

Foreign Policy and Global Role of the USA As Seen by the General Public

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Issues from global politics do not appear in sociological investigations or public opinion polls very frequently although their results tend to be relatively interesting and, oftentimes, they meet with extensive interest and response from media as well as the general public. Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění (Public Opinion Research Centre) strives, as its possibilities allow, to include questions from this area in its continuous investigations. In 2003 and 2004, the Centre investigated, among other things, an issue which has become very topical, in particular in connection with presidential elections in the United States. It was the issue of foreign policy and global role of the USA. In the same period, certain investigations of CVVM also examined the issue of the war in Iraq, a topic closely related to the USA foreign policy, attitude towards the personality of the current American president, George W. Bush, and towards international institutions such as The United Nations Organisation or the NATO.

As far as the general attitudes towards American foreign policy and towards the role that the USA play in the current global politics are concerned, these were investigated twice in CVVM surveys using a six-item battery of statements,¹ on which respondents expressed either their agreement or disagreement. The first investigation was conducted in the first half of March 2003 and the second, so far the last one, in the second half of May 2004.

Table 1: Agreement/disagreement with statements concerning foreign policy and global role of the USA

	III/2003	V/2004
The USA seek to ensure stability and peaceful world organisation.	44/49	47/44
Actions by the USA in international politics do not respect world community opinion.	73/21	64/26
In their foreign policy, the USA stand up in protection of freedom, democracy and human rights.	48/42	51/38
In their foreign policy, the USA give preference to their own power and financial interests.	82/13	76/15
The USA are entitled to use military force against non-democratic regimes	20/71	22/64
Current foreign policy of the USA represent threat for current world	57/31	42/41

Note: Data in the table represent sums of the shares of relevant alternatives of the "tend to" and "definitely" answers. To achieve 100%, the "does not know" answers need to be added.

Data: CVVM, Naše společnost 2003 (Our Society 2003) survey, investigation 03-03, 2004, investigation 04-05

When we compare results from both surveys (see Table 1), it is clear that attitudes of the Czech public towards American foreign policy and towards the global role of the USA were much more critical in March 2003 in certain respects than fourteen months later. Most likely, this was due to the extremely escalated situation around Iraq. In particular, the share of those who thought that the then foreign policy of the USA presented a threat to the world of today was distinctly higher in March 2003 (15 percentage points higher) than in May 2004. A clear development in the period between the two surveys was recorded also for conviction that the actions by the USA in international politics do not respect the

¹ Question: "I am going to read out several statements concerning foreign policy of the United States of America. Can you please tell me in relation to each of them whether you agree or disagree with it?" (For more details, see Table 1)

world community opinion (decrease by 9 percentage points) and that the USA give preference to their own power and financial interests. in their foreign policy (decrease by 6 percentage points). However, there was not any statistically significant increase in the share of those who approved of the United States having the right to use military force against non-democratic regimes, although the share of respondents explicitly disapproving with this statement has decreased by 7 percentage points as opposed to March 2003. The investigation recorded only a very minor development (at the limit of statistical significance) in favour of the statement that the USA seek to ensure stability and peaceful world organisation and that, in their foreign policy, the USA stand up in protection of freedom, democracy and human rights.

In general, results from both investigations tend to purport criticism in relation to American foreign policy and its global role. In May 2004, when the assessment was relatively more favourable, three quarters of the population were of the opinion that the USA give preference to their own power and financial interests in their foreign policy and almost two thirds thought that the United States do not respect the world community opinion. In the opinion of two fifths of respondents taking part in the May investigation, the current foreign policy of the USA presents a threat to the world of today, approximately the same part has expressed an opposite opinion. Similarly, Czech society was cleft apart in opinions concerning the fact whether the United States seek to ensure stability and peaceful world organisation in their foreign policy when 47 % of residents approved of such a statement and 44 %, to the contrary, rejected it. In the question of whether in their foreign policy, the USA stand up in protection of freedom, democracy and human rights, the opinion that it was so prevailed slightly with half of the respondents approving of such statement as opposed to less than two fifths of disagreeing respondents. Approximately one fifth of the Czech Republic's population is of the opinion that the United States are entitled to use military force against non-democratic regimes, two thirds are against it.

Prevailing critical assessment characterising both investigations conducted and the development which occurred in the past period, can be best illustrated through a single indicator encompassing all the above results relating to individual statements. This indicator shows the attitude of Czech public towards American foreign policy through mutual relation between the numbers of positive and negative opinions expressed in respect of the foreign policy for each individual respondent. These relations were subsequently ordered into five categories (see Table 2).

Table 2: Attitude towards foreign policy of the USA (in %)²

	III/2003	V/2004
Clearly positive (without reservations)	5	5
Predominantly positive	16	21
Neutral, indefinite, or combined	17	24
Predominantly negative	32	28
Clearly negative	30	22

Note: Percentage is in columns.

Data: CVVM, Naše společnost 2003 (Our Society 2003) survey, investigation 03-03, 2004, investigation 04-05

² The "clearly positive" category includes respondents with prevalence of five or six statements supportive of or with positive attitude towards American foreign policy or global role, the category of "predominantly positive" includes respondents with prevalence of two to four such statements and the "neutral, indefinite or combined" category contains people for whom the difference between positive and negative statements was either zero or was characterised by prevalence of just one statement to the one or the other side. The "predominantly negative" and "clearly negative" categories were set analogously to the "predominantly positive" and "clearly positive" categories.

The results imply that in May 2004, half of residents viewed American foreign policy and the global role of the USA predominantly critically or completely critically while approximately one fourth of Czech population perceived or evaluated it positively. One out of every twenty Czechs over 15 years accepted American foreign policy completely without reservations. As opposed to March 2003, respondents holding up clearly negative attitudes reduced noticeably (decrease by 8 percentage points from 30% to 22%) and there was also reduction in the share of those whose assessment sounded predominantly critically (by 4 percentage points). On the other hand, the change in question has reflected in particular in increase of the share of neutral, indefinite or combined attitudes (by 7 percentage points) and, to a lesser degree, in increase of predominantly positive evaluation (by 5 percentage points). The group of people with completely uncritical opinion of American foreign policy and the global role of the USA in the current world has remained the same in their numbers.

Table 3a: Attitude towards foreign policy of the USA based on party preferences – 2003 (in %)

	ODS	KDU-ČSL	ČSSD	KSČM
Clearly positive (without reservations)	9	5	3	2
Predominantly positive	23	15	11	6
Neutral, indefinite, or combined	16	16	16	11
Predominantly negative	32	38	34	33
Clearly negative	20	26	36	48

Note: Percentage in the columns.

Data: CVVM, Naše společnost 2003 (Our Society 2003) survey, investigation 03-03

Table 3b: Attitude towards foreign policy of the USA based on party preferences – 2004 (in %)

	ODS	KDU-ČSL	ČSSD	KSČM
Clearly positive (without reservations)	8	4	4	1
Predominantly positive	31	23	22	7
Neutral, indefinite, or combined	19	26	20	19
Predominantly negative	26	31	28	32
Clearly negative	16	16	26	41

Note: Percentage in the columns.

Data: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, investigation 04-05

Tables 3a and 3b clearly show that, as far as party preferences are concerned, supporters of ODS perceived American foreign policy in both investigations relatively the most positively although critical voices prevailed in their group as well, rather noticeably in March 2003, but significantly less fourteen months later. To the contrary, as anticipated, KSČM voters were the most critical in both instances in this respect. However, in 2003, voters of other parties came relatively close to them in their attitudes. The data in Table 4 prove that the situation around the planned attack on Iraq affected the then attitudes strongly.

Table 4: Attitude towards foreign policy of the USA based on attitudes towards attack on Iraq (in %)

	In favour of the attack	Against the attack	Does not know
Clearly positive (without reservations)	20	1	3
Predominantly positive	46	8	15
Neutral, indefinite, or combined	18	13	51
Predominantly negative	12	39	26
Clearly negative	4	39	5

Note: Percentage in the columns.

Data: CVVM, Naše společnost 2003 (Our Society 2003) survey, investigation 03-03

The attack against Iraq which was under preparation in March 2003, was supported by 21% of Czech residents over 15 years, 72% disapproved of it and 7% were undecided on the issue. Table 4 shows how the overall evaluation of American foreign policy appeared in these three individual groups. The data suggest that two thirds of proponents of the attack against Iraq assessed American foreign policy and the global role of the USA positively, one fifth of them practically without any reservations. But, as for the opponents of the war, three fourths treated American foreign policy critically; approximately two fifths were of a clearly negative attitude.

Table 5: Attitude towards foreign policy of the USA based on trust in George W. Bush

	Trusts	Mistrusts	Does not know
Clearly positive (without reservations)	13	2	6
Predominantly positive	44	10	20
Neutral, indefinite, or combined	24	18	48
Predominantly negative	15	36	20
Clearly negative	4	34	6

Note: Percentage in the columns.

Data: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, investigation 04-05

Thanks to data from the survey conducted in May 2004 it was possible to confront the opinion on American foreign policy and the global role of the USA with attitudes of the Czech population towards the person of the current American president. Trust in the president George W. Bush was expressed by 28% of respondents in this investigation, 60% however, to the contrary, did not trust him in their own words, 11% did not have any clear cut attitude towards him and the remaining 1% stated that they do not know George Bush. The results in Table 5 show that those who trusted the person of the current American president assessed American foreign policy positively for the most part (57%) or at least neutrally (24%), while critical attitude completely prevails with the ones who mistrust him (70%). Those without clear-cut attitude towards George Bush assessed American foreign policy neutrally for the most part, approximately one fourth held critical attitudes towards it and an identical part assessed it positively.

Table 6: Attitude towards foreign policy of the USA based on trust in the NATO and the UNO

	NATO		UNO	
	Trusts	Mistrusts	Trusts	Mistrusts
Clearly positive (without reservations)	9	1	6	5
Predominantly positive	31	10	24	17
Neutral, indefinite, or combined	25	16	24	15
Predominantly negative	25	30	28	27
Clearly negative	10	43	18	36

Note: Percentage in the columns.

Data: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, investigation 04-05

Table 7: Attitude towards foreign policy of the USA based on combination of trust in the UNO and George Bush (in %)

	Trusts the UNO and Bush	Mistrusts the UNO, trusts Bush	Trusts the UNO, mistrusts Bush	Mistrusts the UNO, and Bush
Clearly positive (without reservations)	13	20	2	0
Predominantly positive	45	48	11	9
Neutral, indefinite, or combined	24	15	20	12
Predominantly negative	15	15	37	31
Clearly negative	3	2	30	48

Note: Percentage in the columns.

Data: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, investigation 04-05

The research also involved issues surveying attitudes of the Czech population towards certain international structures, among others, the North American Alliance and the United Nations Organisation which play a relatively significant role in connection with American foreign policy. Trust in the NATO was expressed by 49% of respondents in the investigation, 36% took up opposing attitude. As for the UNO, trust expressed was somewhat higher when 64% of respondents defined themselves positively in respect of this institution, 22% declared their mistrust.

Since the United States have dominant position in the NATO and since the NATO tends to be perceived frequently rather as an instrument of American foreign policy than anything else, it cannot be surprising that the attitude towards the organisation correlates very strongly with the attitude towards American foreign policy. As shown in Table 6, positive attitudes towards American foreign policy (40%) slightly prevail over negative attitudes (35%) among the people who trust the NATO. People who do not hold trust in the NATO, to the contrary, assess American foreign policy and global role of the USA critically for the most part (73%).

Situation around the United Nations Organisation is somewhat more complicated. Although the United States, being member state in the position of a world power and permanent member of the Security Council, have very significant impact on the conduct and direction of the entire organisation, they have found themselves, with their foreign policy, in counter position and more or less open conflicts with the UNO or with majority position of the members of the General Assembly or the Security Council quite frequently, especially recently. Results in Table 6, showing overall assessment of American foreign policy among those who trust the UNO and, to the contrary, who mistrust it, imply that difference among both groups is significantly smaller than it was for example from the point of view of trust in the NATO and that the group of people trusting the UNO assesses American foreign policy with more benevolence than people with opposing

attitude towards the UNO. We can get a somewhat different and also a more vivid picture of attitudes towards American foreign policy confronted with trust in the UNO if we incorporate the above attitude towards the personality of American president into the analysis.

As shown in Table 6, it is not the respondents who trust the UNO but a relatively narrow group (approximately 4% of respondents) who trust George W. Bush and mistrust the UNO which assesses American foreign policy relatively most favourably. Those who trust the current American president and the UNO at the same time perceive American foreign policy also in predominantly positive terms but in comparison with the previous group, a little bit less markedly. To the contrary those who trust the UNO but not president Bush perceive American foreign policy critically for the most part and their opinion was just a bit less clear cut in this respect than the attitude of those who do not trust either the UNO or Bush.