it is difficult to agree with Kurilla’s assertion that Kissinger’s approach can be expressed by the

principle: “not ideals, but the interests of *raison d’etat* should govern state decisions”. Kissinger is a special topic in terms of assessing the ideological argumentation of the US foreign policy identity. In general, the use of the definition of “re-ideologization” in relation to Reagan and Trump can be justified in the domestic political context, and among the many merits of Kurilla’s monograph is the presentation of the differentiation of approaches of American political and intellectual elites in relation to the development of foreign policy and the assessment of the US foreign policy identity. However, can we say that there were periods in the history of the United States when the ideological argumentation of its foreign policy identity was absent? The brilliant title of the book “Americans and Everyone Else” makes this question rhetorical. Probably, in the foreign policy context, instead of re-ideologization, it would be more logical to use the concept and theory of securitization in relation to identity, when a political actor declares the existence of a threat from the other and demands that measures be taken to eliminate it, including emergency measures that lie outside the established procedures [Buzan, Waever 1998].

Ideological and political arguments of American identity: an inside view

Henry Kissinger, in the preface to his latest book, *Leadership*, published in the US on the eve of his centenary, speaks of strategic leadership, distinguished by the leader’s ability to define a national idea and new horizons. The six political leaders he writes about, relying on extensive scientific and memoir literature (the list includes 900 works, all of which are referenced) and his own experience of communicating with them, in his opinion, belong to this type. All of them had to fight for their ideas and convictions, which are close to Kissinger, first of all, in his assessment of the US.

Of course, he focuses on the tasks that the leaders set and how they implemented them, taking into account national specifics and the international situation. But in each case, the role of the United States is especially emphasized. On Adenauer’s policy: “Adenauer’s strategy was based on the containment policy developed by George Kennan and implemented by US Secretaries of State Dean Acheson and John Foster Dulles” [Kissinger 2024]; “the achievement of the goals was made possible by the combination of Adenauer’s strategy and Kennedy’s tactics” [Kissinger 2024]. Regarding de Gaulle: “De Gaulle was ready to cooperate on all issues in which, in his opinion, the interests of the French and Americans coincided; de Gaulle was able to maintain autonomy in the field of nuclear strategy and close cooperation with the United States” [Kissinger 2024]. About Thatcher: “She believed that US leadership was the key to the well-being of Britain and the whole world. Anything that weakens the United States weakens the world” [Kissinger 2024].

In characterizing Anwar Sadat as a politician: “his strategy prioritized national sovereignty and course correction in line with the U.S. position, rather than pan-Arab nationalism” [Kissinger 2024]. On the role of Lee Kuan Yew: “Lee became, as far as circumstances allowed, a participant in the American decision-making process on issues of interest to Southeast Asia” [Kissinger 2024]; “Lee built his country’s

geopolitical future on the basis of a reliable partnership with the United States” [Kissinger 2024].

However, Kissinger also draws attention to the ideological argumentation of his heroes’ policies, which justified their attitude towards the United States. Kissinger describes the core of Adenauer’s conviction as containing Soviet power, the importance of morality, faith and commitment to democratic principles for the fate of Germany and Europe [Kissinger 2024]; “Adenauer set himself the task of restoring democratic values on the basis of Christian morality” [Kissinger 2024]. Kissinger explains de Gaulle’s principles by the fact that “unwilling to come to terms with the character of the times in which he lived, de Gaulle sought unanimity by proclaiming the moral and political importance of lost national greatness” [Kissinger 2024]. Lee Kuan Yew, in his opinion, saw in American society “a certain greatness of spirit, caused by a mixture of fear of communism and American idealism” [Kissinger 2024].

Thatcher’s ideals, in his view, echoed those of the greatest Conservative leaders since Disraeli [Kissinger 2024], which is why she fought so hard to preserve the national spirit and what gave her strength: “She had a great influence on the outcome of the Cold War by tying together the contradictory truths of the realists and the idealists” [Kissinger 2024]. “Thatcher behaved as if Britain were an equal to the United States. And more often than not, the Reagan administration was happy to support this belief”, he notes [Kissinger 2024].

It is clear that the author pays most attention to Richard Nixon, who invited a Harvard professor to serve as National Security Advisor and then Secretary of State, despite Eisenhower’s objections that university professors had no place in power. The objection was due to the fact that liberal views dominated US universities. Kissinger talks about this when describing Lee Kuan Yew’s first visit to the US in November 1968. After listening to Harvard students’ opinions on the Vietnam War and their characterization of Lyndon Johnson, from a war criminal to a psychopath, Lee said: “You make me sick”. He explained that Singapore’s survival depended on America’s confidence in its mission as a guarantor of global security [Kissinger 2024].

Kissinger begins his essay on Nixon with an assessment of the situation: “American history is rich in turbulent internal conflicts, but the situation that Nixon faced had one peculiarity: the emerging national elite (intellectual, university. — *L.F.*) came to the conviction that defeat in the war was not only strategically inevitable, but also morally desirable. This conviction implied the breakdown of the centuries-old consensus that considered national interests a legitimate and even moral goal” [Kissinger 2024].

Kissinger recalls that he wrote three volumes of memoirs and speaks of the intention in this book to show the way of thinking and character of the leader. He describes Nixon’s worldview as an unshakable conviction in the correctness of the American way of life, a belief in America’s special mission to protect freedom throughout the world. Kissinger also characterizes his own values and beliefs in each case described in the book. Thus, he repeatedly told the German Chancellor: “If I have a correct idea of the American mentality, the freedom of Berlin and all of Europe is inseparable from our freedom” [Kissinger 2024]. Considering de Gaulle’s policy, he asserts: “New American initiatives (the Marshall Plan and the creation of NATO. — *L.F.*) continued

to be based on ideas about the nature of international relations that were as unique and extraordinary as the entire history of America (cooperation, peace, a fair division of labor)” [Kissinger 2024].

In conclusion, he characterizes the current state of international relations based on competing identities. Thus, the United States “assumes that its values are universal and will eventually be accepted by everyone in the world” [Kissinger 2024]. But “everyone in the world” has its own identities that they are ready to defend: “No society can remain great if it loses faith in itself or systematically questions its self-image” [Kissinger 2024]. He regrets that now “the potential for disastrous confrontation is growing, with the United States facing serious, interconnected challenges to its strategy and values in almost every region of the world” [Kissinger 2024].

He recalls the words of Anwar Sadat, spoken on the occasion of receiving the Nobel Peace Prize: “The world is a dynamic construction, it goes beyond the words ‘us’ and ‘them’. That is why we need politicians with vision and imagination who look beyond the present to the future” [Kissinger 2024]. Characterizing the current situation in the Middle East, Kissinger regrets the unfulfilled hopes: “Sadat’s vision of an international order of sovereign states, based on national interests and expressed in moral categories, could have become a bulwark against disaster” [Kissinger 2024]. The final lines of his book: “Without a moral and strategic compass, the present era will be derailed” [Kissinger 2024].

Conclusion

“The country’s foreign policy is part of the struggle for its self-identification, its affirmation and confirmation” — this is the summary of I. Kurilla’s research [Kurilla 2024] and, at the same time, the formulation of the incentive for new research. The author also made an important conclusion regarding political discourse, which he evaluates as an independent factor that creates a picture of the world. Kissinger’s work, like all his activities, is an ideological, value-based and political justification for the US foreign policy identity.

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