POLITICKÉ VEDY / POLITICAL SCIENCES

THE MIDDLE POWER CONCEPT:
PRESENTING A COMPLEX APPROACH[1]

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ABSTRACT

Middle powers have traditionally played an important role in the international system. Nowadays, the label of middle power possesses relevant political implications and thus theorizing about middle powers is more significant than ever before. However, there is a lack of exact and complex middle power definition in academic as well as in political area. Hence, in the present study, an overview of the development of middle power theorizing from its beginning up to the present was offered in form of a literature review. Subsequently, the main conceptualizations of middle power were compared, the advantages and disadvantages of each particular attitude emphasized and a complex approach toward defining middle power was proposed. The results show that the complex approach towards the conceptualization of middle powers employs the strengths of previous approaches and overcomes their weaknesses. The emphasis on the relative position of a state in the power pyramid is based on the belief that this position, in combination with value orientation and self-image, affects both the state's actions and its ability to create conditions for the functioning of the international system and the ability to influence the basic parameters of the international system.

Key words: Middle power, definitional approaches, complex approach

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Introduction

Middle powers have formed an inseparable part of the international system. Nowadays, referred to as "ideology", "doctrine", "role", "guide", "myth" (Gecelovsky, 2009), or "theoretical construct" (Cotton, 2013), the label of middle power possesses significant political implications, which makes theorizing about middle powers something more than an academic exercise. On the one hand, policy-makers in many developed as well as developing countries are highly motivated to use the term in their public rhetoric because they perceive it as geopolitically significant and politically resonant. In this sense, the self-affiliation with the middle power category is used as a foreign policy tool – to claim power and gain a bigger share of influence and prestige in the international system (Behringer, 2013; Carr, 2014; Chapnick, 1999; Patience, 2014). On the other hand, we would hardly hear states such as France or Great Britain discussing the middle power concept because of their fear of being forced to accept that they are no longer "great". As **A. Chapnick** bluntly put it: "*Today's so-called middle powers are not really middle powers and the true middle powers do not want to be regarded as such*" (Chapnick, 1999, p. 79).

From our perspective, the attitude of **K. Waltz**, distinguishing superpowers and small states and paying attention only to superpowers in the power analysis (Waltz, 1979), was outdated even in the Cold War and cannot be fully accepted when analysing current world politics. After all, **H. Morgenthau** had convincingly argued long before **Waltz** for a more precise analysis of power distribution (Morgenthau, 1961). The ongoing academic middle power debate began after the end of Second World War (WWII) against the background of the Australian and Canadian foreign and security policy emancipation. In the post-WWII academic literature, five main definitional approaches towards middle power can be identified: positional (hierarchical), identity-based, behavioural, functional, and systemic. This does not necessarily mean that relevant authors all use the same labels; it means that they have the same things in mind within the operationalization framework.

The widely perceived lack of definitional clarity of the middle power concept has caused more and more scholars to introduce their own refinements of the concept, attempting to escape from the impasse of inconclusive middle power theorizing. Having said this, we see a strong case for offering an overview of the development of middle power theorizing from its beginning up to the present. First of all, the article compares the main conceptualizations of middle power

and sheds light on their commonalities and differences. Secondly, it shows the advantages and disadvantages of each particular attitude and finally, it proposes a complex approach toward defining middle power.

When thinking about the middle power concept and its contribution to the theoretical International Relations (IR) debate, it is its historic roots lying in international politics and not in the theory of international relations that should be taken into account. The modern middle power concept was born against the background of debating the post-WWII world order, first used by the Australian Minister of External Affairs **H. V. Evatt**, in order to secure Australian interests. Politicians actively applied the middle power rhetoric as a part of diplomatic efforts aiming to confirm the emancipation of the Australian foreign and security policy from Great Britain (Ungerer, 2007). As **C. Ungerer** states: "*As the largest Allied power in the Southwest Pacific area, Evatt expected that Australia would be afforded a special position in the UN security structures commensurate with its perceived regional responsibilities*" (Ungerer, 2007, p. 541). The same motivation can be identified in the Canadian case. At that time, Canada assisted in forging the main Western security institution, NATO, to connect North American and West European security. To cut a long story short, Australia and Canada wanted to gain a privileged position in the post-WWII international system and self-identification with middle-powerhood was one of the many tools that helped to achieve this goal (Ravenhill, 1998). Therefore, in the first post-WWII decade, "*the middle powers were those states who had fought alongside the Great Power allies and who had made a demonstrable commitment to the war effort. Being a middle power was a function of relative military capabilities — sufficient to warrant inclusion in the post-war peace negotiations, but clearly not as significant when compared to overwhelming military resources of the great powers*" (Ungerer, 2007, p. 548). The ongoing debate about new or emerging middle powers also reflects the aspiration of certain countries for a middle power status, as this label has a certain reputation in their societies and geopolitical resonance. As **D. Nolte** explains: "*While traditional middle powers are, first and foremost, defined by their role in international politics, the new middle powers are, first of all, regional powers (or regional leaders) and, in addition, middle powers (with regard to their power resources) on a global scale. Justifying a special position in the international system using the middle power rhetoric represents a very important similarity between the set of traditional and emerging middle powers*" (Nolte, 2010, p. 890).

The concept of middle power has been causing a considerable amount of controversy among IR scholars. The main reason – as is often the case in IR – is its definitional ambiguity. The middle power concept has been described as rarely defined (Chapnick, 2000, p. 188), problematic (David-Roussel, 1998, p. 134), conceptually confused and theoretically contested (Patience, 2014, p. 213), lacking conceptual clarity (Gecelovsky, 2009, p. 79), tautological (Jordaan, 2003, p. 166), selective (Ungerer, 2007, p. 539) or ambiguous (Hynek, 2004, p. 33; Chapnick, 1999, p. 73). The definitional problems have led many scholars to more or less question the meaningfulness and utility of the middle power concept (Frühling, 2007; Stairs, 1998; Patience, 2014, p. 210) or even conclude that it should be confined to the "analytical dustbin" (Ravenhill, 1998, p. 310). The state of the art is further complicated by the proliferation of definitions of middle powers with little reference to previous studies (Ping, 2005). The middle power theory is thus thought to be "mired, and without a clear path forward" (Cooper, 2011, p. 323). In addition, there is a very strong tendency in the relevant scholarly literature towards providing a definition of middle powers that allows Australia and Canada to be classified as such.

On the other hand, there are also many advocates of the middle power concept. Despite the definitional ambiguities, middle power theorizing has been a "thriving cottage industry" (Cooper, 2011, p. 318) for decades, especially in those countries that traditionally identified themselves as middle powers. The lack of consensus on the criteria for classifying states as middle powers has been the main reason why very little comparative work on middle power foreign policies has been conducted (Patience, 2014, p. 213). There is, however, an extensive number of single case studies in the middle power literature. Not surprisingly, most scholarly attention has been given to Canada (e.g. Chapnick, 2000; David-Roussel, 1998; Gecelovsky, 2009) and Australia (e.g. Carr, 2014; Ungerer, 2007; Ravenhill, 1998) as two of the most prominent examples of middle powers. Other case studies devoted to the traditional middle powers have usually covered regions such as Scandinavia or Benelux (e.g. Cooper, 2011; Behringer, 2013; Pratt, 1989). With the proliferation of the so-called emerging middle powers, numerous case studies have appeared, exploring countries like Argentina, Brazil, Mexico (e.g. Belanger-Mace, 1997; Wood, 1988; Lechini, 2007), India (e.g. Lechini, 2007; Nayar-Paul, 2003; Mellor, 1979), Indonesia and Malaysia (Ping, 2005), Iran and Syria (e.g. Ehteshami-Hinnesbusch, 1997; Samhat, 2000), Japan and South Korea (e.g. Rozman, 2007; Cox, 1989; Cotton, 2013), Singapore (Tan, 1999), South Africa (e.g.

Piknerová, 2013; Schoeman, 2000; Ozkan, 2006), South Korea (Cotton, 2013; Rozman, 2007), and Turkey (Engin-Baba, 2015; Yalcin, 2012).

This diverse list of states under scrutiny perfectly illustrates the elasticity, inconsistency, and subjectivity of the attempts to classify states as middle powers (Cooper, 2011, p. 319). It proves that the term middle power has been used as a catch-all phrase in order to refer to a variety of states that do not fit the description of either "great powers" or "small powers" (David-Roussel, 1998, p. 134). Nevertheless, this does not mean that the middle power concept, when conceptualized properly and in a complex way, cannot be a powerful tool for classifying states and analysing their foreign and security policies. In the following parts of the article, a review of the main definitional approaches to the study of the middle power concept is presented and based on their analysis a complex approach to the middle power concept is proposed.

1 The Positional Approach

Power is the central concept of IR. Power can be defined narrowly as control over military resources (Baldwin, 2002) or in a more complex way as the relationship between two states (Nye, 2002). The positional approach, stemming from the realist theory of international relations, originated in order to differentiate middle powers from small states. The hierarchical, multilayer international system creates preconditions for the creation of more categories of states. IR has traditionally studied the most powerful states and operated with a power/non-power dichotomy. However, particularly owing to the consequences of the WWII, it became evident that some small states were gaining power and influence. Therefore, while they were excluded from the group of small states, they also could not be classified as superpowers (Bothwell, 2011). This made space for conceptualizing another category of powers, in which the middle power concept can also be included. As **R. W. Murray** states: "*Middle powers hold a special status in the international system because on the one hand they are not quite powerful enough to be great. On the other hand they are also not so insignificant to be minor*" (Murray, 2013, p. 90).

The positional approach tries to create a hierarchy of states according to their material sources of power; i.e. power is reduced to the property of certain material resources. In this approach, power is perceived very narrowly, not as an ability to assert one's interests in resolving controversial issues in international politics, but as a proportion of the sum of the state's material

capacities in comparison to the capacities of other states. These are relatively easily quantifiable attributes, such as the size of the territory, population, gross domestic product (GDP), military capacity, defence expenses or available natural resources (Behringer, 2013, p. 11; Carr, 2014, p. 71-72). However, it is a mistake to take into account only military power, as **M. Wight** does in his definition. He asserts that middle power is "*a power with such military strength, resources and strategic position that in peacetime great powers bid for its support, and in wartime, while it has no hope of winning a war against a great power, it can hope to inflict costs on a great power out of proportion to what the great power can hope to gain by attacking it*" (Wight, 1978). Currently, the positional attitude usually goes far beyond analysing only military capacities. For demonstration, **J. H. Ping** uses the following nine criteria: (1) population, (2) geographic area, (3) military expenditure, (4) GDP, (5) GDP real growth, (6) value of exports, (7) gross national income per capita, (8) trade as a percentage of GDP, and (9) life expectancy at birth (Ping, 2005).

Among further possible indicators determining state's total material capacities are human capital, measurable by the average accomplished level of education, people's literacy or the state's technological level. These are examined by means of the state's expenses on research and development (Treverton-Jones, 2005, p. 5).

At the same time, economic indicators are also considered. In addition to the size of the GDP and *per capita* GDP, there are also access to capital, which concerns both domestic economic sources and capacities, and the state's ability to employ global resources for its domestic activities. An important role is also played by state institutions and political structures, of which e.g. the level of corruption or size of the administration are regarded as crucial indicators. Furthermore, there are also indicators pertaining to values, trust, social capital, social structure with an emphasis on the aspects of social stratification, ethnic and class distribution, as well as ways in which citizens cooperate and mutually act in political and economic relations (Treverton-Jones, 2005, p. 5-6). In sum, a proper positional approach goes far beyond a simple analysis of the correlation of military forces. Using a positional attitude, **A. Carr** assumes that "*in the modern system, with 193 sovereign states recognized by the United Nations (2013), middle powers are expected to be found within the first 20 states when ranked on significant quantitative measures, with no significance attended to the states which end up at the median point, ranked at 80–90 on a listing of GDP, military strength or population*" (Carr, 2014, p. 72).

In IR literature, critical voices gradually started to appear that regarded the positional attitude as insufficient. The first problem was that of objectivity. Because the definitional criteria for analysing middle power are ascribed by the researchers themselves, there is a risk that a state's middle power status might be subjective. **N. Hynek** demonstrates the weaknesses of this attitude on **C. Holbraad's** (1984) and **L. Neack's** (1993) texts. As **Hynek** further stated: "*Both Holbraad's and Neack's analyses suffer from a lack of emphasis on the issues of intersubjectivity and the social construction of reality*" (Hynek, 2004, p. 36). **Hynek** goes on to claim: "*First of all, one needs to abandon the* '*objective*' *and utility-maximizing rationalist logic that characterizes neo-realist and utilitarian-liberal analyses of foreign policy. Secondly, a constructivist theory of foreign policy based on the logic of appropriateness needs to be brought into focus*" (Hynek, 2004, p. 40)

After all, one can agree with the necessity to take into account constructivist theories for the middle power conceptualization. Yet, we feel it is not necessary to *a priori* refute the objectivist, positional attitude. It is essential to use the criteria, which are generally agreed on within international relations as an academic discipline to be relevant for comparison of material resources of states' power. There is general consensus within international relations that these criteria are the size of the economy, military capacities, number of inhabitants, size of the territory and the country's possession of key resources during the given historical era. Consequently, one can discuss criteria such as cultural influence, quality of science, quality of the country's educational system, diplomatic abilities of the given state and undoubtedly also the country's possession of key strategic resources. The advantage of using these additional criteria is that the final image of the country's power position is less restricted. However, the disadvantage is surely the difficulty of precisely measuring many factors, which considerably undermines the advantage of the positional model.

Last but not least, one must take into account that these material and measurable factors must be perceived in their synergy. If we were to examine the individual resources mentioned above in isolation, the positions of countries *inter se* need not objectively correspond to the state's power. For example, a state may have a vast territory but a small number of inhabitants. Yet if we consider these indicators in their configuration, this approach can be seminal, as it enables us to take into consideration more factors and classify states into clusters according to their relative position in the power hierarchy of the international system.

Nevertheless, this procedure does not entirely eliminate the weaknesses of the positional approach either. Hence, the space for a scholar's somewhat subjective approach will not be absolutely eliminated, as it very much depends on the value ascribed to the individual factors in the model. Finally, having certain material components of power does not need to be directly related to a state's behaviour in international relations. Possessing some material capacities in a certain relation to other states does not mean that a state will behave in a certain special way.

Table no. 1: Strengths and weaknesses of the positional approach

Strengths	Weaknesses
Creation of hierarchy of states according to their material sources of power	Problem of objectivity
Power reduced to property of certain material resources	Insufficient focus on a constructivist theory of foreign policy based on the logic of appropriateness
Relatively easily quantifiable attributes such as size of the territory, population, human capital, economic indicators (GDP), military capacity, defence expenses, natural resources	Difficulty with a precise measuring of a large number of factors
Ability to use additional indicators such as cultural influence, diplomacy, science, education	No direct relation between possession of certain material components of power and a state's behaviour in international relations
Necessity to perceive synergy of material and measurable factors	

2 The Identity-based Approach

The identity approach takes into account the claims of political leaders on middle power status and public opinion. In this approach, a country regarding itself as a middle power is a middle power. Canada and Australia are typical examples of states adopting a self-conception as a middle power. At present, however, the set of states referring to themselves as middle powers is growing. Recently, this list has grown to include Argentina, Indonesia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea and Turkey (Engin-Baba, 2015; Wood, 1988; Pellicer, 2006; Belanger-Mace, 1997; Ping, 2005).The Foreign Affairs Ministers of Australia (**H. Evatt** (1941-1949), Sir **G. Barwick** (1961-1964), **G. Evans** (1988-1996), **A. Downer** (1996-2007), **S. Smith** (2007-2010), **K. Rudd** (2010-

2012) and **B. Carr** (2012-2013) can be cited as examples of political representatives who consider their states to be middle powers.

This constructivist-based approach is a major innovation, which has a number of strengths. According to **M. Finnemore** and **K. Sikkink**, knowing how the state perceives its identity enables us to find out how the given state will behave (Finnemore-Sikkink, 2001). A particular role that a state assigns itself in the international system is an important variable in defining the state's national interest and how it will use its available material resources of power to its advantage.

Table no. 2: Strengths and weaknesses of the identity-based approach

Strengths	Weaknesses
Adopting a self-conception as a middle power	Lacking sustainable definitions
Self-identity as a middle power as an important variable in defining: - the state's behaviour in IR - the state's national interest - the state's way to use available material resources of power to its advantage	Necessity to take into account the view of the political elite and population in terms of long-term identification of a particular state as a middle power
	Potential threat to reach the limits of the material power by pursuing interests in the international system

The critics of this approach point out that although the identity-based approach is important in determining how the countries act, sustainable definitions of middle power would require a more stable foundation than can be provided by the state's self-identification by its political representatives (Carr, 2014, p. 76). At least, when analysing the applicability of a particular state to the middle power category, one must take into account whether the majority of the political elite and most of the population have held long-term identification with this conception or whether it is a purely coincidental fluctuation in their moods. Furthermore, a state that regards itself as a middle power will definitely reach the limits of its material power if it pursues its interests in the international system. In addition, if a country's power capacities correspond to small powers, it can neither accomplish its goals, nor will its behaviour ever correspond to the behavioural definition of middle power. Hence, the identity-based approach per se does not provide a satisfactory conceptual basis for the definition of middle power.

3 The Behavioural Approach

M. Stephen rightfully states that "[*t*]*he behaviour based definition requires observers to stipulate a set of behavioural indicators and then identify middle powers based on them*" (Stephen, 2013, p. 36). The key work to understanding the nature of behavioural attitudes towards defining middle power is surely the early 1990s book *Relocating Middle Powers* by **A. F. Cooper**, **R. A. Higgott**, and **K. R. Nossal**. Rather than focusing on the capacities of middle power, the authors focus on a state's behaviour in international politics, arguing that middle powers are typified by "*their tendency to pursue multilateral solutions to international problems, their tendency to embrace compromise positions in international disputes and their tendency to embrace notions of* '*good international citizenship*' *to guide their diplomacy*" (Cooper-Higgot-Nossal, 1993)*.*

As **Cooper** observes, "[*t*]*he classification of middle powers as a separate class of countries in the hierarchy of nations stands or falls not on their subjective identification but on the fact that this category of actors engages in some kind of distinctive form of activity*" (Cooper, 1997). Nevertheless, this is definitely not the first attempt of this kind. **B. Wood** proposed five definitional roles of middle power: regional or sub-regional leader, functional leader, stabilizer, "free rider" or "status seeker" and, last but not least, a "good multilateral citizen" (Wood, 1988). These roles correspond to state-specific behaviour; hence, it is possible to argue that he perceives the issue of conceptualizing middle power similarly to **Cooper**.

In general, the participation of middle powers in managing and resolving arising conflicts helps maintain a peaceful and stable international system (Cox, 1989; Chapnick, 1999, p. 75; Gecelovsky, 2009, p. 78). Middle power behaviour is reflected in its tactics of compromise, asserting coalition decision-making, participation in international organisations, and reaching consensus in the international community (Stephen, 2013). The internationalism of middle power legitimizes the use of a state's strengths. This increases the state's importance in resolving the particular global issues for which it possesses sufficient capacities (Bothwell, 2011).

Middle powers are characterized by their willingness and effort to engage in global matters. This stems from the need to overcome comparative differences in material resources of influence in comparison with resources possessed by superpowers. Middle powers rely on their credibility and make use of the

advantage of their technological skills, experience and national resources. Multilateral cooperation plays a primary role in their foreign policy, while their multilateral *modus operandi* stresses the need to act diplomatically only in a small number of special matters, balancing their national interests and potential opportunities for spreading their influence (Cooper, 2013).

The basis of a middle power's political actions is formed by soft power, as it guarantees attaining its goals in global politics. Despite the fact that some middle powers can have at their disposal greater hard military power than others, they hardly ever deploy military force to enforce something, as opposed to superpowers. Quite the contrary, by means of soft power, middle powers assert substantial influence in international relations through their use of diplomatic persuasion, information and communication technologies, and their prestigious reputation as credible and reliable actors (Behringer, 2013, p. 18).

Soft power is used especially within niche diplomacy. Niche diplomacy is a specific form of diplomacy, which most thoroughly reflects a middle power's political and economic interests in the world (The Public Diplomacy of Middle Powers, 2010). Niche diplomacy serves middle powers as a suitable means to implement their global goals, as they are not capable of using essential resources to assert their foreign policy within the global strategy (Alden-Vieira, 2005, p. 1078). By means of niche diplomacy, middle powers undertake initiative in matters in which superpowers are not interested or which they overlook to a certain extent. This especially concerns social, economic and humanitarian matters, yet they can also be involved in initiatives in the security realm (Behringer, 2013). **Cooper** argues that "*finding niche areas for middle powers is based on a functionalistic perspective rather than a normative one that regards middle powers as good multilateralists. Niche diplomacy based on this functionalism is particularly rational in the post-Cold War international order, where risks and opportunities inherent in moving from the rigidities of an old order toward the uncertainties of a new environment coexist. The specialized interests of middle powers and related experiences in differentiated issue-specific tasks provide them the enhanced status and constructive roles in the related international system. Accordingly, middle power leadership and initiatives are based on their entrepreneurial and technical competence rather than their structural forces of power*" (Cooper, 1997). **Cooper et al**. identified three ways in which a middle power can exercise niche leadership, i.e. as a mediator, catalyst or facilitator within the international system. In so doing, it again seizes the opportunity to spread its influence, solve problems pertaining

to its interests and in general differentiates its actions from the actions of superpowers (Cooper-Higgott-Nossal, 1993).

J. Ravenhill summarized middle power behaviour using attributes of capacity, concentration, creativity, coalition building and credibility. In his understanding, the attribute of capacity is related to skills in the foreign services and the diplomatic apparatus. Concentration means focusing on some specific aspects of world policy, as middle powers are not capable enough to follow all foreign policy agendas. Creativity is understood as the ability to find new ways of negotiating consensus on complex issues. Coalition building is perceived as the only remaining strategy, as middle powers suffer from a lack of power in comparison with superpowers. Last but not least, in his approach, credibility means playing a constructive role in international politics and consistently following an international agenda. One very important innovation of this approach is the emphasis on combining these attributes, which transforms a small state into a middle power (Ravenhill, 1998, p. 310-313).

Thus, the behavioural definition of middle power overcomes the main problem of the positional approach. This is because possessing certain material resources of power relative to the material resources of power of other actors is not the same as actively using them. Neither the behavioural approach, however, falls short of weaknesses. Let us take no notice of criticisms claiming that the entire behavioural approach to defining middle power is developed so that its criteria are met by states traditionally included amongst middle powers, i.e. Australia and Canada (Ungerer, 2007, p. 265). Even if this were so, it changes nothing about the fact that other states can also meet criteria established in this way; hence were the criticisms of this inclusion legitimate, the behavioural approach toward defining middle power would still make analytical sense.

The uncertainty over how middle power differs in its behaviour from other categories of power is much more crucial. As **A. Hurrell** puts it, the behavioural definition predicts very few, if any, common patterns of behaviour, i.e. patterns of how middle powers will act on an international scale. This is justified by the diversity in the types of middle power regimes (Hurrell, 2000). However, how does one recognize in the empirical world that a state behaves like a middle power if cooperation, reaching compromises, participation in international organisations, concentration on specific problems (niche strategy) and agenda setting, in short all very general attributions of middle powers, also prevail in the behaviour of regional powers and small powers? In the real world, cooperation significantly prevails in the international system (as liberals point out), as conflict

can have a major impact on the form of the international system (aptly emphasized by realists and neorealists). Therefore, it is immensely difficult to distinguish between middle power and small power behaviour.

Another question that needs to be answered is why do states in international politics act in the middle power way? One explanation for this emphasizes role conception (Hynek, 2004). Another possible explanation infers this style of behaviour from the limited sources of power possessed by middle powers. Multilateralism, regarded in this conception as the key sign of middle power (Ravenhill, 1998; Evans-Grant, 1991; Behringer, 2013; Cooper-Higgott-Nossal, 1993) is obviously inevitable for middle powers, especially because of their insufficient capacity and inability to act unilaterally in the international scene. Yet owing to their interest in influencing international matters, participating in international events and contributing to the resolution of international disputes, they emphasize multilateral cooperation. In fact, this approach towards middle power conceptualization actually says that the particular middle power strategy results from the distribution of power. Hence, its proponents again revise the positional approach and it is questionable whether it is a real contribution to the conceptual debate. Furthermore, this conceptualization poses a problem when we regard every state acting and behaving as a middle power as a middle power, regardless of its capacity (Hynek, 2004, p. 37).

Table no. 3: Strengths and weaknesses of the behavioural approach

Strengths	Weaknesses
State identified as a middle power according to its engagement in a distinctive form of activity: - tactics of compromise - asserting coalition decision-making - participation in IOs - reaching consensus in the international community	Developed criteria met by states traditionally included amongst middle powers
Definitional roles of a middle power: regional or sub-regional leader, functional leader, stabilizer, "free rider", "status seeker" and a "good multilateral citizen"	Uncertainty over how middle power differs in its behaviour from other categories of power
Focus on soft power especially within niche diplomacy	Uncertainty over reasons why a state acts in the middle power way
	Based on a certain cultural colonialism of the West

Last but not least, one can object that the behavioural approach to defining middle power is based on a certain cultural colonialism of the West, as certain constructive patterns of state behaviour in international relations, such as cooperation, ability to reach compromise and nonviolent resolution of disputes, are regarded as morally superior to others, especially to those that are less cooperative (Carr, 2014, p. 76).

4 The Functional Approach

The functional approach defines middle power as a state that, to a higher degree than other states, helps fulfil fundamental functions of the international system on the global stage. As is argued by **P. Gecelovsky**, middle power is more likely to use its capacities to pursue "milieu goals" than the narrow "possession goals" (Gecelovsky, 2009, p.78). This approach naturally raises the question of which functions of the international system should be performed by the state in order to be classified as a middle power. Even though there are a number of controversial issues among realists, liberals, constructivists and Marxists in the debate on the functions of the international system, there is a consensus within IR that the crucial function of the international system is to regulate and manage conflicts, maintain stability, and prevent outbreaks of violence. As **Nossal** highlights, the pursuit of milieu interests is consequently related to the commitment to internationalism. Internationalism is associated with both the willingness and the responsibility to adopt a constructive role in conflict resolution; to use multilateralism as a tool to minimize conflicts in international relations; and to meet commitments to international institutions and thus to support international institutions, using national resources for the system as a whole (Nossal, 2013).

According to the functional approach, in certain areas in which it possesses sufficient capacities and abilities, a middle power can take on more responsibilities and use its abilities in favour of the entire international system, going beyond the region in which the middle power is located. Overall, we regard those states whose policies are formed in order to protect and boost the stability of the international system as middle powers. They do not endeavour to radically change the international balance of power and rarely adopt assertive, expansionist or conflicted political lines. This tends to make them appear more non-military, willing to manage international conflicts, and dependent on international trade. Hence, they tend to assume a useful international role (David-Roussel, 1998, p. 135).

However, the functional approach also makes it rather difficult to distinguish between the behaviour of middle power and other categories of power, especially the behaviour of superpowers. At present, this hegemon is represented by the USA; in the 19th Century, it was Great Britain. This hegemon helps fulfil fundamental functions of the international system for a number of various reasons going beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, it is very difficult to identify empirically observed deviations of behaviour between the hegemon in the system and middle power, and to define middle power on this ground alone.

Table no. 4: Strengths and weaknesses of functional approach

Strengths	Weaknesses
Defining states that are able and willing to fulfil fundamental functions of the international system on the global stage	Difficult to distinguish between the behaviour and functions of a middle power and other categories of power
Applicable for general understanding of the middle power concept	Vague and not objective enough in classifying states as middle powers
	Not able to reflect changes in international order, thus lacking analytical exactness

5 The Systemic Approach

The review of the aforementioned approaches towards the conceptualization of middle powers implies that each of them shows certain insufficiencies, making it impossible to identify a clear set of signs differentiating middle power from other types of powers. Doing so requires a new definition or revision of the notion of power. While the behavioural and identity-based approaches avoid the issue of power, the positional approach sees power as a property/possession. **Carr** therefore introduces another approach to defining middle power – a systemic approach. This approach is based on measuring a state's systemic impact and stems from **Baldwin's** conceptualization of power as the ability of actors to influence their own behaviour. He also argues that the positional, behavioural and identity-based approaches have built an important foundation for the research of the middle power concept, yet the systemic approach can be better applied to the current classification of states as middle powers (Carr, 2014, p. 79).

Yet, the systemic approach fails to take into account the position of middle powers in the world system from the perspective of their material resources,

behaviour in the international system, or the rhetoric of their foreign policy. In accordance with **R. O. Keohane** (1969), by understanding power not as the possession of certain capacities but as the ability of Actor A to influence the behaviour of Actor B in a particular situation and to influence the basic parameters of the international system in an interaction, **Carr** focuses on the ability of middle powers to change and shape the basic parameters of the international system. Based on this approach, a middle power is a state that is able to defend its vital national interests and at the same time to significantly influence the main parameters of the existing world order. In his approach, **Carr** actually concentrates on the effect that the state's activities have on the form of the system and the behaviour of other actors (Carr, 2014, p. 79).

Nevertheless, a state's ability to affect the basic parameters is a relative and not an absolute category. As a result, researchers may face much greater problems in measuring states' abilities to influence the basic parameters of the international system than in the positional approach. Even though **Carr's** approach does make sense from the perspective of a conceptual approach to power, doubts arise to what extent **Carr's** innovation is applicable in practical research.

Table no. 5: Strengths and weaknesses of the systemic approach

Strengths	Weaknesses
New definition / revision of the notion of power	Problem with measuring states' abilities to influence the basic parameters of the international system
Going beyond the focus on material resources, behaviour in the international system and the rhetoric of the foreign policy	
Focus on the effect that state's activities have on the form of the system and the behaviour of other actors	

6 Proposing a Complex Approach to the Study of Middle Powers

None of the previous approaches towards the conceptualization of middle power is short of insufficiencies. Therefore, a complex approach toward defining middle power is proposed in order to, firstly, identify the gaps in the above analysed approaches and, secondly, to introduce an appropriate and applicable

definition of a middle power. The approaches using well-measurable indicators (the positional and identity-based approaches) do not grasp the entire complexity of the examined phenomenon (Hynek, 2004; Carr, 2014). The behavioural, functional and systemic approaches (Cooper-Higgot-Nossal, 1993; Gecelovsky, 2009) are more capable of depicting the complexity of this phenomenon, yet they suffer from major problems in operationalizing and measuring state performance and behaviour (Hurrel, 2000). The relevant parameters of these approaches, i.e. state behavioural patterns, influencing the form of the international system, and enhancing the ability to fulfil fundamental functions of the international system make sense as such. Their rigorous analysis is extremely complicated, as it is evidenced in the current state of academic debate.

Every analysis of a state's classification as a middle power should start with an analysis of its material sources of power. Overall, the material sources of power decide to a large extent a state's actions in the international system, as they offer alternatives. States possessing lower relative power capacities than great powers but greater than small powers can choose how they will operate function in the international system and which of its functions they will fulfil (David-Roussel, 1998; Gecelovsky, 2009). Obviously, a similar conclusion can be applied to great powers and superpowers. States belonging, with their relative power capacities, among small powers do not have such a choice. They must act as a small power regardless of their identity and values. They will have to act in the international system just as the behavioural approach presupposes, i.e. act in accordance with multilateralism, promote crisis management, and appeal on the basis of moral power (Cox, 1989; Chapnick, 1999; Cooper, 2013). Owing to their relative weakness, any other option will not be viable for them. Small states cannot maintain all the key functions of the international system, as the functional approach maintains, nor can they influence the fundamental parameters of the international system, as the systemic approach stresses. In other words, an analysis of the relative position in the power hierarchy is crucial to identifying middle power. Moreover, the positional approach can be based on well-operationalized and measurable indicators describing material resources of power.

However, the position on the power pyramid between great powers and small states does not say anything about whether a state will really use its capacities. The self-identification by both the political elites and the public of the particular state plays a great role here. From this point of view, power capacities

are a necessary but not sufficient condition to belong among middle powers. In his analyses of power distribution, **Stephen** downplays behaviour and does not consider self-identification (Stephen, 2013). However, the combination of material resources of power and a state's self-identification with a certain role conception is, in our opinion, the key to the conceptualization of middle power. It is only worth talking about middle power in the case of countries that have power capacities relative to both great powers and small states and which self-identify as middle powers. Only then does it become worthwhile to carry out the extremely complicated analysis of these states' actions, their abilities to fulfil the fundamental functions of the international system, and their abilities to influence matters within that system.

The ideal example of a middle power, in line with **Weber's** ideal typology (Weber, 1998), fulfils the following characteristics: The state is – in terms of its power resources – located exactly between a superpower and a small state on the theoretical superpower / great power / middle power / small state scale (A). Hence, it is the evaluation of its relative, rather than absolute, power capacities in terms of its material resources of power that matters most. A vast majority of the political elite and the population self-identify as a middle power on a long-term basis (B). There are certain patterns of state behaviour characteristic of middle powers in international politics (C). The state has the capabilities to help fulfil the fundamental functions of the international system (D). And last but not least, it has the ability to affect the form of the international system more than a small state but less than a superpower (E). Features (C) to (E) are difficult to operationalize, which complicates their use in an empirical research. However, the two-level approach makes it possible to exclude from the analysis those states that are clearly not middle powers, whether this is due to their relative position in the power pyramid or the lack of self-identification as a middle power by the political elites and population.

Consequently, a middle power – seen through the lenses of the complex approach – should be able to impact the other state's behaviour as well as the form and functioning of the international system. That has to be achieved through, firstly, its relative power position in the international system, measured by material resources of power, soft power and niche diplomacy, secondly, its self-identity and, thirdly, its value orientation.

Conclusion

The conceptual debate on middle powers is very long, rich and varied. Its current state does not imply that it will end any time soon. The debate was initiated by political professionals requiring a certain position of privilege in the international system for states such as Australia and Canada. They used the middle power concept both as an argument to enhance their countries' profile in the international political scene and a mobilization tool in domestic politics. The ongoing debate on emerging middle powers taking place in similar milieus confirms that this issue will remain on the agenda for some time to come. The complex approach towards the conceptualization of middle powers tries to employ the strengths of the previous approaches and overcome their weaknesses. The emphasis on the relative position of a state in the power pyramid is based on the belief that this position, in combination with value orientation and self-image, affects both the state's actions and its ability to create conditions for the functioning of the international system and the ability to influence the basic parameters of the international system. Moreover, it is based on relatively easily measurable indicators, which improves the feasibility of research. Last but not least, it does not disqualify Australia and Canada from being classified as middle powers, which is also important in terms of the history of the concept.

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