

# Balancing abroad

Polish Participation in the Iraq War Examined



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## Introduction

Ever since my father gave me an old collection of World War Two newspapers, the subject of war has caught my imagination. The stark difference between the relatively peaceful time I grew up in and the utter destruction of the Second World War was almost unimaginable. This interest in war was reinvigorated with the start of the Iraq invasion of 2003. It was the first time that war was broadcasted live to an audience of millions worldwide, and seeing the bombs drop on Baghdad was one of the most captivating things I had ever seen.

The fact that it was the first war broadcasted live on television was not the only controversial aspect of the Iraq War. Since its inception in 2003 it remained a hot topic in public opinion. The legality of and motivations behind the war were the focal points of the discussion, severely intensifying after the main arguments for military operations, the Iraqi regime's production of weapons grade uranium and biological weaponry as well as its alleged ties with the terrorist organization Al Qaeda, proved incorrect.<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> The international critique focused mainly on the United States of America and the United Kingdom, naturally because they are among the world's leading powers and the staunchest advocates of military action, but tended to overlook the fact that there were many other nations politically and militarily involved.

Interesting enough was the large number of Eastern European nations that adopted a positive stance towards military action in Iraq. The Czech Republic, Romania, the Ukraine and Estonia all provided military support for the occupation after the war, but the staunchest supporter was Poland. It was the only nation to provide military personnel, apart from long-time allies of the United States the United Kingdom and Australia, to participate in the actual invasion and afterwards it was given command of a multinational division. As Poland had no direct interests in Iraq, in contrast to the US and the UK, what would motivate them to participate in this operation that had little to offer them directly?

In this paper I will explore the motivations of the Polish to participate in the Iraq invasion of 2003. The question can be put in a wider perspective, namely why do nations go to war? This question, as a part of the larger debate on the analysis of state behavior, is one of the fundamental questions of the study of international relations. Since the 1920's several strands of international relations theory have been put forward to explain the behavior of states, to varying degrees of success. The theory of realism is one of these strands and has been among the most dominant forces since the inception of the academic field. It views states as rational, self-interest pursuing entities locked in a competitive struggle for survival and power gain, and uses these principles to explain state behavior.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Associated Press, 'CIA's Final Report: No WMD found in Iraq', *NBC News.com* (25<sup>th</sup> of April 2005) [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/7634313/ns/world\\_news-mideast\\_n\\_africa/t/cias-final-report-no-wmd-found-iraq/](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/7634313/ns/world_news-mideast_n_africa/t/cias-final-report-no-wmd-found-iraq/) (Accessed 4 January 2014)

<sup>2</sup> M. Mount, 2008. 'Hussein's Iraq and al Qaeda not linked, Pentagon says', *CNN* (13<sup>th</sup> of March 2008) <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/US/03/13/alqaeda.saddam/> (Accessed 4 January 2014)

<sup>3</sup> H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York, 1948)

Within the tradition of realism, there are several sub theories and sub strands that have been proposed to explain particular instances of state behavior. One of the most influential of these theories used is the balance of power theory. This theory postulates that if one state amasses too much power, other states will try to counterbalance this power by building up their own capabilities or forming alliances with other nations.<sup>4</sup> A modified version of this theory was later proposed by Stephen M. Walt in his 1985 article ‘Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power’. Called the balance of threat rather than balance of power, this modified version proposed that rather than states balancing in response to sheer power, states did so in response to perceived threats. The concept of threat was heavily dependent upon but not merely constituted of (aggregate power) and included several other factors, such as geographical proximity, offensive capabilities and perceived intentions.<sup>5</sup>

This theory of the balance of threat will function as the framework of this thesis and will be used to analyze whether the theory is an adequate tool to provide an answer to the main question of this thesis. This thesis is therefore divided into three parts. In the first chapter I will briefly discuss rival theories of international relations and their viability in explaining Polish participation in the Iraq War. This is followed by an outline of the main assumptions and analytical concepts of the balance of threat theory. In chapter two the geopolitical and strategic situation of Poland will be reviewed, combined with an analysis of potentially threatening nations to its national security using the analytical concepts put forward in chapter one. Chapter three will identify the behavior of the Polish in countering these threats and see if the balance of threat theory provides a satisfactory explanation for the Polish participation in the Iraq invasion.

In order to answer the problems of threat assessments of chapter two I will be looking at economic, military and political data from several sources such as the CIA Factbook, news articles and institutions such as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. This data will be collaborated and offset by historical influences that guide the perceived intentions of the potentially threatening nations. The questions posed by the third chapter will be answered by looking at academic articles and newspaper publications.

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<sup>4</sup> K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York, 1979)

<sup>5</sup> S.M. Walt, ‘Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power’, *International Security* Vol.9 No. 4 (1985) 9

## The Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I will start with a quick view of how and if two other main theoretical approaches of international relations, constructivism and liberalism provide explanatory models for the Polish participation in the Iraq invasion. This overview is followed by the realist approach to this subject and a further elaboration on the realist theoretical framework and concepts that guide this thesis.

### Liberalism and the Polish participation in the Iraq War

The tradition of liberalism subscribes to the realist notion of states locked in competition but instead of accepting this as an unchangeable property of the system, it holds the view that states can overcome this ‘security dilemma’ by creating international institutions, economic interdependence and international law.<sup>6</sup> These supranational collaborations would relieve the international system of much of its aggression and power politics by creating an interdependence that would provide incentive for peaceful solutions. So instead of believing international relations to be a zero-sum game, liberalism believes in the possibility of mutual benefit through cooperation. As a consequence, liberalists do not believe in power as the sole motivational and explanatory factor in politics, instead they add other factors such as morality, ideology, emotions, habits of cooperation and altruism to the equation.<sup>7</sup>

The invasion of Iraq in 2003, and with it the Polish participation, is actually a clear example of the failure of supranational institutions to govern international relations. The United States, the United Kingdom and Poland, among others, are all members of the United Nations and were therefore bound by Article 2.4 of the United Nations Charter, stating that “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.”<sup>8</sup>

In the wake of the 911 terrorist attacks and the outbreak of the American War on Terror, the Americans sought to gain United Nations approval of military action against Iraq. It stated that Iraq was in violation of resolutions adopted in the aftermath of the first Gulf War in 1991, but still needed UN Security Council approval for military action. When this was not forthcoming, the Americans, in collaboration with the British, sought partners to create a ‘Coalition of the Willing’ in order to mask what was in fact a unilateral decision to go to war.<sup>9 10 11</sup> To further weaken the liberal case, UN secretary general Kofi Annan later

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<sup>6</sup> B. Russett, ‘Liberalism’, in T. Dunne, M. Kurki and S. Smith (ed.), *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, (Oxford, 2013) 95

<sup>7</sup> J. Rourke, *International Politics on the World Stage*, (New York, 2009) 23

<sup>8</sup> *United Nations Charter, Chapter One, Article 2, sub 4* (date of publication unknown, original version 1945)  
<http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter1.shtml> (Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> of March,2014)

<sup>9</sup> Soomo Publishing, *Between Nations Theory in Action: The War in Iraq* (date of publication unknown)  
<https://soomopublishing.com/blogs/posts/new-original-video-assignments-for-between-nations-ir> (Accessed 19th of March 2014)

<sup>10</sup> I. Daalder, ‘Unilateralism Disgraced’, *American Prospect* Vol 14 No 9 (2003)

<sup>11</sup> N. Boaduo, ‘Invasion of Iraq: Introspective Analysis of US Long Term Foreign Policy in the Middle East’ *Journal of Political Studies* Vol 19 No 2 (2012) 89-90

confirmed that the war was in fact illegal.<sup>12</sup> It is obvious that the liberal theoretical approach has very little to offer in explaining Polish participation in the Iraq invasion since the invasion itself foregoes essential liberal principles.

### Constructivism and the Polish participation in the Iraq War

Growing in popularity since the end of the Cold War, constructivism is not a concrete operational theory, as wrongfully assumed by the author in his previous thesis, but more a meta-theory. It makes the distinction between cold hard facts and ‘social facts’, with cold hard facts being those that are true independent of human interaction. Social facts on the other hand are socially constructed, meaning that they are created by the interests, ideas, identities and perceptions of the actors throughout interaction rather than given by nature.

One of the fundamental structures of the international relations theories is the concept of anarchy, which describes the state of the international system that there is no higher authority operating above the state level. This state of anarchy is one of the facts that is socially constructed according to constructivists, as one of the most famous proponents of constructivism, Alexander Wendt, argues in his 1992 paper *Anarchy is what States make of it*. In this paper he shows that the anarchic state of the international system has its origins not in the actual structure of the system, but in the identities and interests of the states themselves and their corresponding perceptions about the structure of the international system. Therefore, ‘anarchy is what states make of it’, meaning that if the actors in the system behave conflictual and aggressive towards one another, the states perceive the system as conflictual.

Alternatively if they show cooperative behavior, the system will be perceived as cooperative.<sup>13</sup>

Central to this theory is that states have a mental picture of who they are, what they are composed of and what their corresponding interests are. In addition, states have a perception of how the international system works and act correspondingly. As the identities and interests of different actors interact they create the structures that govern the international system. This perception of the international system in itself influences the ideas and identities of the actors. This way, constructivism describes a constant process of interaction of meaning and identity which creates room for the fluidity of foreign policy and international relations.

Although constructivism shows great promise, it is not yet a complete operational theory. The main problem lies in an accurate delimitation of the concept of national identity as a driving factor for state behavior. Until this concept and others are more fully and clearly developed for analytical purposes, constructivism remains more a body of metatheoretical statements about international relations.<sup>14</sup>

Another aspect of criticism faced by constructivism was its lack of power to predict outcomes. Being void of this capacity, constructivism is more apt to analyze the change in ideas and

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<sup>12</sup> Author unknown, ‘Iraq War illegal, says Annan’, *BBC News* (16<sup>th</sup> of September 2003)  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/3661134.stm> (Accessed 9th of January 2014)

<sup>13</sup> A. Wendt, ‘Anarchy is What States Make of it’ *International Organizations* Vol. 46, No.2 (1992) 391-425

<sup>14</sup> P. Kowert, ‘The Peril and Promise of International Relations’, *Ritsumeikan Journal of International Studies* Vol 13 No 3 (2001) 165

identities in order to explain shifts in the behavior of states and subsequent changes in the international system.<sup>15</sup>

### Realism and the Polish participation in the Iraq Invasion

The realist tradition of international relations is centered upon four assumptions about the international system. The first assumption is that states operate in an anarchic international system, meaning that there is no higher authority regulating affairs above the level of states. As we have seen, this assumption of anarchy is contested by constructivists who believe this to be a social fact. The second assumption is that the primary goal of states is survival and prosperity within the system. The third and fourth assumptions are that states are the most important actors in the international system, as opposed to liberalism that allows institutions and other non-state actors to play a central role, and that these states are rational, unitary actors. The notion of rational implies here that they are capable of coming up with sound strategies that maximize their prospects for survival, notwithstanding that they are capable of making mistakes.<sup>16 17</sup>

The result of this view is that confrontation is the essential analytical component of politics among nations. The states are faced with two choices when dealing with confrontation, they can either bandwagon or balance. These choices reflect the balance of power theory that is central to realist thought. The balance of power is the idea that, because of the condition of anarchy in the international system, states will try to find a balance of power among states as a means to create a stable and predictable environment in which it is easier to navigate and guarantee their own survival. If one state upsets this balance of power by amassing too much power of its own, other states, at risk of being dominated or even conquered, try to build up their own capabilities or search for allies to counter the threat posed. These processes are called internal and external balancing respectively.

Alternatively, if a state is faced with another state amassing too much power, it can decide to bandwagon. Bandwagon is the process of joining the aggressor's side in the face of its overwhelming power. This can be done for two main reasons either, defensive or offensive. Defensive bandwagoning is the diverting of the threat posed by another state's power while offensive bandwagoning is joining the dominant power in order to share in the spoils of victory.<sup>18</sup>

The balance of power theory was especially viable during the Cold War, in which two power blocs led by the two superpowers faced each other head on. But the fall of the Soviet Union left the United States with virtually no opposition, becoming the world's sole superpower in a hegemonic position. According to the balance of power, states would have either formed an opposing bloc or would have joined the United States-led alliance. This unsatisfactory explanation led Stephen M. Walt to propose another version of the balance of power theory,

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<sup>15</sup> S. Walt, 'One World, Many Theories', *Foreign Policy Special Edition: Frontiers of Knowledge* (1998) 45-46

<sup>16</sup> J. Donnelly, 'The Ethics of Realism', in C. Reus-Smit and D. Snidal (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (Oxford, 2008) 150

<sup>17</sup> J. Mearsheimer, 'Structural Realism' in T. Dunne, M. Kurki and S. Smith (ed.), *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (Oxford, 2013) 79

<sup>18</sup> S. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, 1987) 18-21

namely the balance of threat theory. This theory postulates that, instead of balancing or bandwagoning in response to another state's power, states only did so when faced with a viable threat. This notion of a threat emanating from a state is for a large part composed of but not limited to a state's power and takes into account other factors.<sup>19</sup>

### The balance of threat theory

The balance of threat theory proposes that instead of responding solely to other state's power, the behaviors balancing and bandwagoning occur in respond to threats from other states.

Because of the behavior in response to threat, offensive bandwagoning is no longer a viable option. Stephen Walt expands the concept of threat to include four criteria that have to be taken in consideration in order to assess the threat a states poses. These 'sources of threat' are the following:

- **Aggregate power:** This is where the 'old' concept of power comes into play. A state's aggregate power is defined by its total resources and capabilities such as population size, industrial and military capabilities and technological advancement, among others. The greater this power, the bigger a threat the state can pose. The threat of aggregate power can produce both balancing and bandwagoning responses.
- **Geographic Proximity:** The closer state A is positioned to state B, the more easily it can project power on this state. The further away from each other the states are the less likely they are to consider each other as potential threats. The response to this kind of threat varies. The more overwhelming the power of the nearby state, the more likely it is that the threatened state will bandwagon, but balancing is the more prevailing option.
- **Offensive Power:** States with large offensive capabilities are more likely to be regarded as a potential threat than states with largely defensive military capabilities. Once again, the response to this kind of threat varies. If a state's offensive capabilities are deemed overwhelming and successful defense unlikely, the threatened state is more likely to bandwagon than to balance. If the threatened state sees possibilities for a successful defensive campaign, they are more likely to balance.
- **Aggressive intentions:** A state that appears aggressive to other nations in the system is more likely to provoke hostile alliances, even when it commands modest capabilities. Perceptions of intent are the crucial factor in this concept.<sup>20</sup>

All four sources of threat result in the same two potential responses, the above mentioned balancing and bandwagoning. As of such, the sources of threat explain why these concepts invoke these responses, but fail to explain fully when which response is to be expected.

Stephen Walt therefore defines a set of parameters to predict which behavior of states is to be expected.

The first parameter is power versus weakness. The stronger the threatened state is relative to the aggressor, the more it is likely to balance. In contrast, the weaker the state is

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<sup>19</sup> Walt, *Origins of Alliances*, 21-22

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp 22-26

relatively, the bigger the likelihood of it bandwagoning. The second parameter involves the availability of allies. If there are no potential allies available and the threatened state feels it does not possess the capability to face the aggressor alone, it will be more likely to bandwagon in the face of threat. The third parameter is the different response states give in times of peace versus times of war. Walt shows that states take a more balancing approach in times of peace and early stages of conflict. As the outcome of conflict seems certain, states have an obvious tendency to bandwagon more.<sup>21</sup>

To recap the theoretical framework, the main question in this thesis will be analyzed on the basis of the following assumptions:

- States form alliances in response to threats, not to power.
- The concept of threat is based on the four sources of threat as identified by Stephen Walt; aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive capabilities and aggressive intentions.
- The behavior of states in response to these threats depends on four conditions; the relative power of the aggressor versus the threatened state, the availability of allies, whether it is peacetime or war and the polarity of the international system.
- As policy choices, the states have two options, either to bandwagon or to balance the threat.

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<sup>21</sup> Walt, *Origins of Alliances*, 29-32

## The Threats to Polish National Security

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the realist view of international politics produces a hostile international system in which states are to fend for themselves to ensure survival. According to the balance of threat theory within this realist view, states forge alliances in response to potential sources of threat. In this chapter we will assess which states, as the most important actors in the international system, would have formed the biggest sources of threat to Poland. To limit the scope of the analysis, I have selected four states that will be examined according to the four sources of threat identified in the previous chapter. These states are the United States, Iraq, Germany and Russia. I have selected Germany and Russia because of their troubled historical relations with and geographical proximity to Poland. Iraq seems an obvious choice since the military alliance under scrutiny in this thesis is directed against the Iraqi state. The United States seems a much more unlikely choice at first glance, but we have to account for the possibility of bandwagoning, as described above. As the leader of the ‘Coalition of the Willing’ in Iraq<sup>22</sup> and the world’s sole superpower, if bandwagoning should indeed prove the case, the United States seem a prime suspect. But before we start to assess the threats, it is important to first look at Poland’s own situation and power.

### Poland’s geopolitical and strategic situation

#### *Geographical and Political situation*

Poland occupies roughly 312 thousand square kilometers and is situated on the Northern European flat plains in what is considered either Central or Eastern Europe. It is bordered in the west by Germany, in the north by the Baltic Sea and Russia (through the Kaliningrad enclave) and to its east lie Lithuania, Belarus and the Ukraine. The southern border is marked by two mountain ranges, the Carpathians and the Tatra mountains, indicating the transition into either Slovakia or the Czech Republic. This geographical situation offers the first security problems for Poland: besides the mountain ranges in the south, Poland has virtually no natural defenses to hide behind in case of overt aggression from either the west or the east. The only natural defense points are the occasional rivers, but none of these pose significant military obstacles.<sup>23</sup>

This lack of defensibility has cost the Poles dearly in the past. In the eighteenth century the then Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was divided three times in what have been dubbed the Polish Partitions. Being encroached upon from three sides, Poland was unable to fend off the aggressors Prussia, Russia and Austria and forced to give up large swaths of territory. The third partition in 1795 even wiped the Poles off the map until 1918. Reinstated after the treaty of Versailles, the Poles were immediately forced to fend off the Soviet Russians, only to fall victim to combined German and Soviet aggression a mere twenty years later. This Fourth Polish Partition, as the Poles themselves refer to it, initiated the Second World War after

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<sup>22</sup> J. King, ‘Bush: Join Coalition of the Willing’ CNN News (November 20<sup>th</sup> 2002)

<http://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/europe/11/20/prague.bush.nato/> (Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2014)

<sup>23</sup> G. Friedman, ‘Poland’s Strategy’ *Stratfor Geopolitical Weekly* (28<sup>th</sup> of August 2012)

<http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/polands-strategy> (Accessed 13th of January 2014)

which Poland found itself under communist rule and its borders shifted 500 kilometers westward.

It was not until the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s that Poland could reclaim full political sovereignty. It immediately started a process of democratization and the transition to a free market economy. The democratization resulted in a parliamentary representative democratic republic, with a Prime Minister as head of government and a President as head of state, with 4 year and 5 year terms in office respectively. In the sense of domestic policy, Poland has been a reasonable stable democracy without any major political crises since its political independence at the end of the Cold War and has been an active member in international politics. It is a member of the United Nations, NATO and aspiring member of the EU since 1989, achieving membership in 2004

### *Economic Situation*

With slightly more than 38 million inhabitants, Poland was the 34<sup>th</sup> most populous nation in the world and ranks 8<sup>th</sup> within Europe. It has a uniquely homogenous population, with over 96 percent claiming to be of Polish nationality and descent, and around 90 percent following the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>24</sup> These 38 million Poles produced a total worth of 9700 dollars GDP per capita purchasing power parity in 2003, attaining the 76<sup>th</sup> position worldwide, on par with Russia. The Polish economy's main industries include machine building, iron and steel, coal mining, chemicals and food processing, among others. With regard to trade Germany is Poland's most important partner, accounting for a third of total Polish exports and nearly 30 percent of all its imports. Other significant trade partners are Italy and France, while Russia provides more than 7 percent of Polish imports. In the two years leading up to the Iraq invasion, Poland's economy averaged a 1.2 percent growth while in the 1990's Poland averaged around 5 percent.<sup>25</sup> The main challenges to Poland in economic regard are the modernization of its industries and technology, increasing its energy security through diversification of supply and promoting free trade.<sup>26</sup>

### *Military situation*

Poland's armed forces consist of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Special Forces and had a standing strength of 135.000 men. Of these, 86,970 were enlisted in the Army, 34,000 were Air Force personnel and around 14,000 were active in the Navy.<sup>27</sup> Military expenditures amounted to 3.5 billion dollars, which amounted to 1.9 percent of the Gross Domestic Product. With this amount of expenditure, Poland ranked 27<sup>th</sup> globally in 2003.<sup>28</sup> Since joining NATO in 1999, Polish armed Forces have undergone a dramatic modernization and reorganization process to fulfill to NATO standards. As the armed forces were originally organized along Warsaw Pact principles, the former Eastern counterweight again the Western

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<sup>24</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook: Poland* (Washington, 2003)

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Economic Affairs, *Annual Data Part IV: Annual Economic Indicators* (Warsaw, 2010)

[http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xocr/gus/PUBL\\_annual\\_economic\\_indicators\\_part\\_IV.xls](http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xocr/gus/PUBL_annual_economic_indicators_part_IV.xls) (Accessed March 20, 2014)

<sup>26</sup> Ministry of National Defence, *The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland 2003* (Warsaw, 2003)

<sup>27</sup> J. Pike, 'Poland', *Global Security.org* (14<sup>th</sup> of August 2012)

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/pl.htm> (Accessed March 20, 2014)

<sup>28</sup> CIA, *Factbook: Poland*

NATO alliance, the complete structure of the Armed Forces had to be remodeled to Western examples. This process is still ongoing as of 2003.<sup>29</sup>

## Foreign threats assessed

### **Germany**

*Aggregate power:* With more than double the population of Poland, Germany is one of Europe's powerhouses. Despite hampered economic growth in the late 1990's and early 2000's, partially due to an economically lagging eastern part of Germany which only joined the rest after leaving communist rule in 1990, Germany is one of the most economically powerful nations on the globe. It has Europe's largest economy and produces 26,200 dollars' worth of Gross Domestic Product per capita, nearly three times the amount of the Polish.<sup>30</sup> Its main industries include heavy industries such as iron, steel, chemicals as well as finished products in machinery, machine tools and shipbuilding In addition to the economic power, Germany is also one of the most technologically advanced countries of the world, ranking at number 10 globally, whereas Poland occupies number 27 on the same list.<sup>31</sup> Germany spent about 1.4 percent of its GDP on military expenditures and a total of 49.3 billion dollars.<sup>32</sup>

*Geographical proximity:* Germany shares a common border with Poland of over 450 kilometers, making Germany as geographically proximate as possible to Poland. Parts of Poland occupy former German lands, which were annexed by Poland after the Polish borders shifted westwards due to the Yalta agreements.

*Offensive capabilities:* In respect to its population and economy, Germany has a rather small army of 190.000 personnel as of 2003.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the German Bundeswehr is equipped with state of the art capabilities as dictated by NATO standards and has ample storage of natural resources for offensive warfare.

*Aggressive intentions:* Although objective, hard statements about Polish perceptions of German intent are hard to substantiate through data, we can make some fairly certain assumptions. The first is that, historically, there are a lot of hard feelings between the two nations, resulting from the Polish Partitions in the eighteenth century but mostly from the German invasion and occupation of Poland during the Second World War. The five year duration of German presence is pockmarked by brutal events and left more than 5 million Polish dead.<sup>34</sup> Since the end of the Cold War and the subsequent unification of Germany

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<sup>29</sup> Ministry of National Defence, *The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland 2003* (Warsaw, 2003)

<sup>30</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook: Germany* (Washington, 2003)

<sup>31</sup> M. Desai e.a., 'Measuring the Technology Achievement of Nations and the Capacity to Participate in the Network Age', *Journal of Human Development* Vol 3 No 1 (2002) 103

<sup>32</sup> CIA, *Factbook Germany*

<sup>33</sup> Author Unknown, 'Entwicklung des Personalbestands der Bundeswehr von 2000 bis 2014' Statista (Date of Publication unknown) <http://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/38401/umfrage/personalbestand-der-bundeswehr-seit-2000/> (Accessed March 20, 2014)

<sup>34</sup> T. Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust: Ethnic Strife, Collaboration with Occupying Forces and Genocide in the Second Republic* (London, 1998) 315

relations have improved with the formal recognition of the Oder-Neisse line as official border, but remained strained whenever sensitive topics are brought up for discussion. Among these topics, the Nazi War crimes and the post war expulsion of Germans from the new Polish homelands create the most tension.<sup>35</sup>

The second assumption we are safe to make is that, despite the obvious political tensions between the two countries due to past experience, the Polish are not likely to hold the view that Germany harbors renewed aggressive intentions towards their state. They are militarily allied through NATO and Polish accession to the European Union, of which Germany is a prominent member, has been achieved in 2004. Now accession is complete, Poland has joined the other EU members in talks concerning European security issues, which leads to the conclusion that any potential German hostilities will be dealt with diplomatically.

### **Russia**

*Aggregate power:* With a population of 144 million inhabitants Russia has about 3.5 times as many inhabitants as Poland but spread out over a vastly larger space. The total surface area amounts to more than 17 million square kilometers, making it the largest country on earth. The Russian economy however, is not so great. The Russians have the same Gross Domestic Product purchasing power parity per capita of 9,700 dollars as the Polish but are still experiencing backlashes from their transformation to a free market economy. In 1998, amidst the global economic crisis, Russia was forced to declare government bankruptcy and devalue its currency. In the last years, Russia has recovered, averaging an annual growth of 6 percent but its economy remains fragile. The lion share of the growth is due to the export of raw materials such as oil, gas, timber and metals, while most of the industries are seriously outdated and in need of replacement. In addition, widespread corruption, weak institutions and a poor business climate hamper investments.<sup>36</sup> Russia is therefore also not among the 50 best performing nations according to the Technology Achievement Index of the United Nations.<sup>37</sup> Russian military expenditures account for 4.3 percent of GDP in 2003 with a total of 42.3 billion dollars.<sup>38</sup> There's one economical aspect of Russia that is threatening to Poland

*Geographical Proximity:* Through the exclave Kaliningrad Oblast, the former German region around Königsberg, Russia and Poland share a border of 210 kilometer. The distance between Poland and mainland Russia is only about 600 kilometer so geographically speaking, Russia and Poland can be considered to be very close.

*Offensive capabilities:* In 2003 the Russian Armed Forces totaled about 1.2 million men, but were in very bad shape. Soldiers lacked proper training and (advanced) military equipment

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<sup>35</sup> Author unknown, 'German-Polish Relations: A History of Betrayals', *Der Spiegel* (June 18<sup>th</sup> 2007) <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/german-polish-relations-a-history-of-betrayals-a-489527.html> (Accessed March 20, 2014)

<sup>36</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook: Russia* (Washington, 2003)

<sup>37</sup> Desai, 'Measuring Technology Achievements of Nations', 107

<sup>38</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *Military Expenditure Database 1988-2012* (Stockholm, 2013) <http://milexdata.sipri.org/files/?file=SIPRI+milex+data+1988-2012+v2.xlsx> (Accessed March 20, 2014)

while corruption reigned virtually unchecked.<sup>39</sup> Just as the Polish, the Russians still adhered to the old Warsaw Pact structure of army organization, which hasn't been updated in more than a decade. But where the Poles have started reorganizing and modernizing their armed forces, the Russians have been complacent due to lack of funds. The Russians are trying to make up for this by creating "an outward show that exaggerates a positive veneer over the condition of the military."<sup>40</sup> But even despite the deplorable state of the forces, Russian military capabilities remain considerable by sheer weight of numbers.

Another aspect of offensive action Russia could take against Poland is the shutting down of supply of gas and oil. This would seriously cripple Poland's security as it is largely dependent on Russian imports, as will be discussed later on.

*Aggressive intentions:* Just as German-Polish relations, Russo-Polish relations have an extensive history of mutual animosity. Russian domination after the three partitions of the eighteenth century and the Soviet sponsored communist rule after the Second World War have left a deep sense of mistrust among the Polish. And, although the physical marks left by the Germans in World War II were more severe than the Soviet ones, the continuing domination of the Russian and Soviet Empires have made a deeper psychological impact on Polish national identity.<sup>41</sup> The Russians are therefore portrayed as Poland's public enemy number one, or the external threat that endangers the Polish People.<sup>42</sup>

Seen the historical experiences with the Russians and the fact that the last Red Army troops left only in 1993<sup>43</sup>, it is safe to assume that the Poles view Russian intentions with distrust. This is further corroborated with military buildups in Belarus and Kaliningrad, which Russia says is in response to the accession of Poland to NATO of 1999.

## Iraq

*Aggregate power:* Iraq's 2003 population numbered around 24 million, about two thirds of the Polish population size. It has a very weak economy as a result of two wars (Iran – Iraq War and the First Gulf War) and subsequent sanctions by the United Nations that have lasted from 1991 until the ouster of Saddam Hussein in 2003. The resulting GDP purchasing power parity per capita is only 2,400 dollar. On top of the weak economy is the problem of lack of economic diversification and technological backwardness. The Iraqi's are mainly dependent

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<sup>39</sup> D. Chirkin, 'What is the Salvation for Russian Army?', *Pravda.ru* (March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2003)

<http://english.pravda.ru/society/family/13-03-2003/1976-army-0/> (Accessed March 20, 2014)

<sup>40</sup> R. McDermott, 'Russia's Armed Forces: The Power of Illusion', *Russie.Nei.Visions* No 37 (2009) 5

<sup>41</sup> I. Przel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and leadership in Poland, Russia and Ukraine* (Cambridge, 1998) 124-129

<sup>42</sup> T. Siren, 'State Agent, Identity and the "New World Order": Restructuring Polish Defence Identity after the Cold War Era' *National Defence University Finland, Department of Strategic and Defence Studies*, Series 1, No 26 (Helsinki, 2009) 244-249

<sup>43</sup> Author unknown, 'Last Russian Combat Troops Are Withdrawn From Poland' *The New York Times* (October 29, 1992) <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/29/world/last-russian-combat-troops-are-withdrawn-from-poland.html> (Accessed March 20, 2014)

on oil production for their revenue and are not listed among the 50 most technologically advanced nations.<sup>44</sup> <sup>45</sup>

*Geographical proximity:* Iraq lies about 2500 kilometers away from Poland so is not to be considered geographically proximate.

*Offensive capabilities:* Due to the ongoing economic sanctions, Iraq's offensive capabilities were limited as of 2003. Despite having a standing army of 375.000 man complemented with a Republican Guard of 50.000, it was modelled on outdated Soviet structures and doctrine and was easily swept aside in the Iraq War.<sup>46</sup> However, many strategists believed before the invasion that the Iraqi's were the most effective military power in the region and would not be easily swept aside.<sup>47</sup> <sup>48</sup>

*Aggressive intentions:* It seems unlikely that the Polish perceived any aggressive intentions towards their state coming from Iraq. Historically, the Poles have had good relations with the Iraqi's dating from the 1980's and Iraq was Poland's most important Third World economic partner during these years.<sup>49</sup> Poland's close association with the United States through NATO and its participation in the war in Afghanistan might make it more susceptible to Islamic fundamentalism, but this seems a negligible risk especially considering that the homogenous population of Poland is not encountering the integration of foreigners as a social problem.

### ***The United States of America***

*Aggregate power:* The USA are without a doubt the world's foremost economic and political power. The population of 290 million produces a GDP purchasing power parity per capita of 36,300 dollars, nearly four times that of Poland. In addition to being the largest economy on the planet in 2003, the American economy is also one of the most technologically advanced, only surpassed by the Finnish.<sup>50</sup> In the 1990's and early 2000's, the economy grew at fast rate, even showing resilience in the wake of the 911 attacks. This resilience is in part due to a large diversification of economic activities as well as lightly regulated markets. American power is also expressed in their defense expenditure: Americans spent a whopping half a trillion dollars on military costs, and this still only accounted for 3.7 percent of GDP.<sup>51</sup>

*Geographical proximity:* The United States and Poland are separated by the Atlantic Ocean and most of Western Europe. The approximate distance is about 6000 kilometer, so it can be safely assumed the USA is not geographically proximate to Poland. That being said, the USA

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<sup>44</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook: Iraq* (Washington, 2003)

<sup>45</sup> Desai, 'Measuring Technology Achievements of Nations', 107

<sup>46</sup> F. Weir, 'Iraqi defeat jolts Russian Military' *The Christian Science Monitor* (April 16, 2003) <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0416/p06s01-woiq.html> (Accessed March 20, 2014)

<sup>47</sup> A. Cordesman, 'If We Fight: Iraq and the Conventional Military Balance' *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (Washington, 2002) 42

<sup>48</sup> See among others: T. Dodge, 'Iraqi Army tougher than US believes', *The Guardian* (November 16, 2002) <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/nov/16/iraq> (Accessed March 20, 2014)

<sup>49</sup> J. Labecki, 'Poland in Iraq: The Politics of the Decision' *The Polish Review* Vol. 50 No. 1 (2005)

<sup>50</sup> Desai, 'Measuring Technology Achievements of Nations', 104

<sup>51</sup> SPIRI, *Military Expenditure Database 1988-2012*

maintains troops in over 200 bases in Europe, with the majority located on bases in Germany and Italy.

*Offensive capabilities:* The USA is the global leader in defense expenditure and has a standing army of close to 1.4 million men and women, making it the largest army in the world. On top of its size, it is also the most technologically advanced. Its offensive capabilities therefore are enormous.

*Aggressive intentions:* Ever since Poland regained full independence and sovereignty after the fall of the Soviet Union, Poland and the United States have enjoyed good bilateral relations. This is evidenced by Polish military participation in several American led operations, such as Haiti and more recently Afghanistan. They are also military allied through NATO, which makes the perception of threat by the Poles even less likely.

### Conclusions of threat assessments

After assessing the threats along the four concepts or sources of threat, we can conclude the following. Of the four potential threatening nations under examination, only two can theoretically be considered a threat to Poland. Germany and Iraq are not these two. Germany does have a history of animosity with Poland but since both nations are militarily allied through NATO and were soon to be EU partners, aggressive intentions are hard to substantiate. Offensive capabilities of Germany are not especially threatening to Poland, leaving only aggregate power and geographical proximity as potentially threatening factors. Neither is Iraq a likely threat to Poland. Its weak economy and technology, geographical distance to Poland and its questionable capabilities and intentions make it the least likely candidate for explaining Poland's behavior.

The Americans on the other hand, with their overwhelming power, massive offensive capabilities and geographical proximity through military bases, could be argued to pose a major threat to Poland. The problem with this assessment lies in the fourth source of threat, aggressive intentions. Since these intentions of aggression are virtually non-existent, exceptionally good relations have existed between the two nations for more than a decade and both nations are militarily allied through NATO, a Polish fear of American hostile intent seems unlikely.

The second nation that theoretically can be said to pose a threat is Russia. It has large (admittedly outdated) armed forces, is geographically nearby and there is a good argument to make that the Polish view the Russians with distrust. The only source of threat that is questionable in the Russian regard is aggregate power, but with the same GDP PPP per capita Russia still has a three times bigger economy as Poland. As perceived intentions are the most likely source of threat to influence state behavior, it is safe to assume that Poland felt and feels threatened by Russia.

## Poland's behavior in response to threat

Now that we have identified Russia as Poland's most likely threat, in this chapter we will analyze which behavior, according to the four parameters in chapter one, the balance of threat theory predicts. This analysis is followed by an examination whether this prediction is consistent with Polish foreign Policy and whether the Polish participation in Iraq falls into this pattern.

### Poland's expected behavior

We have seen the four parameters in chapter one that, according to Walt's theory, predict when states exhibit either bandwagoning or balancing behavior. If we apply these parameters it is clear that Poland should demonstrate balancing behavior in response to a threatening Russia. In relative power, Russia is the stronger one but not in an overwhelming sense. Poland would certainly have a fighting chance. As for the other parameters, allies were available to Poland and the Poles was and is militarily allied to them through NATO. In addition, the Poles joined the coalition in times of peace.

The question remains, is the prediction of Poland's balancing behavior to counter the threat of Russia a viable explanation of the Polish participation in the Iraq invasion?

Poland's support of the American-led Coalition of the Willing is not the first instance of Polish support for American-led military endeavors. It is the latest military undertaking in a pattern starting just after Poland's independence from the Soviet Union in the late 1980's. The Polish have supported American action (under UN-mandate) in Haiti in 1994 and in former Yugoslavia and Kosovo throughout the 1990's. But these were merely, if expensive, peacekeeping missions. The 911 attacks and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq offered the Polish the possibility to prove to the Americans that they were a dependable ally that was willing to bleed if its friends came under attack, and were among the first to offer their help. In doing so, the Polish hoped to create a moral obligation for the time it might ever need a return of the favor.<sup>52</sup>

This intense, unquestioning support for the Americans is based on the fact that the Poles believe that Poland and Europe are not secure without a continued American presence. As a senior military official put it: "*We simply don't believe that Europe without the United States is safe. If this century has taught us anything, it's that Europe and North America are one strategic space.*"<sup>53</sup> This belief, together with the assumption that it would bring the USA and Poland closer together, was the main motivating factor behind the Polish wish to join NATO after the fall of the Soviet Union.

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<sup>52</sup> M. Omolesky, "Polish – American Security Cooperation: Idealism. Geopolitics and Quid Pro Quo", *DIAS-Kommentar* No.90 June (2006) 5

<sup>53</sup> S. Erlanger, "Poland is Pressed to Choose Between EU and US," *New York Times* (4<sup>th</sup> of June 2000) <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/06/04/world/poland-is-pressed-to-choose-between-europe-and-us.html?ref=poland&src=pm&pagewanted=1> (Accessed January 17<sup>th</sup> 2014)

With joining NATO, Poland was member of a reliable defensive alliance for the first time in its history. But just as Poland was in the process of joining, the alliance was moving away from its original purpose and becoming divided over its new role in the post-Cold War world.<sup>54</sup> In these discussions Polish officials kept stressing the importance of Article 5, the provision that provided for mutual defense in case of attack. This Polish commitment to conventional collective security was also demonstrated by its hesitation to transform its armed forces according to NATO's highly mobile warfare doctrine, fearing that the threat of conventional attack was underestimated by other countries.<sup>55</sup>

As we have seen in the examples above, Poland's foreign policy is centered on creating obligations and alliances in order to ensure support when its own security might be threatened. This external balancing through bilateral obligations and alliances is consistent with the behavior one would expect from a Poland that feels threatened by Russia.

The Polish participation in the Iraq War can thus be explained through the attempts of the Polish to counter a possible Russian threat. But the Iraq War offered Poland more ways of trying to improve Polish security with regard to Russia. The Iraqi oilfields offered an enticing prospect for a country heavily dependent on imports for their fossil fuel consumption. As of 2009, Russia was the supplier of 91 percent of Poland's crude oil consumption and supplied more than half of Poland's natural gas consumption.<sup>56</sup> Although these numbers are not of 2003, significant changes have not taken place in Polish fossil fuel imports since 2000.<sup>57</sup> Considering the threat perceived to come from Russia, this dependency must have given Poland an uneasy feeling. Iraq thus offered a promising possibility to diminish this dependency and improve Poland's energy security. During a contract ceremony between Polish firms and a subsidiary of the American oil company Halliburton, Foreign Minister Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz made remarks that corroborated this point of view. "*We have never hidden our desire for Polish oil companies to finally have access to sources of commodities,*" adding that it was "*our ultimate objective.*"<sup>58</sup> This attempt of lessening the energy dependency on Russia can be explained as a form of internal balancing.

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<sup>54</sup> T. Noetzel & B. Schreer, 'Does a multi-tier NATO matter? The Atlantic Alliance and the process of strategic change' *International Affairs* Vol. 85 No. 2 (2009) 213-214

<sup>55</sup> T. Siren, *Restructuring Polish Defence Identity*, 245

<sup>56</sup> J. Sharples, "Russo-Polish Energy Security Relations: A Case of Threatening Dependency, Supply Guarantee, or Regional Energy security Dynamics?" *Political Perspectives*, vol. 6 no.1 (2012) 33

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 37

<sup>58</sup> BBC News, 'Poland seeks Iraqi Oil Stake', (3<sup>rd</sup> of July 2003) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3043330.stm> (Accessed 12th of January 2014)

## Conclusion

Ever since Poland regained its political independence from Russia in the late 1980s, national security has been priority number one. The threat emanating from Russia drove the Polish to make sure they were properly allied to withstand future Russian attempts of dominating the Northern European plains. This security was realized through cultivating a good bilateral relationship with the United States as well as joining NATO. One of the Polish tactics of cultivating good relations with the US was through supporting American military endeavors. This is a pattern that can be traced throughout post-Cold War Polish-American relations. The Iraq War is merely the latest example of this pattern and can thus be seen as the balancing against Russian aggression.

On a theoretical note, in defining the threat level posed by the several sources of threat, instead of the hard, measurable concepts, the decisive factor seems to be the soft concept of perception of aggressive intentions. This is the only source of threat not easily defined by data and is instead dependent on historical identity and interests of the threatened state. For a theory so heavily reliant on realist thought (and therefore material capabilities), this seems a remarkable thing and points to the (partial) adaptation of constructivist methods as a future choice for.

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