

THESIS COLLECTION

Selján Péter

**The Role of Foreign Intervention in the Balance of Power System
of the Greater Middle East:**

The Case of Iraq

Doctoral dissertation

Supervisors:

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Professor

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**Institute for International, Political and Regional Studies
Department of International Relations**

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1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR THE TOPIC

1.1. Armed conflicts and balance of power

Foreign military intervention seems one of the ultimate instruments of forceful foreign policy and is becoming a determining phenomenon of world politics in the 21st century. Especially in the Middle East, where since the beginning of the so-called Arab Spring one external military intervention follows another. We can see this happening in some countries struggling with civil wars and armed conflicts like Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. The empirical literature on foreign military intervention has made considerable progress in the last few decades identifying the causes and consequences of military intervention, but we still have much to learn about the subject. Where and when states use armed forces is frequently interpreted in terms of international norms. However, there is serious disagreement as to whether the norms governing the use of force are primarily due to international law or balance of power.

According to realist thinking, where and when a state uses armed forces is primarily affected by the opportunities and obstacles afforded by the recognized distribution of power among states in the international system. From a liberal perspective, state behavior on the international stage now appears to challenge the validity of the classical balance of power theory. It seems that now the process of globalization, increasing institutionalism, economic interdependence and other factors are transforming world politics and international relations. However, non-state actors are ready to challenge the international order built around the power of nation-states, and, while states are often reluctant to cooperate with one another, they are standing side-by-side against the threat of international terrorism. Meanwhile, the preponderant power of the United States has failed to generate a balancing behavior. Therefore, many are skeptical whether the traditional notions of balance of power might still apply in contemporary international relations. The bulk of the criticism of the theory has focused on its methodological and empirical weaknesses, and on the failure of its proponents to predict the timing in which balance of power occurs. However, realists think that balance of power dynamics still operate in some way, and that hard balancing continues at the regional level, particularly where protracted conflicts are, while soft balancing and asymmetric balancing are occurring almost everywhere.

The history of the Middle East region is dominated by protracted armed conflicts, rivalries, civil wars, and foreign interventions. Foreign powers are traditionally highly involved in the

Middle East because of its natural resources, its strategic location, their alliances in the region and their various security and economic interests. There is a constant power competition in the region, which can be balanced by the intervention of great powers to prevent the formation of a regional hegemony. States also tend to bandwagon with a global hegemon that regularly intervenes in the region, which can create a situation where revisionist states and non-state actors are likely to be kept contained. In this sense, a regional system is neither totally anarchic, nor fully autonomous because of the influence of great powers, which means it depends on the great powers of the international arena. In other words, only when great powers disengage from a region is an autonomous regional system able to form, and until then, balancing at the regional level takes place primarily through great-power alliances with local actors.

This research project is an attempt to fill the gap in the scientific literature through looking for the link between foreign intervention and changes in a balance of power system or the change of the system itself. The aim of this study is to find out, whether a foreign military intervention can induce significant shifts in a regional balance of power system. In addition, this research includes questions related to the impact of interventions on alliance formation, threat perception, and non-state actor activities. To identify the relationship between the impact of the interventions and shifts in the balance of power, this study provides an overview of the foreign military interventions in Iraq since the end of the Cold War, traces the changes in the national capabilities and the strategic landscape, and highlights the connections.

1.2. Explanation of Choice

In recent years there seems to be a growing interest in the changing balance of power of the region, however, little research has been dedicated to the theory's applicability at the regional level, especially in the Middle East. The competitive relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia today seem to reflect the operation of the balance of power theory, although the ongoing transformation of the region towards a new regional political order is mostly driven by the Arab Spring and the protracted civil wars.

The Middle East is a geographical region that has been of great importance in history.¹ Due to its strategic location, it is a natural land bridge, connecting the continents of Asia, Africa, and

¹ The Middle East has always been a very vague term, in which countries were added and removed depending on the context. Our research area as the Greater Middle East and North Africa includes countries from West-Africa to India

Europe. It was the site of some of the world's earliest civilizations and the birthplace of three world religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In recent decades, its huge oil reserves have made the Middle East region more important than ever before. The significance of this region is clear when one deals with the questions of war, peace, power, and influence that have traditionally been at the center of the discipline of International Relations since conflicts in developing countries of the Middle East continue unabated. The current regional trends point to the increasing importance of the Middle East in matters of international security as well. To better understand the causes of conflicts in the Middle East, and to find possible solutions for them, we must first have a better understanding of the region itself.

The centrally located Iraq, which occupies the historical region of Mesopotamia (often referred to as the cradle of civilization), has been a battleground since the US-led military intervention ousted Saddam Hussein in 2003. The mainly Shia-led governments that have held power since have struggled to stabilize the country amid the growing sectarian violence. Iraq has the world's fifth-largest reserves of crude oil, however, the country's unsettled security environment made efforts futile to rebuild its shattered economy.

The United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (UNUCPR) published an occasional paper in March 2017, which provided insights into major trends in violent conflict and analyzed the implications of these trends for international actors engaged in conflict prevention and management. According to their data, major civil wars – those with over 1,000 battle deaths per year and involving at least one state actor – declined by about 72% from 1990-2003. This trend, however, has been dramatically reversed over the past decade, with the number of major civil wars since then rising from 4 to 11 in 2015. The last time the number of major civil wars was higher was in 1992 (Einsiedel 2017).²

Minor civil wars were also on the rise, standing at 38 in 2015, which was the highest number since 1994.³ It must be noted that the sharp increase since 2014 has been largely driven by the expansion of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and its affiliates, which were involved

(including Iran, Israel, Turkey, Afghanistan, and Pakistan). In this regard, we use the term of Middle East not as a merely geographical term to describe a region that lies between Asia and Africa, but more as a political one, as was introduced by George W. Bush in 2004.

² The eleven civil wars include Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria (2x), Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Syria (2x), Ukraine, Yemen.

³ An armed conflict qualifies as minor civil war if results in at least 25 battle deaths per year, and if there is at least one state actor involved.

in conflicts in 3 countries in 2014 and 12 in 2015 (Melander, Pettersson & Themnér 2016). With the rise of intrastate conflict, the number of battle deaths has also grown significantly. From 2011 to 2015, there has been a six-fold increase in battle deaths in major civil wars, which in 2015 stood at 90,000, making 2014 and 2015 the deadliest years on the battlefield since the end of the Cold War. The rise in battle deaths since 2011 was due to two major factors: the lethality of conflicts in the Middle East, Syria in particular, and the expansion of jihadist groups, such as ISIS, al-Qaeda and their affiliates. However, this data fails to capture “indirect deaths”, which are caused by the consequences of conflict and significantly surpass the number of battle deaths (Einsiedel 2017; Krause 2016:113-126).

It must be noted that the causes of civil war tend to be multiple and complex, and the specific dynamics of each case are unique. However, earlier studies highlighted the central importance of weak institutions as the key structural cause that create the conditions for conflict and violence, particularly in combination with political and economic exclusion. Quantitative studies indicate that countries that have experienced regime change, sudden changes in the degree of democracy, or recent independence are especially conflict prone. Moreover, civil wars tend to exacerbate the conditions that helped cause them in the first place. This may explain the finding of the 2011 World Development Report that 90% of the civil wars since 2000 occurred in states that had experienced a civil war in the previous 30 years (World Bank 2011).

The nature of conflicts is also changing, as armed conflicts are becoming more intractable and less conducive to political settlement. Three developments can be named which significantly complicate the endeavors of international actors in conflict management, such as: (1) the impact of organized crime as a major stress factor; (2) the increasing internationalization of civil war, that is the increase in military involvement of external actors in civil wars which renders conflicts more difficult to solve; and (3) the growing presence of jihadist groups in modern conflict settings (Einsiedel 2017:4).

In regard of the impact of organized crime, it is worth noting that during the Cold War, many civil wars were fueled by superpower support to rebel forces in “third world” proxy conflicts. As external state support decreased, armed non-state groups increasingly engaged in the shadow economy. This trend continues even today, and the growing ability of armed groups and other non-state actors to tap into global illicit markets, and their deepening involvement in criminal activities are dramatically affecting conflict dynamics. Furthermore, the significant rise of internationalized

civil wars is another trend of recent years that makes conflict even more intractable. In 1991, 4% of conflicts were internationalized, that is other states intervened militarily on one or both sides. By 2015, this number had multiplied ten-fold to 40%. This is a concerning trend because research shows that when external interventions in domestic conflicts do not lead to a rapid military victory, they are likely to make internal conflicts deadlier and longer. The significant rise in jihadist violence in modern conflict settings is another phenomenon of particular concern. Since 2010, there has been a substantial rise in the number of Salafi-jihadist fighters. Accompanying this trend has been an almost ten-fold increase since 2003 in the number of fatalities from terrorist attacks. It must be emphasized that only four groups were responsible for 74% of all these deaths: ISIS, Boko Haram, al-Qaeda, and the Taliban. And the sharp rise in deaths has been due to a large number of fatalities in a handful of conflict-affected countries: Iraq, Nigeria, and Afghanistan (Einsiedel 2017:4-6).

The theory of balance of power is regularly mentioned during discussions of the worrying trends of armed conflict and the internationalized civil wars in the Middle East. But despite being a frequently mentioned and cited theory, it is still a controversial, widely debated and variously defined realist concept. The “new balance of power of the Middle East” appears often even in the daily press in different contexts, which shows the growing popularity of the balance of power concept in recent years. But the term “balance of power” is still far from being free from theoretical confusion. With all this in mind, the question arises for researchers of IR as to whether the theory of the balance of power can help to understand the latest political developments in the region. Even if the theory may no longer be applicable or may be just of limited application, it may still be subject to further development.

2. THE METHODS USED

2.1. Research problem and hypotheses

This exploratory research project attempts to answer the following questions related to foreign interventions, undertaking both quantitative and qualitative means:

1. Can a foreign military intervention induce notable shifts in the regional balance of power through the redistribution of the national capabilities among the states in the system during the postwar period?
 - a) Can a foreign military intervention directly or indirectly change a balance of power system through its impact on alliance formation, tightening or loosening existing alignments among the actors?
 - b) Is there any relationship between foreign military interventions and changes in the threat perception of a state or statesman?
 - c) Does foreign military intervention lead to increasing non-state actor activities in the target-country due to the decreasing national capabilities of that state?

The main hypothesis and the sub-hypotheses of this research are as follows:

- H1. A large-scale foreign military intervention can lead to decreased levels of national capabilities for the target country due to increasing conflict intensity, which can result in changes of the relative power status of other states in the regional balance of power system.
 - a) A 'balance of power intervention' or 'balancing intervention' can have an effect on regional alliance formation, changing the tightness of existing alliances or pave the way for a new one.
 - b) Foreign military interventions can influence the threat perceptions of ruling elites.
 - c) Decreased levels of national capabilities lead to a more anarchical system, which can lead to the rise of non-state actors within the target country and in its proximity.

To answer these questions, first and foremost, two pieces of information are required. On the one hand, foreign military intervention must be defined. On the other hand, changes in the balance of power system must be identified, presuming that the theory itself still applies to the region. We consider a foreign military intervention as a political use of military force in an active attempt to influence the behavior of other actors. Some events did not involve the hostile introduction of ground troops in large numbers, and some are rather obscure. A more inclusive definition of foreign military intervention can be applied to gain a more thorough understanding of the subject. In this research project we review cases of foreign intervention targeting Iraq from

1990 until 2014, using the International Military Intervention (Kisangani & Pickering 2008), and the Military Intervention by Powerful States (Sullivan & Koch 2011) data sets.

A fairly reliable measurement of national power is also needed to answer these questions. The ‘control over resources’ (COR) approach is the most widely used and accepted one for measuring and studying power and national capabilities (Singer & Small 1966; Modelski 1974). The most frequently used indicators of national power are military expenditures, the size of armed forces, the Gross National Product (GNP), and population. The COR approach assumes that control over resources can be converted into control over actors or events. However, it is not always certain that actors will be able to use resources which are nominally under their control, and it is not always clear what types of resources should be included in a general measure of power. Additionally, the focus on national power precludes the consideration of the role of non-state actors in determining the outcome of conflicts (Hart 1976).

One way to measure national power is to apply the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC)⁴ dataset from 1816 to 2012, which is a statistical measure of national power created by David Singer for the Correlates of War project in 1963 (Singer, Bremer & Stuckey 1972:19-48; Singer 1988:115-132). It uses an average of percentages of world totals in six different components, which represent demographic, economic, and military strength.⁵ More recent studies tend to use this score, because it better represents state power than GDP or GNP solely. Another complementary source of data to measure anarchic patterns of states is the Fragile States Index by The Fund for Peace, which is based on a conflict assessment framework – known as “CAST” – that was developed by FFP for assessing the vulnerability of states to collapse.⁶ For a comparative

⁴ The Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) score aggregates the six individual measured components of national material capabilities into a single value per state-year. The CINC reflects an average of a state’s share of the system total of each element of capabilities in each year, weighting each component equally. In doing so, the CINC will always range between 0 and 1. “0.0” would indicate that a state had 0% of the total capabilities present in the system in that year, while “1.0” would indicate that the state had 100% of the capabilities in a given year (and by definition that every other state had exactly 0% capabilities in that year.) See also: The Correlates of War Project, National Material Capabilities (v5.0), <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/national-material-capabilities>.

⁵ These components are total population, urban population, iron and steel production, primary energy consumption, military expenditure, and military personnel ratios.

⁶ The CAST framework was designed to measure this vulnerability in pre-conflict, active conflict and post-conflict situations. The methodology uses both qualitative and quantitative indicators, relies on public source data, and produces quantifiable results. Twelve conflict risk indicators are used to measure the condition of a state at any given moment. The indicators provide a snapshot in time that can be measured against other snapshots in a time series to determine whether conditions are improving or worsening. See more at <http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/>.

analysis the data of the indices can be examined with the help of graphs, while changes in the regional balance of power due to external intervention can be evaluated by process tracing.

There are two options for identifying changes in national capabilities. One way is to take the CINC score received by the target nation in two years prior to the year of the intervention and compare it to the rating received in the two years after the year of intervention. The post-intervention rating can be subtracted from the pre-intervention score to obtain a final rating. The larger this number, the greater the decrease in the share of national capabilities while a negative result would mean a positive change, that is an increase in national capabilities. However, this method has its own limits. The result requires careful additional evaluation, since a decrease in national capabilities not necessarily means that a change in the balance of power occurred as well. The data cannot be evaluated correctly without a context, which can help to put everything into a perspective, and in this regard, graphs can make the interpretation much easier for us.

According to Organski and Kugler (1980:16), “the major mechanism through which the balance of power system is maintained is the making and unmaking of alliances”. Moreover, they note that in the balance of power model, changes are the results of alliances.⁷ Thus, in addition to the evaluation of interventions and changes in national capabilities, alliance formation processes also must be investigated. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita (1975) provides indicators which are measures of changes in alliance behavior. According to his argumentation, if alliances tighten, and interaction among alliance groups decreases, such behavior may be taken as an indication that statesman perceive the environment as presenting a threat to the security and/or the power position of their countries and are preparing to fight. On the other hand, the loosening of alliances can be taken as an indication that similar elites have judged the danger to have passed or to have been a false alarm, and peace should continue. From this perspective, wars are still possible even when alliances loosen, but the frequency of their occurrence should be low, and they should be presumed to be the result of miscalculation (Organski & Kugler 1980:39; De Mesquita 1975:207).

The degree of tightness or discreteness in the alliance system is not as important as the shifts in these arrangements. Increasing tightness makes clearer to leaders which states are likely to fight with them and which against them, and thus makes possible more accurate estimations of

⁷ “The rule is simple: a nation can influence the balance of power in its own favor by allying itself with other nations and by adding to its own capabilities those of its allies. Other means are available if a nation wishes to improve its power position. [...] But the least costly and most certain way for a nation to improve its power position is to combine its strength with that of friends or to break the coalitions of adversaries.” (Organski & Kugler 1980:16; 24).

what resources will be available to them and their enemies if a war breaks out between them. In this sense, there is a link between threat perception, the tightness of alliances, and the decision whether to fight, hence alliance behavior is taken to measure threat. Organski and Kugler offer a method for measuring alliance behavior, which was developed from an original scale built from four types of alliance: defense pacts, mutual nonaggression pacts, ententes, and no alliances at all. Using the tightness and looseness of alliances, they developed a simple eight-point scale that reflects both degree of commitment and the direction of change in commitment (Organski & Kugler 1980:38-41).

According to Organski and Kugler, a positive position on the scale means that there has been a change in the tightness of alliances between the two actors, and that each of the actors has increased its alliance commitments with other nations with whom the second nation in the pair also has alliances. On the other hand, a position on the negative end of the scale means a cutting of ties with the other state and with its allies. They coded point on the scale stretching from nonaligned to positive as nonhostile, and all of the points stretching from the center to the negative pole as hostile. The “indifferent” position is for nations which do not have and never have had any ties with any nation in the system. Therefore, this position got situated outside the scale, and it can be occupied only by nations outside the system (Organski & Kugler 1980:41-42).

2.2. Mixed-Method Design

This study follows a mixed-method research design, combining a descriptive design (a case study) with a quantitative (correlational) element to formulate a holistic interpretative framework. The mixed-method design can utilize the existing data, while at the same time it can test a grounded theory approach to describe and explain the phenomenon under study. Mixed-method designs are usually applied to investigate complex research problems, since this way the researcher is not constrained by the application of only one method. As a matter of fact, with this approach, the strengths of one method can be used to overcome the weakness of another. Moreover, it may generate new insights that a single methodological approach would not reveal.

The exploratory case study on Iraq attempts to provide an in-depth analysis of the research problem, applying some statistical methods and a comprehensive comparative inquiry. The case study method can help to evaluate whether the balance of power theory actually applies to the contemporary regional system. This element of the research design makes also possible to

understand this complex issue through a detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of interventions and their relationships. In addition, a case study allows to apply various methodologies and to rely on a variety of sources to investigate the given research problem, while it can extend existing knowledge or confirm earlier research findings. To examine real-life situations and provide basis for the application of concepts and theories, a case study method seems adequate.

2.3. Pragmatist Research Paradigm

In the academic discipline of IR, there are two kinds of fundamental controversies. There are debates over substantive issues, which are also embodying conceptual ones, and debates over methodological issues. The latter became prominent in the 1950s and 1960s, during the ‘behavioral revolution’ in American political science, when behavioralists argued that IR should be placed on a foundation of ‘scientific’ analysis. Behavioralists believe that social science is not so different from natural science, that interdisciplinary studies among the social sciences can be conducted, and the same analytical methods can be applied in both areas. They argue that the individual person is the basic unit of analysis, politics is only one aspect of the behavior of people, and political behavior can be examined at the personal level, the social level, and the cultural level. In the focus of the study of political behavior is the roles of people in social structures, and the central social structure is the political system itself. This behavioral approach seeks to transform political science into social science by applying the scientific standards of natural sciences, with the aim of collecting data which can lead to scientific explanation. This requires scientific methodology and attitude, in order to make possible to provide empirical explanations of political behavior. A scientific study of this kind requires precise research designs, methodology and analysis to produce verifiable empirical propositions (Jackson & Sørensen 2010:279).

One of the earliest examples of this behavioral approach was Kaplan’s ‘system analysis’ to distinguish between different kinds of international state systems: the ‘balance of power’ system; the loose and the tight bipolar systems, the universal international system, the hierarchical international system, and the Unit Veto International System. Kaplan argues that states act in a ‘balance of power’ system, which is characterized by different patterns of behavior, and actions of states that lead to certain patterns of alignment in the system which the theory can predict (Kaplan

1957:21-53).⁸ Kaplan's system analysis later proved to be wrong in many ways. His 'balance of power' system received its harshest scientific critique from Waltz (1979:50-59). However, the logic of empirical analysis later became widespread among scholars who are seeking objective knowledge. This academic orientation later has come to be known as positivism, and its methodology is still widely criticized (Jackson & Sørensen 2010:278-281).

There is also the traditional, or classical methodological approach of IR, which does not have an explicit methodology, it does not frame hypotheses and test them, or apply a formal apparatus of research. It does not even gather and organize data. It views the international system as highly complicated, thus difficult to understand, and it rejects the view that there can be one correct scientific analysis of international politics. According to the classical approach, science is a matter of experience in the practice of scholarship, not a matter of methods, models, and statistics. It is a matter of becoming a careful and critical observer of international relations. One of the great defenders of this approach is Hedley Bull, who argued that the activity of research basically involves thinking on a topic, and the most important thing in carrying out research is not scientific methodology, it is knowledge of substance.⁹ Classical scholars call attention to the limitations of IR scholarship, which they see as an imperfect field of study which cannot give definitive answers to complex questions of international relations. In sum, these two approaches hold different conceptions of the world – ontology – and fundamentally different ideas of the best way to gain knowledge of the world – epistemology (Jackson & Sørensen 2010:284).

Positivist methodology is the legacy of behavioralism, as it views the international world as having regularities and patterns that can be explained if the correct methodology is properly applied. It argues that observation and experience are keys to constructing and judging scientific theories, which should consist of empirical propositions that are logically related and can be tested against evidence to confirm or refute the whole theory (Nicholson in: Smith, Booth & Zalewski 1996:128-146). According to Waltz, whether a theory is a positivist empirical theory can be

⁸ According to Kaplan: States 1.) Act to increase capabilities but negotiate rather than fight. 2.) Fight rather than pass up an opportunity to increase capabilities. 3.) Stop fighting rather than eliminate an essential national actor. 4.) Act to oppose any coalition or single actor which tends to assume a position of preponderance with respect to the rest of the system. 5.) Act to constrain actors who subscribe to supranational organizing principles. 6.) Permit defeated or constrained essential national actors to re-enter the system as acceptable role partners ... Treat all essential actors as acceptable role partners (Kaplan 1957:21-53).

⁹ "Thinking is also research' was a saying adopted by him. The principal stages in this process were listing the central questions, defining the relevant concepts and drawing distinctions, and examining the principal considerations." (Holbraad in: Miller & Vincent 1990:193).

determined by a test involving six questions, which indicate the conditions that IR theories should be able to meet to count as scientific or empirical. Waltz notes that these conditions may be difficult to meet in practice since the world is not an isolated laboratory where variables can be excluded or controlled (Waltz 1979:13; Jackson & Sørensen 2010:284-285).

Neorealism is often seen as the essence of positivism and behavioralism in International Relations, however, positivism is broader than neorealism. Nicholson (1996) argues that there are two general research programs of positivism in IR: a program of quantitative research, and a program of rationale choice analysis, such as game theory. Since positivists are seeking to establish verifiable empirical generalizations, they are inclined to employ quantification. On the other hand, the approach of the rational choice theory is based on logic, rather than strictly quantitative measures (Jackson & Sørensen 2010:286).

In International Relations post-positivism rejects the scientific methods of positivism, arguing that the empiricist observation of natural sciences cannot be applied to the social sciences, since it is the people who construct and constitute the international world, hence it is a human arrangement. One of the several approaches of post-positivist methodologies is critical theory, according to which the international system is a specific social construction of the powerful states, and as such it can be changed. Critical theorists believe that knowledge cannot be neutral because it is produced from the social perspective of the analyst, thus it is obviously biased. One leading critical theorist, Robert Cox (1981) argued that effectively all IR theories are biased.¹⁰ However, if that is the case, we will not be able to tell whether a theory is good or not in academic terms, because we are all biased. Another post-positivist approach, the postmodernist thinking similarly argues that social science is not neutral, and there is no such thing as object reality or truth, since everything that human beings are involved in is subjective (Jackson & Sørensen 2010:289; Smith 1997:181).

Considering this fundamental issue of methodological divide in IR, we believe it is better to avoid the choice between extremes of the positivist and the post-positivist methodology. We proceed on a middle ground instead. This exploratory research project aims for results accomplished by employing both a positivist approach with a quantitative method (scores and indices) and a post-positivist/constructivist approach with a qualitative method (case study).

¹⁰ According to Robert Cox: "Theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose." (1981:128)

Combining these approaches and methods, this study falls into the category of mixed-methods, following a pragmatist paradigm.

3. RESULTS OF THE DISSERTATION

The main goal of this project was to analyze the changes in the balance of power of the Middle East applying the concept of foreign intervention and the theory of the balance of power as analytical tools. In order to be able to take on such a complicated task, we designed a framework based on the possible applicability of the balance of power theory in the contemporary Middle East, while we also noted the known and anticipated limits of the design. Influence, power, the use of force, foreign intervention, threat perception, and alliance formation are key interconnected concepts of International Relations. Using the balance of power theory as an analytical concept can help to evaluate and put into context international events and processes in world politics.

The balance of power theory can still be applied as an analytical tool. However, it must be noted that as uncertainty grows, and the number of variables increases in the international system it can only provide limited results. Calculations based on the balance of power theory have become much more complicated since the end of the bipolar order of the Cold War, which was relatively easy in contrast of the case of today's "nonpolar" world and the "disordered" Middle East region. Therefore, in case of an unstable security environment, great caution must be exercised when applying the balance of power theory – especially in the Middle East –, and it must be kept in mind that uncertainties can make one's calculations even irrelevant or transient.

Foreign military interventions are key since the use of regular military forces of one state within the territory of another country represents a convention-breaking action in order to influence the conflict process in that country. In addition, unlike proxy war, where one state uses proxies in indirect engagements in another country, a direct foreign military intervention shows the strongest commitment of the intervener to that particular alliance or political goal. Moreover, regarding the methodological challenges of measuring power in the international system, the use of force, that is foreign military intervention is also an indicator of an actor's power in the international arena, or as Moul (1989) put it, it is the fighting power itself that needs to be measured. In other words, in addition to the components of national capabilities, other qualitative factors are relevant in determining power. The CINC score itself is inadequate for measuring changes in the balance of power, however, as a quantitative methodological tool it makes possible to monitor processes and

to perform comparative analyzes. Moreover, a proxy-type indirect involvement tends to have only a limited influence over a given actor, and this influence is not equal to the power manifested in the direct use of military force. This is a significant qualitative difference, which is important to keep in mind even when applying a broader definition of intervention.

Our main research question was whether a foreign military intervention can induce notable shifts in the regional balance of power through the redistribution of the national capabilities among states? In case of large-scale military interventions, their negative impact regarding the national capabilities can be easily identified, while earlier studies have concluded already that during a post-war period the redistribution of capabilities occurs (Ikenberry 2001). Depending on its extent, an external intervention can be system-wide, which can change the whole system, or it can be an in-system intervention with limited impact that does not change the system itself. This differentiation can be made in case of Iraq, where the 2003 invasion as a regime-changing military intervention can be considered a balance-of-power system-altering military action due to the removal of one of the main actors of the system. However, the military interventions in Iraq cannot be assessed in isolation as unrelated events, as each has played a role in shaping the changing strategic environment.

Our additional research questions regarding the impact of foreign military intervention on threat perception, alliance formation, and the activities of non-state actors proved to be key in understanding the context of the regional strategic landscape. Based on previous studies and as a partial result of this research project, the relationship between foreign interventions and threat perception can be reasonably assumed, while as Walt argued, threat perception is a key driver of alliance formation. Thus, it can be stated that the relative changes of national capabilities can influence the threat perceptions of other actors in the international system, while perceived or real threats are important drivers of alliance formation processes. In addition, the story of the Islamic State provides enough evidence for us to say that due to decreasing national capabilities and increasing anarchic patterns, non-state actor activity can increase as well, as the target state cannot maintain its monopoly on the legitimate use of violence.

Iraq has seen the most foreign military intervention by powerful states in the last three decades, while its central location alone would be enough to be considered a state of great importance in the region. Thus, if we want to understand the current security challenges of the

Middle East and the changes of the strategic environment in the region, Iraq is the starting point, because what happened there can help a lot to place everything into context for an observer.

The example of Iraq is a good illustration of how external intervention can influence the development of regional threat perceptions, and thus alliance formation as well. The Gulf War took place after the Iraq-Iran war weakened Saddam Hussein's position during the 1980s and the United States did not prevent him from invading Kuwait in 1990. He acted as a rational actor and should not necessarily have foreseen a coalition forming against him to restore the status quo and thus the regional balance of power. Although Saddam Hussein remained in power after the Gulf War, and Iraq could maintain some of its military strength, the state's serious economic problems also remained. Moreover, the imposition of sanctions and two no-fly zones caused further significant damage to both the economy and state institutions during the 1990s.

The Gulf War was the first major military operation by the United States after the end of the Cold War, which is an example of an internationally supported military intervention to restore the status quo and the regional balance of power. The 2003 invasion of Iraq can be seen as a continuation of the Gulf War, as the US was effectively in a low-intensity conflict with Iraq from 1991 through 2003. During this period, economic sanctions began to take effect, state institutions started to decline, hyperinflation set in, and poverty rates increased. In contrast of the Gulf War, the 2003 Iraq War marked a major deviation from the international norms, as it was the first preemptive war in a century, which later turned out to be waged on the basis of false intelligence reports. However, this unnecessary war had wide implications and serious regional consequences, as the removal of Saddam Hussein was followed by a long occupation, a violent insurgency, and a challenging state building process.

We can classify the examined external military interventions according to their role from a regional balance of power perspective. The Gulf War can be considered as a balancing intervention, in the sense that it was carried out to restore the status quo and the regional balance of power, with international support. In contrast, the invasion of Iraq in 2003 can be seen more as a disruptive intervention, as it upset the regional order by breaking with international norms. The international response against the Islamic State in Iraq can also be seen as an asymmetric balancing intervention, as it was carried out with the consent of the Iraqi government by external actors in the name of the fight against terrorism, that is, against a non-state actor.

Iraq has been in focus of US national security policy since decades, and today, this centrally located state can be considered as the main battleground for regional influence against Iran, as it long has been the most important arena for Iranian foreign policy as well. The 2003 invasion of Iraq contributed to the change of the regional balance of power, which shifted to non-Arab states, namely to the United States, Turkey, and Iran. Due to these changes in the balance of power, Iran had strategic gains, and was able to increase its regional influence. However, it must be noted that Iran was very active in the region even before the Iraq War, and increasing its influence was not without any obstacles. The strategic winner of the external military interventions in Iraq was Iran, which assessed the situation as a rational regional player and increased its influence in the region as such. In line with the changing threat perceptions, there has been a corresponding rapprochement between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, without a comprehensive security sector reform, threats rooted in state failure will persist in Iraq. Non-state actors and terrorist organizations will be able to find the opportunity to operate, while the Iraqi state remains vulnerable to the meddling of external actors.

In addition, further conclusions can be drawn from this research project. It is worth noting that changes in the balance of power or in the formation of alliances will not necessarily be proportional to the changes in national capabilities due to external intervention. Moreover, even a small-scale external intervention can lead to significant changes in the balance of power, through its impact on threat perception.

The use of the CINC score system may necessitate the differentiation of external interventions according to whether they may reduce (negative) or increase (positive) national capabilities. However, solely applying the CINC score as a quantitative methodological tool is inadequate for distinguishing between positive and negative interventions in the target state. This is because even a large-scale military intervention on the side of the government does not necessarily lead to a notable increase in the state's national capabilities, while it is a clear signal of alliance tightness, which can have a significant impact on threat perceptions, and that can induce significant changes in the balance of power.

The operation of the balance of power can be presumed if there is no preponderance of power in the international or regional system. In case of hegemony, eventually a balancing alliance must form against the hegemon, or an emerging dissatisfied power must question the status quo, and make an attempt to change it, according to the power transition theory. The theory of the

balance of power may become irrelevant in the event of the emergence of hegemony, and especially in the absence of an actor questioning the status quo. In this case, the international order described by the theory cannot prevail, the system is organized hierarchically, and its operation is ensured by the power of the hegemon.

The increase in the number of internationalized armed conflicts is partly due to the destabilization of the regional order as some states in the system have collapsed or become failed states, at least in the sense of the central government in these states not functioning properly. As a result, both uncertainty and the number of variables increased, while the deteriorating security environment is forcing the rational actors to act, as the realist thinking would suggest. However, this process fosters the emergence of a “pre-Westphalian” hybrid regional system in which state sovereignty is not complete since the state does not have a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. Thus, external, and non-state actors become the actual determinants of the regional order. But, in this pre-Westphalian order the balance of power theory must be applied with caution. Since the realist school considers states to be the main actors in the international system, it goes without saying that the classical theory of the balance of power disregards non-state actors.

The regional order can be shaped by large-scale external military interventions through the redistribution of power capabilities, at least among democracies, as Ikenberry (2001) put it earlier. In case of partly democratic or authoritarian regimes, while the redistribution of power capabilities can take place in a similar way, establishing and maintaining a regional order becomes harder.

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