

## POSUDEK OPONENTA HABILITAČNÍ PRÁCE

**Masarykova univerzita**

**Uchazeč**

**Habilitační práce**

PhDr. Michal Smetana, PhD.

*The Foundations of Nuclear Order. Norms, Attitudes, and International Institutions*

**Oponent**

**Pracoviště oponenta,  
institute**

Prof. PhDr. Milada Polišenská, CSc.

Anglo-americká vysoká škola, z.ú,

PhDr. Michal Smetana, PhD., has submitted a habilitation thesis, *The Foundations of Nuclear Order. Norms, Attitudes, and International Institutions*. Brno: Masaryk University, Faculty of Social Studies, 2021, 265 pages. It is a thesis of type b)., pursuant to Directive No. 7/2017 Article 5 (1b), i.e., it is a set of published scholarly works equipped with a commentary.

Smetana selected fifteen articles, which became fifteen chapters of the thesis. One-third of the articles have been written solely by Smetana; the majority are collaborative works, with Smetana being the first author, while the co-authors were experts from Czechia and from abroad. The selected articles document a thematic homogeneity on one side and an epistemological and methodological heterogeneity on the other. At the time of the submission of the thesis, ten articles had been published already, two had been accepted, and three were under review –all in high ranking, impact factored international journals, and Routledge and Harvard University Press are also represented. The habilitation thesis is in English.

The thesis is structured in two parts: 1. Nuclear Order and Public Attitude (eight chapters), and 2. Nuclear Order and International Institutions (seven chapters).

The first part consists of studies on the attitudes of individuals towards the core institutions, norms, and practices of the global nuclear order. It focuses on topics such as the military nonuse of nuclear weapons, moral approaches towards strikes and fatalities, nuclear and chemical weapon "taboos," the population's views about hypothetical armed conflicts and nuclear disarmament, and the attitudes of the general public and political elites towards NATO's nuclear-sharing practice.

The second part's theme is "the interplay between norms, practices, and institutions of the global nuclear order from a broader, macro perspective" (p. 167, 224, 241). The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is investigated from various aspects; the topics include five primary institutions of nuclear order: nuclear deterrence, nuclear arms control, nuclear nonproliferation, nuclear nonuse, and nuclear disarmament.

The thesis offers numerous statistics and graphs, and the results of experimental and empirical research, which are very valuable and innovative and provide deeper insights.

A substantial part of the comments formulates research plans for the future. Smetana outlines seven promising avenues for research and emphasizes a cross-national and cross-cultural perspective; sharpening the public-elite distinction, the role of gender and race, generational aspects, consideration of (neuro-)psychological factors, the comparative examination of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), interactive linkages between the core norms and institutions of global nuclear order, and the inherent contestedness of the nuclear order and the real-world implications of this contestedness.

One of the strongest aspects of the thesis is that Smetana interlinks his research plans for the future in each of these avenues with his research and publishing experience, which is based on a thorough understanding of the issues supported by considerable knowledge of the literature on the topic, and by empirical research and experiments. Smetana presents his arguments and opens the possibilities for other, innovative perspectives. Based on his unique empirical and experimental research, Smetana has achieved a deep insight into the attitudes of the people of Russia, Germany, Denmark, the UK, the Netherlands and the United States on nuclear weapons. On this research, he builds his argument for the necessity of cross-national and cross-cultural research to balance the still prevailing U.S. centric perspective. The author claims credit for having (co)authored the first article in this academic field based on experimental methods of examining Russian attitudes towards the military use of nuclear weapons. British citizens are, according to Smetana's conclusions, more averse to the use of nuclear weapons than American citizens, while the German populace expresses "atomic aversion," and Smetana suggests that "All these findings strongly point to the possibility that the much-publicized willingness of a large number of Americans to approve the use of nuclear weapons might not be replicated in other national contexts" (p. 16). Smetana also points to the gaps between the public and elite, and argues that there is a lack of knowledge of elite attitudes towards nuclear weapons and formulates a surprising hypothesis that "political elites are, on average, more averse to the potential use of nuclear weapons than the general public" (p. 17).

Gender and age are largely under-researched and stereotypically viewed concerning attitudes towards nuclear weapons, and Smetana formulates his research plans in this direction. Smetana gives considerable space to his interest in moral psychology in the context of nuclear weapons: "The (neuro-)psychological foundations of attitudes towards nuclear weapons represent an intriguing area of scholarly research, in line with the recent "behavioral turn" in political science and IR" (p.19).

He supports his research by the Moral Foundations Theory – he applied this theory in his earlier research – and develops and empirically tests hypotheses about the relationship between "individualizing" and "binding" moral foundations and attitudes towards the use of nuclear weapons. He identifies a gap in the research concerning the relationship between moral foundations and individuals' political ideology in attitudes towards nuclear nonuse, which he wants to address.

In respect of chemical weapons, discursively clustered together with chemical and biological weapons as "weapons of mass destruction" (WMD), Smetana intends to provide a comparative analysis of attitudes towards their use, advancing his (and his co-author's) earlier work, including survey experiments. Their surprising, according to Smetana, findings revealed that the public is more averse to chemical than to nuclear weapons, which Smetana explains, hypothetically, as an issue of identity, as people usually "associate nuclear weapons with modern, developed countries ["countries like us"] and chemical weapons with "rogue states" and terrorists ["inferior others"]" (p. 22). Smetana also plans to investigate the sensitivity of individuals to biological threats in response to the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interactive linkages between nuclear deterrence and nuclear nonproliferation represent another avenue for further research. Smetana has identified and examined the tensions between these two strategies and the general attitudes towards them, as documented by U.S. versus German opinions. Smetana suggests that the institution of nuclear nonuse will be a priority for research into the linkages between the core institutions of nuclear order (p. 23).

The contestedness of nuclear order represents a key question of Smetana's research projects. He claims that "the global nuclear order is built on inherently contestable and perpetually contested normative structures" (p. 24). Smetana includes one more perspective for consideration and future research: the problem of peaceful nuclear use, specifically the idea of using nuclear explosions to deflect those near-earth objects which are a threat to the existence of life on Earth. However, according to Smetana, the legitimization of nuclear explosions would represent a serious contestation of the idea that all nuclear explosions should be prohibited and

nuclear weapons abolished (p. 24, 243). The recurring contestation of the meaning of the nuclear disarmament norm is one of the key questions Smetana examines and will examine in the future. Smetana is aware of the difficulties in reconciling the diverging positions on disarmament and finding a basic consensus.

### **Summary and conclusion**

It can be concluded that the research and publication achievements of Michal Smetana, as presented in his habilitation thesis, confirm its high quality and recognition in the international expert and academic environment. The chapters/articles shed new light on many issues that were hitherto perceived unilaterally, stereotypically or superficially; there was a lack of knowledge about them, or they were not yet explored. The theoretical and methodological approaches and the author's ability to design and implement conceptual innovation confirm the high academic level of his work. As a sole author as well as a co-author, he has established himself well in his specialization. His habilitation thesis is a promising document of Smetana's strong research potential, which will certainly bring important results in the future. Smetana was a visiting scholar at the Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC), Stanford University, and asserts the influence and inspiration of Scott Sagan and other experts

Formally, the habilitation thesis is very well edited, and despite the diversity of periodicals where the articles were published, a coherent, homogeneous text was achieved. The rich references, both in the commentary and in the articles, prove the author's solid knowledge of the field.

The submitted habilitation thesis documents significant expert contributions that advance knowledge to open new questions and approach existing interpretations from new perspectives. The author convinces us about his strong research potential and ability to address the most current issues (for example, in connection with the 2022 NPT Review Conference). His work is theoretically and methodologically well established, and he uses new, innovative and challenging empirical procedures.

### **Dotazy oponenta k obhajobě habilitační práce**

1. Your thesis pays considerable, maybe dominant attention, to the public-elite gap. Could you, therefore, please, explain in more detail your conclusions that “political elites are, on average, more averse to the potential use of nuclear weapons than the general public” when, logically, the decisions concerning nuclear weapons are made by the top decision-makers?

2. Could you please, elaborate even further than we learned from the thesis on collecting views on nuclear weapons in various countries?

I would be particularly interested to know more particulars about your research on the attitudes of the Russians on nuclear weapons.

3. Could you, please, explain the Czech political positions and the attitudes of Czechs towards nuclear weapons?

Please, also explain, in this context, why your research has not yet focused on these Czech attitudes.

## **Závěr**

Habilitační práce Michala Smetany *The Foundations of Nuclear Order. Norms, Attitudes, and International Institutions* **splňuje** požadavky standardně kladené na habilitační práce v oboru politologie.

V Praze, dne 7. února 2022

