

**WHY DID CANADA SIT OUT OF THE IRAQ WAR? ONE CONSTRUCTIVIST ANALYSIS
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Abstract

Why did Canada stay out of the Iraq War in 2003? This decision is not only puzzling considering Canada's recent foreign policy record, but it also confounds the logic of a number of International Relations theories. In this paper, I offer a constructivist explanation of Canada's Iraq decision. In this account, national identity is a function of state-to-society relations, meaning that the dominant discourse at the societal level in a given period will shape foreign policy choices. I argue that the dominant discourse on Canadian identity, as recovered in an analysis of popular texts in Canadian society in 2002-2003, enabled Ottawa's non-participation in the US-led coalition of the willing.

Pourquoi le Canada s'est-il abstenu de participer à la guerre en Iraq en 2003? Non seulement cette décision peut-elle laisser perplexe, si l'on considère la politique étrangère récente du Canada, mais elle paraît aussi aller à l'encontre d'un certain nombre de théories sur les relations internationales. J'offre ici une explication constructiviste de cette. En effet l'identité nationale est-elle ici fonction des relations état-société, ce qui veut dire que l'enjeu sociétal dominant à une période donnée oriente les choix de politique étrangère. J'avance en effet que l'enjeu dominant qu'était l'identité nationale, à en croire les textes bien connus sur la société canadienne des années 2002-2003, était une raison, pour le Canada, de ne pas se joindre à la coalition dirigée par les États-Unis.

WHY DID CANADA SIT OUT OF THE IRAQ WAR? ONE CONSTRUCTIVIST ANALYSIS

SRDJAN VUCETIC *

In a speech to the House of Commons on March 17, 2003, after months of considerable debate, Prime Minister Chrétien announced that Canada would not join the coalition of the willing and go to war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The rationale behind the refusal was not so much the principled opposition to the war, but the fact that the United Nations Security Council failed to pass a resolution authorizing military intervention. Thus, for the first time in history, Ottawa simultaneously turned down both the United States and Britain – Canada's foremost and historic allies.¹

The announcement was a bolt from the blue for many, especially in Washington. Canada had hitherto supported all US interventions in the post-Cold War period, including three against the same dictator in Iraq, in 1991, 1996, and 1998. Also, and perhaps ironically, unlike a number of members of the coalition of the willing, Canadian troops were actually sent to the theatre of operations in Iraq. The point, therefore, is not that Canada said "no" because it was militarily incapable, but that it was politically unwilling to say "yes". Long-time observers of Canadian foreign policy have characterized the Iraq decision as anomalous, (Harvey 2004: 200) surprising, (Massie and Roussel 2005: 69) and mystifying. (Coulon 2004: 142)

Canada's Iraq stance poses a puzzle from several theoretical perspectives in international relations (IR). Various forms of realism cannot explain the variation in behaviour of similarly positioned units in the international system over Iraq: some states chose to "bandwagon" with the United States; others, like Canada, decided to hide. The case is no less confounding for asymmetric interdependence, where US-Canadian relations are seen as a textbook example. According to this logic, Canada should follow the US lead because "... less vulnerable states will use asymmetrical interdependence in particular sets of issues as a source of power". (Keohane and Nye 1989: 32) As *The Economist* (2003: 15) succinctly put it, "How could the superpower's neighbour and biggest trading partner be against?"²

Domestic process theories that emphasize the domestic political constraints on foreign policy decisions seem to fall short, too. Because it faced a provincial election in Québec in April 2003, as well as a federal re-election in 2004, the ruling Liberal Party of Canada chose to pander to public opinion by distancing itself from the unpopular Bush administration over Iraq. But as Frank Harvey notes, this explanation is "... seriously flawed [because] foreign [END PAGE 133] policy is ranked quite low in Canadian elections, even lower in provincial elections, and is almost insignificant in Québec politics". (2004: 204-205)

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¹ In my analysis, conventional measures of interest similarity among pairs of states, such as UN voting indices (Gartzke and Jo 2002) or alliance-based indices, (Sweeney and Khesk 2005) confirm Canada's special affinity towards the United States and Britain.

² Using several measures of interdependence, (Gartzke and Li 2003) I found no statistical correlation between interdependence and the coalition membership.

Using one constructivist perspective, I will consider this puzzle by linking foreign policy to national identity. I say “one” because in IR, constructivism – like all “isms” – should be seen as a family of theories.³ Thus the security communities approach posits that the process of state-to-state interaction, under certain conditions, leads to interdependence, integration, and identity. (Adler and Barnett 1998) Combined, these factors influence the states’ foreign policies, such as military interventions against third parties. Since the US-Canadian security community stands as one of the most mature in the world, (Shore 1998) the lack of a common front on Iraq may be regarded as a puzzle from this perspective.

In the security community approach, state identities relevant in international relations are established in state-to-state interactions. When they interact with each other, states acquire international identities – friend, partner, rival, enemy and so on. However, while two countries might be extremely interdependent and integrated, and while they might share similar liberal democratic traditions and other traits, their national identities – and thus their national interests – can significantly differ. In this paper, I will apply an approach developed by Ted Hopf (2002), who submits that national identity is constituted not only in its interaction with other states, but also in its relationship to its own society. Canadian identity is thus established not only through Canada’s interactions with its significant “others” in the international system of states, but also through state-society relations within Canada. Like domestic process theories, this approach disaggregates the black box of the state, but sees domestic political constraints as primarily ideational, not material. These constraints reward/punish actions that are consonant/deviant, and delimit what is possible, i.e., imaginable and thinkable.

A state, like every social actor, has multiple identities that can be said to synthesize into discourses. The unit of analysis, therefore, is the discourse of identity at the societal level.⁴ Different discourses in society vie for defining a state’s identity – a democratic state, a capitalist state, a trading state, a middle power, Western state, a Northern state, a multicultural state, and so on. While there are multiple discourses, in any given context one discourse tends to prevail. This dominant or hegemonic discourse establishes national identity, which then implies some national interests over others. A multicultural national identity, for example, will render impossible an interest in racist immigration policies.

My contention is that everyday identity-talk in Canadian society shapes Canadian foreign policy. Expressed in the social-scientific language, I see discourses of identity as the explanans and foreign policy as the explanandum. In what follows I will show how the predominant discourse – here labelled as “liberal” – implies a foreign policy committed to the maintenance of multilateral international institutions and international law, even if it means shunning the superpower neighbour and the biggest trading partner over Iraq. A first challenger to the dominant liberal discourse – which I call “North American” – called for support in the US-led military attempt to rid the world of Hussein. Had this discourse proved predominant [END OF PAGE 134] in Canada in 2002-03, Ottawa would have been more likely to join the coalition. The

³ In IR theory, the concept of identity has been colonized by constructivism. Constructivists assume that the political system, domestic as well as international, is a social structure seen to be primarily ideational or cultural, not material. National identity thus refers to the social constructions of statehood and can be defined as a set of meanings that a state attributes to itself while relating to significant “others.” In general, constructivists believe that foreign policy and national identity are mutually constituted. For theoretical discussions and/or empirical applications, see, *inter alia*, Campbell (1998); Hopf (2002: Ch. 6); Kubáľková (2001); Macleod (2004); Telhami and Barnett (2002); Wendt (1999: Ch. 7).

⁴ Due to space limitations, I cannot discuss discourse further. For understandings of the link between discourse and foreign policy in IR theory, see literature surveys in Larsen (1997) and Milliken (1999).

second challenger – “feminist” – strove for a more extensive realization of human rights at home and abroad, but it occupied a limited foreign policy foothold.

DISCOURSES OF CANADIAN IDENTITY

In political science, identity has come to be treated as one of the “most normatively significant and behaviourally consequential aspects of politics”. (Smith 2004: 302) In IR theory alone, identity has been used to explain everything from war to peace to human rights. So while there are many ways in which national identity can be conceptualized, operationalized, and measured, any attempt to analyze it must consider two elements – content and contestation. (Abdelal *et al* 2006) “Content” refers to the intersubjective meanings that can be normative (who or what we are), purposeful (what we want), relational (who or what we are not), and/or cognitive (what we know and how we know what we know). “Contestation” means that a national identity is not a fixture, but a process. Within any collective, the level of agreement on the content of national identity varies.

The content and contestation of Canadian identity are empirical questions. In what follows, I seek to demonstrate how a deep look at the discursive contestation of the Canadian self can help us account for Ottawa’s Iraq decision. One way to analyze national identity is to conduct a discourse analysis (DA) of a wide range of popular cultural texts with a goal of discovering and evaluating its content and contestation. Let me summarize my assumptions:

1. Structure is material as well as ideational, i.e., social and cognitive;
2. Society is the key ideational structure;
3. Contestations of national identity aggregate into discourses; one will dominate and win the contest;
4. National identity is discursively recoverable because it is always shared by a large community of people, and is relatively stable and enduring over time; and
5. A state’s identity politics shapes its foreign policy because both operate in roughly the same intersubjective structure.

In the other words, elites who make foreign policy decisions belong to the same society, the same ideational milieu. I will return to the last assumption later.

My DA consists of collecting and reading a sample of the texts Canadians were producing and consuming from January 2002 to March 2003, i.e., in the relatively brief juncture of Canadian history before the Iraq decision.⁵ The objective is to find out which identities of Canada are present and which predominate, both in terms of their frequency and across sources. Because of the immense number of relevant texts in this moment of history, I deploy an auxiliary (and perhaps heroic) assumption that sampling is possible in such analysis. Identities are first contextualized, i.e., interpreted and coded as present in an individual text; then they are intertextualized, i.e., interpreted and coded across the entire sample of texts. In the second step, the interpretation and coding are binarized across distance (similarity/difference) and value (positive/negative). [END OF PAGE 135]

Two of my sources are works of literature. Carol Shields’ *Unless* is a best-selling novel published by a Canadian author in the period under study,⁶ and a volume of short stories – *The Journey Prize Anthology* – chosen because it deals with potentially important identity

⁵ In addition to Hopf, my inspiration here is Marc Angenot (1989) and his “story of the year” approach. There are many ways to present research findings; mine will use the illustrations drawn from the texts surveyed.

⁶ By the second week of March 2003, the book had been on *Maclean’s* national bestseller list for 46 weeks and on *The Globe and Mail’s* list for 40 weeks.

relationships captured by Canada's new writers, whose stories "... make place for the day-to-day". (Alexis *et al* 2002: x)⁷ The selection strategy employed by the editors of the collection mirrors my sampling strategy: "... [t]he stories we've chosen are the raw material from which versions of our country (its sensibilities, its possibilities...) and our time (its morals, its culture...) might be reconstructed". (Alexis *et al* 2002: xi)

For a survey of non-fiction, I turned to a history of Canada for children, (Hacker 2002) and about three hundred articles from newspapers and newsmagazines. *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto) and the *National Post* (Toronto) are Canada's national daily newspapers. I randomized the sample by closely reading Wednesday editions (as a random day in the week) of both newspapers for the second and third weeks in the first quarter of 2002 (January 16, January 23, February 13, February 20, March 13, March 20, April 17, April 24). The French-language texts were represented by a random sample of articles from *Le Devoir* (Montreal) in the same time period. I also included *Maclean's*, which sells itself as Canada's national newsmagazine and is widely read. I surveyed thirty issues of this newsmagazine, in a reverse chronological order, starting with the second week of March 2003. In the attempt to capture discourses within which Canadian identity is situated, I analyzed sections and articles that do not deal with foreign policy topics, such as "Arts and Life", "Globe Review", "Closing Notes", or "Obituaries". (I also supplemented the sample by locating articles by inserting such keywords in simple database searches.)

While I strongly believe that pure induction is impossible, I also deem it a matter of methodological discipline to separate the evidence of Canada's identities and discourses from that of foreign policy outcomes. The textual sources of Canadian identity were distinctly analyzed from those dealing with foreign policy, such as interviews with government officials or relevant editorials. I do this because the three discourses on Canadian identity in 2002-03, i.e., liberal, North American, and feminist, have discrete foreign policy implications that need to be distilled separately from the analysis of foreign policy outcomes. These implications can take the form of falsifiable hypotheses not unlike those derived from other theoretical approaches in IR. And as such, they should be tested against the empirics collected independently from the evidentiary base that affected these implications in the first place.

The identities that emerged in my readings of these sources aggregate into three broad discourses – liberal, North American, and feminist (the reader may prefer other labels, e.g., nationalist, continentalist, and critical). These discourses can be seen as discrete inasmuch as they differently evaluate various identity themes of the Canadian self, yet they can also be seen as strands of a single discourse. In the period under study, the liberal discourse emerged as the strongest, both contextually and intertextually, followed by a weaker North American challenger and an even weaker feminist one.

Both liberal and North American discourses can be said to stem from a single master discourse, which can be called "liberal democracy". This discourse encompasses individualism, universalism, capitalism, middle class, secularism, industry, and equality. In this sense, liberal democracy is not exclusively Canadian, but it is certainly well established in Canada. According [END OF PAGE 136] to *The Kids Book of Canadian History*, Canada was the first among the British colonies to have responsible government: "Basically, Canada still has this system today". (Hacker 2002: 16) Judicial independence, as editorialized in *The Globe and Mail* (2002: A20), is

⁷ Leah Postman "Being Famous"; Robert McGill "The Stars are Falling"; Neil Smith "Green Fluorescent Protein"; and Emma Donoghue "What Remains" in Alexis *et al* (2002).

a “hot issue today in the developing world and in some former Communist regimes. Canada’s got it”. Ostensibly, in other liberal democracies, judicial independence is also not an issue. Canada, in this view, not only belongs to the liberal democratic world, but it is one of its leaders. Importantly in this discourse, law and order are associated with social justice. Economic rights are seen as important as social and individual rights, but they are not automatic. One obituary states “... retirement dreams came true when they were able to buy property”.

However, while the will of the majority is critical, individual liberties and group rights must be recognized and protected. In the right-of-centre-leaning *National Post*, seven letters to the editor react to an editorial on pot (2002). All seven authors, including a retired police officer, support the decriminalization of marijuana. In *Unless* – a story of a translator and writer whose daughter suddenly drops out of university to become a panhandler in downtown Toronto – the parents decide against forcefully trying to bring their teenage daughter back to home and school, to safety. Legality trumps family. Obeying and otherwise upholding the law is not only a civic duty but also a simple matter of habit. An interviewed historian observes: “In nationalist myths about Canada, we are supposed to be polite and civil, but look at hockey. Hockey is essentially one long rant where Canadians vent the emotions they are supposed to repress.” The norm, as in “supposed to”, is to repress “long vitriolic complaints”. While the real Canadian likes to rant, the ideal Canadian puts the “civil” in civil society – she or he is composed, civil, tolerant, and respectful of others. (Heer 2002: B4)

In the liberal democratic discourse, Canada is firmly rooted in North America and the Atlantic. The East and the South are simply too distant. In *Unless*, (Shields 2003) there is some inability to distinguish among traditional dresses of Muslim women – a chador, a veil, and a burka (79). Waking a sleeping person is clearly seen as a violation of human rights, but it is unclear where it took place – “in China, or was it Argentina?” (75). The liberal democratic discourse also values cultural diversity. In Canada, multiculturalism famously became an official government policy in 1971. A rather large multicultural lens is used in the reading of history, particularly in *The Kids Book of Canadian History*. Multilingualism is not nearly as desirable as (also official) bilingualism, especially if fully fluent.

The discourse, which I label “feminist”, probes the limits of liberal democracy. As intertextualized in this study, it makes a double critique. It challenges both liberal democracy and its counter-discourses – various forms of authoritarianisms (but does not see them as equivalents) – because they overlap in several gender-biased or class-biased areas: asymmetrically distributed material wealth, consumerism, militarism, misogyny, and so on. As such, the feminist discourse is mostly inward looking and has no obvious implications for Canada’s alliance choice on Iraq.

In contrast, the liberal democratic discourse clearly has a bearing on the realm of foreign policy, albeit on a most general position: Canada should side with other “Western” liberal democracies. This hypothesis would probably not surprise the proponents of the democratic peace. This research program finds that, among other things, democracies tend to ally with each other as well as go to war on behalf of democratic allies. (Bueno de Mesquita *et al* 1999: [END OF PAGE 137] 791) Democracies also tend to perceive non-democratic governments as potentially threatening, thus increasing the likelihood of liberal war – war waged by democracies against illiberal governments. (Farnham 2003: 396) Ottawa’s decision to send troops to Afghanistan, for example, is consistent with the liberal democratic understanding of the Canadian identity.

But when the world of Western liberal democracies is divided, this discourse offers no clear implications for foreign policy. For the purposes of this study, the main discursive battle is

between its strands – liberal and North American. In my reading, liberal and North American discourses entail sufficiently distinct collections of identity relationships to be regarded as separate. The splintering of liberal democracy occurs over the understanding of Canada's relationship with the United States.

LIBERAL VS. NORTH AMERICAN

The United States is ubiquitous in Canadian texts; it is the elephant “other” of Canadian identity. In *The Kids Book of Canadian History*, no explanation is given about Newfoundland's trilemma in 1948: why was a union with the United States an option almost as feasible as those of independence or a union with Canada? Similarly, in 1962, why was a Canadian satellite launched aboard a US rocket, and not some other rocket? The presence, power, and interest of the United States are simply assumed, as it is that Canada, more than any other country in the world, is deeply and extensively influenced by the American way of life.

In the liberal discourse, the proximity of, as well as the similarity with, the United States are sources of considerable anxiety. Let me begin with an extreme illustration. Writing in the *Globe and Mail*, a Canadian traveller on a Vegas-style cruise ship in the Gulf of Mexico describes them as “brash”, “excessive,” “very frazzled,” and a “bit much right now”. Apparently, they are “no longer just public-spirited and patriotic, but also supporting Bush ... sporting America-the-Beautiful lapel pins and high-school marching bands belting out ‘God Bless America’.” It is easy to “immerse” oneself in the “mindlessness of it all”. (Dwyer 2002: R1) In this discourse, the monotony and simple-mindedness of Hollywood is a particular aspect of this identity threat. In the opinion of one *Maclean's* film critic-in-residence, in Hollywood, the premise on which Pedro Almodóvar built his *Talk to Her* would “... only serve as fodder for high-concept comedy”. Similarly, *Adaptation* is “... [t]he year's wittiest and most warmly entertaining American movie ... [because it] mocks Hollywood while making the best of it”. (Johnson 2002: 83) According to one entertainer, “Sitcoms follow a very simple format in America. Canadians are willing to go out on a limb with you a little further.” (Cullen 2003: 32) A *Globe and Mail* critic follows this line of argument: “This country is well used to being served steaming slabs of American glamour drama accompanied by dollops of unpretty, quality CBC-made starch”: Canadian television connoisseurs would gladly substitute some of “the money, the music, the flash, the hot bodies [of] North American TV drama [for a] British soap [with some] character-led grit.” (McLaren 2002: R4).

With free trade, the maintenance of Canadian difference has become even more difficult. Major Canadian media houses customarily restrict the hours of TV and radio programming made in the United States or the percentage of magazine ads about American goods and services. *The Kids Book of Canadian History* explains that opponents to Free Trade Agreement of 1989 were worried that “... Canada would become like the United States and lose [END OF PAGE 138] its unique culture, along with other Canadian things such as medicare”. (Hacker 2002: 67) As a general rule, Canadians are likely to sacrifice productivity to protect their identity. (Simpson 2002: A19)

The liberal discourse sees Canada as a distinct, even a unique part of the Western liberal democratic world. This distinction is a scarce value; the main threat, accordingly, lies in “Americanization” – the turning of Canadians into a nation of Elvis impersonators. Foreign policy, in the liberal discourse, should imply a foreign policy that is sovereign, independent, and, ultimately, sufficiently different from that of the United States.

The North American discourse places Canada firmly in the liberal democratic West, but it challenges claims to uniqueness. In particular, it critically regards the deployment of difference from the United States, and considers the threat to identity as grossly overstated. In the North American reading, the threat for Canada lies not in “becoming too much like the Americans”; rather and to put it crudely, it lies in delusions of grandeur. One *Maclean's* analyst asks “... how does a nation that is one-tenth the size of another in population, with a vanishing military, an economy smaller than a couple of large US states, and a dramatically different political system imagine it is like its much more powerful neighbour?” (Cruikshank 2002: 39) The references to the military and economy in this passage seem to suggest that Canadians might as well find succour in the security and prosperity provided by the proximity to the United States. The difference between the two political systems is enough to underwrite Canada's distinction. Instead of complaining about being misunderstood, taken for granted, or even swallowed up by the United States, Canadians should worry about appearing absurd in the eyes of the world.

Cultural ties over the Canadian-US border – measured in almost any social category – are as close as over any other border in the world. In North American discourse, such high cultural interaction is a value: it goes a long way in reducing possible tensions between the neighbours. That such interaction leads to identification is a given, but identification is not the same as Americanization. In two-dozen texts, the possessive “our” clearly refers to “North American”, not “Canadian”. A professor of African-American history at the University of British Columbia contends, “... our collective North American prosperity has been built on a series of injustices, from land grabs and slavery to cheap immigrant labour”. (*Maclean's* 2002: 38) In newspapers' automobile sections, a domestic vehicle refers to one built in North America, and is contrasted with Japanese or European. In *Unless*, the book's main protagonist distinguishes “our North American paper clips” from the “chic” ones from France. (Shields 2003: 176).

The aforementioned UBC professor offers that Canadians are only “outwardly more civil” about race. Similarly, while Canadians may be better able to “grasp the absurdity” in art than Americans, (Cullen 2003: 32) the difference is merely in degree, not in kind. North American audiences (again, “we” means Canadians and Americans) simply do not get (continental) European expressionism. (Taylor 2002: R1; Conlogue 2002: R2) A Canadian in New York observes: “On my way home to theatre, three people apologized to me when, lost in thought, I bumped into them. I used to think that only happened in Canada.” (Kingwell 2002: A22) Canadians, in the North American discourse, are not seen as all that different, i.e., more sophisticated, more civil than Americans. Besides, Canadians could do worse than become like the Americans. *The Kids Book of Canadian History* maintains that two of Canada's 19th Century [END OF PAGE 139] leaders, William Lyon Mackenzie and Louis-Joseph Papineau, wanted Canada to be more democratic, like America. (Hacker 2002: 34-35) Being on America's side in the Gulf War in 1991, like peacekeeping, can bring Canada “great prestige in international affairs”. (Hacker 2002: 69)

The Hollywood threat is simply overblown. Its values “did not change Kentucky, Arkansas or Massachusetts”. (Cruikshank 2002: 39) A character in *Unless*, “loves Oprah” but still watches Canadian “ten-o'clock news” religiously. (Shield 2003: 13) An American-born Canadian character in “What remains”, reaches an illumination on her nationality: “it occurred to me that I was a Canadian. Not that I'd ever got around to filling in the forms; on paper I was – as I still am – a US citizen. But sometimes things about you change without you noticing.” (Alexis *et al* 2002: 135) Identification does not necessarily mean Americanization: two identities – Canadian and American – can co-exist without the former being subsumed by the latter.

The North American understanding of liberal democracy is generally the same as in the liberal discourse. But its view of Canada’s place in the world, including the common North American home, differs from the liberal view. The North American discourse offers an alternative Canadian identity in which the United States is not a threatening “other”. In fact, similarity to, not difference from the United States, is understood as desirable. Thus acting in unison with the United States in international relations – including joining the coalition of the willing – is implied in this discourse. Had this discourse proved predominant, as I said earlier, Canada probably would have supported the military action against Hussein.

PUBLIC OPINION, VALUES AND ELITE TEXTS

In this section, I will first examine whether the results of my DA corroborate findings in public opinion polls and survey research on values. Then I will try to confirm my assumption that the mass and elite share the same inter-subjective milieu, by way of a survey of elite texts – defined as those produced by media commentators, foreign policy scholars, and parliamentarians.

The linkages between national identity, discursively understood, and public policy are most obvious in legislation enacted through mechanisms of direct governance, such as referenda and plebiscites. It is somewhat less obvious in public opinion polls. Public opinion is different from national identity because it refers to issue-specific, often short-term, values and attitudes of citizens. Direct questions, even if open-ended, cannot capture the depth and complexity of discourse. For most constructivists, public opinion surveys are generally seen as a poor tool for analyzing national identity.

Table 1 provides an overview of Canadian public opinion polls on the themes of Iraq and the United States. Opinion polls show a strikingly fluctuating public mood, but it is probably safe to say that, in the period under study, most Canadians most of the time did not support military action against Iraq. And in terms of opinion towards the United States, *Maclean’s* annual poll found a “... profound cooling of feelings towards the Americans since last year’s poll, taken just after the shattering events of September 11, [and concluded that o]ur need to be distinct from the United States today is not based on our fixation with our proximity to the Americans but on our understanding that their view of the world is increasingly different from ours”. (Gregg 2002) [END OF PAGE 140]

Table 1 Canadian Public Opinion Polls about Iraq and the United States, 2002-2003		
Date	Source*	Main Results
August 2002	Ipsos-Reid	54% opposed the war
September 2002	<i>The Economist</i>	Majority questions United States justification for the war
December 2002	<i>Maclean’s</i> (Annual Poll)	22% describe Americans as “family” or “best friends” (dropped from 33% in 2001); 67% believes the United States behaves “like a bully”
January 2003	Ipsos-Reid, Léger, Gallup	Between 10% and 26% support the war without UN approval
February 2003	Ipsos-Reid, Léger	67% against an attack on Iraq without proper UN approval (60% supported a UN-sanctioned attack); 50% Canadians described the United States as Canada’s “best friend” (25% said it was Britain)
March 2003	Pollara	56% support the war
April 2003	COMPAS	41% support “verbal support”; 31% support troop deployment
* Also see, Haglund 2005: 19; Harvey 2004: 204; and Jedwab 2003.		

Survey research on values – what a society believes to be good, right, and/or desirable – also seems to support my finding on the dominance of the liberal discourse. In his comprehensive research on social trends, Michael Adams (2003a) discovers profound and growing dissimilarities between American and Canadian societies, where Canadians are less nationalist, less religious, less conformist, and less patriarchal.⁸ These Canadian values approximate those in Europe and, arguably, shape social policy that resembles a European one. Values, like public opinion, should not be equated with national identity, the way it is understood in this analysis, but the implications for Canadian foreign policy are similar. Indeed, Adams submits that strained US-Canadian relations over Iraq can be understood in the context of the “... increasingly divergent values of the people of the two nations”. (2003b: A13) For example, Ottawa’s recent moves to liberalize gay and lesbian life-style laws, and to legalize marijuana were met with considerable disbelief south of the border (the North American discourse is likely to downplay American’s disbelief and underscore the opposition to this legislation in Canada itself). In contrast to the increasingly conservative United States, Canada, in the words of a popular critic, is starting to be perceived as a “hippie nation”. (Klein 2003: 12) A political cartoon by Dan Murphy, entitled “Why Canadian Bakers now Terrify the White House” shows a gentleman in an apron asking, “And your same-sex wedding cake, will that be hash or non-hash?” (*Maclean’s* 2002: 55) Another, Pascal Élie’s “Iraq’n Roll,” shows Chrétien in [END OF PAGE 141] full hippie outfit, playing guitar and singing: “All I am saying is give da peace a chance”. (Ibid.) A hippie leader is not likely to lead his (hippie) country to war. For the hippie Canada, an alliance with the conservative United States was unlikely in 2003.

Instead of asking if the public or “mass” matter in foreign policy, I turned my assumption, that mass and elite worlds are intersubjectively shared, into a hypothesis: one should expect to find that a majority view in elite texts is consistent with the liberal discourse at the societal level. My analysis suggests that the hypothesis obtains. At the elite level, the majority view roughly corresponds to what Canadian political scientists and historians call “liberal internationalism”. This view closely relates to the liberal discourse. The minority view approximates continentalism, which can be seen as an elite version of the North American discourse.⁹

Liberal internationalism stresses that Canada has played an important international role since the dusk of World War II. Terms used to describe this role include middle power, relevant power, principal power, soft power, civilian power, peacekeeper, value-added nation, helpful fixer, honest broker, integrator, consensus-builder, mediator, “do-gooder”, good international citizen, reflexive multilateralist, and assertive globalist. Under all of these terms, Canadian foreign policy is understood to be independent, and independence is always defined in terms of the distinction from the superpower neighbour. For example, in explaining the Iraq decision, one observer offers that Ottawa “... exercised independent judgment, and that independence has both

⁸ For a values-based approach to Canadian foreign policy analysis, see Lee (2002) and Michaud (2005).

⁹ As elite texts, I considered, first, Op-Ed pieces in the aforementioned daily newspapers and newsmagazines in the period from January 2002 to March 2003. Then I surveyed five relevant periodicals: *Canadian Foreign Policy*, *International Journal*, *Études internationales*, *Policy Options*, and the *Canada Among Nations* series (1996-2003). Last, I reviewed recently published textbooks on Canadian foreign policy (see references). Due to space constraints, I cannot present my findings in detail. For a consideration of the role of liberal internationalism and continentalism in the recent episodes of Canadian foreign policy, see Roussel (2004). For a telling overview of Canadian IR scholarship, see Nossal (2000).

supported and differed from the U.S. judgment of world events, especially military conflicts”. (Simpson 2003: A15)

In the attempt to play an important and independent role in the world, Canada has supported multilateralism – a policy of acting through the coalitions made up of allies and like-minded actors. (Harvey 2004: 50-51, 185-208; Keating 2002: 1-16; Nossal 1997: 138-170) The same applies, to a lesser extent, to the United Nations. For Canadian foreign policy, international institutions and multilateralism are major facilitating conditions. These regularities suggest that Ottawa is not likely to support near-unilateral military interventions by its allies. According to Janice Gross Stein (2002), a world in which American unilateralism is the order of the day is Canada’s “nightmare”. Writing about the Gulf War 1990-91, John Kirton offers a counterfactual: “... if only America and a handful of its small associates had gone to war, Canada would have probably, as in Vietnam three decades earlier, sat the conflict out”. (1992: 383)

Continentalism offers a different take on independence and multilateralism. If these reflect nothing more than a desire to distinguish the country from its superpower neighbour, then Canada’s international role is profoundly miscast. First, American dominance and Canadian independence are not mutually exclusive. Second, Canada’s support for multilateralism is either naïve or hypocritical. (Harvey 2004: Ch. 7; Ignatieff 2003) It is naïve because it unrealistically expects a state, especially the superpower neighbour, to be altruistic and “ignore its national interest”. (Knox 2003: A13) It is hypocritical because Canada does not support multilateralism because of some high moral commitment, but because of its limited capabilities. A Canadian entertainer sees the situation thus: “Canadians are observers, not doers. When Britain and America say, ‘We’re going to invade Iraq,’ people go, ‘Oh look out! There’s trouble brewing.’ [END OF PAGE 142] In Canada, we don’t have the power, military or economic, to affect the world.” (Cullen 2003: 32) In addition to the size, a series of spending cuts that began in the late 1980s resulted in the rise of what some have called the “Potemkin Canada”: a country with a vanishing military, ever-decreasing levels of international aid and development assistance, and a diplomatic corps in which the attrition rate is higher than in a graduate school. (e.g., Cohen 2003)

A prudent way to match rhetoric to practice would be to support the United States, even if it means abandoning some of the multilateralist ideals. The superpower neighbour faces an enormous responsibility in the post-Cold War, post-9/11 world; many expect it to lead the world, whether by example, cash, or military muscle. Canada, as a trusted insider in Washington, could contribute to the direction of American leadership; the alliance with United States thus offers a practical component to Canada’s rhetorical one. Continentalism, in this sense, can be said to resonate with the North American discourse, which implies that Canada plays a supportive role in the reproduction of the US global preponderance, ideally by providing a subtle Canadian twist to American foreign policy.

Government officials constitute a key part of the elite. Based on my analysis of eighty-four discrete texts produced by Canada’s parliamentarians (press conference transcripts, press releases/briefings, speeches, and publicly available interviews), I confirm the dominance of the liberal discourse.¹⁰ Canada’s ruling Liberals, by and large, were against the war. Only one minister hinted that he was in favour of joining the coalition (Defence Minister John McCallum). Most Liberal MPs criticized the military intervention in Iraq as unnecessary and ill timed, using positions implied by the dominant discourse. Some loudly criticized the US Iraq policy as

¹⁰ For a content analysis of decisional statements by key government representatives in House of Commons during Question Period, from January 2002 to May 2003, see Michaud (2006). His findings imply the consistent and clear dominance of the liberal discourse in the Chrétien government.

hypocritical, and a select few opined that Washington's goal was neither to change nor to disarm the Ba'athist regime, but instead, was simply a show of America's power. Very critical remarks about the US government, including President Bush, were voiced by Brent St. Denis, John Cannis, Janko Peric, Yvon Charbonneau, and, especially, Carolyn Parish and Natural Resources Minister, Herb Dhaliwal.¹¹

The opposition was divided. The right-of-centre Canadian Alliance, the strongest opposition party, supported the United States and continually criticized the Prime Minister for turning his back on Canada's traditional allies. The US action was read through the North American discourse where similarities easily outweigh the differences. (Harper and Day 2003: A12) The centrist Progressive Conservative Party, the left-of-centre New Democratic Party, and the nominally separatist Bloc Québécois all supported the government, with the latter loudly demanding even further distancing from the war in Iraq. (Buzzetti 2003: A13; McCarthy and Leblanc 2003a: A1, 2003b: A1) Even the radical positions were consistent with the liberal discourse.

The provisional conclusion is that the dominance of liberal discourse was present at all relevant levels of Canadian society in 2002-03. Of course, Ottawa's decision to stay out of the war would not have been so shocking, had it been discursively predetermined. The Canadian government's position on Iraq was inconsistent and ambiguous until the last day, as it was unclear whether the existing UN resolutions against Iraq justified military action. (Harvey 2004: 193-215; Massie and Roussel 2005). The majority of Liberals were not opposed to the removal of Hussein *per se*. The Prime Minister even suggested that he could appreciate a military [END OF PAGE 144] intervention without a UN approval. (Cornellier 2003: A8) Also, following the commencement of military operations, the Canadian government repeatedly reaffirmed respect for US leadership. Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham wished the US-led coalition "Godspeed" and the Prime Minister, speaking on the fortieth anniversary of his first election to parliament, expressed hope that the United States would accomplish its mission quickly and with minimal casualties. But overall, the government's decision to sit out the Iraq war was consistent with the dominant reading of Canadian identity. In other words, the dominance of the liberal discourse made the decision more likely. The conclusion, however, remains provisional because I am yet to undertake the critical test of intersubjectivity: did the key foreign policy decision-makers "think liberal," too?

THE CHRÉTIEN EFFECT

I have argued that the predominance of the liberal discourse in Canadian society in 2002-03 can help us account for Ottawa's decision to opt out of the war. A critic may say that I have provided an explanation based on an over-socialized view of actors, treating them as "structural dupes". In order to comprehensively respond to this criticism, I will begin with an attempt to ground my structural explanation with a more actor-based approach. (Hudson 2005: 2-5) Let me call it the "Chrétien effect".

As a variable, leadership is decidedly agentic because it emphasizes the capacity and creativity of political actors and the contingency of choices. Leaders, in this view, are able to "... stretch the constraints [and] nudge political trajectories in new and unexpected directions". (Samuels 2003: 2; also see Winter *et al* 2003). Prime Minister Chrétien must be seen as a leader with the capacity and motivation to change political trajectories. Canadian governments are

¹¹ Dhaliwal's remarks and the reaction by American Ambassador created an unusual stir in diplomatic relations. On McCallum's position, see *Presse canadienne* (2003).

usually single-party majorities, which means that foreign policy decisions are highly centralized at the top of the government's hierarchy, with the prime minister sitting firmly at the top. (Nossal 1997: 174-194) Chrétien, judging by the number of concerns voiced about the democratic deficit under his rule, is rightly described as one of the most powerful prime ministers in recent Canadian history. (Savoie 2003: 82-87) The beginning of the Iraq crisis roughly coincided with Chrétien's last cabinet re-shuffle and the apex of his power. Having announced his retirement in August 2002, the Prime Minister Chrétien entered the crisis as a lame duck, which arguably gave him even more decision-making power. According to one commentator, Iraq was Chrétien's "loneliest decision" (MacDonald 2002: 30)

As far as his motivation goes, two interrelated factors stand out. First, the Prime Minister seems to have held the Bush administration, particularly President Bush, in low regard. *The Economist* attributed much of the strain in US-Canadian relations in March 2003 to the "barely-hidden mutual disdain" between Chrétien and Bush. (*The Economist* 2003: 15) Much of it is Chrétien's fault. In the 2000 presidential campaign, he endorsed Bush's Democratic opponent. On the first anniversary of 9/11, the Prime Minister made controversial remarks about American foreign policy. And in his Chicago speech of February 13, 2003, Chrétien ventured to daresay that people in other countries "sometimes" question motivations of the United States.¹² [END OF PAGE 144]

Chrétien had a major interest in rounding out his legacy. (Wilson-Smith 2003: 4; Frum 2002: A24) Apparently, the Prime Minister strongly identified with Liberal leaders who valued Canada's independence over its alliance with the United States. One biographer thus describes the Iraq decision: "With this emblematic display of sovereignty and with his many recent activist domestic initiatives, he has positioned himself much closer to where he wanted to be in the Liberal pantheon." (Martin 2003: A21) Or, expressed in the words of a member of the opposition, "The Prime Minister finally has a legacy. He is the first prime minister in Canadian history to abandon our British and American allies at a time of need, and has brought Canada-US relations to their lowest level in modern times." (Taber 2003: A1)

The Chrétien effect was no doubt major, but how does it relate to the earlier analysis? As causal variables, national identity and leadership are both promising, yet considered in isolation from each other, they ultimately do not suffice. (Nossal 1997: 14) The "all things being equal" assumption under which mono-causal explanations operate is just that – an assumption. All other things are usually not equal. In order to overcome inferential limitations, one needs to consider, at a minimum, how leadership effects interact with national identity.

The question leads to the so-called agent-structure problem – an ontological debate between individualists and holists. (Wendt 1999: 26) The questions such as: What do we know for sure? What is there to be explained? What makes the world hang together? all refer to a set of first principles on which every theory is based. In IR, some theories assume that the world is made of structures (anarchy, interdependence, alliances); others that it consists of agents (prime ministers, cabinets, terrorists); and still others believe in both.

¹² Bush retaliated. First, he broke with tradition and made his first presidential visit to Mexico, not to Canada. The President visited Canada twice and met with the Prime Minister nine other times, but only at international summits. In April 2003, Bush officially cancelled what would have been his first state visit to Ottawa, scheduled for the next month. The cancellation was officially termed a postponement and explained by President's increased workload due to the war in Iraq. In Canada, many observers saw it as a calculated snub in return for Canada's non-participation in the war, as well as for earlier anti-American and anti-Bush comments by Canadian officials. Bush also never invited Chrétien to his Texan ranch and never once talked to Chrétien during the Iraq crisis.

Constructivists belong to the last group. In IR theory, “agents and structures are mutually constituted” has become something of a constructivist mantra. At the barest, the idea is that our theoretical task should be to locate agents in relation to structures, rather than to fixate on the choices of disembodied actors or to ascribe action to exogenous forces beyond human control. In the constructivist view, actors are neither disembodied nor structural dupes; instead, they actively participate in the social construction of reality. Agents constitute, and are constituted by, structures. But how does one do justice to both agents and structures in the actual empirical analysis? One way is to consider the research question twice, once using structures and again using agents, and then to examine the explanations as complementary. The key, therefore, is to temporize the ontology, isolate agentic and structural elements, and see how they relate to each other.

Evaluating the two types of analysis against each other and against the available evidence, I would suggest that any explanation that exclusively focuses on the expressed preferences of individual leaders suffers from an omitted variable bias. In my view, a key omission concerns national identity.

In the structural perspective, discourses make some outcomes more possible than others. Foreign policy-making can be seen as a process of legitimation: leaders make policy by articulating it so that it appears legitimate to an audience.¹³ In a democratic system, the leaders will be more likely to keep their jobs, the more legitimate their policies appear to the public. To legitimate or frame a policy, leaders must deploy the available discourses. Canadian decision-makers were unlikely to frame Canada’s non-participation in Iraq on the basis of [END OF PAGE 145] Canada’s neutrality. Such legitimating would probably confuse most Canadians. So while leaders might want to legitimate particular policy in a way that follows their personal interest, e.g., legacy, their discursive range is limited. In fact, precisely because they are instrumentally motivated, leaders will be likely to stay within the range of the dominant discourse as such framing would resonate with the majority of the public. Defending a policy no one could disagree with is a remarkable low-cost way to score points with an audience. Legitimizing a position in a manner consistent with the dominant discourse in a society is a politically sound strategy.

Consider how Graham and Chrétien use references to independence and multilateralism to justify Canada’s Iraq policy. In a speech in the House of Commons in January, Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham quoted President Bush’s State of the Union address that the United States “does not depend on the decision of others”. Then he said: “Canadians expect no less from their government. And why would Americans expect less of us than they expect of themselves?” (quoted in McCarthy and Leblanc 2003b) In the following month, Graham made the following point in a public speech: “... I think we should be where we are, have our policy, which is to support the multilateral system with good arguments and to say to them, ‘We’re staying put. And you’re better to have an ally and friend that debates frankly than to have someone who says yes, sir’.” (quoted in Wells 2003) In both speeches, Canada is articulated as independent from and/or equal to the United States. As in the liberal discourse, the emphasis here is on the difference with the United States: Canada is capable of not only making its own policy (multilateralism), but also deliberating, disagreeing, and, ultimately, staying the course in the face of the superpower pressure.

¹³ On the meaning of legitimation in the constructivist research program, see, *inter alia*, Barnett (1999: 6-9); Campbell (1998: 381-3); and the contribution by Nicholas Onuf in Kubàlková (2001).

Chrétien insisted on multilateralism and the UN authority from the outset of the crisis. In January 2003, the Prime Minister stated: “The position of Canada is that we were insisting right at the beginning, you remember, that Canada act through the United Nations, through international institutions. We believe in multilateralism very strongly.” (quoted in McCarthy and Leblanc 2003b: A1) In his Chicago speech on February 13, the Prime Minister explained that multilateralism is a part of Canada’s “distinctive international personality”. A week later, Chrétien confirmed his belief that any unilateral action against Iraq would “go nowhere” and then asserted that terrorism is in Afghanistan, not in Iraq. And within the same month, Foreign Affairs Minister Graham gave the same message to the US Secretary of State Colin Powell. In all these expressions, multilateralism was argued to be at the core of Canada’s difference from the United States. The government could have ostensibly framed the Iraq decision in terms other than independence and multilateralism, but doing so would not have been as resonant with the dominant discourse on the Canadian identity at the time.

Chrétien in particular was in tune with the liberal discourse. Consider how the Prime Minister clarifies his relationship with President Bush: “Personally, I have no problem with Mr. Bush. We’re not the same. His social policies are not the same type as mine. He’s against abortion, he’s for capital punishment and he’s against gun control. I’m for a public health-care system, he’s probably not for that. He’s a conservative and I’m not.” (Chrétien 2002: 40) In this text, Chrétien establishes difference with President Bush by listing a set of beliefs commonly held by Canadians. While beliefs, as features of the cognitive self, can be entirely idiosyncratic, e.g., “I am the Emperor of Canada”, it is far more likely that they come from the shared social [END OF PAGE 146] imagination. Chrétien’s explanation clearly contains meaning beyond his own individual, cognitive and behavioural life: the Prime Minister frames his political differences with the American president on the specific points of social policy that resonate with the dominant discourse on Canadian identity. As per constructivist ontology, high-level articulations of difference such as this one not only strengthened the dominant liberal reading of Canada, but also the *status quo*, meaning Chrétien’s power-hold. The liberal discourse and the Liberal government mutually constituted each other. Framing the differences outside the dominant discourse would have been possible, but would not resonate as strongly with the Canadian audience and would not score as many political points. In the final analysis and regardless of the putative level, it is the discourse that provides the grammar for identifying actors, (Chrétien, Canada) their situations, (multilateralism, independence) and the possibilities for action and interaction, (personal friendship, coalition membership). In this sense, the liberal discourse enabled Canada to sit out the Iraq war.

CONCLUSIONS

As US-led military interventions have become one of the most talked-about and, indeed, consequential features of contemporary international politics, the question of what determines coalition membership has come to the fore of IR theory. In a recent paper, Tago (2006) finds significance in four variables: the type and legitimacy of a coalition, military capability, and the dyad-level affinity with the United States all positively affect the probability of joining coalitions. In other words, coalition membership is a function of both material and ideational factors. Constructivism, as I said, concentrates on the latter. Constructivist work on identity – which conceptually corresponds to what Tago calls “affinity” – has been successful insofar as the attempts to bracket this variable or define it by assumption, e.g., Canada is a middle power, are now considered *passé* in IR theory.

A growing appreciation of identity is usually prefaced by cautionary remarks. One in fact emerged in my DA: “identity [is] the dominant mystery of our lives ... [but it] can never be known”. (Shields 2003: 186) Many political scientists would probably agree: as a variable, identity is too mercurial to suit the task of explaining outcomes in the political world.

In this paper, I have attempted to demonstrate one way of defining an identity and using it to explain an empirically puzzling event, such as Canada’s non-participation in Iraq. For a comprehensive analytical purchase, however, I would need to subject my approach to an empirical evaluation beyond a single foreign episode. Sticking with the case of Canada, I could, for example, argue that *prima facie* evidence for my explanation is the decision of the subsequent Canadian governments to stay the course on Iraq. The same applies to the decision to opt out of Washington’s Ballistic Missile Defense program. Indeed, in February 2004, the government announced that Canada expected to be consulted every time a missile is launched over Canadian air space. Like Iraq, this decision constitutes a precedent of sorts in Canadian foreign policy behaviour. Perhaps, like Iraq, it too can be explained by national identity.

These are, of course, speculations. What my analytical framework needs is more historical-comparative variation.¹⁴ The meaning of liberal democracy – what I see to be the baseline discourse on contemporary Canadian identity – no doubt changed over the course of [END OF PAGE 147] history and had different effects on Canada’s participation in the international arena. In the Cold War, the effects of these changes were probably minimal in terms of foreign policy implications – as Canada primarily identified against communism and other non-Western, non-liberal democratic significant states. In this sense, critical for empirical evaluation are the episodes of military interventions over which the liberal democratic West was divided. Why did Canada support the United States over Suez, but not in Vietnam? How about the post-communist period? Why did Canada support American near-unilateralist bombing of Iraq in 1996 and 1998? What about the so-called “illegal, but legitimate” intervention in Kosovo in 1999? Were different discursive configurations dominant in Canadian society in each of these occasions? Were different readings of the United States at play? One could also explore the effects of the degree of multilateralism on Ottawa’s foreign policy options. (Harvey 2004: 52) In the contemporary discourses on the Canadian identity, what international group is likely to render an intervention legitimate: the UN Security Council? G8? NATO? The “Anglosphere”? Britain and the United States?

Apart from more empirics, this framework obviously needs further theorization. For one, I have discovered a high correlation between the discursive undercurrents and elite institutions such as the parliament, media and academia. Institutional variables should be seen as central in this sort of analysis not only because institutions are key sources of discourses, but also because discourses are deployed in accordance to institutional interests. The linking of institutions to discourses in a single theoretical framework would arguably constitute a step forward in the attempt to “resolve” the agent-structure problem in IR theory. [END OF PAGE 148]

¹⁴ To explain foreign policy as a function of identity, one should no doubt venture beyond international security. Again using the Canadian example, why did Canadian identity imply free trade with the United States in 1988, but not in 1948 and 1911?

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