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Keywords

islamic, australia, poland, against, strategic, state, culture, coalition, understand, participation, expeditionary, operations:

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Using strategic culture to understand participation in expeditionary operations: Australia, Poland, and the coalition against the Islamic State

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates how strategic culture influenced the decision-making of Australia and Poland regarding the global coalition against the Islamic State. In the coalition, Australia has followed its tradition of active participation in United States-led operations, while Poland has embarked on a more cautious line, thereby breaking with its previous policy of active participation. The article examines how Australian and Polish responses to the coalition were shaped by five cultural elements: dominant threat perception, core task of the armed forces, strategic partners, experiences of participating in coalitions of the willing, and approach to the international legality of expeditionary operations. It finds that Australia and Poland differed on all five elements but that the major differences are found in dominant threat perception and core task of the armed forces.

KEYWORDS Australia; coalition against the Islamic State; expeditionary operations; Poland; strategic culture

The United States-led coalition against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has been characterized by very uneven burden sharing since its inception in September 2014. While some coalition members have conducted air strikes in Iraq and Syria, others have limited their participation to humanitarian aid, political support, military assistance, or primarily training of Iraqis and Syrians to combat ISIS.¹ Why states contribute to alliances or expeditionary operations in different ways constitutes a long-standing puzzle in international relations. Long dominated by collective goods theories (Olson & Zeckhauser, 1966; Oneal, 1990; Ringsmose, 2010; Russett, 1970), previous research suggests that smaller states are likely to free ride on the back of

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larger states. Yet a variety of approaches have challenged these theories. Threat perspectives, for instance, claim that, if states perceive the target of an operation as a threat, they are more likely to participate (Davidson, 2011). Alliance politics predict members that are dependent on the coalition leader to carry a high share of the burden (Snyder, 1984), while domestic politics focuses on how domestic interests influence contributions to coalitions (Kreps, 2010; Kupchan, 1988). Another group of scholars takes as its point of departure an integrated model, including insights from all these perspectives (Frost-Nielsen, 2017; Haesebrouck, 2016; Saideman, 2016).

Two scholars have thus far investigated the patterns of contributions to the anti-ISIS coalition: While Haesebrouck (2016) concludes that the willingness to participate in air strikes was the result of interplay between alliance politics, threat perception, and domestic constraints, Saideman (2016) argues that the lessons of Afghanistan in combination with being victim of ISIS attacks provide the most important factors. A factor not considered by these integrated models, but which has gained increasing scholarly attention in recent studies of expeditionary operations is strategic culture (Becker, 2017; Biehl, Giegerich, & Jonas, 2013; Britz, 2016; Doeser, 2016a, 2017; Mirow, 2016; O'Connor & Vucetic, 2010). In contrast with most previous research on burden sharing, which is quantitative in nature, based on large-N approaches, this article examines burden sharing based on a qualitative research design. Culture belongs to a category of “thick” concepts, which cannot “be reduced to a single indicator without losing some important part of their meaning” (Coppedge, 1999, p. 468), implying that a small-N approach is preferable.

The aim of the article is to illustrate how strategic culture influenced the decision-making of two states, Australia and Poland, regarding the anti-ISIS coalition. Australia has been one of the strongest and most consistent coalition members, participating in air strikes in Iraq and Syria, and contributing over 300 soldiers to train the Iraqi army, thereby following its tradition of active involvement in United States-led operations. Poland’s participation was limited to humanitarian and political support until June 2016, when Poland deployed four F-16s for reconnaissance flights and 60 soldiers for the training mission. This cautious and modest contribution represents a break with earlier Polish behavior in United States-led operations, in which Poland usually was one of the main contributors. The article intends to show how the differences in coalition responses between these two middle powers (see below) can be explained using strategic culture and applying John Stuart Mill’s (1882) method of difference.

The article demonstrates that Australia’s strategic culture, which includes fear of terrorist attacks on liberal values, an ambition to balance territorial with expeditionary defense, major experiences of participating in coalitions of the willing, a flexible approach to international law, and the United States as its strategic partner, predisposed Australia’s leadership toward the

option of a consistent and strong contribution. Poland's strategic culture, which contains fear of Russian military intervention, a focus on territorial defense, less experience with coalitions of the willing, a somewhat flexible approach to international law, and the United States as its key strategic partner, predisposed Poland's leadership toward the option of a cautious and modest contribution. Australia and Poland differed mainly in their threat perception and core task of the armed forces, which had a significant impact on their different approaches to the coalition. There were fewer differences regarding their view of different cooperative frameworks such as coalitions of the willing, international legality, and strategic partner. However, there were still gradual differences that reinforced the different approaches taken by Australia and Poland.

In the next section, the concept of strategic culture is reviewed, further defined, and operationalized. This is followed by two empirical sections: the first on Australian culture and participation in the coalition, and the second on Polish culture and involvement in the coalition. A final section elaborates on the main findings of the article, by discussing interactive effects between different cultural elements, and presents possible avenues for further research.

Strategic culture and expeditionary operations

Strategic culture captures a state's core beliefs in military strategic matters, thus shaping a government's behavior in issues such as burden sharing in expeditionary operations. The concept has its origin in a work of Snyder (1977) and has since then challenged perspectives that assume that states are mainly influenced by material factors. Despite the prominence of the concept, there is no consensus on a definition of strategic culture. Previous research can be divided into four generations. The first generation used the concept to understand why states approached strategy in different ways (Gray, 1981; Snyder, 1977). The second generation understood culture as an instrument of hegemony (Klein, 1988). The third generation, from the mid-1990s, attempted to build falsifiable theories (Johnston, 1995). The fourth generation, based on constructivist ideas, focuses mainly on competing subcultures within the state and on strategic cultural change (Lantis, 2002).

The debate between first- and third-generation scholars is the most prominent in the literature. Third-generation scholars perceived culture as an independent variable, separable from material and non-cultural factors (Johnston, 1995). This led to criticism from first-generation scholars such as Gray (1999), claiming that it is futile to make a distinction between culture as a dependent and an independent variable, since culture is a "shaping context for behavior" (p. 55). In the opinion of Gray, behavior and culture are inseparable, since actors who are "encultured" carry out behavior (p. 55). Thus, strategic

culture is “an interpretive prism through which decision-makers view the strategic landscape. It is always there, both within individuals and institutions” (Poore, 2003, p. 281).

Following the first generation, this article defines strategic culture as a “shaping context for behavior,” influencing which options are perceived as appropriate by decision-makers regarding participation in expeditionary operations. In the making of strategy, decision-makers do not start with a “blank sheet,” but act based on “pre-existing” beliefs about appropriate behavior (Meyer, 2005, p. 527). Thus, culture predisposes decision-makers toward certain actions over others. This approach does not imply that an explanation of outcomes is impossible (Bloomfield & Nossal, 2007). Rather, the investigation can provide the reasons for action, which can “be considered as part of the explanation” (Meyer, 2005, pp. 527–528).

Furthermore, the article is delimited to the culture of political elites, here represented by the strategic leadership. In Australia, the strategic leadership is composed of the prime minister, the foreign minister, and the defense minister. The Australian parliament has very little say in military strategic decisions. In Poland, the leadership is composed of the president, the prime minister, the foreign minister, and the defense minister. The decision to use Polish troops abroad is made by the cabinet or the prime minister; however, the president must sign the decision. The formal powers of Parliament are very weak regarding expeditionary operations.

The article focuses on five distinct elements of culture potentially influencing participation in expeditionary operations. These elements are often used to understand participation in expeditionary operations, as opposed to other potential elements of strategic culture such as civil–military relations. What is novel here is the combination of the five elements (for similar approaches, see Doeser, 2016a, 2017). The first is the state’s *dominant threat perception*: which threat(s) have been perceived as most dangerous since the Cold War ended. Enduring threat perceptions can be incorporated into strategic culture (Basrur, 2001; Bloomfield, 2011; Giles, 2002), as members of the elite acquire these perceptions through instruction or imitation (Snyder, 1977, p. 8). A state’s dominant threat perception, if any, can consist of threats posed by a state, group of states, or by non-state actors such as terrorists. In addition to threatening actors, it also consists of notions of what should be protected, from the state’s own territory (including its population), to others’ territories, or perceived global values such as human rights. As argued by proponents of the threat perspective, if the threat perception is terrorism, the state is more likely to contribute to anti-terror coalitions (Davidson, 2011, p. 16). A threat perception dominated by terrorist attacks against the state’s own territory, or against values of perceived considerable importance, would likely increase the state’s willingness to share the burden in an anti-terror coalition.

The second element concerns the *core task of the armed forces*. This varies from territorial defense to placing major emphasis on expeditionary operations (“expeditionary/forward defense”). If the core task is expeditionary defense, the state is more likely to participate in the coalition. If the core task is territorial defense, the state is less likely to participate. It does not mean that the state will not be involved in expeditionary operations at all (see contributions in Biehl et al., 2013). For instance, the state might perceive that expeditionary participation strengthens its territorial defense, through experience and learning (Biehl et al., 2013), but the commitment is likely lower.

The next three elements concern operational characteristics: When the state does participate in expeditionary missions, which are the preferred operational characteristics? The first is the state’s experiences of taking part in different *cooperative frameworks* such as international organizations and coalitions of the willing (Dijkstra, 2016; Kreps, 2011). When it is not possible to act through international organizations, which is the preferred option, some states are not hesitant about taking part in a coalition of the willing (Kreps, 2011). If the state has deemed coalitions of the willing appropriate in earlier interventions, it is more likely to participate in such coalitions in the future. The second characteristic concerns the importance assigned by the state to the *international legality* of operations. For some states, a clear legal mandate, in terms of UNSC authorization or an invitation from the host state, is a necessary factor for their participation, while for others, it is not (see contributions in Britz, 2016). If a clear legal mandate has not been deemed necessary in earlier interventions, the state is more likely to participate in such operations in the future. The third characteristic is the extent to which the state’s *strategic partner(s)* participate in the operation. If states perceive the coalition leader as a strategic partner, they are more willing to contribute significantly to the operation (Becker, 2017; Frost-Nielsen, 2017; Ringsmose, 2010). Thus, if the strategic partner is the United States, the state is more likely to participate in the coalition. The theoretical expectations, based on previous research, are summarized in Table 1.

The reason for selecting Australia and Poland from the wider group of countries in the coalition is that both can be characterized as middle powers (Cooper, 2011), while their level of participation varied significantly and their cultures differ on each of the five elements. That these two middle powers contributed to the coalition in very different ways suggests that collective action theory cannot account for the differences in behavior, since size was not the determining factor. Rather, elements of strategic culture have the potential to explain the differences. The main aspects of Australian and Polish cultures are displayed in Table 2 and are elaborated on in the empirical sections.

Table 1. Cultural elements and theoretical expectations.

Element	Expectations on military participation in the anti-ISIS coalition
Dominant threat perception	(1) If the dominant perceived threat is terrorism, the likelihood of participation increases (2) If the dominant perceived threat is a state, the likelihood of participation decreases
Core task of the armed forces	(1) If expeditionary defense is the core task, the likelihood of participation increases (2a) If territorial defense is the core task, and if participation is perceived to strengthen territorial defense, the likelihood of participation increases (2b) If territorial defense is the core task, and if participation is not perceived to strengthen territorial defense, the likelihood of participation decreases
Cooperative frameworks	(1) If coalitions of the willing have been deemed appropriate in earlier interventions, the likelihood of participation increases (2) If coalitions of the willing have not been deemed appropriate in earlier interventions, the likelihood of participation decreases
International legality	(1) If a clear legal mandate has not been deemed necessary in earlier interventions, the likelihood of participation in the intervention into Syria increases (2) If a clear legal mandate has been deemed necessary in earlier interventions, the likelihood of participation in the intervention into Syria decreases
Strategic partner(s)	(1) If the strategic partner is the coalition leader, the likelihood of participation increases (2) If the strategic partner is not the coalition leader, the likelihood of participation decreases

Australian strategic culture and the anti-ISIS coalition

The *dominant threat perception* in Australian strategic culture is not entirely clear. Traditionally, the threat from “the North” has been a common feature, such as Japan in the Inter War years and the spread of Communism during the Cold War (Lockyer, 2017, pp. 147–171). After the Cold War, the rising power of China has caused concern and has stimulated a debate on whether it is to be viewed as a potential threat or as an economic opportunity (Gyngell, 2017, pp. 348–354). However, as Lockyer (2017) states: “[T]he risk

Table 2. Main aspects of Australian and Polish strategic cultures.

Element	Australia	Poland
Dominant threat perception	Shifting between a threat from the North and terrorist attacks on liberal values	Russian military intervention into Polish territory
Core task of the armed forces	Balancing territorial with expeditionary defense	Territorial defense
Cooperative frameworks	Major experiences of international organizations and coalitions of the willing	Major experiences of international organizations, less of coalitions of the willing
International legality	Flexible approach Lack of legal mandate not an obstacle	Somewhat flexible approach
Strategic partner(s)	United States	United States and NATO is supplementary

of a conventional attack on the Australian mainland is likely to remain low well into the future” (p. 241).

The biggest change in Australian threat perception occurred with the terrorist attacks of September 11 and the Bali Bombings in 2002 that killed 202 people, including 88 Australians. Participation in the War on Terror, including the Afghanistan and Iraq operations, challenged the traditional state-centered threat and created a complex security environment for Australian decision-makers (Ungerer, 2008). Furthermore, Australia’s Counter-Terrorism White Paper illustrated the strong perception by the Australian government of the threat from terrorism (Council of Australian Governments, 2015). Still, the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Varghese (2015), acknowledged the threat from terrorism but stated that overall “our best strategic judgement for decades has been that we face no foreseeable threat.” Rather, the dominant threat perception continues to shift over time between a threat from the North and terrorist attacks on Australian values.

The *core task of the armed forces* has varied over time, reflecting what Evans (2005) refers to as the “strategic paradox,” that is, the discrepancy “between strategic theory and operational practice” (p. 5) with strong focus on territorial defense on the one hand and on defending liberal values anywhere in the world on the other hand (see also Lockyer, 2017). Australia’s culture has further been shaped by what Varghese (2015) refers to as its “strategic anxiety”—a small population placed far from its cultural roots—and its strategic geography—the sheer size of Australia makes it almost impossible to conquer. The main debate has therefore been between three schools of strategic thought (Burns & Eltham, 2014, p. 190):

- (1) The Continental school focusing on the defense of mainland Australia from any threats from the North (1901–1949).
- (2) The Forward Defense school focusing on sending expeditionary forces overseas, for example, in the Korean War, the Vietnam War (1949–1972).
- (3) The Self-Reliance school and a renewed focus on the defense of Australia (1986 to about 1999).

Territorial defense has therefore often been the focus of attention in Australian strategic debate but, since the early 1990s, Australia has participated in a range of expeditionary operations deemed vital for its interests—the Gulf War, Cambodia, Somalia, Rwanda, East Timor, Afghanistan, Iraq, Solomon Islands, and now Iraq/Syria. These operations illustrate that, in practice, particularly in what Gyngell (2017) refers to as “Australia’s national security decade 1998–2008” (pp. 240–242), Australia’s armed forces has been carrying out a new form of expeditionary defense, similar to Forward Defense. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull (2016a) echoed this sentiment in remarks to

Australian troops in Iraq and Syria: “But what you are doing is having a global impact, it is making the world safe, it is making our homes in Australia and New Zealand safer.” Currently, Australian armed forces balance the need of territorial defense with the need to defend liberal values anywhere in the world.

Australia has shown a flexible approach toward different types of *cooperative frameworks* since the Cold War ended. Frameworks have included both international organizations (several times under UN leadership) and coalitions of the willing. Australia took the lead role in several interventions in the Pacific, organized as coalitions of the willing, including the interventions into Solomon Islands 2003 and 2006, and into Timor Leste and Tonga in 2006 (Bloomfield & Nossal, 2007, p. 295). The prime example though is Australia’s participation in the United States-led coalition of the willing against Iraq in 2003 (Doeser & Eidenfalk, 2016). Thus, Australia has major experiences of cooperating in both international organizations and coalitions of the willing.

Regarding *international legality*, Australia has long been committed to international law and the incumbent Turnbull government has repeatedly emphasized the global “rule-based order” (Turnbull, 2016b), while also being emphasized in the 2016 Defence White Paper (Department of Defense, 2016). This commitment is understandable since, as a middle power with limited military strength, Australia is dependent on the protection that international law provides (Burchill & Griffiths, 2014, p. 9). Nevertheless, the legal foundation of previous interventions has been mixed. The four interventions in the Pacific (see above) were carried out without UNSC authorization (Bloomfield & Nossal, 2007, p. 295). The Iraq invasion was justified legally on Iraq’s violation of previous UNSC resolutions, which was rejected by many legal scholars (Anton, 2013). However, Prime Minister John Howard (1999) insisted no intervention into East Timor in 1999 would occur without the explicit consent of Indonesia and having been asked by the UN, thereby following international law. Thus, despite a preference to support international law, lack of a legal mandate is not an obstacle to participation in expeditionary operations.

Australia’s *strategic partner* is the United States. There has been one consistent theme in Australian defense policy since Federation in 1901, that is, the perceived need for a Great Protector from external threats due to its small population and limited capacity to defend itself from great powers. Britain provided this protection until the Fall of Singapore in 1942 (Firth, 2005, p. 26). The alliance with the United States was formally ratified with the ANZUS Treaty in 1951 (Smith, Cox, & Burchill, 1996, pp. 54–56) and has remained a bipartisan “bedrock” of Australian foreign policy ever since. Indeed, Dean (2016) refers to it as Australia having a “largely alliance-based strategic culture” (pp. 230–231), since Australia’s war participation

has almost exclusively occurred as partner of either Britain or the United States.

Australia: Consistent and strong contributor

Australia's strategic leadership immediately answered the call from the United States to participate in the anti-ISIS coalition in August 2014 and has been one of the largest contributors ever since, for a long time the second largest (Walker, 2015). Prime Minister Tony Abbott indicated already in June 2014 that Australia as a dependable ally of the United States would provide "whatever" the Obama administration may ask (Kehoe, 2014) but ruled out sending ground troops (Kerin, 2014). By following the Obama administration, the strategic leadership acted in line with its culture and its focus on the United States as strategic partner.

The first phase of Australian involvement, starting in August 2014, included providing arms and ammunition to the Kurdish forces that were combating ISIS, following a request from the Kurdish regional government, and dropping supplies to the Turkmen forces (Baldino & Barnes, 2016, p. 179). However, it was the plight of the Yazidi people, trapped on Mount Sinjar by ISIS forces, which really caught the attention of the Australian leadership. More than 20,000 Yazidis were forced to flee, and ISIS killed 5,000 in the month of August (Moubayed, 2015, p. 138). Prime Minister Abbott (2014a) stated that Australia is "acutely conscious of the potential for genocide on Mount Sinjar and elsewhere in Northern Iraq and we will do what we reasonably can to protect people." He made it clear from the start that what was going on in Iraq and Syria had direct implications for Australia:

The important point to remember about all of this is that right now there are at least 60 Australians that we know about who are fighting with ISIL and other terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq. Right now, there are 100 Australians that we know about that are supporting those who are fighting with ISIL and other terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria. So, this is a matter of domestic security rather than simply being a matter of international geopolitics. (Abbott, 2014b)

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop (2015) went even further, referring to the ISIS-led rise in international terrorism as "the most significant threat to the global rules-based order to emerge in the past 70 years—and included in my considerations is the rise of communism and the Cold War." These statements show the importance assigned to terrorist attacks on liberal values by the Abbott leadership.

The decision to get involved militarily in Iraq was taken in September 2014 (Abbott, 2014c). The decision was shaped by Australian strategic culture, since participation was motivated by the attacks on liberal values and can be related to the long-standing Australian ambition to defend its interests

and values by means of expeditionary defense. The Air Task Group (ATG) of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) that was sent to Iraq included approximately 400 personnel and six F/A-18F Super Hornets, a KC-30A Multi Role Tanker Transport aircraft, and an E7-A Wedgetail Airborne Early Warning and Control aircraft (Department of Defense, 2014). The first actual airstrikes on ISIS targets took place on October 8, 2014.

In addition to the ATG, a further 200 Special Forces were deployed in September 2014; 100 of which have been conducting combat missions (Coorey, 2014a). The strategic leadership further increased its involvement in April 2015 by 300 non-combat personnel, which would train the Iraqi Army (Department of Defense, 2015), bringing the total Australian commitment to about 900 military personnel (Kerin, 2015a).

In September 2015, just about a week before Abbott was to be ousted as Prime Minister (and replaced by Malcolm Turnbull), the decision was taken to extend the Australian commitment into Syria. This decision was preceded by a discussion on international legality. When asked in 2014 if Australia would consider extending its campaign into Syria, Abbott said it would most likely involve a UNSC resolution due to the legal obstacles involved, while Foreign Minister Bishop said Syria was different from Iraq, seeing as Australia was invited to Iraq but had no such invitation by the Syrian government (Coorey, 2014b). However, Abbott began softening his legal stance in August 2015, saying: “while legally different, whether the airstrikes are taking place in Syria or Iraq, the morality is the same” (as cited in Kerin, 2015b). He justified the Syria decision by saying:

It is simply the Daesh death cult which is doing so much damage in Iraq which we are pledged to help to defend and we are exercising the right to collective self-defense under article 51 of the UN charter in striking Daesh in Syria. (Abbott, 2015a)

Prime Minister Turnbull (2015) subsequently echoed this legal argument after taking over the reins: “Australia’s objective is to operate in Syria as part of the collective self-defense of Iraq against ISIL or Daesh.” The first Australian mission into Syria took place in mid-September 2015 (Kerin, 2015c). The debate on the mission’s mandate illustrates Australia’s culture where a legal mandate is preferred but not crucial for participation.

The ousting of Abbott by Turnbull in September 2015 had no immediate impact on Australia’s ISIS policy. However, it would become clear over time that Turnbull was a different type of leader—more cautious, less dramatic in language and action. The Australian military commitment against ISIS had continuously increased under Abbott but Turnbull changed approach and instead focused on maintaining a status quo in terms of numbers of airstrikes and personnel. Turnbull put forward a much softer tone compared to his predecessor (Coorey, 2015). Abbott often used words like “evil” and used to

describe ISIS as the “death cult.” Turnbull (2015), when asked whether he would continue Abbott’s terminology, simply responded: “I’ll use my own language. ISIL or Daesh is a violent, extremist terrorist organization which is a threat both regionally and globally.” It quickly became clear that Turnbull was downplaying the previous tough rhetoric and instead stressed the need for a political solution in Iraq and Syria (Financial Review, 2015). In fact, rather than increasing troop numbers, one of the first developments under the Turnbull leadership was to reduce the number of Special Forces from 200 to 80, leaving a total of 780 Australian military personnel in Iraq (Andrews, 2015a).

Defense personnel numbers has remained steady over the next two years under Turnbull. The aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015 led to calls for a larger Australian military presence. Former Prime Minister Abbott had already in October 2015 given a speech wherein he urged the government to consider troops “on the ground” (Riordan, 2015) and the calls increased after the Paris attacks. Abbott again said Australia needed to consider doing more (Dean, 2015), while the now former Defence Minister Kevin Andrews (2015b) was more forthright, saying ground troops would be needed to defeat ISIS. Turnbull and his Defence Minister Marise Payne defended maintaining the current troop numbers, pointing to how Australia was the second biggest contributor already and that Australia could not unilaterally decide to send in ground troops (Anderson, 2015; Walker, 2015).

In sum, the Australian commitment to the coalition has been a policy of strong and persistent support from 2014 to 2017, shaped by Australia’s strategic culture, in particular the elements of threat perception and core task of the armed forces. It is also a story of two leaderships. Australia was the first to put their hand up under Abbott, and military personnel numbers increased in 2014 and 2015, and the mission was extended into Syria. However, once Turnbull had ousted Abbott, troop numbers were initially drawn down from approximately 900 to 780, and has remained steady since then, despite calls from the previous leadership to do more.

Nevertheless, overall both leaderships followed Australian strategic culture. The dominant threat perception at this time was threats to liberal values from terrorist organizations, while expeditionary defense continued to play an equal role as the core task of the armed forces. Each of these two cultural elements clearly shaped the decision to take part in the military operations. The differences between the two leaderships were quantitative in nature and affected troop numbers and specific mission tasks. In addition, the cooperative framework of the anti-ISIS coalition resembles the coalition frameworks of the Iraq invasion and of the interventions in the Pacific. The international legality approach is based on the principle of collective self-defense and illustrates Australia’s preference for a legal mandate but also that it accepts participation without a clear UNSC mandate. This approach was extended to include attacks on ISIS targets in Syria as part of the

defense of Iraq, since ISIS also operated from Syria in their attacks on Iraq. Finally, Australian culture is also displayed in its support for its strategic partner. Australia's participation follows a clear pattern over the last 75 years of being a "dependable ally" to the United States and the campaign in Iraq and Syria is no exception. Thus, the five elements of Australian strategic culture influenced (more or less) the two leaderships toward a strong and consistent contribution to the coalition.

Polish strategic culture and the anti-ISIS coalition

The *dominant threat perception* in Polish strategic culture centers on Russia, and the risk of war between Russia and the West, since such a war would most likely involve Polish territory (Koziej, 2014; Szpyra & Trochowska, 2014, p. 165). This perception is the result of Poland's geopolitical position between Germany and Russia, and of the country's historical experiences of sharing borders with these great powers (Terlikowski, 2013, p. 269). Poland's geopolitical position was one of the main causes of the country's collapse in 1795 and in 1939, and of the installment of communism in 1945. After the Cold War, the Russian threat has continued to dominate Polish culture, gaining further urgency in connection with Russia's interventions in Georgia (2008) and in Ukraine (2014) (Doeser, 2016b, pp. 127, 141–143). The threat of terrorism has never been high on the Polish security policy agenda (Doeser, 2016b, pp. 132, 139).

Because of the perceived Russian threat, there is almost a dogmatic obsession with territorial defense in Poland, constituting the *core task of the armed forces*. Owing to this threat perception, Poland desires only to supplement expeditionary operations (Terlikowski, 2013, p. 271). However, participation in operations led by the United States or NATO, especially Operation Enduring Freedom and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan (2001–2014), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) (March–April 2003), and the subsequent stabilization missions in Iraq (2003–2008), was perceived as vital for the strengthening of territorial defense. There were basically two reasons for this: first, by assisting the United States and NATO, a succession of Polish leaderships believed that the United States would support Poland against future Russian aggression, and, second, by taking part in expeditionary operations, Polish armed forces would gain experience and develop skills useful for territorial defense (Piekarski, 2014, p. 94).

After Russia's intervention into Georgia, a process of re-evaluation was sparked within the Polish security establishment, in which decision-makers gradually became less favorable to use expeditionary operations as an instrument for the strengthening of territorial defense (Koziej, 2014). Increasingly, Polish decision-makers started realizing that spending on the needs of an expeditionary operation detracts from long-term development plans for the

territorial defense (Komorowski, 2013). The Polish decision to not join Operation Unified Protector in Libya was partly based on such assessments (Doeser, 2016b, pp. 140–141). In 2013, President Bronisław Komorowski (2013) declared a “retreat” from the country’s “overzealous” policy of “eagerly sending Polish forces to the world’s antipodes.” The Komorowski doctrine implied that Poland should concentrate on operations that are “absolutely necessary” and that “are not too far away” (as cited in Doeser, 2016b, p. 139). The Russia–Ukraine War with its character of hybrid warfare, which came as a strategic surprise for the Polish leadership, reinforced the belief in further Russian aggression and that Poland should prioritize territorial defense (Koziej, 2014).

Regarding *cooperative frameworks*, Poland regularly contributes to EU military operations and has made significant troop contributions to ISAF and the Iraq operations, including the controversial OIF. From 2001 to 2010, Poland significantly decreased its participation in UN-led missions, while increasing its participation in NATO and EU-led operations, and coalitions of the willing such as in Iraq (Doeser, 2016b, p. 126). In recent years, however, Polish decision-makers have declared that Poland instead should increase its activities in the UN (White Book, 2013, pp. 164–166). The conclusion is that Poland has major experiences of international organizations but less experience of coalitions of the willing with OIF as the prime exception.

In Polish culture, there is some skepticism about international law, partly because of the inability of the UN to prevent the Cold War that left Poland on the wrong side of the divided Europe (Osica, 2004, p. 304; Zaborowski & Longhurst, 2003, p. 1014). Thus, the *international legality* of operations has not been a primary concern, demonstrated by Polish actions during Operation Allied Force in Kosovo and OIF (Zaborowski & Longhurst, 2003, p. 1014). In recent years, it seems that the importance of legal authorization for expeditionary missions has been upgraded in Polish thinking (National Security Strategy of Poland, 2014, p. 27; White Book, 2013, pp. 164–166). As noted in the White Book (2013): “An important premise of taking a decision with regard to Poland joining a given operation is whether the latter has been given an explicit international mandate” (p. 166). The conclusion is that Poland, after the Iraq failure, has highlighted the importance of international legality, but that *realpolitik* considerations most likely still hold primacy. Thus, Poland has a somewhat flexible approach.

When it comes to *strategic partners*, Polish culture is based on the idea of ensuring “the most robust international security guarantees attainable” (Terlikowski, 2013, p. 269). Since the early 1990s, the political elite has been guided by the belief that only the United States can defend Poland from aggression and that Poland should strive for membership in NATO (Longhurst, 2013, pp. 365–366). Thus, the United States is Poland’s most important

strategic partner, with NATO as a supplementary force. Poland's membership in the EU is a "second insurance policy" (Terlikowski, 2013, p. 274). Polish culture is also based on the belief that the presence of American and/or NATO troops on Polish territory is vital for discouraging intrusions by Russia. If American soldiers are present in Poland during an armed attack, the United States is drawn directly into the conflict (Matlár, 2014, p. 261). In 2011, a permanent detachment of the U.S. Air Force was sent to Poland and, from 2014, Poland is protected by the NATO assurance measures, included in the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), in which allied forces mainly from the United States, Britain, Canada, France and Germany remain in Poland on a rotational basis. Poland has also been working for the establishment of a United States missile defense system on Polish territory, leading to several Polish troop surges in Afghanistan between 2007 and 2010 (Piekarski, 2014, pp. 89–90).

Poland: Cautious and modest contributor

When President Obama requested eight NATO members, among them Poland, to join a coalition to fight ISIS in September 2014 (Cooper, 2014), the Polish strategic leadership declined to contribute militarily, referring to the Ukrainian situation as the main impediment. As stated by Defense Minister Tomasz Siemoniak: "Poland does not envisage participation of its soldiers in military operations, though it intends to politically support the coalition and organize humanitarian aid" (as cited in Drennan, 2014). Foreign Minister Grzegorz Schetyna (2015) added that "Polish military engagement is out of question." However, "if there is an expectation on the part of the grand coalition, we are open to talk about it" (as cited in Radio Poland, 2015a). Despite the ambition of the United States to build a broad multinational coalition, and Secretary of State John Kerry's reference to Poland as "a very important NATO member" (as cited in Radio Poland, 2015a), Poland would not send any troops until the summer of 2016.

The perception of the strategic leadership of an increased Russian threat in connection with the annexation of Crimea implied that, in 2014–2015, the leadership was pre-occupied with the Ukrainian situation and did not perceive any possibilities to contribute forces to combat ISIS: "The situation in Eastern Europe is the cause of our greatest concern and anxiety. Poland is the only EU country to share border with both Ukraine and Russia" (Council of Ministers Report, 2014, p. 4).

The expansion of ISIS was by the Defense Minister in the fall/winter of 2014 perceived as a threat "close to the EU" (Siemoniak, 2014), but not as an explicit threat to Poland. Foreign Minister Schetyna (2015) noted: "We are far from playing down the threat posed by the so-called Islamic State," however, the ISIS threat could not compete with that of Russia, which is

much more deep-rooted in Polish culture, constituting the dominant threat perception.

Because of the perceived increasing Russian threat, Polish decision-makers became more willing to strengthen Poland's territorial defense (Komorowski, 2014; Schetyna, 2014). Of utmost importance was that NATO's RAP was implemented, especially the formation of the Rapid Reaction Forces and the strengthening of the Multinational Corps Northeast in Szczecin. As stated by Foreign Minister Schetyna (2015), it is a primary objective "to guarantee and enhance the permanent rotating presence of NATO troops in the East." For the strategic leadership, this rotation should be so intense that in practice it meant permanent (Council of Ministers Report, 2014, p. 3). The plan was to reach NATO agreement on the full implementation of RAP during the following NATO summit, to take place in Warsaw in the summer of 2016. The Polish negotiating strategy was to argue that NATO's eastern flank had been ignored in terms of military capabilities for years, and that Poland would not invest in the defense of NATO's southern border, in the war against ISIS, unless the eastern border was secured first. This interpretation of the Polish negotiating strategy is supported by several Polish statements found in, for example, the Council of Ministers Report (2014):

European security is one and indivisible. We are prepared to strengthen it together with our allies, including in southern borderlands, guided by the principle "one for all, all for one." However, this principle must apply in equal measure to the South and to the East.

A subsequent Council of Ministers Report (2016) also confirms this interpretation of the Polish negotiating strategy:

We want Warsaw to be the place where, through practical steps, the Alliance reaffirms the credibility of security guarantees vis-à-vis countries of its eastern flank. Our proposals in this regard are now subject to allied consultations. What they amount to is eliminating evident disproportions in defense infrastructure between the so-called old and new NATO members.

A statement by President Komorowski (2014) further supports this interpretation: "For us, as far as prospective involvement on a greater scale in any other region of the world is concerned, it could simply be easier and more understandable when we feel more secure ourselves on the eastern flank," implicitly pointing to the threat posed by Russia.

Because of the perceived Russian threat and Polish ambitions to increase its territorial defense, it was also vital for the Polish leadership to deepen its defense cooperation with the United States (Council of Ministers Report, 2014, 2015, 2016). This Polish ambition included the implementation of the Polish-American missile defense agreement, set to start in 2016, and a more permanent presence of U.S. forces on Polish territory (Council of

Ministers Report, 2014, 2015, 2016). In 2014–2015, the United States had on several occasions requested military support from Poland in the fight against ISIS (Radio Poland, 2015a, 2015b). The Polish reluctance at the time can in part be explained by an understanding on the part of the United States of Poland's security situation after the Russia–Ukraine war. Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski (from November 16, 2015) said in December 2015 that “none of the coalition countries expects Poland or any other Eastern European country to commit significant military forces. ... Our attention right now must be turned toward the Ukrainian conflict” (as cited in Radio Poland, 2015b). Thus, the requests from its strategic partner to cooperate may not have been as pressing this time, compared to the Afghanistan and Iraq interventions. The strategic leadership may also have felt that Poland by now had sufficiently contributed to the alliance. The new President (from August 6, 2015), Andrzej Duda (2016), explained Poland's cautious involvement because of Poland's contributions to Afghanistan and Iraq, Poland's large defense spending, and the country's ongoing modernization of armed forces and its contributions to Baltic air policing, meaning that Poland's territorial defense was focused on the threat posed by Russia.

The Polish position on the anti-ISIS coalition started to change in February 2016. This was most likely stimulated by the decision of the Obama administration in early February to quadruple funding for its European Reassurance Initiative, including the strengthening of United States rotational force presence and of pre-positioning of military equipment in Europe (Majumdar, 2016). Another reason was most likely the decision by NATO defense ministers on February 10 to agree on a set of principles for the modernization of NATO's defense and deterrence posture. This decision included an enhanced forward presence of multinational and rotational character in Eastern Europe; however, without specifying any details (Stoltenberg, 2016). Later the same day, Defense Minister Antoni Macierewicz (from November 16, 2015) stated that Poland has accepted to join the coalition:

When it comes to the details of our participation, we will continue to discuss this topic, especially since we can see it in the broad terms of the situation in which NATO finds itself, counting on the support of both the United States and all of NATO to assist Poland and other countries of the eastern flank with a permanent presence. (Macierewicz & Carter, 2016)

In this statement, the Defense Minister clearly signaled that the Polish level of engagement in the coalition would depend on NATO's response to Russia's assertiveness in the East. However, President Duda did not admit that Poland would join the operation (Bolton, 2016). Duda (2016) did though more clearly recognize the ISIS threat: “[W]e fully recognize seriousness of challenges from the South. Terrorist activities of the Islamic State pose a threat which undermines the foundations of our civilization.” However, the

ISIS threat was still far behind the Russian threat. As noted by the Foreign Minister in April 2016, Russia's policy is "a sort of existential threat because this activity can destroy countries," while ISIS is "not an existential threat for Europe," although "being a very serious one" (as cited in Pempel, 2016). Yet, by this time, the Polish decision-makers had adopted a more positive view of the coalition; however, it was not yet certain that Poland would participate.

On May 30, 2016, journalists asked President Duda whether Poland would be satisfied with about 4,500 soldiers along the entire eastern flank of NATO (Stoltenberg & Duda, 2016), which was the number speculated about regarding the outcome of the Warsaw summit. He answered that the most important result is that NATO have forces from several different members. This, in combination with the protection of the missile defense and the deployments to Poland announced by Obama, imply that "we will have really a lot of allied soldiers present in Poland" (Stoltenberg & Duda, 2016).

In June, the strategic leadership was most likely quite certain that a positive result would be reached at the Warsaw summit. This strongly contributed to a Polish decision to contribute military resources on June 17, 2016 when President Duda authorized, at the request of Prime Minister Beata Szydło, the use of two Polish military contingents during the period June 20–December 31, 2016 (the operation was later extended in time and is still ongoing). The combined force includes 150 soldiers and military personnel, stationed in Kuwait, and 60 soldiers, deployed to Iraq. The force in Kuwait consists of four F-16 aircraft, prepared with DB-110 reconnaissance pods, implementing aerial surveillance. In Iraq, part of the soldiers includes Special Forces, which provides advice and training for Iraq's military forces (Press communique, 2016). Previous Polish experience of the coalition of the willing in Iraq (2003) and the clear international mandate for the Iraq operation against ISIS facilitated the decision. However, the most important motivation was summarized by Head of the National Security Bureau Paweł Soloch, who said that President Duda "expects support from its Allies on the Eastern flank" (Press communique, 2016; see also Macierewicz, 2016a). This indicates that the cultural elements of threat perception and core task were the main reasons for the Polish decision.

President Duda received the allied support during the Warsaw summit, which took place on July 8–9. Agreement was reached on the strengthening of NATO's military presence in Eastern Europe, with four multinational and rotational battalion-size battlegroups in Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, to be in place by 2017 (Warsaw Summit Communique, 2016). The expectation of the strategic leadership that NATO would reach such an agreement clearly influenced the Polish decision to share the military burden in the anti-ISIS coalition. When the leadership perceived that its allies would satisfy Polish demands for the eastern flank, the leadership returned the favor by sending forces to the southern flank. The relationship

between the two flanks in Polish thinking is further confirmed by a speech given by the Defense Minister to Polish troops in Kuwait in August:

If it was not for your decision, if not for your service here, there would not be a guarantee of the safety and independence of Poland, which we have obtained thanks to the recent decisions of the NATO Summit, thanks to the decisions of the US government, with the result that the US military and NATO will be permanently stationed on the eastern borders of the North Atlantic Alliance. (Macierewicz, 2016b)

The belief that it is vital for Poland's security that American and/or NATO troops are stationed on Polish territory is well rooted in Polish culture. When the Multi-national Battalion Battle Group was officially welcomed to Poland on April 13, 2017, President Duda (2017) explained the importance of the battlegroup:

Today, the presence in Poland of the US army, the biggest army in the world and the biggest NATO army, is proof that the world has been changing and is a chance that such dramatic developments in Poland's history like in 1939 and 1940 will never repeat themselves.

The Polish reluctance to contribute militarily before June 2016 can be seen in light of four circumstances: Polish discontent with defense imbalances between old and new NATO; increased Polish skepticism about expeditionary operations; priority given to the Russia–Ukraine war over the ISIS threat; and the view that Poland already had contributed sufficiently to NATO. In early 2016, the first circumstance began to change when the Polish leadership perceived that the United States and other NATO members became more willing to increase their forces on the eastern flank. To encourage and facilitate this process, the Polish leadership decided to contribute militarily to the coalition, according to the evidence examined here.

Culture played a key role in Poland's decision to limit its contribution. Although Poland faced multiple threats, including ISIS, the leadership acted on its dominant threat perception. The dominant threat perception and core task of the armed forces were both primarily concerned with Poland's territorial defense from a Russian threat. Joining the coalition was therefore seen as less important to start with but an increasing willingness of the United States and NATO from early 2016 to boost their military presence in Poland, meant that it was deemed appropriate to replicate in kind with a minor but symbolically important contribution. Although Polish culture predisposes its decision-makers toward actions that keep the United States satisfied, arguably nothing was going to make ISIS a bigger threat to Poland than Russia.

Conclusion

This article has tried to explain why Australia and Poland participate differently in the coalition against ISIS. The two case studies demonstrate that

strategic culture was influential in shaping the decision-making in both countries. Dominant threat perception and core task of the armed forces was the key difference between the two countries. According to Mill's (1882) method of difference, these two elements provided the most important reasons for action, as the behavior of Australia and Poland differed significantly (pp. 479–487). Thus, based on Mill's explanatory logic, the most influential reasons for Australia was its leadership's threat perception that core liberal values was under threat and that foreign fighters might return to Australia to carry out terrorist attacks and that the threat therefore had to be met in Iraq and Syria, following a well-established pattern of expeditionary defense. Poland felt less need to be as strong contributor, since the ISIS threat was perceived as less acute by the leadership and would do little to mitigate what it identifies as its dominant threat, Russia. In addition, sending expeditionary forces goes against the Polish focus on territorial defense.

Based on these two cases, it is clear that threat perception and core task are closely linked, with the former contributing to shaping the latter. The other three elements had less influence on the differences between Australia and Poland. However, each of these elements showed differences in nuance that reinforced Australia's and Poland's opposite approach. The differences in cooperative frameworks and international legality contributed to Australia showing more willingness to participate in a coalition of the willing framework and in the intervention into Syria, compared to Poland. In addition, if the threat perception is characterized by terrorism, as in Australia, decision-makers are more willing to disregard legal obstacles for joining an anti-terror coalition. Furthermore, without a watertight legal mandate, coalitions of the willing are often the only alternative. Although both states perceive the United States as their strategic partner, Australia and the United States shared the perception of the immediate threat of ISIS to liberal values, while Poland was more focused on the threat from a Russian military intervention into Polish territory. This shows how the element of strategic partner interacted with threat perception, and it may also have contributed to the differences in behavior.

However, this article has not covered other potential elements of strategic culture, nor assessed the relevance of alternative factors such as public opinion and the media. Thus, there is room for further research on the decision-making of these two (and other) states regarding the anti-ISIS coalition. Critics might also argue that the elements described as cultural here might just as well be rational calculations driven by the international system. However, culture and perspectives such as realism are not in opposition. Decision-makers are all encultured and pursue their interests based on their culture. If decision-makers behave according to realist predictions, it is because of their culture, rather than of any external objective force. By considering, for instance, Poland's historical relationship to Russia, or Australia's

experiences of participating in coalitions of the willing, which realism would not, culture adds to our understanding of participation in expeditionary operations.

Finally, although the article has expanded the case universe of strategic culture and has created stronger subfield links between strategic culture, foreign policy and war, further research is needed. As seen in the analysis, individual decision-makers also played a role. In the Australian case, there were clear but small differences between Prime Ministers Abbott and Turnbull as well as between other members of the two cabinets. In Poland, the decision to participate in the coalition was preceded by the election of a new president and a new cabinet. Thus, future research should investigate why some decision-makers are more influenced by the country's culture than others. For these purposes, concepts such as operational code or leadership style may contribute to our understanding. Furthermore, the article could lead toward future research on alliance structures and its impact on decision-making on burden sharing in expeditionary operations.

Note

1. As of April 16, 2018, there are 75 coalition members, among which about 40 contribute military resources, including advisors, weapons and ammunition (Global Coalition, <http://theglobalcoalition.org/en/home/>).

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