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"Missionary Zeal of Recent Converts"  
Norms and Norm Entrepreneurs in the Foreign Policy of Czech Republic and Slovakia: the Case of the Iraq War

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1. Introduction: The coalition of the eager?

Recent converts are often prone to missionary zeal. Following the downfall of communism, the young democracies in Central and East Europe quickly became known for displays of moral fibre in combating authoritarian regimes and terrorism around the globe, readily committing to risky and, at times, controversial ventures, such as the 1999 strike in Kosovo, the 2003 invasion of Iraq or the surge in the 2000s against the remaining strongholds of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Participation in the invasion of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq is a showcase for this activist and, some would say, venturesome foreign policy. Two days before the invasion, Washington released the list of the 30 allies that joined its “coalition of the willing”. About half of them were post-communist states: though they were relatively weak militarily, their number marked an essential contribution to the perceived legitimacy of Washington’s war effort. For the Central and East Europeans’ part, it was not that much of a stretch to dub the club the “coalition of the eager”, in terms of both foreign policy discourse and output. As the peaceniks of “old Europe” writhed in distaste at the “hegemonic unilateralism” of the US – demonstrated, above all, by the circumvention of the UN – the hawks of “new Europe” readily sanctioned what they perceived as “ethical war” against a brutal dictatorship, invoking memories of the communist regime that had oppressed their people for four decades.

There is no shortage of works explaining CEE states’ motivation to back the US, but few of them place the case of the Iraq War in the context of the scholarly debate on state behavior. Was the resolve of CEE elites to help overthrow Saddam Hussein driven by interests, norms or both? Moreover, which interests and norms – and they could be international or domestic – should we factor in? In answering these questions, the following paper seeks to make a theoretical contribution to the relevant international relations and comparative politics literature on patterns of foreign policy-making in the post-communist world.

The puzzle that it hopes to crack is: why was there a pro-active Iraq policy when CEE

states could have gotten away with no stance on the invasion at all? That “new Europe’s” behavior during the Iraq crisis quite conspicuously resembles a model case of “band-wagoning” makes it easy to overlook the fact that for these “small states”, supporting the US was, in many ways, counter-intuitive. There were few apparent gains: by invading Iraq, CEE states were not containing a direct security threat, nor were they chasing after slices of “post-war pie”, simply because the US couldn’t promise them many. On the other hand, losses seemed imminent: the danger of being left out in the cold by anti-war “old Europe” couldn’t be discounted; moreover, heated debate inside CEE states indicates that pockets of political elite as well as the civil society at home were more than a little unhappy about going to war. Hence, the question – asked by few scholarly works to date – remains: why did Central and East European policy-makers bother to take a stance – and a controversial one, at that – on Iraq at all? Were they, from their own point of view, mercenaries, crusaders, conscripts, recruits – or something else?

The paper suggests that they were recruits who, after careful consideration, joined the “coalition of the willing” because they were convinced that overthrowing Saddam Hussein was “good” and “appropriate”. Offering a nuanced explanation, it focuses, above all, on the power of foreign policy norms and the political clout of the elite networks of norm entrepreneurs that promoted them. Ultimately, it argues that in the absence of clear security and material interests, and in the face of medium to high international and domestic costs, norms help us understand why CEE policy-makers jumped on the US-dragged “bandwagon” to Bagdad at all. Furthermore, the relative power of norm entrepreneurs deepens our grasp of the different degrees of support that various CEE states rendered to the US.

The paper makes the case in three steps. First, it discusses the shortcomings of the dominant neo-realist perspective in explaining the CEE states’ stance on Iraq. This discussion, in turn, justifies the choice of a corrective set of analytical tools, rooted in the constructivist school of thought and the theory of norm entrepreneurship. Next, the paper identifies the framework of US-inspired foreign policy norms relevant for CEE policymakers during the Iraq crisis, which are conceptualized here as “Atlanticism”. Finally, it proceeds to analyze the discourse and the decision-making in the run up to the Iraq War in two CEE states, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, capitalizing on more than 100 interviews with elite actors and multiple foreign policy documents, public speeches and media reports. In so doing, the paper makes an attempt to enhance our empirical and conceptual understanding of one of the most important “Atlanticist” foreign policy outcomes in Central and East Europe. Perhaps the most important contribution of the paper lies in the illustration of the interaction between foreign (US) and domestic (CEE) foreign policy norms – via “cultural match” or “resonance” – which hopes to shed more light on the under-studied dynamics of norm diffusion in the post-communist world.

7 President Jacques Chirac’s unkind remark about “missing the opportunity to shut up” is good point of departure: why didn’t CEE states simply stay silent?
2. The limitations of the realpolitik explanation: mercenaries that were too altruistic

Much of the literature on Central and East Europeans’ involvement in the Iraq War does not go beyond the neo-realist outlook on “small state” behavior. Though most works concede that CEE states had multiple reasons to back the Bush administration, they highlight variables such as power, threat and interests. In general, realpolitik – and especially its structuralist variant – remains the dominant paradigm for political practice as well as academic analysis of foreign affairs in the post-communist world.\(^8\) In this view, “small states” such as those in Central and Eastern Europe are expected to seek the backing of a powerful ally (i.e. the US) to “band-wagon” on its security provision even at the expense of partial loss of sovereignty.\(^9\)

The recently developed neo-realist theories of “soft balancing” and “soft band-wagoning”,\(^10\) tailored to the unipolar world of the 1990s and early 2000s – do offer some valuable insight into the dynamics of foreign policy-making in CEE states ahead of the Iraqi invasion. They explain not only whom Central and East Europeans supported but also how they did it. Both theories, of course, make a standard neo-realist assumption about state behavior by positing that in a uni-polar international system revolving around a sole superpower – in this case, the US – smaller and weaker states are expected to either balance against American power or bandwagon on it in hopes of obtaining security and/or economic benefits. But crucially, the theories also propose that the opposition to or the support for the US as the uni-pole will remain moderate or symbolic: in other words, the balancing and the band-wagoning will be “soft”. Hence, the conceptual innovation lies in the emphasis on tools such as diplomacy and international institutions, rather than military capacity or economic power. If we apply the two theories to the Iraq crisis, “soft band-wagoning” elucidates why, for instance, some CEE states supported Washington but made only a modest contribution to the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF).\(^11\) On the other hand, “soft balancing” illustrates why the Iraq War split Europe into “old” and “new”: West Europeans turned against the Americans in an attempt to contain, by “soft” means, what they saw as “post-2001 US unilaterialism”. In so doing, they deepened the rift between them and Central and East Europeans, who clung on to the powerful yet benign hegemon for the fear of what they saw as the French attempts to build a “European Gaullism” as well as the new German “Westpolitik” reflecting diminished dependence on the US.\(^12\)

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8 States act as self-interested agents: their interests are shaped by systemic or structural constraints, which means that they are driven to pursue strategies of expansion, balancing, band-wagoning or cooperation depending on their relative power and position in the Hobbesian “anarchy” of the international system. Jervis, R., 1998. Realism in the Study of World Politics. International Organization 52(4): 971-991


11 Grigorescu (2008)

Yet the “mercenary” logic of analysis falls short of fully explicating why CEE states became active members of the “coalition of the willing”. Most importantly, the assumption of rational decision-making must be questioned in this respect: the Atlanticist stance on Iraq threatened to incur substantial short- and medium-term losses in strategic and potentially also economic terms, which, upon rational calculation, could have outweighed the ultimate gains. In the international arena, the cacophony of spiteful remarks from Brussels, Berlin, Paris and elsewhere rammed home the disquieting message that the upcoming EU accession could be in jeopardy,13 while on the domestic front, the grumbling of hostile publics and the popularity surge of anti-war political parties raised the alarm that government stability and re-election might be in danger. Moreover, the idea that power structures and threat perceptions alone dictate foreign policy is somewhat problematic: the various Central and East European states supported the US despite their the divergent structural positions: Hungary and the Czech Republic, inland European states safely inside NATO, were as hawkish vis-à-vis Bagdad as the Baltics or Romania, whose security dilemmas – faced from outside NATO – were clearly more complicated. Though more recent neorealistic works also concede that systemic pressures are filtered through intervening domestic variables14, their analytical frameworks have not yet been applied to the Iraq War.

3. The constructivist argument: crusaders that were too pragmatic?

Given the limitations of the neo-realist argument, the constructivist “crusader” logic of analysis serves as a much-needed complement. Constructivists focus on variables such as ideas, values and, above all, norms, arguing that they can be an important causal force driving state behaviour.15 That non-material factors were at play in Central and East Europe in the run up to the strike against Saddam Hussein’s Ba’athist regime is a standard observation. But few works to date have gone beyond this simple act of recognition to attempt to assess the causal weight of these factors and theorize the type of influence that they wielded on foreign policy in the region in 2002-2003. This paper seeks to rectify that, arguing that a set of foreign policy norms conceptualized here as “Atlanticism” had traceable effects on the behavior of CEE elites during the Iraq crisis. The following section introduces Atlanticism as a normative framework. Norms are collective expectations about proper behavior for a given identity16, and as such, they can cajole or shame national governments into

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13 French president Jacques Chirac implied a French veto on enlargement, European Commission president Romano Prodi told the Poles that, “You can't entrust your purse to Europe and your security to America,” after Warsaw completed a $3.5bn contract for American fighter aircraft and enlargement commissioner Guenther Verheugen said that Central and East Europeans will learn a lesson from Iraq, “They will...not make the same mistakes again. They know only too well where their money’s coming from.” The Guardian, 2003. New Europe Gets Shock Lesson in Realpolitik. April 28.
adopting norm-conforming behavior to gain approval or avoid being stigmatized in the given community.

3.1. Atlanticism as a normative framework: the mission

Central and East European Atlanticism consists of foreign policy norms that originate in American “democratic globalism”. In the US, “democratic globalism” is understood as a kind of muscular Wilsonianism, minus the international institutions, that seeks to use US military supremacy to support US security interests and, simultaneously, democracy, around the world. In Central and Eastern Europe, the Atlanticist normative framework relies on a diluted version of democratic globalism: on the ontological level, the region’s doctrine relies on the founding norms of the liberal democratic community, which bind all of its members to defend and promote the Western developmental model. The norms include Isaiah Berlin’s notion of negative liberty and universal values such as human rights and democracy, non-appeasement in the face of autocracy, as well as the moral obligation to extend the zone of prosperity and stability to less successful states. On the theoretical level, Atlanticism rests upon an understanding of democracy and democracy promotion that is clearly sympathetic to hard Wilsonianism, the Manichean line of thought positing that tyranny is the new face of evil. As fighting tyranny equates to defending democracy, Central and East Europeans posit that if all else fails, democracy could and should be installed by deposing dictatorial regimes by force in reliance on ad-hoc “coalitions of the willing” rather than the medium of the United Nations. The region’s elites perceive democracy not as a “particularly rare and delicate plant that cannot be transplanted in alien soil”, but as a venture that can be undertaken whenever there is democratic craftsmanship and proper zeitgeist. In turn, Central and East Europeans’ understanding of democracy promotion is based on the notion of exporting Robert Dahl’s procedural minimum. Such - admittedly American - approach to democracy promotion differs starkly from the “developmental model” based on good governance that is championed by the rest of the European Union.

The normative influence of democratic globalism on CEE states’ foreign policy

17 The term was coined by one of Washington’s leading conservative thinkers, Charles Krauthammer, to conceptualize the ideational mycelium underpinning US foreign policy under G.W. Bush.
18 Fukuyama, Francis, 2004. The Neo-conservative Moment. The National Interest 76, p. 58; As Charles Krauthammer, a leading conservative thinker, put it: “We will support democracy everywhere, but we will commit blood and treasure only in places where there is strategic necessity – meaning, places central to the larger war against the existential enemy, the enemy that poses a global mortal threat to freedom.” Krauthammer, C., 2004. Democratic Realism: an American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World. The Annual Irving Kristol Lecture, American Enterprise Institute, Washington, D.C., USA
19 The conclusions about the normative framework are based on pointers given by interviewees.
doctrine is clearly visible in most strategic documents and public remarks of relevant CEE policymakers.\textsuperscript{25}

\textbf{3.2. Structural preconditions for the localization of Atlanticist norms: the conversion}

The US-inspired foreign policy norms resonated in Central and Eastern Europe ahead of the Iraq War because they tapped into existing, domestic ones. In the realm of foreign policy, norms typically stem from “state identities” or “strategic cultures”, which render certain types of foreign policy actions appropriate or not. Wendt and other constructivists claim state identities are “at once cognitive schemas that enable an actor to determine "who I am/we are" in a situation and positions in a social role structure of shared understandings and expectations”.\textsuperscript{26} In Central and East Europe, one particular aspect of state identity, based on a powerful historical narrative, significantly increased the resonance of Atlanticist foreign policy norms during the Iraq crisis.

The narrative speaks of defenseless small nations fatedly wedged between Germany and Russia. In the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, Central and Eastern Europeans suffered the oppression of both Nazi and Soviet totalitarian rule, which transformed the region’s identity in a way that made it particularly receptive to Atlanticism. First, four decades of one-party dictatorship translated into an unusually strong emphasis on human rights and political freedoms in foreign policy. Next, memories of the “betrayals” at Munich and Yalta, as well as of Cold-War era acquiescence in the form of Ostpolik or “detente”, taught Central and Eastern Europeans to distrust the “realpolitik” of major Western European powers. This historical narrative predisposes the US to be perceived by Central and Eastern Europeans as a benign hegemon: it was Woodrow Wilson who in the interwar period helped secure independent statehood for Czechoslovakia and others; likewise, Washington never formally recognized the Baltic States’ annexation by the Soviet Union in the 1940s. Moreover, Central and Eastern Europeans credit Ronald Reagan’s uncompromising stance vis-à-vis the USSR for winning the Cold War.\textsuperscript{27}

\textbf{3.2. Atlanticist norms and the agency of norm enterpreneurship: the zeal}

That Central Europe’s “unique historical experience” supplies the normative ingredient for the countries’ external conduct is a standard observation. What is seldom explored, however, are the mechanics through which the experience, and the


norms stemming from it, affect decision-making. There are a number of possible pathways, but in the case of Central and Eastern Europe, I argue that elite agency – in the form of “norm entrepreneurship” – constitutes the critical link between norms and “Atlanticist” foreign policy outcomes. Norm entrepreneurs engage in what Nadelmann conceptualized as moral proselytism:28; they use moral arguments and strategic constructions to persuade relevant audiences to redefine their interests or identities. The concept of “norm entrepreneurs” is similar to, but not identical with, the more widely used concept of “epistemic community”: norm entrepreneurs constitute “principle issue networks” that are bound not only by shared knowledge and understanding of cause-and-effect relationships (as “epistemic communities” tend to be), but also by a shared commitment to particular political, social and moral values.29 It is this accent on common values that marks the subtle distinction of norm entrepreneurs from epistemic communities.

The network of Central European norm entrepreneurs developed at the backdrop of substantial intellectual input and material support of influential American governmental and non-governmental institutions and individuals in the 1990s. Throughout the almost decade-long NATO enlargement process, CEE and US officials came to establish strong personal relationships. Moreover, organizations such as the Aspen Institute, German Marshall Fund, the Open Society Institute, the EastWest Institute or the National Endowment for Democracy as well as American universities such as Harvard, Brown, Boston or New York University sponsored hundreds of fellowship and scholarship programmes, conferences, seminars and workshops that aimed to promote ideational exchange between not only Westerners and Easterners, but also Easterners themselves. On top of institutions, prominent individuals from the United States took an active part in the articulation and, subsequently, the promotion of the Atlanticist normative framework among the Central European elite.30 These linkages provide interesting evidence of how foreign policy norms are shaped both from the outside and the inside: the US activities could work because they resonated in the domestic or, more broadly, regional setting.

Though undoubtedly country-specific, norm entrepreneurs in Central European states share certain social traits that enable us to identify them as a distinct elite group: a history of non-conformist behavior under the communist regime as well as an active role during the political and economic transformation of the early 1990s.31 The norm entrepreneurship enterprise was launched in the late 1990s by a community of ex-dissidents, intellectuals, civic activists, as well as junior foreign policy officials associated with them. The most prominent included, among others, Adam Michnik, Bronislaw Geremek, Alexander Kwasniewski, Adam Rotfeld or Radek Sikorski in Poland; Janos Martonyi, Miklos Haraszti, Arpad and Kinga Goncz or Matyas Eorsi in Hungary; Václav Havel, Karel Schwarzenberg and Alexander Vondra in the Czech

30 The most prominent included Madeleine Albright from the US State Department, Richard N.Perle from the American Enterprise Institute, Ronald Asmus from GMF, Bruce Jackson and Paige Reef from the US Committee of NATO, James Wolsey from the CIA, Anne Applebaum from the Washington Post, and many others.
Republic; Martin Bútora and Pavol Demeš in Slovakia; Valdas Adamkus and Vytautas Landsbergis in Lithuania; Sandra Kalniete or Vaira Vike-Freiberga in Latvia; or Lennart Meri, Mart Laar and Toomas Hendrik Ilves in Estonia. Even as the original norm entrepreneurs lost control over most areas of domestic day-to-day policy-making, they remained a formidable force at foreign and defense ministries, and to a lesser extent, presidential administrations and parliaments, well into the 2000s. Part of it can be explained by path dependent effects: for instance, younger officials recruited by post-revolutionary foreign ministers and presidents to replace the communist cadres later carried on the normative legacies even after their masters left the ministry or the formal political arena as such. Other early followers – many of whom spent time in the US for the purposes of mid-career education – became influential scholars, think-tank experts or civil society leaders.

The following section will assess the norm entrepreneurs’ leverage on foreign policy-making in the Czech Republic and Slovakia in the run up to the Iraq War. First, it will outline the macro-opportunity structure, weighing up the benefits and the costs of joining the “coalition of the willing” for both countries. Next, it will proceed to identify relevant norm entrepreneurs and their role in shaping policy discourse and policy output in the run up to the invasion. Ultimately, the paper argues that in the absence of clear security and material incentives, and in the face of medium to high costs in the international and domestic realms, the relative influence of norm entrepreneurs explains both why the Czechs and the Slovaks rallied behind the Americans and how – decisively or indecisively – they did so. The two countries do, of course, differ in the degree of the military/political support rendered to the US before and during the war. In the Czech Republic, the uneven leverage of norm entrepreneurs at the various stages of the foreign policy-making process resulted in an “ambiguous” foreign policy outcome: the Czech stance on Iraq was clearly supportive of the US de facto, but less so de iure. In Slovakia, the strong influence of norm entrepreneurs on foreign policy-making translated into a “clear” foreign policy outcome in Washington’s favour.

Figure 1. Czech Republic and Slovakia before the Iraqi invasion: an overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Incentives</th>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>Norm entrepreneurs</th>
<th>Foreign policy outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Somewhat strong influence on foreign policy</td>
<td>Somewhat solid support for the US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Strong influence on foreign policy</td>
<td>Solid support for the US</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. The Czech Republic: the hesitant reservist

In the months ahead of the American strike against the Ba’athists, the Czechs behaved like hesitant reservists: though they demonstrated a certain readiness to join the ranks
of America’s recruits, there was no great rush to get onto the battlefield. The Czech Republic had less to lose than Slovakia by taking part in the “coalition of the willing”: NATO member as well as EU accession frontrunner, it was in a comfortable position vis-a-vis both Washington and Brussels. In this sense, it is puzzling that its response to the US was so lukewarm. Yet, at the same time, it is important to note that the momentous buildup before the controversial venture in Iraq put the fragile Prague government, whose majority depended on a single vote, under conflicting pressures based on high expectations that it couldn’t hope to reconcile. Abroad, the Europeans trusted the dependable candidate country to “not fall out of line”, while the Americans expected the ally to fulfill its duty. At home, Czech politicians had good reason to fear “punishment” from the public, which was no less pacifist than its French counterpart: the resonant memory of the passive – yet pronounced – backlash against the 1999 NATO bombings of Slobodan Milosevic’s Serbia certainly didn’t invite the cabinet to risk a reprise that threatened to be even more hostile, given the US failed to secure the approval of the UN or NATO. From this angle, it is no surprise that the Czechs’ response to America’s hornblow was half-hearted. But then the question is, why, given the circumstances, did they not resort to lip-service?

The following section seeks to assess the explanatory power of norms and norm entrepreneurs to ascertain whether they enhance our understanding of the Czechs’ pattern – or lack thereof; the Czechs sent mixed messages – of foreign policy-making during the Iraq crisis. First, it considers the macro-opportunity structure, e.g. the security and material interests, as well as the international and domestic costs of the participation in the “coalition of the willing” that the Czechs had to assess in the run up to the invasion in 2002-2003. Next, it analyzes the micro-opportunity structure for “norm entrepreneurship”, identifying relevant members of the network of norm entrepreneurs in the circles of decision-makers and opinion-makers within the Czech Republic’s foreign policy-making community in 2002-2003. Finally, it attempts to weigh up their influence, by examining the policy discourse as well as policy output related to the Iraq War.

Figure 2. Attitudes of leading Czech political parties toward the Iraqi invasion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political party</th>
<th>Government/Opposition</th>
<th>Stance on Iraqi invasion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSSD (social democrats)</td>
<td>Government (senior)</td>
<td>Rather negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KDU-ČSL (Christian democrats)</td>
<td>Government (junior)</td>
<td>Affirmative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US-DEU (liberals)</td>
<td>Government (junior)</td>
<td>Affirmative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODS (civic democrats)</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>Affirmative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KSČM (communists)</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Geopolitically, the optimal foreign policy for the Czech Republic was, in fact, not to take sides on Iraq. or, in the not-so-subtle words of Jacques Chirac, to “shut up”. Most Czech policy-makers agreed that it was in the small country’s vital interest to prevent the deepening euro-atlantic rift over Iraq from weakening America’s commitment to NATO and thus compromising the security of the European continent. Indeed, one of the foreign and security policy priorities set by the coalition government led by social democrat Vladimír Špidla in 2002 was to, “strengthen the transatlantic bond as a backbone of the European security architecture.” The generally prickly opposition led by civic democrats was, for once, on board: as their then-chairman Mirek Topolánek, put it, they were ready to do what it took keep the US and the EU on the same boat. At the height of the Iraq crisis, President Václav Havel publicly expressed the Czechs’ grave concern over the squabble between their American and West European allies when he said: “It is neither in the interest of the world nor in the interest of the Czech Republic for the Alliance to start crumbling.”

As for other strategic motivations to join the “coalition of the willing”, the strive to defuse the “Axis of Evil” – or, simply put, terrorism as a “hard” security threat to the Czech Republic and her allies – was also an insufficient reason for the country’s backing of America’s mobilization against Iraq. True, concern over the mushrooming of terrorist networks and proliferation of WMDs among “hostile” regimes around the globe featured prominently in official Czech strategic documents drafted after the 9/11 attacks on the United States. It also set the tone of key programmatic documents of the leading opposition party ODS. Yet most Czech policy-makers – including the outspoken civic democrats, whose shadow defense minister Petr Nečas coined the alarm-inducing concept of “mega-terrorism” to describe terrorist activity supported by states or regimes suspected of possessing or developing WMDs – agreed that intelligence, police methods and international regimes were the preferred method of dealing with terrorism. Hence, it might seem that terrorism wasn’t a good-enough casus belli for the Czechs. Of course, the positions of the Czech government ahead of the invasion were carefully coordinated with UN Security Council resolutions, complete with their emphasis on WMDs. But confidence in the intelligence reports that Washington presented as compelling evidence of proliferation in Iraq was largely confined to norm enterpreneurs at the foreign ministry and right-wing media. Petr Uhl, a left-wing dissident turned journalist, recalls an earlier conversation as well as a TV debate with foreign minister Cyril Svoboda in April 2003: “He told me with

36 Kral 2008, Topolánek 2011
http://racek.vlada.cz/usneseni/usnweb.nsf/0/C02EEEF28290EB96C12571B6006F07B0
a serious expression on his face that he understood it perfectly and also that he had proof that Saddam Hussein had accumulated biological and even bacteriological weapons in Iraq.\textsuperscript{42} Former head of Czech foreign intelligence services and norm entrepreneur Oldřich Černý is also (still!) adamant that there were WMDs in Iraq: "Because of my former position, I knew [Saddam] used them against the Kurds."\textsuperscript{43} Norm entrepreneur Karel Kovanda, the Czech Republic’s ambassador to NATO at the time, likewise believed that the Ba’athists had WMDs, as did norm entrepreneur Luboš Palata, a leading journalist at the Lidové noviny, which was, perhaps, the most pro-Atlantic daily newspaper in the country in those days. "...I felt a bit like an idiot when it came to light that what [secretary of state] Powell showed at the UN wasn’t true. I honestly thought I could trust something presented at the UN by a country of America’s calibre;" Palata says today.\textsuperscript{44} But in the public debate on the course of action against the UN-defying Ba’athist regime, the argument built on the necessity of disarmament and Bagdad’s links to Al Quaeda was overshadowed by the argument based on the responsibility of the international community to overthrow Saddam Hussein’s blood-stained dictatorship.\textsuperscript{45} In other words, WMDs were a necessary, but not a sufficient, cause.

When it comes to material incentives – or, in other words, the anticipated “spoils of war“ – it is difficult to imagine that they would be behind the Czechs’ decision to join the “coalition of the willing“, given the uncertainty surrounding possible energy deals or post-war business contracts. It only became clear after the invasion, in April 2003, that the US had included the Czech Republic on the list of the countries that were to take part in post-war reconstruction. Even so, Czech companies could, at best, hope to act as co-suppliers of the most heavily involved American, British, Australian and Polish enterprises.\textsuperscript{46} As for US military aid, there were slim chances that it would soar as a result of the Czechs’ decision to go to Iraq. In 2003, Washington contributed a modest $11m and, referring to Czechs as “graduates”, unveiled plans for further cuts, to an estimated $8m in 2004.\textsuperscript{47} There was a potential gain for the Czechs in terms of trade: in the past, Czech exporters had extensive linkages with Iraqi companies – the Iraqis even call tractors “zetors“ (a Czech brand) – and they were interested in picking up where they left off, but the overall share of trade that the Czechs could hope for was negligible.\textsuperscript{48}

Arguably, the vague hope for security and material gains could not compensate for the clear risk of repercussions – both at home and abroad – for joining the “coalition


\textsuperscript{43} Černý, O., 2011. Interview with author. Prague, 27.2.

\textsuperscript{44} Palata, L., 2011. Interview with author. Prague, 20.2. Kovanda 2011

\textsuperscript{45} Kral&Pachta 2004


of the willing“. On the international level, it may seem that the boldest gamble pertained to the Czechs’ reputation in the EU. Though the country’s accession was a geopolitically and economically “inevitable”, the Czechs wanted to enter “in good standing“. By allowing themselves to be recruited by the Americans, they risked being dumped onto the same heap as the rest of Donald Rumsfeld’s imagined community, “new Europe“, be their support robust or symbolic. But Czech politicians knew they could beat the odds with those old EU members that “mattered”: most notably Germany. Foreign minister Cyril Svoboda insists that, “The accession process was too far along...and speaking in pragmatic terms, the Germans benefitted immensely from the enlargement because they invested so heavily in the new markets, including the Czech one. [Chancellor Gerhardt] Schroeder knew that we weren’t a Trojan horse; we were, at best, a Trojan cockhorse.” Hence, it seems that on the part of some Czech policy-makers, the perceived cost of alienating “old Europe” was not as high as one might have expected, given the media hype surrounding the intra-European row.

Domestic costs of participation in the war against Saddam Hussein were much higher. The Czech public was outright dismissive of the idea of military intervention. Moreover, the ruling Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) struggled to contain a powerful faction of peaceniks in the ranks of its own parliamentarians. Crucially, the Czech public was interested in offering a helping hand to the Americans and their allies; it merely wasn’t in favour of a military solution to the Iraqi crisis. In this respect, the Czechs’ attitude toward the war on terror is quite telling: in the aftermath of 9/11, 78% of them perceived the war on terror as a shared problem, but even so, they were more reluctant to support a military strike against any other country, even when provided with proof that it supports terrorism. At the end of 2002, a copper-bottomed 53% of them were opposed to any attack on the Ba'athists without the mandate of the UN Security Council. At the same time, in apparent recognition of the necessity for their country to stay engaged, more than half of them supported various non-military forms of participation in the US-led disarmament, regime change and reconstruction efforts: 54% Czechs were in favour of dispatching a staffed field hospital; 47% were in favour of deploying an NBC unit, and 30% were in favour of administrating an airliner including a crew NBC unit. Norm entrepreneur Zbyněk Pavlačík, head of public defence diplomacy organization Jagello 2000, close to deputy foreign minister Alexander Vondra and ODS chairman Mirek Topolánek, who both supported the US war effort says today: “The public wasn’t against overthrowing Saddam Hussein in principle, so we weren’t afraid of French-style demonstrations.“ Importantly, this means that norm entrepreneurs didn’t perceive the cost of “passive“ public discontent as too high. Some social democrats, including the prime minister, thought otherwise.

49 Topolánek 2011, Kovanda 2011
50 Špidla 2011
51 Svoboda, C. 2011
54 Pavlačík 2011
55 Špidla 2011
Apart from public discontent, another possible cost of getting “conscripted“ by the US to help “pacify“ the Ba’athists was compromised government stability: why risk the downfall of the government to support the Americans? In early 2003, as the transatlantic as well as intra-European squabble over the oncoming attack against Iraq were turning nasty, the senior partner in the Czech Republic’s fragile coalition government, the social democratic ČSSD, also descended into a deep internal crisis because of the Iraq issue. Centrist government officials headed by prime minister Vladimír Špidla – advocating “responsibility“ and “allied loyalty“ – kept clashing with a vocal faction of left-wing liberal internationalists and peaceniks led by chairman of the UN’s General Assembly Jan Kavan and chairman of the Czech parliament’s foreign affairs committee Vladimír Laštůvka. The disunity of the ČSSD – and the apparent inability of prime minister Špidla to deal with it – were sharply criticized by the opposition civic democrats: during a heated parliamentary debate, Atlanticist norm entrepreneur Petr Nečas even proposed – unsuccessfully – to connect the vote on the Czech military support for the anti-Ba’athist coalition to a confidence vote on the government on the grounds that it was damaging the Czech Republic’s reputation of reliable ally.56 ODS was not entirely off mark. Laštůvka’s public statements – either in the committee hearings, where he claimed that the Czech Republic was not on America’s list of the “willing“ or in the media, where he argued that the Czech position was closer to the French and German one57 – were sending mixed messages ahead of the Iraqi invasion. ČSSD’s “rebellion of the lefties “culminated in an “anti-war declaration”: publicized at the 31st party congress in March, it struck a chord with an overwhelming majority of ČSSD delegates – opposition votes weren’t even counted – which severely damaged the prime minister’s credibility just days after the first shots were fired in the Iraq War.58

The analysis of the macro- opportunity structure – e.g. possible gains and losses associated with participation in the “coalition of the willing“ – shows that material factors do not fully account for the complexities and subtleties of the Czechs’ behavior during the Iraq crisis. Hence, non-material factors, namely norms and norm entrepreneurs will be factored in to help explicate why the divided Czech political elite allowed itself to be recruited at all, given the reasonably high political risk of the attack on Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship.

In 2002-2003, the Czech network of Atlanticist norm entrepreneurs consisted of a strongly charged nucleus of “missionaries” and several loosely attached clouds of “converts”. In the internal hierarchy, by far the most influential “missionaries” – by the norm entrepreneurs’ own admission – were president Václav Havel, deputy foreign minister Alexander Vondra, US ambassador Martin Palouš, NATO ambassador Karel Kovanda and Kuwaiti ambassador Jana Hybášková.59 Norm entrepreneurs are recognizable by their stance on the Iraqi issue and/or by their political views more generally. Members of the network are able to identify other members of the network. The norm entrepreneurs’ goal in 2002-2003 was to officially

59 Observation based on multiple interviews.
engage their country in the US-led campaign seeking to overthrow the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, which was oppressing – and massacring – its own people.

The micro-opportunity structure for norm enterpreneurship in the Czech Republic was only somewhat favourable in the run up to the invasion of Iraq: this helps explain why the Czech Republic is a “mixed case”. Of course, norm enterpreneurs (both missionaries and converts), especially their “dovish” breed, were abundant among opinion-makers. In the media, they infiltrated editorial boards, news desks and comment divisions, good examples include Tomáš Klvaňa and Daniel Anýž (at both Hospodářské noviny and Mladá Fronta DNES) as well as the Atlanticist lot at Lidové noviny (Luboš Palata, Daniel Kaiser) and Respekt (Erik Tabery), a weekly newspaper owned by “missionary” Karel Schwarzenberg. In the non-governmental sector, they penetrated leading think-tanks and NGOs, including People in Need (chairman Tomáš Pojar, activist Šimon Pánek), Václav Havel’s Forum 2000 Foundation (Oldřich Černý, Jirí Pehe), the Euro-Atlantic Council, Ústav mezinárodních vztahu (director Jirí Šedivý) and the Prague Security Institute, interlinked with the foreign and defence ministry, respectively. In the academia, the Prague branch of America’s New York University was – quite tellingly – an important hub for Atlanticist norm enterpreneurs (dean Jirí Pehe). But crucially, norm enterpreneurs were also decision-makers in 2002-2003. Indeed, Atlanticist “hawks“ or “doves“ headed most institutions with structural power, e.g. those most relevant for the foreign policy-making process at the time: the presidency (Václav Havel), the foreign ministry (minister Cyril Svoboda and especially his deputy Alexander Vondra) and to a lesser extent, defence ministry (Jaroslav Tvrdík), the embassies in Brussels (NATO, Karel Kovanda), Washington (Martin Palouš) and Kuwait (which also covered Iraq, Jana Hybášková), as well as Senate chairmanship and vice-chairmanship for foreign affairs (Petr Pithart, Jan Ruml) and Chamber of Deputies chairmanship (Lubomír Zaorálek). Importantly for the Iraq crisis, norm enterpreneurs had little leverage on prime minister Vladimir Špidla. They also lost influence on the presidency in the period following the Letter of Eight, which Václav Havel signed in his last 72 hours in office. His successor Václav Klaus, not a norm enterpreneur, was a passionate critic of US unilateralism and was not afraid to say it out loud. This contributed to the overall ambiguity of the Czech stance on Iraq.
Thanks to norm entrepreneurs in high positions, official policy discourse buzzed with zeal and echoed with norms, especially those related to solidarity with allies and moral responsibility to protect human rights and spread democracy. The “hawks” were in the forefront: by far the fieriest “Atlanticist missionary” – a “war instigator” for some – was deputy foreign minister Alexandr Vondra: rumours had it that it was him, rather than minister Cyril Svoboda, who effectively “ran” the pro-American foreign ministry. During the difficult months ahead of the invasion, Vondra repeatedly urged his colleagues – and the Czech people – to recognize brutal and terrorist-affiliated regimes such as Iraq as a “deadly threat” to the “over-riding values” of freedom, democracy and human rights that define our civilization. The enthusiasm vibrating in Vondra’s passionate “sermons” was hard to match. Yet other Czech policy-makers delivered the same message in slightly calmer voices: President Havel directly appealed to the notion of Pax Americana and labeled the Iraq invasion as an “ethical war”, motivated by principles and values binding the international community to heed the rights of man – as opposed to the rights of states – above all else. Gabriela Dlouhá, who was Havel’s close aide at the time, recalls that, “It was never about finding WMDs; it was about deposing a criminal dictator that was decimating his own people.” NATO ambassador Karel Kovanda also defended the

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62 Rihackova 2005  

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decision to go to Iraq from a humanitarian perspective: overthrowing a beast like Saddam Hussein in the name of freedom and democracy was “praiseworthy”, he says today.\textsuperscript{64}

The normative rationale that Czech policy-makers used to explain their actions at home and abroad was based on the analogy between the plight of the oppressed Iraqi people and the totalitarian subjugation of the Czech nation under the Soviet yoke. Three weeks before the strike against the Ba’athists, US ambassador Palouš published an article in the Washington Post, dismissing accusations that Central and East Europeans were acting as “servants and lackeys” of the United States. He claimed that the reason for the region’s support for democratization efforts of the world’s leading superpower stems from its recent experience of “dangerous and devastating totalitarian rule”.\textsuperscript{65} “It would be inaccurate to say that realpolitik wasn’t a part of the equation;” he concedes seven years on. “But realpolitik always gives you a set of options: it is how you look at them that determines the outcome. Without the lense of our values, we would have decided otherwise.” In addition to the memory of the country’s own past, the recent wars in the Balkans provided a cognitive shortcut to Atlanticist norms for some Czech norm entrepreneurs. “Like many other politicians of his time, Havel remembered only too vividly what the Europeans’ inability to decide on intervention soon enough had allowed to happen during the Balkan wars;,”\textsuperscript{66} says his aide Dlouhá of the decision to support the Americans. The same goes for Alexandr Vondra, who used the example of the war in Bosnia to contrast the impotence of the Europeans to the robustness of the Americans who, he claimed, had both the vision and the fibre to look past their backyard to places where basic freedoms were trampled on. „The carnage in Vukovar and Srebrenica were the price for the success at Maastricht,” he wrote in November 2002.\textsuperscript{67}

The unofficial policy discourse on Iraq followed a similar pattern. Right-wing daily newspapers such as Lidové noviny or MF Dnes – also the weekly magazine Respekt – keenly published op-eds and interviews with norm entrepreneurs advocating intervention in Iraq though they also gave room to those that were more skeptical. Commentator Martin Weiss describe the atmosphere in the media as “go-getting”: “We were all in favour. But we had to be objective,” says Weiss.\textsuperscript{68} Among think-tanks and NGOs, the world-renowned People in Need was particularly active in translating the normative commitment to freedom and democracy into public remarks that aimed to sway undecided policy-makers and – though chances of that happening were slim – the indignant public. Paradoxically, activists were often unsure if they agreed with Washington’s course of action, but norms compelled them to defend it anyway. “At the time, I was consistently saying: Saddam Hussein has to be removed, though I had doubts about the timing as well as the execution of the operation,” says activist Šimon Pánek – the man Václav Havel said he wished would succeed him – from People in Need.\textsuperscript{69} Finally, among intellectuals, there was a tendency – quite typical for democratic globalists – to portray the Iraq crisis as an “either/or” critical juncture that would determine the fate of the Western civilization. “When the Bush

\textsuperscript{64} Kovanda 2011  
\textsuperscript{66} Dlouhá, G., 2011. Interview with author. Prague, 4.3.  
\textsuperscript{68} Weiss, M., 2011. Interview with author. Prague, 25.3.  
\textsuperscript{69} Pánek, Š., 2011. Interview with author. Prague, 4.3.  

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administration speaks about democratization of Islamist countries, we shouldn’t simply dismiss it and say that it all boils down to oil anyway... It can well be about our being and non-being. [Over-throwing Saddam Hussein] and ‘expediting history’ is the only way of avoiding global catastrophe,“ Jiri Pehe wrote in early 2003. Today, he nods his head with slightly curved lips: “There are a lot of wilsonians – if not neo-cons – in our midst that definitely don’t think that Fukuyama was a utopist because he heralded the end of human history.” Considering unofficial public discourse, it is important to note that norms may have actually been the deal-breaker in the near-pacifist Czech foreign policy-making community: these “dovish” norm entrepreneurs did watch Americans’ tug of war with a good deal of skepticism. Yet ultimately, norms prevailed: in an illustrated quote, activist Marek Svboda from People in Need put it this way, “The UN mandate is, by far, the most bullet-proof sanctification of such a course of action, but it is difficult to reach. When you are faced with what is practically genocide, unilateral action is excusable.”

The foreign policy output reflected the uneven leverage of norm entrepreneurs at different stages of the decision-making process. On 17 January, the Czech parliament, where norm entrepreneurs were scarce, made an important gesture when it offered its soil and airspace to allied forces involved in the invasion. But it also ruled that Prague would not render military support to the “coalition of the willing” unless Washington secured the UN’s seal of approval: in other words, another resolution. On 29 January, president Havel signed the Letter of Eight, largely thanks to the quick reaction of and some diligent hustling by two leading norm entrepreneurs, US ambassador Poulos and deputy foreign minister Vondra. The Clausewitz-quoting prime minister Špidla – not a “convert” to Atlanticist foreign policy norms – was asked to sign first, since all of the other signatories were prime ministers, but he refused. The day before the letter was released, lobbyist Bruce Jackson called Palouš’ embassy and urged him to secure Havel’s support. Palouš alarmed Vondra, who called Havel at a theatre during intermission: the president was spending his last days in office at a state visit in Bratislava. It was Vondra who convinced Havel to sign the letter and by return confirmed the president’s approval to 10 Downing Street, where the signatures were collected. “[Havel] overstepped his constitutional powers. I would have tried him for treason,” says prime minister Špidla. Had the president’s signature been demanded 72 hours later, it wouldn’t have been delivered: Havel’s successor Václav Klaus, again, not a “convert” to Atlanticist foreign policy norms, firmly rejected the idea of “forceful democratization”, of which he said that for him, it is something “from another planet”. Shortly after taking

71 Pehe 2011
72 Svboda, M., 2011. Interview with author. 22.2.
74 Špidla 2011
76 Dlouhá 2011, Pánek 2011, Počuch 2011
77 Špidla 2011
office, he had a medialized row with US ambassador Craig Stapleton: though it took place at the Prague Castle, behind closed doors, Klaus allegedly said that he didn’t believe that Iraq had WMDs and found it likely that the Bush administration made the story up. Though Klaus was surrounded by norm entrepreneurs – even his spokesperson was Tomáš Klvaňa, who resigned within months because of “personal differences on the idea of what the job entailed” – he didn’t become a convert. Importantly, there were many others – even in the ranks of norm entrepreneurs, for instance Petr Pithart from the Senate – who didn’t believe in the existence of WMDs, but decided to throw their support behind the Americans anyway, not because Iraq was a threat, but because they had faith in shared norms. When the war commenced in Iraq, president Klaus expressed his sentiments in a statement where he said that he regretted the Americans’ decision. He also said that contrary to what the international community might think, Czech Republic didn’t belong to the “coalition of the willing”. On the eve of the invasion on 19 March, the government, largely thanks to the pressure of “missionaries”, formulated a “balanced” position stating that de iure the Czechs would remain outside the “coalition of the willing”: the Czech army wasn’t going to contribute to the military operations unless a new UN mandate came into force. The ministry of foreign affairs – namely its Department for Security, headed by Vondra – originally drafted a proposal that was much more pro-war, inasmuch as it authorized the use of force “under resolution 1441“, which, according to this interpretation, sufficed as a multilateral framework for the invasion. But Vondra and minister Svoboda encountered strong resistance from ČSSD ministers, who, in turn, came up with an anti-war version of the government’s statement. Finally, a compromise was reached amidst threats of resignation from Vondra – and largely thanks to passionate argumentation by foreign minister Svoboda – for whom the social democrats’ take wasn’t acceptable. It is thus possible to say that these two norm entrepreneurs averted the Czech Republic’s official “abstention” from the US-led “coalition of the willing”. Due to sustained pressure of defense minister Tvrdík, also a convert to Atlanticist norms, the 357-member unit of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons experts – deployed in Kuwait as part of operation “Enduring Freedom“ – got permission to enter Iraq territory, though only if there was reasonable suspicion that the Ba’athists were using WMDs. The Czech troops entered Iraq on 1 April, as entourage of the 7th field hospital that the government agreed to send to Basra under the new UN resolution 1472, and upon sustained lobbying of Kuwaiti ambassador and norm entrepreneur Jana Hybášková.

Due to uneven leverage of norm entrepreneurs on foreign policy-making, the Czech Republic wasn’t an ally de iure, but it was an ally de facto. Officially, the ambiguous foreign policy output indicates that “missionaries” did sway some decision-makers –

81 Klaus, V., 2003. Declaration of the president to the beginning of the attack on Iraq. Press release. 20.3.
83 Svoboda, C. 2011, Špidla 2011
for instance, foreign and defense ministers Svoboda and Tvrdík were “converts” to Atlanticist norms – but they failed to persuade others, most notably president Klaus and prime minister Špidla. The result was a cacophony of mixed messages from various members of the ruling elite. However, unofficially, the Czechs maintained close links with the American allies throughout the crisis. “Missionaries” Alexander Vondra and Jana Hybášková as well as “convert” Jaroslav Tvrdík should take much of the credit. In his communication, with the HQ of operations “Enduring Freedom” and “Iraqi Freedom” in Tampa, Florida, defense minister Tvrdík managed to maintain the Czech Republic’s image of “loyal” ally, while Kuwaiti ambassador Hybášková helped create an impression of an “active ally” through her flurry of activity on the ground: throughout the Iraqi crisis, she communicated messages of support to American diplomats in Kuwait; after the invasion, she was instrumental in the launch of the Czech Republic’s humanitarian and development aid in post-war Iraq. As for Vondra, that the Czechs’ part-taking in the Iraq venture was “his doing” is virtually undisputed.

5. Slovakia: the enthusiastic recruit

In the run up to the Iraqi invasion, the Slovaks acted like overly enthusiastic recruits, readily springing to attention and, some observers pointed out, even marching to the front line to show its willingness to fight in America’s “just war”. Interestingly, it had, perhaps, most to lose by joining the “coalition of the willing”: as a small country still outside both NATO and the EU, it was in an unenviably awkward position of double asymmetry. Once dubbed a “black hole in the middle of Europe” by president Bill Clinton’s secretary of state, the Czech-born Madeleine Albright and excluded from the first round of both NATO and EU enlargement due to extensive abuse of democratic standards, the country had only recently reinvented itself as pro-democracy activist and pro-market reformer: on the one hand, it could not easily get away with displeasing Washington, but by “stirring waters”, it also ran the risk of upsetting Brussels by reviving the reputation for trouble-making it had so ardently sought to shed along with its former strong-man, Vladimír Mečiar, who was ousted in the crucial election of 1998. The ruling government also faced barricades on the home front: above all, a disgruntled public whose pacifist sentiments were clearly at odds with the intentions of the Bush administration, hell-bent at the time on over-throwing Saddam Hussein’s regime. The following section traces the steps leading up to Bratislava’s decision to support Washington’s offensive in Iraq: what role – if any – did norms and norm entrepreneurs play? First, it considers the macro-opportunity structure, e.g. the security and material interests, as well as the international and domestic costs of the participation in the “coalition of the willing” that the Slovaks had to assess in the run up to the invasion in 2002-2003. Next, it analyzes the micro-opportunity structure for “norm entrepreneurship”, identifying relevant members of the network of norm entrepreneurs in the circles of decision-makers and opinion-makers within Slovakia’s foreign policy-making community in 2002-2003. Finally, it attempts to weigh up their influence, by examining the policy discourse as well as

86 The Economist, 2010. Slovakia’s election: another direction. 20.5.
policy output related to the Iraq War.

Figure 4. Attitudes of leading Slovak political parties toward the Iraqi invasion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political party</th>
<th>Government/Opposition</th>
<th>Stance on Iraqi invasion</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SDKÚ (Christian democrats)</td>
<td>Government (senior)</td>
<td>Affirmative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KDH (Christian democrats)</td>
<td>Government (junior)</td>
<td>Rather negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMK (party of the ethnic Hungarian minority)</td>
<td>Government (junior)</td>
<td>Affirmative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smer (social democrats)</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HZDS (V.Mečiar’s party)</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>Affirmative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Geopolitically, Washington’s increasing impatience with Bagdad caught the Slovaks halfway to NATO: Bratislava had to do what it took to remain on track.\(^{87}\) In mid-2002, the prevailing sentiment was that to close the deal with NATO, it was enough “not to make a big mistake”.\(^{88}\) Since the ouster of Vladimir Mečiar, whose erratic leadership steered the country in international isolation in 1994-1998, Slovakia had made amends in Washington by behaving like a model ally: the foreign policy rationale of the rainbow coalition led by Mikuláš Dzurinda was to “…act like a full member of the Alliance“.\(^{89}\) The Slovaks’ courting of the world’s sole superpower marked the recognition that the road to both NATO and the EU “led through Washington”\(^ {90}\). Incidentally, Prime Minister Dzurinda adopted this foreign policy course after a 1999 dinner discussion with Karel Schwarzenberg and Martin Bútora, former aides to Václav Havel and prominent “norm entrepreneurs”, says former dissident turned editor-in-chief of Slovakia’s leading daily newspaper SME, Milan Šimečka, who also sat at the dinner table.\(^ {91}\) Hence, by mid-2002, when the debate on Iraq was in full swing, Slovakia had successfully reinstated itself in the international arena, but – NATO’s Prague summit where the invitation to Slovakia and six other post-communist states was to be extended had not yet taken place – some Slovak opinion-makers and decision-makers were of the opinion that their country was “running out of credentials“: the country’s economic achievements or the contribution to the Kosovo campaign in 1999\(^{92}\) seemed outdated at a time when the talk of the town was global terrorism. “American senators will, above all, want to know how we can help them in future operations against terrorists,“ Tomáš Valášek, Slovakia’s leading security specialist, wrote at the time.\(^ {93}\)

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\(^{89}\) Transformacia NATO a bezpečnostna a obranna politika SR., CSS, p. 86; Dzurinda first said it in 1998; then he repeated it after the Washington summit in 1999.


\(^{92}\) During NATO’s campaign against Slobodan Milosevic, Slovakia opened its airspace to American fighter jets.

\(^{93}\) Valášek, T., 2003. Uloha nových členov v bezpečnostnej politike EÚ. *Listy SFPA* vol. 8 (March-April): 5-6
Containment of international terrorism and non-proliferation were also strategic imperatives for Slovakia’s involvement in Iraq. Yet rather than a threat to Slovakia, Al Quaeda and Saddam Hussein’s WMDs were perceived as as a threat to the “West”, of which Slovakia was soon to become part.\textsuperscript{94} Martin Bútora, ambassador to Washington at the time, puts it this way: “[Terrorism] was a real danger. Our allies had already been affected by it. They were also convinced that WMDs were involved, and we believed them. If there is a danger that WMDs will be used against civilians or the Western world as such, you have a responsibility to step in.”\textsuperscript{95} Needless to say, the Bush administration had taken pains to overwhelm CEE allies with information about the Ba’athist regime’s supposed stash of WMDs and alleged connections to terrorist groups in the run up to the Iraqi invasion. When state secretary Colin Powell was giving one of his final speeches in the UN – at the session of the UN Security Council on 5 February, 2003 – most US-based Central and East European diplomats were in full agreement with his main points.\textsuperscript{96} Back in Slovakia, warnings against terrorism resonated in countless public remarks of Slovak officials in the run up to the Iraqi invasion\textsuperscript{97}, though their authenticity in discourse as well as their influence on foreign policy-making must not be overstated: at least some of them were used to appease the antiwar public. Finally, when it comes to material benefits – in other words, a reasonable rate of return – of the part-taking in the “coalition of the willing”, the Slovaks could not, and did not, hope to extract too many: energy deals and visa waivers were not discussed, which, for instance, wasn’t the case with the Poles.\textsuperscript{98} Nor could Slovakia hope for more military aid from the US. In 2002, Washington made a modest contribution of $7.75m and in 2003, it threw in a slightly higher sum of $8m (though it originally planned for $1m more), with budget justification reports for Congress citing ”Slovakia’s continued progress in transition” as a reason for scrapping bits of the funding.\textsuperscript{99} In fact, the aid was frozen mid-year in 2003 because of Bratislava’s decision to cooperate with the ICC by not granting US citizens immunity from the court’s powers.\textsuperscript{100} As for post-war reconstruction of Iraq, another potential source of material gains, it wasn’t clear at the time whether– and if so, to what extent – Slovak companies would be involved. As late as December 2003, Slovakia’s Investment and Development Agency SARIO was merely speculating that Slovaks could potentially win contracts worth 2-5% of the $15.63bn earmarked by the US for restoration projects in Iraq.\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{94} Vaščka, M., 2011. Interview with author. Bratislava, 4.1.
\textsuperscript{95} Bútora, M., 2011. Interview with author. Bratislava, 4.2.
\textsuperscript{96} The Centre for Strategic International Studies, 2003. Commentary on Secretary Powell’s statement on Iraq, 5.2., \url{http://www.csis.org/features/comment_powell.pdf}; Bútora 2011
\textsuperscript{101} The Slovak Spectator, 2003. Slovaks in Iraq’s reconstruction. 22.12.
The modest security and economic incentives for joining the “coalition of the willing” were arguably off-set by the relatively high costs that Slovakia’s government faced on both the international and domestic levels. Internationally, the main concern was the near-complete EU accession process: the prevailing sentiment among Slovak foreign policy-makers amidst the flurry of thinly veiled threats from Brussels and, above all, Paris, was the fear that a “wrong decision” on Iraq could still derail the country’s pending European integration. For the post-Mečiar establishment, this was a “first”: the twin goals of NATO and EU entry that had coexisted under the same foreign policy brand – the “return to the West” – for half a decade suddenly had to be decoupled. But ultimately, the choice wasn’t between NATO and the EU, says Slovakia’s leading political scientist Grigorij Mesežnikov of the Bratislava-based Institute for Public Affairs (IVO), an unaffiliated think-tank that, nevertheless, could not deny certain links to prime minister Mikuláš Dzurinda’s party SDKÚ at the time of the Iraq crisis. “What made the difference was that other EU members – such as Denmark, Great Britain, Italy, Spain and Portugal – supported the Bush administration. [The cabinet] realized it was was a rift within the EU, not between the EU and NATO.” Domestically, the Slovak government was also faced with an interesting paradox: by agreeing to partake in the “coalition of the willing” and thus demonstrating Slovakia’s loyalty to the US, it also risked compromising NATO entry, which was contingent upon the success of an upcoming national referendum. In stark contrast to the elite’s pro-American stance, the attitude of the Slovak public towards operation “Iraqi Freedom” was that of open hostility: in March 2003, 60.3% Slovaks were against the participation of Slovak military forces in the campaign against Saddam Hussein. This reflected badly on public support for NATO accession, which steadily decreased in the run up to the Iraq War, hitting a low of 43% at the time of the invasion. At the same time, opponents of NATO entry came to constitute more than 50% of the Slovak public. Yet since there was still time before the referendum, and since the government didn’t have to worry about re-election – the electoral cycle had just begun – the domestic costs of joining the “coalition of the willing” were perceived as less high.

The exhaustive analysis of the macro-opportunity structure – or, more simply, the Slovaks’ cost-benefit calculation of fighting back to back with the Americans – has served to show that since material factors do not offer a satisfactory explanation of Bratislava’s decision to support Washington, non-material ones must have been at play. Norms and norm entrepreneurs help us understand why the Slovak political elite allowed itself to be recruited – and readily, at that – to a war of few spoils and many controversies.

In 2002-2003, the Slovak network of Atlanticist norm entrepreneurs – not unlike its Czech counterpart – consisted of a core of “missionaries” and a jacket of “converts”.

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102 Bátor 2011
103 Martin Bátor, IVO’s co-founder and president, was persuaded by prime minister Dzurinda and foreign minister Kukan to take the post of US ambassador.
107 Šimečka 2011
Within the community, by far the most influential “missionaries” – by the norm entrepreneurs’ own admission – were US ambassador Martin Bútora, civil society leader Pavol Demeš, deputy defense minister Rastislav Káčer and diplomats Milan Ježovica and Miroslav Wlachovský. Norm entrepreneurs in Slovakia are also recognizable by their stance on the Iraqi issue and/or by their political views more generally. Members of the network are able to identify other members of the network. The norm entrepreneurs’ goal in 2002-2003 was to topple Saddam Hussein’s oppressive regime.

The micro-opportunity structure for norm entrepreneurship in Slovakia was very favourable in the run up to the Iraq crisis. Norm entrepreneurs were well represented among leading opinion-makers: civil society leaders such as director of the German Marshall Fund’s office in Bratislava Pavol Demeš, academics such as head of the political science department at the Comenius University Sofia Szomolányi or journalists such as editor in chief of the leading daily newspaper SME Milan Šimečka were all in favour of George W. Bush’s strike against Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship. But crucially, norm entrepreneurs also wielded influence in the community of decision-makers. By 2002, they had penetrated almost all institutions with structural power, e.g. those most relevant for the foreign policy-making process at the time: the prime minister’s office, the foreign and defence ministries and the embassies in Brussels (NATO) and Washington. The norm entrepreneurs’ capacity to shape policy stemmed from an informal – though initially uneasy – alliance with senior figures in the ruling coalition in the aftermath of 1998. The interlink between the community of norm entrepreneurs and the official foreign policy establishment was personified in Martin Bútora, a Velvet revolution leader and OK98 campaign organizer, recruited by prime minister Dzurinda and foreign minister Kukan in 1999 to be Slovakia’s ambassador in Washington. By 2002, Bútora’s embassy had become a powerful institution in framing Slovakia’s foreign policy, enjoying close personnel links to the prime minister’s office in Bratislava. In a telling snapshot of the institutional power balance, František Šebej, a MP for Mr Dzurinda’s party SDKÚ in 1998-2002 as well as a norm entrepreneur, recalls that: “Even the policy towards Brussels went via Washington.” Thanks to Bútora, norm entrepreneurs gained access to the apex of executive power: two deputies from the Washington embassy, career diplomat Milan Ježovica and former think-tanker Miroslav Wlachovský, alternated as chief foreign policy advisors to prime minister Dzurinda. Apart from the prime minister’s office, “missionaries” also managed to muster support for norms at the foreign and defense ministries, swaying deputy foreign minister Ivan Korčok, defence minister Ivan Šimko and deputy defence minister Rastislav Káčer as well as NATO ambassadors Peter Burian and Igor Slobodník. Interestingly, also communist-trained politicians such as president Rudolf Schuster, foreign minister Eduard Kukan and chairman of the Slovak parliament’s committee for foreign affairs Peter Weiss succumbed to the pressure of norm entrepreneurs.

108 Observation based on multiple interviews.
As a result, official policy discourse in the run-up to the Iraq war was imbued with rhetoric centred around norms such as solidarity, non-compliance in the face of autocracy and defence of freedom and democracy. “Our part of the political elite read the situation in Iraq Bush-style,” says Peter Weiss. Centre stage stood the highest-ranking “convert” to Atlanticist norms, prime minister Dzurinda himself. Pavol Demeš and other norm entrepreneurs, including the prime minister’s adviser Miroslav Vlachovsky, insist that Dzurinda’s conviction – underlined by avowed statements and grand gestures – was genuine: “He invested in it both politically and personally. It started with the marathon that he ran in New York in the aftermath of 9/11. He wanted to physically demonstrate his sympathy and readiness to contribute.” In the run-up to the invasion of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, Dzurinda’s public remarks echoed with messianism – some Slovak observers now respectfully joke that they have earned him the epithet “more pro-Bush than [President G.W.] Bush” – built on a Manichean distinction between the avatars of “good” and “evil”, democracy and autocracy, that is typical for democratic globalists and/or neo-conservatives: “Saddam Hussein’s regime is dangerous…it has links to Al Quaeda. This inter-connection is evil, and it threatens by evil of colossal proportions.” To convince the Slovak public of the strategic necessity to disarm Iraq by force, he also roared: “Our
democratic civilization is targeted by [the Ba’athists’] contacts and weapons…it doesn’t matter if we are American, French or Slovak.”

The prime minister’s speech in front of the Slovak parliament ahead of the crucial vote that would sanction the dispatch of a Slovak military unit to Iraq also resonated with a deep regard for democratic values: “This ballot will be an expression of our ability to act as a free country able to help those that are not free and of our capacity to decide responsibly as a country that can protect the shared democratic values that it professes.”

Next to the (over)-zealous prime minister, the rest of the government naturally seemed a bit “apathetic”, but it got the message across nevertheless. There were those that used norms instrumentally. The communist-trained foreign minister Eduard Kukan – a graduate of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, class of ’64 – claimed adherence to Atlanticist norms in a string of statements about the US (“paramount ally”), Iraq and need for preservation of world peace: even by force (“if all else fails”) and via ad hoc coalitions (“in spite of the disapproval of some European members of NATO”).

Yet, as his speech ahead of the vote on Slovakia’s military contribution to the Iraq campaign indicates, his principal concern must have been Slovakia’s entry to NATO. But there were also those government officials, who, by their own admission, internalized Atlanticist norms: missionaries Milan Ježovica and Miroslav Wlachovský and converts Ivan Korčok, Igor Slobodník and Rastislav Káčer. The latter, deputy defence minister at the time, is adamant that the Slovaks joined the “coalition of the willing” to stand up for values, not get into NATO: “That was a done deal after the Prague summit [in November 2002].” Though most “missionaries” were from the political right, “converts” could be found on both sides of the political spectrum. President Schuster remains a showcase for the stunning metamorphosis from a communist apparatchik to defender of democratic values: when the statue of Saddam Hussein was knocked down in central Bagdad, he cried “tears of joy”. At the time, he was in the Oval Office with his American counterpart, who later described the emotional moment in his memoirs.

Devoid of political constraints, unofficial policy discourse on Iraq was, naturally, more directional: norms, in their dovish and hawkish incarnations, appeared with greater frequency and emphasis. Conservative norm enterpreneurs around the marginal Civic Conservative Party (OKS) and the weekly newspaper Týždeň were particularly vocal in their condemnation of the “enemies of freedom”: one of their rank and file, intellectual and politician Peter Osuský, says today that he wanted to see Saddam “hang”. Conservative-liberal norm enterpreneurs huddled around ambassador Bútora’s think-tank IVO and foreign affairs think-tank SFPA – an elongated arm of the foreign ministry – expressed their commitment to norms with

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116 Mesezník 2008
117 Press Agency of the Slovak Republic (TASR), 2003. 7.2.
119 Press Agency of the Slovak Republic (TASR), 2003. February 7
121 Osuský, P., 2011. Interview with author. Bratislava, 16.1.. Editor in chief of Týždeň Štefan Hrib later wrote that the war in Iraq “showed the enemies of freedom that we still have strength”.
more caution, but, nevertheless, most of them defended the invasion as “just” and “legitimate”.122

The foreign policy output reflected the normative discourse inasmuch Atlanticist norm entrepreneurs mustered enough political influence to sway the foreign policy agenda in the desired direction. At the Prague summit in November 2002, the Slovak delegation – thanks, in part, to sustained lobbying of Ivan Korčok123 – signed the first international statement on the Iraqi crisis, put forward by seven applicant countries and three member states. It stipulated that these states were ready to join an international coalition with the aim of disarming Iraq if Bagdad failed to meet the conditions of Resolution No. 1441. On January 29, 2003, three days after US ambassador Ronald Weiser officially requested Slovakia’s participation in the “coalition of the willing”, the Slovak cabinet responded with a resounding “yes” and opened its airspace to the US Air Force and international coalition forces. On January 30, 2003, prime minister Dzurinda approached his Spanish counterpart Jose Maria Aznar, expressing interest in signing the “Letter of Eight”.124 On February 6, the Slovak parliament approved the deployment of a nuclear, biological and chemical protection unit of 75 men to the crisis area, conditional upon a new resolution by the UN Security Council in accordance with a UN mandate.125 Finally, on 5 February 2002, the stamp of the Bratislava government appeared on the letter of the Vilnius group that caused so much irritation in Paris. The idea itself originated on “Slovak” soil: it first came up at a dinner at Martin Bútora’s embassy, attended by Bruce Jackson and most Vilnius Group ambassadors. “This was a product of the Slovaks and the Latvians,” Jackson later said of the letter.126 Operation “Iraqi Freedom” commenced on 21 March. Slovakia sent altogether 716 troops – 4 of which were killed – to Iraq before it pulled out in 2007.127 Overall, just how important norm entrepreneurs were in 2002-2003 can be illustrated by a simple counterfactual: the leader of then-opposition party Smer Robert Fico, who would later become the prime minister who pulled Slovakia’s troops out of Iraq, says that had it been him in Mikuláš Dzurinda’s chair, he would never have agreed to go to war.128

6. Conclusion

Only some converts are prone to missionary zeal. In 2002-2003, elite networks of Atlanticist “norm entrepreneurs” in the Czech Republic and Slovakia helped orchestrate their countries’ participation in a “crusade” of few spoils and too many controversies: the Iraq War. The support for the US-led venture varied depending on

123 Samson 2011, Korčok 2011
125 Until then, the unit could only operate from Kuwait, as the original Resolution No.1441 permitted. Ivan Korčok later said that Slovakia would support US military intervention even without a new UN resolution, Slovak News Agency (SITA), 2003. March 13
126 Agence France Presse, 2003. February 20
the ability of “missionaries” – core members of the network – to sway “converts” in institutions with structural power: presidencies, prime ministerial offices, ministries, embassies, etc. Overall, the capability of norm entrepreneurs to articulate, advocate and implement activist foreign policy agendas – which mainstream neo-realist IR theories wouldn’t expect in post-authoritarian “small states” – poses at least three intriguing questions that could and should inspire future study: on the power of norms to shape and potentially transform state interests, on the role of anti-authoritarian and transition legacies in foreign policy, and on the power of specific elite configurations to act upon agendas that may not enjoy societal support.