



NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**TURNING THE EAGLE'S HEAD: POLISH
NATIONHOOD AND THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR**

by

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September 2019

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC 20503.				
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)	2. REPORT DATE September 2019	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's thesis		
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE TURNING THE EAGLE'S HEAD: POLISH NATIONHOOD AND THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR			5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) Timothy G. Borden				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A			10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.				
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.			12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE A	
13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words) This work explores the response to the global war on terror during the last decade in the nation of Poland. Specifically, it examines how visions of the country's nationhood have been used by the leaders of the country's dominant political party, Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, or PiS), in conjunction with real or imagined terrorist events to gain power and further its political agenda. This effort is examined in the context of one particular element of Polish nationhood, Sarmatism, which formed in the 1600s and reemerged in the first decade of the 2000s as a potent cultural force. Basing its view of modern terrorism through a Sarmatian lens and responding with Sarmatian rhetoric has proved particularly useful to PiS; not only did it gain power during this decade, but it remains the dominant political force in the country. This ascendance of PiS has transformed both terrorist and non-terrorist events into perceived existential threats to the country, threats that the party has exploited for electoral success. But this success has also transformed Poland's position in its two most important international alliances, the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. As a result, any effective foreign policy responses directed at Poland must account for the Sarmatian values embedded in its nationhood and manipulated by PiS in the political arena.				
14. SUBJECT TERMS terrorism, European Union, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Poland, Eastern Europe, Central Europe, Cold War, Russia, nationhood, nationalism, Law and Justice Party, xenophobia, isolationism, authoritarianism, homophobia, right-wing extremism, white power, Sarmatism, Visegrad Group			15. NUMBER OF PAGES 81	
			16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	

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AND THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES
(HOMELAND SECURITY AND DEFENSE)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
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ABSTRACT

This work explores the response to the global war on terror during the last decade in the nation of Poland. Specifically, it examines how visions of the country's nationhood have been used by the leaders of the country's dominant political party, Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, or PiS), in conjunction with real or imagined terrorist events to gain power and further its political agenda. This effort is examined in the context of one particular element of Polish nationhood, Sarmatism, which formed in the 1600s and reemerged in the first decade of the 2000s as a potent cultural force. Basing its view of modern terrorism through a Sarmatian lens and responding with Sarmatian rhetoric has proved particularly useful to PiS; not only did it gain power during this decade, but it remains the dominant political force in the country. This ascendance of PiS has transformed both terrorist and non-terrorist events into perceived existential threats to the country, threats that the party has exploited for electoral success. But this success has also transformed Poland's position in its two most important international alliances, the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. As a result, any effective foreign policy responses directed at Poland must account for the Sarmatian values embedded in its nationhood and manipulated by PiS in the political arena.

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GLOSSARY

chłopi	peasantry
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)
polanie	Poles, the original inhabitants of the Polish nation
Prawo i Sprawiedliwość	Law and Justice Party (PiS)
Sarmatians	nomads from Persia and the mythical basis for the formation of the szlachta
Sarmatic	value or practice characteristic of the Sarmatians
Solidarność	Solidarity Party
szlachta	Polish gentry (landowners)
Sejm	Parliament
U.S.S.R.	United Soviet Socialist Republic (Soviet Union)
Visegrád Group	Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia
Wielkopolska	Greater Poland, the earliest Polish nation-state
wolność	freedom/liberty

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This thesis explores the intersection of nationhood and global terrorism by examining the responses of Poland's political leaders to a series of terrorism-related events during the last decade. In doing so, this work demonstrates the crucial importance of analyzing Poland's contemporary experience with terrorism through a particularly Polish sense of nationhood, one rooted in Sarmatism.¹ It is only by understanding the influence of Sarmatian ideals and practices that one can comprehend the actions of the current leadership of the Polish nation.² Moreover, it is through this understanding that a more effective set of foreign policy security initiatives can be fostered with Poland and the other nations of the Visegrád Group: Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic.

Focusing on the Sarmatian concept of Polish nationhood also alleviates the confusion endured by Western observers of the country, who have largely failed to comprehend the wild swings of the nation's foreign relations in the past decade.³ As a constant feature in the discourse of the modern Polish state since its founding as the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania in 1569, Sarmatism remains a powerful influence over the nation's psyche and its leaders' political rhetoric. By focusing on contemporary events through the framework of Sarmatism, then, a view of modern Poland emerges that is more illuminating than one derived through Western concepts of nationhood. This comprehension is vital to implementing a more effective set of Western foreign policy

¹ Ewa Thompson, "Sarmatism, or the Secrets of Polish Essentialism," in *Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature and Culture since 1918*, ed. Tamara Trojanowska, Joanna Nyzynska, and Przemyslaw Czaplinski (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), Kindle.

² Piotr Cap, "'We Don't Want Any Immigrants or Terrorists Here': The Linguistic Manufacturing of Xenophobia in the Post-2015 Poland," *Discourse & Society* 29, no. 4 (2018): 380–98.

³ James Traub, "The Party That Wants to Make Poland Great Again," *New York Times Magazine*, November 6, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/06/magazine/the-party-that-wants-to-make-poland-great-again.html>; and Anne Applebaum, "A Warning From Europe: The Worst Is Yet to Come," *Atlantic*, October 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/10/poland-polarization/568324/>.

initiatives geared toward Poland, especially in the area of security against global terrorism and military threats.⁴

This Sarmatian description of nationhood, as applied to Poland's contemporary experience with global terrorism, is used as an analytical tool to explore the three most significant contemporary "terrorist" events to touch the country: the 2008 plane crash at Smoleńsk, Russia, that killed the president and 95 others; the 2015 European Union migrant crisis that brought millions of refugees to Europe (although none were known to be traveling to Poland); and the 2016 slaying of Polish truck driver Łukasz Urban, who died in a terrorist attack on a Berlin Christmas market.⁵ The analysis of each of these events shows how the manipulation of Sarmatian values by the leaders of the Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* in Polish, or PiS) continues to influence the nation's domestic politics and foreign relations, with significant implications for its most important alliances: the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union.

Using a Sarmatian analysis also helps Western policymakers better tailor their foreign policies toward Poland to counter the sometimes toxic strain of xenophobic nationalism that can be found among Sarmatian values. At a time when the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization face great challenges to their internal unity and possible external conflicts with an unstable Russia and an ambitious China, retaining Poland in these Western alliances is crucial.⁶ This goal will not be accomplished without

⁴ Aleksandra Cichocka et al., "What Inverted U Can Do for Your Country: A Curvilinear Relationship between Confidence in the Social System and Political Engagement," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 115, no. 5 (2017): 883–902, <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000168>; and Piotr Buras and Josef Janning, "Divided at the Centre: Germany, Poland, and the Troubles of the Trump Era" (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, December 19, 2018), https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/divided_at_the_centre_germany_poland_and_the_troubles_of_the_trump_era.

⁵ Emily Tamkin, "Has the Clock Run Out on the Smolensk Controversy?," *Foreign Policy*, April 10, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/10/has-the-clock-run-out-on-the-smolensk-conspiracy/>; Monika Sieradzka, "Smolensk: The Tragedy That Defined Polish Politics," *Deutsche Welle*, April 10, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/smolensk-the-tragedy-that-defined-polish-politics/a-43328611>; Cap, "'We Don't Want Any Immigrants or Terrorists Here'"; and Notker Oberhäuser, "Polish-German Relations: The Sticking Points," *Deutsche Welle*, June 4, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/polish-german-relations-the-sticking-points/a-44074544>.

⁶ Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018).

first understanding the values that underlay Polish nationhood and then analyzing how they are manipulated by PiS to its advantage.

In pursuing its current path of isolationist, xenophobic, and autocratic policies, the current ruling party in Poland has destabilized the entire region, which benefits its rulers in the short term despite disastrous implications for the future.⁷ Offering a better understanding of the essential elements of Polish nationhood and applying them to the proclaimed counterterrorism policies of the current administration, this thesis calls for reengagement of the West into an active dialogue with Poland's leaders and citizens. This new discourse, focusing on Poland's understanding of itself instead of projecting Western values onto it, echoes similar efforts to bolster the *Solidarność* (Solidarity) movement of the 1980s and 1990s. That effort was successful in restoring a vibrant civil society and active democracy to a nation that has always treasured both among its founding ideals.⁸ Ceding the creation of this discourse on nationhood in contemporary Poland risks the perversion of these ideals in the name of a more toxic version of nationalism that serves neither its nor the West's long-term interests. In the nation's coat of arms, Poland's white eagle faces west; now the West must make an effort to ensure that the eagle's head does not turn.

⁷ "EU to Sue Poland, Hungary and Czechs for Refusing Refugee Quotas," BBC News, December 7, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-42270239>.

⁸ David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics: Opposition and Reform in Poland since 1968* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); and Seth A. Jones, *A Covert Action: Reagan, the CIA, and the Cold War Struggle in Poland* (New York: Norton, 2018).

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I seek to create afresh the stages by which the mind gives way to compulsion from without, and to trace the road along which men in people's democracies are led on to orthodoxy.

— Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind*

My greatest thanks go to the instructors of CHDS Cohort 1801/1802, each of whom offered vastly constructive criticism in our courses. I am especially thankful to my advisor, Dr. Carolyn Halladay, and my second reader, Dr. Bożena Shallcross, for their careful guidance throughout the thesis process. My classmates, especially the loyal opposition of the 1802 back row—Lana Angert, Chris Barney, and Ana Lalley, along with my honorarily adopted daughter, EmilyJane McLoughlin—will forever be valued colleagues and, in many cases, friends.

We live and work in especially challenging times for federal employees. I would not have undertaken, let alone completed, this course without the trust and support of my CBP colleagues, particularly Chief Andrew Ferreri and his team of Terrorism and Tactical Response supervisors: Joshua Behrend, William Mistal, Yadira Tejada, and Kelly Villa. The supervisors in my Contraband Enforcement Unit, Orlando Medina and Rafał Rygula, also provided unfailing good humor and comradeship along the way. I also owe a debt of gratitude for the patient ears of Watch Commanders Brian Henke, Brian Bell, Ralph Piccirilli, and Jaime Gray, who always made time to listen to my latest academic challenges.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the response to the global war on terror during the last decade in one of Central and Eastern Europe's largest and most populous countries, Poland. Specifically, it examines how visions of the country's nationhood have been used by the leaders of the country's dominant political party, Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, or PiS), in conjunction with real or imagined terrorist events to gain power and further their political agenda. This effort is examined in the context of one particular element of Polish nationhood, Sarmatism, which formed as an original culture in the 1600s and reemerged in the first decade of the 2000s as a potent cultural force. Basing its view of modern terrorism through a Sarmatian lens and responding with Sarmatian rhetoric proved particularly useful to PiS; not only did it gain power during this decade, but it also remains the dominant political force in the country.¹

This ascendance of PiS indeed owes much to the party's ability to use Sarmatian rhetoric and images to transform both terrorist and non-terrorist events into perceived existential threats to the country, threats that it has exploited for electoral success. But this success has also transformed Poland's position in its two most important international alliances, the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Sarmatian values, as embodied in PiS's domestic and foreign policies, carry significant implications for Poland's future in these alliances; they may have already eroded Poland's place in the Western democratic-market capitalist order. As scholar Alexandra Gheciu noted in 2019, "Recent developments . . . are a potent reminder that not all middle powers [such as Poland] are alike; on the contrary, based on their socially constructed, historically specific definitions of identity, they can perform a diversity of international roles—in support of, or, conversely, as obstacles to liberal internationalism."²

¹ Hubert Tworzecki, "Poland: A Case of Top-Down Polarization," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 681, no. 1 (January 2019): 97–119, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716218809322>.

² Alexandra Gheciu, "NATO, Liberal Internationalism, and the Politics of Imagining the Western Security Community," *International Journal* 74, no. 1 (2019): 33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002070201983645>.

Other “middle powers” in Central and Eastern Europe, such as those of the Visegrád Group (Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, along with Poland) have undergone similar transformations of their political landscapes to a more nationalistic, xenophobic, and illiberal orientation.³ Although this thesis touches upon the contemporary experiences of Poland’s regional cohort, however, it remains focused on Poland itself as the most crucial country of the four Visegrád nations. By its very size, Poland is both the most populous, with about 60 percent of the group’s total population, as well as the largest, with well over 50 percent of the region’s landmass. The country also has the region’s biggest economy; this accomplishment was driven by a quarter century of continuous economic growth, a boast that no other country in the EU can make. As Poland goes, then, the Visegrád Group follows.

It is not just its geographic, demographic, or economic profile that makes Poland a particularly important country to understand in this global age of terrorism. Hailed as the preeminent example of a country that was able to reorient its economy from a centrally planned scheme into a market-based platform, the nation was applauded by the West for completing a successful transition from Soviet-dominated communism to Western-oriented democracy.⁴ These trends were symbolized by Poland’s accession into NATO (1999), which reversed its previous membership in the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact, and the EU (2004), which promised to align its future with Western markets, social values, and political agendas. Characteristic of the tone of this era was American diplomat Ronald Asmus’s observation that “the vision was clear: a new NATO between the United States and a Europe whole and free committed to tackling the new threats of the 21st century,” specifically global terrorism.⁵

³ Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage Publications, 2015), Kindle.

⁴ Wojciech Przybylski, “Explaining Eastern Europe: Can Poland’s Backsliding Be Stopped?,” *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 3 (July 2018): 52–64.

⁵ Ronald Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), loc. 341, Kindle.

Nevertheless, as this thesis argues, these transformations were not so complete or irreversible as Western observers thought at the time.⁶ Indeed, the last decade—specifically, the period under scrutiny here, one greatly influenced by the global war on terrorism—has shown how fragile and superficial these changes may have been. As Wojciech Przybylski recently observed,

A mere four years ago, Poland was widely viewed as an exemplar of democratic transformation in Central and Eastern Europe and a pro-democracy force on the international stage. . . . By 2018, however, Poland had become the first EU country to be threatened with sanctions under Article 7 of the Lisbon Treaty over infringements of the rule of law.⁷

It is precisely this journey, explored through the interplay of nationhood and terrorism, that this work explores.

A. RESEARCH QUESTION

Using Poland as a case study, how has the Law and Justice Party used the global war on terror to further its political agenda?

B. REMARKS ON NATIONHOOD AND TERRORISM IN POLISH HISTORY

For two centuries, the Poles were not recognized as a nation, at least not one that claimed control over territory with recognized borders. The Polish “nation” was a romantic ideal, a nationalist rallying point, a nostalgic reference, but never an actual state. After Poland disappeared from the map of Europe in 1772, Poles were Austrians, Russians, or Prussians—to name but a few nationalities—but never Polish citizens.⁸ The Polish national anthem enshrines this imagined community even today: “*Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła*”

⁶ As one journalist recently noted, “Poland today appears to be the antithesis of its own post-transitional success. Once a powerhouse of democratic institutions and liberal change, it is now slowly descending into a mafia-like state.” Mateusz Mazzini, “Poland’s Historical Revisionism Is Pushing It into Moscow’s Arms,” *Financial Times*, February 12, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/02/12/polands-historical-revisionism-is-pushing-it-into-moscows-arms-smolensk-kaczynski-pis-law-justice-holocaust-law/>.

⁷ Przybylski, “Explaining Eastern Europe.”

⁸ A series of partitions by Poland's neighboring, multi-ethnic empires--Prussia, Russia and Austria--took place between 1772 and 1795. Karen Majewski, *Traitors & True Poles: Narrating a Polish-American Identity, 1880-1939* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003).

(Poland is not yet lost, as long as we are living).⁹ As Jan Józef Lipski noted in his essay on Poland's place in Europe, "The experience of years of tyranny and struggle for liberation has probably been forever ingrained in the Polish national consciousness . . . something which could be called the Polish national character."¹⁰

The achievement of national sovereignty by Poles, however, was not just a struggle; outright violence—including armed force—was one factor the reemergence of the modern Polish nation in the twentieth century. When almost 150 years of Polish non-existence came to an end with the formation of the modern Polish nation in 1918, it was not solely the events of the First World War that had contributed to its revival. As recent scholarly work by Felicitas von Weikersthal has argued, modern terrorism was also fundamental to the formation of the newly recognized country of Poland.¹¹ Such a claim would have likely been inconceivable just a generation ago, when scholars of Polish studies focused primarily on describing the nation's drive toward freedom. As von Weikersthal's work shows, and what this thesis explores, examining terrorism as a factor in Poland's nationhood yields a radically different interpretation of its contemporary experience, especially in its relations with the West.

A more nuanced view of Polish nationhood emerges, then, when terrorism is used as a concept for exploring its nationhood.¹² As Andrzej Wajda, the country's most notable director, showed in his trilogy of films about Poland during and after the Second World War, the country faced insurgencies for years after official wartime hostilities had ceased.¹³

⁹ "The Story behind Poland's National Anthem," Kafkadesk, February 23, 2019, <https://kafkadesk.org/2019/02/23/the-story-behind-polands-national-anthem/>. For a broader study of how national consciousness is created, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991).

¹⁰ Jan Józef Lipski, "Two Fatherlands, Two Patriotisms," in *Between East and West: Writings from Kultura*, ed. Robert Kostrzewa (New York: Hill & Wang, 1990), 52–71.

¹¹ Felicitas Fischer von Weikersthal, "From Terrorists to Statesmen: Terrorism and Polish Independence," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2018): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1471967>.

¹² Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015); and Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

¹³ The trilogy consisted of *Pokolenie* [*A Generation*] in 1955; *Kanał* [*The Sewer*] in 1957; and *Popiół i diament* [*Ashes and Diamonds*] in 1958. Andrzej Wajda, *Double Vision: My Life in Film*, trans. Rose Medina (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1989).

Ironically, it was Wajda, who worked under the constraints of the officially sanctioned Polish film industry, who found the most creative ways to depict terrorism as a central theme of the Polish postwar experience.¹⁴ Many contemporary scholars and journalists, including Timothy Snyder and Anne Applebaum, have been held captive by contemporary political exigencies—including overt political critiques of PiS in the apparent hope of chipping away at its support—than Wajda ever was in his much subtler battles with the authorities.¹⁵

Between the complexities of the Polish artist, Wajda, and the blunt didacticism of the American writers, Snyder and Applebaum, where have Poland's contemporary political leaders placed terrorism in the national dialogue? The answers are no less contentious among Western observers. Descriptions of terrorism in the political world of Poland certainly have been both explicit and agenda-driven, especially after the nation moved out of the Soviet orbit and closer to the West. For example, as it sought to strengthen its ties to NATO, it was the fear of terrorism (as exemplified by 9/11), no matter how remote, that led the country to allow secret interrogation camps and even missiles to be placed on its soil. In the first decade of the new millennium, terrorism became one bridge between Poland and the West, first through NATO and then by joining the EU in 2004.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the past several years have witnessed an abrupt turn of events as Poland suddenly turned on the liberal social values and democratic capitalism of the West

¹⁴ Anna Misiak, "Don't Look to the East: National Sentiments in Andrzej Wajda's Contemporary Film Epics," *Journal of Film and Video* 65, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 26–39.

¹⁵ Applebaum (who is married to Polish politician Radosław Sikorski) and Snyder have been harshly critical of PiS and its efforts to destabilize its role in the EU, especially as it favors Russian influence in the region. Anne Applebaum, "A Warning from Europe: The Worst Is Yet to Come," *Atlantic*, October 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/10/poland-polarization/568324/>; and Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018). For a description of Snyder as activist-scholar, see Jacob Mikanowski, "The Bleak Prophecy of Timothy Snyder," *Chronicle Review*, April 12, 2019, <https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/20190412/snyder>.

¹⁶ Malgorzata Kossowska et al., "Relationships between Right-Wing Authoritarianism, Terrorism Threat, and Attitudes towards Restrictions of Civil Right: A Comparison among Four European Countries," *British Journal of Psychology* 102 (2011): 245–259; Piotr Cap, *Proximization: The Pragmatics of Symbolic Discourse Crossing* (Amsterdam: John Benjamin Publishing, 2013); and Piotr Cap, *Legitimation in Political Discourse: A Cross-Disciplinary Perspective on the Modern U.S. War Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2006).

with the decisive election of the Law and Justice Party in 2015. Whereas global terrorism had brought the nation closer to the West in the previous decades, it became a wedge issue, both domestically and internationally. In its use by PiS, proclaimed terrorist events have been transformed into Western threats that strike at the very heart of the Polish nation, a dynamic that shaped its response to the EU migrant crisis in 2015.¹⁷ One of the few academics to make sense of these changes is Piotr Cap, who has explored terrorism as a dynamic factor in contemporary politics as well as a concept rooted in Poland's sense of nationhood; this thesis subsequently applies Cap's theories to contemporary Western counterterrorism efforts involving Poland.¹⁸

C. LITERATURE REVIEW: POLISH NATIONHOOD AND SARMATISM

What is a nation? The answer can be as simple or as complex as one wishes. A nation can exist simply by being recognized as such by the international community, if only by one other nation. It can exist as a linguistic group; a bloodline; an ethnic, racial, or tribal group; a geographic area with borders; or even as a group of people with common beliefs. Yet the nation must first be defined, using whatever parameters, before its role in response to outside forces can be discussed. As one defines a nation, one is also defining its values; this social construction of reality, as Benedict Anderson describes it, is thus vital to understanding how that nation responds to international events.¹⁹

Understanding nationhood is especially important when discussing Poland, where Western observers have often been confused by the seemingly irrational choices made by the country's contemporary leaders—choices that defied the West's expectations of how the leaders of a modern, European nation should act.²⁰ Many Western observers assumed that every nation would be based on not only sovereignty but also a desire to modernize,

¹⁷ "Poland's Ruling Party Does Well in the Heartland, but Not in Big Cities," *Economist*, October 24, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/10/24/polands-ruling-party-does-well-in-the-heartland-but-not-in-big-cities>.

¹⁸ Piotr Cap, "'We Don't Want Any Immigrants or Terrorists Here': The Linguistic Manufacturing of Xenophobia in the Post-2015 Poland," *Discourse & Society* 29, no. 4 (2018): 380–398.

¹⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 4.

²⁰ Przybylski, "Explaining Eastern Europe."

improve the material standards of its people, and engage with the international order. This analytical framework presumed that a country's leadership would naturally make rational decisions to meet these goals, which were also presumed to be supported by those governed.²¹

This framework served scholars well in the immediate aftermath of the breakup of the Warsaw Pact after 1990. Over the subsequent two decades, this prevailing Western view seemed vindicated by the region's swing toward democracy, free markets, and social liberalism. Be that as it may, this era of optimism lasted less than a generation; today, Western-derived notions of nationalism seem largely inapplicable to Poland and its approach to international relations.²² In order to address this inadequacy, this thesis first suggests that a Polish-derived conception of nationhood is better suited to providing insights into the nation's current response to terrorist and military threats. Second, this work serves as a reminder that one must not take for granted the assumption that other nations will inevitably pursue the typical Western goals of economic advancement, the spread of civil liberties, and integration into international alliances. This course is fraught with challenges, especially without engagement in Western alliances such as NATO and the EU.

Indeed, a crucial limitation on the scholarship of Central and Eastern Europe in the declining days of the Cold War and its aftermath was the assumption that countries outside the Western orbit shared the same goals, values, and frameworks as the West. Bolstering this view, the political and economic reforms of the 1990s and 2000s seemed to suggest that the region's countries, unburdened by the dominance of the Soviet Union, had returned to their historical norms of democracy and market capitalism; these forces would then,

²¹ Perhaps the most nuanced description of the region from the early 1990s came from scholar George Schöpflin. But even Schöpflin wrote that the main challenge of transitioning societies in Eastern Europe was "catching up with the West" as though that path had been predestined. George Schöpflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe 1945–1992* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993).

²² Gheciu, "Politics of Imagining the Western Security Community."

inevitably, lead them away from dangerous paths of isolated nationalisms, and they would take place in the new international order.²³

Perhaps no work embodies the optimism—as well as the analytical limitations—of nationalism in the post–Cold War era than Francis Fukuyama’s 1992 work, *The End of History*. Positing that democracy and capitalism are inevitable—as evidenced by the nations of Central Europe reclaiming their sovereignty and reorienting toward Western democracies—Fukuyama believed that the new, liberal order would inhibit the rise of dangerous strains of nationalism.²⁴ This new nationalism would also bolster international projects such as the EU; as Fukuyama subsequently noted, scholars should not have been concerned about the threat of nationalism but about the threat of new technologies that could be used against democratic capitalism.²⁵

As the rise of authoritarian, xenophobic parties such as Fidesz and Jobbik in Hungary and Law and Justice in Poland have shown, these nationalist analyses of Fukuyama and Anderson have subsequently been inadequate in explaining the rise of the right and the rejection of liberal Western values. However, this thesis goes beyond describing how dominant Western narratives have largely failed to illuminate the region’s rightward turn. For there is an alternative analysis that can be employed to understand Polish nationhood: the exclusively Polish concept of Sarmatism. Any understanding of the Polish nation—including its modern state—must include a consideration of Sarmatism as a seminal influence.

The concept of Sarmatism is the best tool for describing contemporary Polish politics in the context of the nation’s history. It allows for the complexities and seeming contradictions that are omitted from a strict geopolitical analysis. Furthermore, specific to a discussion on terrorism, it is one of the best avenues to explain the seemingly topsy-turvy

²³ In his pivotal *Imagined Communities*, Anderson stated that he expected the U.S.S.R. not to exist in the new millennium, describing the country “as the precursor of a twenty-first century internationalist order.” Ten months later, the U.S.S.R. was dissolved; many of its successor states were put on the path to EU and NATO membership within a decade, almost seamlessly. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, xi.

²⁴ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

²⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002).

world of Polish foreign relations to an audience outside of Poland. This last point is crucial, as most Western observers, including some of the most celebrated writers on the subject, have been baffled as the country has turned toward authoritarianism and xenophobia. As leading journalist (and naturalized Pole) Anne Applebaum recently summarized this turn in the *Atlantic*,

Poland's economy has been the most consistently successful in Europe over the past quarter century. Even after the global financial collapse in 2008, the country saw no recession. What's more, the refugee wave that has hit other European countries has not been felt here at all. There are no migrant camps, and there is no Islamist terrorism, or terrorism of any kind.²⁶

Yet Applebaum's last insight shows the danger in ignoring terrorism and its usefulness to PiS in contemporary Polish politics. In contrast, this thesis first argues that not only has Poland experienced terrorism in various forms, but terrorism itself has had a significant impact on Poland's domestic social policies, international relations, and sense of itself as a nation. Equally important, Sarmatism has been a persistent influence in this process as it is the vital link between each contemporary terrorist event and the discursive narrative created by PiS. It is this interaction of Sarmatism and terrorism, manipulated by the leaders of PiS, that explains why Poland has charted a different course over the past decade.

Looking at terrorism through the framework of Sarmatism also places a firmly Pole-centric set of ideas at the heart of the analysis, which is a necessary corrective approach to the last generation of scholars who examined Eastern Europe through Western

²⁶ Applebaum, "A Warning from Europe," 55.

references to representative democracy and modernization.²⁷ Building on recent works by Piotr Cap and Ruth Wodak, for example, this thesis addresses a deficiency in Western scholarly work on Eastern Europe that too often emphasizes what is *wrong* or *aberrant* in the political rhetoric of the region's nations. That view, often based in linguistic or cultural ignorance that presupposes Western policies are inherently more logical or practical than homegrown remedies, has led to a seemingly endless sense of frustration by observers such as Applebaum and others.²⁸ Instead, this study takes the perspective that global terrorism, like all politics, is essentially *local* in how it is understood by the populace. This is especially important in understanding how terrorism is perceived in Poland, a country that—while not having directly experienced a terrorist attack in its modern history—has been greatly influenced by the global war on terror. Thus, terrorism must be explored in its local context—in Poland's case, through the political discourse of PiS's leaders, greatly influenced by the legacy of Sarmatism—to understand its impact and to gauge the West's foreign policy stance more effectively.

By examining the continuing influence of nationalism in Poland and other Central and Eastern European post-socialist countries, this thesis suggests that there are ways to counter its potentially destructive effects on international relations.²⁹ It is by revisiting the

²⁷ Put another way, this work explores the continuities of the national experience in contrast with the disjuncture of the post-communist era; this work also counters the assumption that Eastern European nations would naturally follow an unceasing path toward representative democracies in the post-communist era. For a typical view of Eastern Europe's challenges at that time, see George Schöpflin, "Post-Communism: Constructing New Democracies in Central Europe," *International Affairs* 67, no. 2 (April 1991): 235–50, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2620828>. Schöpflin now serves in the European Parliament as a member of the right-wing, nationalist Fidesz Party. Schöpflin, who now serves under his original, Hungarian name, György Schöpflin, suggested that putting pig's heads on border fences would deter Muslim migrants from coming to Hungary and that the West is driving a conspiracy to transform Hungary by settling Muslim migrants there. Cynthia Kroet, "Hungarian MEP: Pig Heads on Border Fence Would Deter Migrants," *Politico*, August 22, 2016, <https://www.politico.eu/article/hungarian-mep-gyorgy-schopflinpig-heads-on-border-fence-would-deter-migrants/>; and "Hungarian MEP György Schöpflin: 'Nationhood Is the Answer,'" YouTube, video, 1:12, posted by Deutsche Welle News, May 3, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Z7dn0B_API.

²⁸ In an interesting comparison, Ruth Wodak asks essentially the same question as Applebaum in her work on right-wing nationalist parties: "Many people react to [the rise of extremist parties] with surprise, asking themselves, how could this happen? And why is it happening now?" She then discusses how this extremism has been "normalized" or mainstreamed in political discourse. Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*, loc. 110.

²⁹ Alexandra Gheciu, "Remembering the Roman Past, Building a European Future," *International Relations* 28, no. 4 (December 2014): 449–55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117814533043b>.

essential elements of a nation's identity—or, at least, how these elements are manipulated by a nation's political leaders—that one may better understand the seemingly anti-Western, illiberal courses that these nations have taken in the last decade.³⁰ This realization is a necessary first step if the main Western alliances—the EU and NATO—are to adapt to new military and security threats. If Western leaders fail to understand these forces and the impact on regional leaders' decisions, the vacuum will be filled by nations that do understand them and will gladly exploit them, chiefly, Russia.³¹

D. RESEARCH DESIGN AND CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In reconciling the contradictory responses to terrorism by contemporary Polish leaders, this study broadly addresses the deficient understanding of the country among Western leaders and scholars. The thesis then argues that the Western-derived conceptions of nationhood largely fail to explain Poland's contemporary political scene, insofar as they are disconnected from an understanding of the country's social and cultural history. In their place, this work offers a Polish-derived conception of nationhood—one rooted in Sarmatian values and practices—that even pre-dates, as Joanna Nyżyńska describes it, the “semiotic code [that] was rooted in the Romantic tradition, which elevated the victimhood, heroism, and martyrdom that resonated in the rhetoric of ‘traditional Polish values.’”³² As is argued throughout the remaining chapters, it is this Sarmatian nationhood that continues to be an essential value of Polish national life. To fail to understand Sarmatism and its influence is to fail to understand Poland.

³⁰ For a contrasting view that emphasizes the role of the political process itself as a vital influence on electoral outcomes, see Tworzecki, “Poland: A Case of Top-Down Polarization.”

³¹ Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom*. For an overview of the current Russian regime's ability to use terrorism to further its own political agenda, see David Satter, *The Less You Know, the Better You Sleep: Russia's Road to Terror and Dictatorship under Yeltsin and Putin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016). Another excellent description of Russia's criticism of NATO's expansion and its agility at countering NATO's solidarity can be found in Stephen M. Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), Kindle.

³² Joanna Nyżyńska, “The Politics of Mourning and the Crisis of Poland's Symbolic Language after April 10,” *East European Politics and Society* 24, no. 4 (Fall 2010): 467–79, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325410377656>.

Grounded in the history of the nation and the definitions of terrorism, this work analyzes three contemporary events in which a Sarmatian understanding of global terrorism has been an influential factor in Poland's national discourse: the myth of Smoleńsk (2008), the European Union migrant crisis (2015); and the death of Łukasz Urban (2016).³³ Each of these events resulted in major changes to Poland's political landscape, as PiS leaders largely succeeded in shaping the dominant discourse on terrorism in Poland, one that was politically advantageous to the party. Yet each event has been quite distinct. The myth of Smoleńsk was built upon a simple airplane accident that PiS reshaped into a terrorist attack by an unknown entity, variously described as either an internal or external threat. Similarly, the party responded to the EU migrant crisis by again creating a perceived terrorist threat that was poised to strike at the religious and cultural basis of the nation before eventually destroying all of Europe. Moreover, with the death of Łukasz Urban, PiS decried with accuracy that terrorism had taken the life of a Pole, yet the fact that the event took place in neighboring Germany was used by the party to show that even its allies were now working against Poland.

In explaining the past decade of Poland's increasingly contentious relationship with its EU and NATO partners, this thesis first provides an overview of the nation's history, including its formative experience as a modern nation-state, and the Sarmatian values that were embedded in it. It then traces the development of Polish nationhood through the partitions of the country by its regional rivals, its brief re-emergence as an independent nation between the two World Wars, and its decades of domination by the Soviet Union before leading the region's generally peaceful transition to democracy and market capitalism in the 1990s. After describing the country's apparent integration into Western

³³ Monika Sieradzka, "Smolensk: The Tragedy That Defined Polish Politics," Deutsche Welle, April 10, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/smolensk-the-tragedy-that-defined-polish-politics/a-43328611>; Michał Strzałkowski, "Fortress Europe Lives on in Poland," Euractiv, May 28, 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/fortress-europe-lives-on-in-poland/>; and Włodzimierz Szczepański, "Państwo Zadba o rodzinę kierowcy, który zginął w Berlinie: Beata Szydło przyznała specjalną rentę bliskim Łukasza Urbana [State will take care of family of driver who died in berlin: Beata Szydło granted a special pension to those close to Łukasz Urban]," Na: Temat, December 23, 2016, <https://natemat.pl/197617,beata-szydlo-przyznala-specjalna-rente-rodzinie-lukasza-urbana-kierowcy-ktory-zginal-w-berlinie>.

alliances such as NATO and the EU, it then explores Poland's unexpected turn away from them in the last decade.

The final, expository chapter describes the workings of Poland's leading political party, PiS, through an analysis adapted from *The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behavior Is Almost Always Good Politics* and traces its rise in power based on its manipulation of Sarmatian cultural themes. In the analytical section, the thesis explores three discrete events in the 2010s that demonstrate how PiS leaders have used Sarmatian values in response to real or imagined terrorist events and how this discourse has shaped Poland's relationship with its Western partners. Finally, this work uses the framework developed in *The Dictator's Handbook* to offer some pragmatic views to Western policymakers that may create a constructive dialogue (and, presumably, a set of foreign policies) that will integrate and not alienate Poland from its Western partners.³⁴

³⁴ Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith, *The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behavior Is Almost Always Good Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), Kindle.

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II. METHODOLOGY: SARMATISM IN POLISH NATIONHOOD

Whether one argues that Sarmatism is based on the nation's actual historical experience—as some on the extreme political right claim—or on a “foundational myth”—as scholar Joanna Nyżyńska has noted—its impact as a historical and cultural force in contemporary politics has been decisive.³⁵ The use of Sarmatian rhetoric, themes, and images by PiS was perhaps the most crucial element in its electoral success after 2010. As this chapter explains, PiS itself may be seen as a modern Sarmatian political party. Moreover, its continued manipulation of Sarmatian values during the last decade, specifically in response to real or imagined terrorist acts, has continued to serve the party—if not the democracy—well.

A. THE SARMATIANS

Originating in Persia around 500 BC, the Sarmatians were a warrior class that eventually moved into the most southeastern reaches of Europe over the next nine centuries. Despite the archeological documentation of their existence, however, their transformation into the seminal ruling class of nascent Poland is much more difficult to determine. One difficulty in tracing the history of Sarmatians into Poles is the fundamental place of Roman Catholic Christianity in Polish nationhood, which stands in stark contrast to the Sarmatians' Eastern origins. It is essential, however, to explore this contradiction and the space it provides in reconciling the continuing contradictions that characterize Polish nationhood through the present day.

The formal date of the foundation of the Kingdom of Poland is 966, when Mieszko I of the Piast dynasty accepted Christianity and its Western ties as he sought allies in the country's skirmishes over neighboring northern and western lands. Through his baptism and the dynasty's series of alliances through marriages, the Piasts consolidated their rule

³⁵ Maria Barłowska, “Chivalric Death in Sarmatian Culture,” *Passage to Knowledge* (blog), accessed August 7, 2019, http://wilanow-palac.pl/chivalric_death_in_sarmatian_culture.html; Michał Mochocki, “The Sarmatian Cultural Turn in 21st-Century Poland,” in *(Re)Visions of History in Language and Fiction*, ed. Dorota Guttfield, Monika Linke, and Agnieszka Sowińska (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 208–24; and Nyżyńska, “The Politics of Mourning.”

over *Wielkopolska*, or Greater Poland, in the area corresponding with the Poznań region in today's western Poland. Still, the country remained decentralized and fragmented to the point that successive rulers often split the country apart along new hereditary lines or alliances, only to reform in other permutations with the next generation of rulers. It was within this chaotic nature of Poland's earliest centuries that the Sarmatians provided another unifying set of principles that provided stability and protection to the peasants while retaining the same benefits for the nobility. It was the Sarmatians, then, that became the essential element in Poland's very survival as a modern nation.³⁶

As described by Adam Zamoyski, the nomadic Sarmatians moved into southeastern Europe and continued to act like a warrior caste that protected the existing inhabitants of the region, the *polanie* (field dwellers), from neighboring aggressors. Over time, the Sarmatians became agrarians and eventually transformed into a land-owning gentry known as the *szlachta*, and by 1400 represented 8–10 percent of the total population of the Kingdom of Poland. Yet this transition into gentry did not replace the monarchy; instead, it fundamentally changed the very concept of a monarchy as the basis of nationhood. This crucial change instituted republicanism, or representative government, in Poland. Formalized by the creation of the *Sejm*, or Parliament, in 1505, it would be the *szlachta*, not the nobles, who held legislative authority. Although not a representative democracy, as the *polanie* were still obligated to the *szlachta* and nobles who owned the land, it was the first step in Europe toward a form of representative government.³⁷ And, in one of the most curious contradictions that characterized the young Polish nation, the *szlachta* ended automatic hereditary succession for the kingdom's leader in 1569; by mandating that a successor be approved by the *Sejm*, Poland now had an elected monarch.³⁸

³⁶ Wojciech Zembaty, "The Elegant Downfall of the Polish Sarmatians," Adam Mickiewicz Institute, January 14, 2019, <https://culture.pl/en/article/the-elegant-downfall-of-the-polish-sarmatians>.

³⁷ Or, as Adam Zamoyski noted, "Clannish and arrogant, the *szlachta* underpinned its position with mutual solidarity and fierce rivalry with other groups. . . . The *szlachta* thought of itself as a nation, while the remaining ninety-odd percent of the population who were the plebs, who did not count." Adam Zamoyski, "History of Poland in the 16th-18th Centuries," in *Land of the Winged Horsemen: Art in Poland 1572-1764* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 28.

³⁸ Adam Zamoyski, *Poland: A History* (London: HarperPress, 2009).

The weakening of obligations to the monarch expanded throughout the sixteenth century, a period now described as Poland's Golden Age of Liberty. Marked by the formation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth under an elected monarch in 1569, the Warsaw Confederation of 1573 guaranteed voting rights as well as religious freedom to the szlachta and townspeople, but not the *chłopi*, or peasants, who were still tied to the land. Although Catholicism remained the official state religion, then, it did not hold that position at the exclusion of other faiths. As a result, the early-modern Polish nation was also a golden era for Jews, who made Poland the center of Jewish culture through the 1700s.³⁹

As embedded into the Polish nation during its formation, then, Sarmatian cultural beliefs provided the foundation of the Polish nation while embodying elements that were in themselves potentially contradictory. Sarmatism expanded the Christian precept—specifically, the Roman Catholic precept—of the sanctity of all human life to the political realm of republicanism. In this sense, every person played a role in the functioning of political society. In practical terms, however, this set of cultural beliefs, transformed into a political framework, meant governance by the szlachta elite and no meaningful political role for the *chłopi*, a trait that characterizes the nation to this day.⁴⁰

This key concept of equality translated directly into the governance and foreign policies of the Polish nation through the 1700s, but ultimately with disastrous effects. Whereas other European countries centralized national institutions as part of a nation-building project, Polish lands continued to be self-governed at the local level. Although this practice allowed the szlachta to be more responsive in governing the *chłopi* and

³⁹ Zamoyski, *Poland: A History*. For more on the relationship between Sarmatian culture and Jewish culture and religion, see Jan K. Ostrowski, "Polish Baroque Art and Its Social and Religious Context" in *Land of the Winged Horsemen: Art in Poland 1572-1764* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 38-53.

⁴⁰ The seeming contradiction of an elite leadership class as embodying civic equality in Sarmatism differs from other forms of nationalism in the region. Although references to Sarmatian images in contemporary Polish politics do refer to the so-called "common man/woman as opposed to the elites" in their messages, they do so in chivalric codes. Moreover, PiS does not follow the laissez-faire liberalism that typically characterizes right-wing populism in the region. Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*, loc. 482. Furthermore, as Mochocki suggests, "It was only during the Sarmatian period that the Poles had their own truly national culture: developed by Polish citizens themselves, not found outside the Polish-Lithuanian state, and universally dominant on its entire territory." Mochocki, "The Sarmatian Cultural Turn in 21st-Century Poland," 209.

certainly allowed the gentry to amass surplus capital, the lack of a strong central government meant that these riches were not diverted to the modernization of the state or the economy. Even during the Golden Age, Poland fell behind its neighbors in terms of early industrialization, with the gentry preferring to spend their fortunes on material displays of wealth.⁴¹ Indeed, the curiously Eastern-oriented formal dress and habits of the Polish elites were hallmarks of the era, with the szlachta now consciously maintaining the Sarmatian origin myth through public rituals that displayed their wealth.⁴²

Related to the independence and proclaimed equality of the Sarmatians, as represented by the szlachta, is the central ideal of *wolność*, a term that means, variously, both freedom and liberty. This concept, too, embedded inherent contradictions into the Polish nation. The concept allowed a multi-ethnic Poland to exist as an inherently decentralized nation, one built on the concept of a nation of people, not institutions, that self-governed without a monarch.⁴³ The Polish nation was not yet defined by ethnicity, regionality, clan affiliation, or even language; it did require self-identification with the ideals of liberty and freedom. However, this commitment to personal liberty proved to be the country's downfall, as the szlachta failed to reconcile their freedoms with a commitment to the nation, whether through taxes or investments in the infrastructure of industry. Missing out on both the centralization of its government as well as the initial stages of industrialization, Poland's position in relation to its neighbors was in decline, even as the country's assembled army fought the Battle of Vienna in 1683, which prevented the Ottoman Turks from advancing into Europe.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Zembaty, "The Elegant Downfall of the Polish Sarmatians."

⁴² Jan Sowa, "Spectres of Sarmatism," in *Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature and Culture since 1918*, ed. Tamara Trojanowska, Joanna Nyzynska, and Przemyslaw Czaplinski (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), loc. 1428–2033, Kindle.

⁴³ Wojciech Przybylski argues that decentralization remains the hallmark of the Polish political psyche, so embedded is it in the nation's past. In reference to a 2019 corruption case involving PiS, he notes that Jarosław Kaczyński's decision *not* to run for prime minister or president stems from his awareness that "the real boss had to remain out of the spotlight" as he carried out his illicit activities. Wojciech Przybylski, "The Kaczyński Tapes," *Visegrad Insight*, February 7, 2019, <https://visegradinsight.eu/kaczynski-tapes/>.

⁴⁴ Michael Moran, *A Country in the Moon: Travels in Search of the Heart of Poland* (London: Granta, 2008).

Just as Sarmatism itself embodies many contradictions, so too was the Battle of Vienna a contradictory moment in the nation's history. Although the victory is the most notable embodiment of Sarmatism in Poland and saved the country from foreign invasion, it also marked the beginning of the end of the early modern Polish nation. 1683 was both a high point and a low point for the nation. Having shown that the szlachta could maintain the nation's sovereignty with few obligations to the nation itself, the country fell further behind its neighbors in modernizing its governance or economy. Continually attacked by Sweden, Turkey, and Austria, chaotically governed by the gentry, and with one succession crisis after another in the 1700s, the nation suffered its first partition by its neighbors in 1772. As Wojciech Zembaty recently observed of its limitations, "The decadent and outlandish nobility known as the Polish Sarmatians are often said to have brought down the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth through their mistakes and hubris."⁴⁵

Even as it led to the country's dismemberment, Sarmatian nationalism was crucial to the very survival of the Polish nation. Because it did not define the nation through borders, ethnicity or (as yet) language and religion, the concept proved essential in keeping the Polish nation alive, albeit as an imagined construct. As Ewa Thompson observes, "This Sarmatian custom allowed Poles (whose ranks began to swell as peasantry gained awareness of their Polishness) to survive as a community in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when they enjoyed no political recognition" and when the country could not be found on a map.⁴⁶ Mindful of its potential destructiveness, Zembaty agrees:

[Sarmatism] became an identity pattern for Polish nobility, a way of life. One of its primary concerns was defending the 'golden freedom' of nobles against the king's tyrannical inclinations. Thus, conservative Polish thinkers perceive Sarmatism as an original, pure form of Polish republicanism, similar to the tradition of the Founding Fathers of the United States.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Zembaty, "The Elegant Downfall of the Polish Sarmatians."

⁴⁶ Ewa Thompson, "Sarmatism, or the Secrets of Polish Essentialism," in *Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature and Culture since 1918*, ed. Tamara Trojanowska, Joanna Nyzynska, and Przemysław Czapliński (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), Kindle.

⁴⁷ Zembaty, "The Elegant Downfall of the Polish Sarmatians."

Leading alternately to liberty or subjugation, victory or defeat, a fascination with the East that was nonetheless parochial and xenophobic, the contradictions of Sarmatism in Polish nationalism are still present in the contemporary nation.⁴⁸ This set of beliefs is especially true in its leaders' responses to global terrorism, in which they have continually presented themselves as a modern warrior class defending the Roman Catholic West from an array of destructive (yet sometimes unnamed) outside forces.

⁴⁸ As Zdzisław Żygulski, Jr. observed, "Contradictions were to be found in everything [of the Sarmatian culture], since while drawing inspiration from Islamic peoples who allegedly resembled the mythical Sarmatians, the Poles doggedly fought those pagans, turning Poland into the 'bulwark of Christendom.'" Zdzisław Żygulski, Jr., "The Impact of the Orient on the Culture of Old Poland," in *Land of the Winged Horsemen: Art in Poland 1572-1764* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 70.

Table 1. Pivotal Dates in Sarmatian Poland

966	Poland becomes a Christian nation with the baptism of Mieszko I.
1505	Sejm takes legislative power from the monarch.
<i>The Golden Age of Liberty Begins</i>	
1565	Monarch now elected by Sejm.
1569	Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania established as the first modern Polish nation-state.
1573	Warsaw Confederation grants rights, including religious freedom to szlachta and townsfolk.
1683	The Battle of Vienna
<i>The Golden Age of Liberty Ends</i>	
1772	The First Partition: The end of the first modern Polish nation-state.

Table 2. Sarmatian Ideals and Practices

Warrior class
Public rituals to commemorate events and transmit meaning
Chivalric death
Political equality among the inner group, which governs the people
Fatalism: fighting a doomed war in the name of honor
Catholicism as central to preserving the nation and civilization
Freedom and liberty—nationhood as a voluntary alliance
“Golden Liberty” under a just ruler who allows the maximum amount of freedom to the people
Every nation a sovereign nation

B. DORMANT, THEN ASCENDANT: SARMATISM'S INFLUENCE ON CONTEMPORARY POLAND

Unlike the terrorist events that shaped its formation as a nation after the First World War and its reformation as a Soviet-dominated state following the Second World War, Poles established a modern, democratic nation in the 1990s, largely without violence. Many parties share credit for this achievement. The leadership of the labor union *Solidarność* (Solidarity), whose agenda forced the government to offer free elections in 1989, cannot be emphasized enough.⁴⁹ Nor can the actions of everyday Poles themselves be discounted; on March 27, 1981—during a crucial juncture in the relationship between the state and *Solidarność*—12 million people out of a population of 35 million took part in a nationwide, half-day strike in support of the union. This mass protest helped to force the government into substantial negotiations with the union, an effort that reestablished democracy within the decade.⁵⁰

These events, of course, did not take place within a vacuum. As recently declassified materials make clear, the United States devoted significant resources to dissident groups within Poland, including *Solidarność*.⁵¹ And the overwhelmingly inefficient, centralized planning system that it shared with other Eastern Bloc countries resulted in a massive foreign debt in Poland that significantly hampered consumer spending. So, too, did a command economy doom its controlling state, the U.S.S.R., to falling further and further behind in maintaining its place as a serious rival to the United States, including its ability to control the governance of the Warsaw Pact. Yet the drive to replace the command economy with a market-based system; the elimination of domestic policies based on directives from Moscow; and the institution of free, democratic processes

⁴⁹ Although outside the scope of this thesis, scholars have also argued that Solidarity owed much of its success to its exploitation of (Sarmatian) values inherent to Polish ethnocentrism and Roman Catholicism. Iana Sabatovych, "Does Nationalism Promote Democracy? Comparative Analyses of Ukraine's 'Maidan' Revolution and Poland's 'Solidarity' Mass Mobilisation," *Contemporary Politics* 24, no. 2 (2018): 131–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2017.1382826>.

⁵⁰ "Bydoski kryzys - marzec 1981," *Solidarność*, accessed August 16, 2019, <http://www.solidarnosc.org.pl/bbial/solidarnosc/bydoski-kryzys-marzec-1981/>

⁵¹ Seth A. Jones, *A Covert Action: Reagan, the CIA, and the Cold War Struggle in Poland* (New York: Norton, 2018).

and institutions would not *necessarily* follow the demise of socialist Poland. Those institutional transformations would be up to the nation's leaders, and the Poles themselves.

While the economic reforms of the 1990s transformed parts of Poland's economy through a sort of "shock therapy," the implementation of democratic initiatives was arguably less disruptive.⁵² But it was chaotic: with so many choices among the newly formed political parties, coalition governments became the norm in post-socialist Poland, a standard that remains in place to this day. Still, both achievements impressed Western observers, who praised the country's ability to make tough economic decisions to become competitive in the world market and to incorporate legitimate, albeit messy, democratic procedures. By the millennium, Poland was praised as an example of the triumph of Western values, including republicanism and capitalism. The West had won the Cold War, and the proof was in Poland.⁵³

If the integration of market capitalism and Western-style democracy were the hallmarks of the apparent Polish transition into the modern capitalist order, its accession into NATO symbolized its integration into the West's geopolitical hegemony.⁵⁴ However, the event was not as unambiguous an achievement as was proclaimed by Western observers. Even this event, celebrated as another triumph of West (embodied by the United States) over East (the now-defunct U.S.S.R.), signified a more complex set of issues that went far deeper than direct, geopolitical changes.

As Piotr Cap outlines in his essay on Poland's accession into NATO in 1999, for example, the continuities with Poland's past were the most notable rhetorical devices invoked by then-President Aleksander Kwaśniewski in his celebratory remarks. As a product of the country's communist past, it would at first seem odd that the president, whose rise in politics came directly from his lifelong association with the former ruling

⁵² Jerzy Lukowski and Hubert Zawadzki, *A Concise History of Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁵³ Wojciech Moskwa, "The Polish 'Economic Miracle' Comes with Warnings," Bloomberg, September 27, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-09-27/the-polish-economic-miracle-comes-with-warnings>.

⁵⁴ Gheciu, "Politics of Imagining the Western Security Community."

party, would have stressed historical events and not Poland's future in his address.⁵⁵ Even more unusual, in light of his support of America's global war on terror, was Kwaśniewski's avoidance of policy directives or any suggestions concerning Poland's active role in NATO.⁵⁶ Regardless, the president's discourse would have seemed perfectly natural, even obvious, given his domestic audience and their shared outlook of equal, sovereign nations in voluntary association and a sense of Poland's destiny: "We are a country of stable democracy. Independent courts, freedom of speech, and independent local government are now taken for granted in Poland. . . . Polish reforms have passed a critical point. They are now irreversible."⁵⁷ In this sense, joining NATO was not so much a military or geopolitical move as it was a natural return to essential Polish national values and its place in the international arena.

In addition to these republican values, Kwaśniewski also emphasized the equality of nations symbolized by NATO membership rather than the great military force that served as the very rationale for the group's existence. No longer at war with its neighbors or threatened by faraway enemies, belonging to NATO was nevertheless described as essentially restoring the nation to "the community of democracies," in Cap's observation, "a norm contributing to the worldwide stability and peace."⁵⁸ In this benign vision of the Sarmatian order, the purpose of NATO was not to engage in military action against Poland's enemies, or even to advocate for change in the political cosmos. It was a simple recognition, as Jan Józef Lipski had earlier noted in his cautionary essay on nationalism,

⁵⁵ Piotr Cap, "Further Applications and Concluding Remarks," in *Legitimization in Political Discourse: A Cross-Disciplinary Perspective on the Modern US War Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2006), 121. As Cap notes, a majority of the verbs used in Kwaśniewski's NATO speech in 2004 were in the past tense.

⁵⁶ In addition to sending Polish troops to Iraq as part of the U.S.-led Coalition of the Willing, Kwaśniewski later admitted to authorizing the CIA to operate "black sites" in Poland to detain and interrogate suspected terrorists. Douglas Ernst, "Ex-President Kwasniewski Admits Poland Hosted CIA 'Black Sites,'" *Washington Post*, December 10, 2014, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/dec/10/aleksander-kwasniewski-admits-poland-hosted-cia-bl/>.

⁵⁷ Cap, "Further Applications and Concluding Remarks," 121.

⁵⁸ Cap, 125.

that “every nation has its worth and dignity regardless of whether at any given time it is possessed by Hitlerism or some other abomination.”⁵⁹

This benign Sarmatian vision of Poland’s place in the new international order continued through the 2000s. Although its domestic politics routinely produced chaotic results with volatile coalitions forming and dissolving, Poland’s admission into the EU in 2004 and its continued economic growth seemed to validate the West’s prevailing opinion: Poland was like other Western nations after all, it seemed.⁶⁰ Yet it would not be long before the darker side of Sarmatism reasserted itself, a force brought to life in the name of Law and Justice.

⁵⁹ Lipski, “Two Fatherlands, Two Patriotisms,” 60.

⁶⁰ Mochocki lends a more skeptical view of Poland’s apparently superficial embrace of Western values during this period: “In search for a new post-communist identity, going back to the bygone eras was not an option compared to the shiny and glamorous Americanization. It was not until now, twenty years later, that Sarmatianism seems to be rediscovered. More than that, it seems to be gradually moving from the cultural margins to mainstream.” Mochocki, “The Sarmatian Cultural Turn in 21st-Century Poland.”

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III. THE RISE OF LAW AND JUSTICE IN A SARMATIAN CONTEXT: LESSONS FROM *THE DICTATOR'S HANDBOOK*

Many Western observers after 9/11 took it as self-evident that Polish leaders would eagerly adopt Western counterterrorism policies as their own, so obvious were the horrors inflicted by jihadist extremists.⁶¹ This policy perspective forgot, as the authors of *The Dictator's Handbook* note, that “politics is about getting and keeping political power,” not about making the world a better or safer place.⁶² To the extent that Poland eagerly participated in efforts by the “Coalition of the Willing” by sending its troops into Iraq or allowing secret “black” interrogation sites to be operated on Polish soil, these measures did not signify a fundamental, common understanding of the meaning of terrorism or a commitment to ending it.⁶³ It was, arguably, in the self-interest of Poland’s political leaders to follow these policies; to borrow again from *The Dictator's Handbook*, states themselves do not have interests. People—such as a nation’s elected officials—do, and it is this set of interests that are the driving force of politics.

The Dictator's Handbook also brings insight into the dynamism of the political discourse on global terrorism in Poland. As the authors note, political survival is best achieved by keeping one’s coalition small, with the support of only a few people necessary to gain office and stay there. This element has been crucial to the success of the party that has dominated Poland’s political landscape for the past decade, Law and Justice, which has built its support among a base of conservative, nationalistic, xenophobic, and overtly religious followers. In economic terms, Law and Justice has bragged about granting pension and “family supplement” benefits to Poles across the country. It has done so while

⁶¹ Alternatively, as Ronald Asmus bluntly wrote in 2002 about NATO’s expansion, “The debate revolved around America’s vision of Europe,” not about what Poland or the other prospective members may have envisioned. Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, loc. 343.

⁶² Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, *The Dictator's Handbook*, loc., 252.

⁶³ “Q&A: What Is the ‘Coalition of the Willing’?” *New York Times* (International), March 28, 2003, https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/cfr/international/slot1_032803.html?mcubz=0; and Adam Goldman, “The Hidden History of the CIA’s Prison in Poland,” *Washington Post*, January 23, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/the-hidden-history-of-the-cias-prison-in-poland/2014/01/23/b77f6ea2-7c6f-11e3-95c6-0a7aa80874bc_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.8e7a9a98de01.

placing its cronies in judicial and bureaucratic positions as a symbol of its revolt against the supposed elites oriented toward a more internationalist position. The party has also propagandized the alleged (but unreal) mass migration of North Africans and Middle Easterners into the country as an assault on its borders and used the only documented instance of a Polish victim of a terrorist attack—a truck driver who was killed during the Berlin Christmas Market attack in 2016—as evidence of Poland’s existence as a “martyr” nation to outside, Western interests, especially Germany.⁶⁴

With its success dependent on a small coalition of supporters, how has Law and Justice prevailed with a set of policies that are narrowly nationalistic and isolationist? Again borrowing from *The Dictator’s Handbook*, there are three primary groups in Poland’s political landscape; see Table 3. Law and Justice has skillfully manipulated each one of them to retain power.

Table 3. PiS and the Modern Sarmatian State: An Analysis through *The Dictator’s Handbook*

Interchangeables	Voters	chłopi	Nominal rights; voting power diluted by the parliamentary system
Influentials	PiS Party Chairs	szlachta	Control legislation; accountable to party, not voters
Essentials	Jarosław Kaczyński	king	No direct legislative authority; not in elective office but approves all actions

⁶⁴ Law and Justice Party leaders accused the truck driver’s German employers of delaying his delivery, thereby leading to his abduction and death. Włodzimierz Szczepański, “Państwo zadba o rodzinę kierowcy, który zginął w Berlinie.”

The “interchangeables,” or the voters in Poland’s democratic system, are the largest political grouping. This group includes voters currently living outside the nation’s borders. The group is largely unsupportive of Law and Justice, which holds a bare majority of both houses of the Polish parliament despite receiving less than 38 percent of the popular vote in the last national election.⁶⁵ This group generally has favored EU and NATO membership and has benefitted from non–Law and Justice economic policies oriented toward market capitalism, as the country’s economy has grown continuously for the past quarter century. (Remarkably, Poland was the sole European nation not to see a setback during the global recession after 2008.)⁶⁶ Given the economic success of the past quarter century and Poland’s ascendancy into the EU and NATO, however, members of the group are generally satisfied by the progress they have witnessed in Poland’s fortunes during their lifetimes. This satisfaction has led to some political disengagement that allows Law and Justice’s representatives to make unpopular political decisions without generating serious opposition.⁶⁷

The “influentials” are the party chairs of Law and Justice. They are the group who put forth the party’s candidates to the voters and who chose the prime minister and the Council of Ministers, which set domestic and foreign policies. Tellingly, it is widely acknowledged by political observers both within Poland and internationally that the most important politician in the country is, in fact, not an elected official at all but rather the chairman of Law and Justice.⁶⁸ The influentials largely are elected officials themselves but have kowtowed to the chairman at public events and have refrained from criticizing his controversial statements. The influentials owe their positions to the chairman; their

⁶⁵ James Traub, “The Party That Wants to Make Poland Great Again,” *New York Times Magazine*, November 2, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/06/magazine/the-party-that-wants-to-make-poland-great-again.html?_r=0.

⁶⁶ Moskwa, “The Polish ‘Economic Miracle.’”

⁶⁷ Aleksandra Cichocka et al., “What Inverted U Can Do for Your Country: A Curvilinear Relationship between Confidence in the Social System and Political Engagement,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 115, no. 5 (2017): 883–902, <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000168>.

⁶⁸ Mazzini, “Poland’s Historical Revisionism”; and Tworzecki, “Poland: A Case of Top-Down Polarization.”

ideological commitment is harder to gauge.⁶⁹ As is discussed in the forthcoming chapter, however, the members of this group are highly skilled in the visual and rhetorical displays of Sarmatism during pivotal moments related to the country's terrorist experience. It is as though, in Zembaty's observation, "the key component that propelled Sarmatism on[,] the duty of protecting the country's borders from Islamic enemies," has never really gone away.⁷⁰

The "essentials," to complete the trio of *The Dictator's Handbook*, include just one person—Lech Kaczyński, chairman of the Law and Justice Party. A long-time political advisor, Kaczyński held elective national office for only a few months as prime minister in a coalition government in 2006–2007. Acknowledged as the dominant political figure in the country, Kaczyński deferred obtaining a formal position as prime minister or president as many polls showed him to be decidedly unpopular with most Poles.⁷¹ Like other nationalist leaders in Central Europe, Kaczyński is profoundly isolationist and an interlocutor of international conspiracy theories claiming to show that his country is the target of nefarious foreign influences. He has been especially critical of the EU and its handling of the recent refugee crisis, arguing that Poland has been treated as a second-rank member of the alliance.⁷² This last issue has been a recurring one in Kaczyński's speeches and one that has largely gone unchallenged by Western leaders, despite an EU lawsuit against Poland to force it to stick to the organization's resettlement policies.

Along with other PiS leaders, Kaczyński has been astonishingly adept at manipulating the Sarmatian discourse to exploit real or imagined threats, including terrorism, in supposed defense of the Polish nation. As Piotr Cap shows in his analysis of speeches on immigration by PiS leaders in the 18 months after they gained leadership in the Polish government in November 2015, the party engaged in "us-versus-them" discourse

⁶⁹ Michał Broniatowski, "Polish Switcheroo Unsettles Ruling Party," Politico, December 8, 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-reshuffle-new-pm-morawiecki-szydlo-kaczynski/>.

⁷⁰ Zembaty, "The Elegant Downfall of the Polish Sarmatians."

⁷¹ Broniatowski, "Polish Switcheroo Unsettles Ruling Party."

⁷² "Kaczyński: Poland Did Not Invite Refugees, Has the Right to Say 'No,'" Euractiv, July 2, 2017, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/kaczynski-poland-did-not-invite-refugees-has-right-to-say-no/>; and Traub, "Make Poland Great Again."

to portray outsiders as a terrorist threat to the nation. Skilled at reading opinion polls and adjusting the party's message accordingly, PiS relied on anti-immigration rhetoric by labeling migrants "as a growing threat to Poland's national security" at a time when the party's approval ratings needed a boost.⁷³ This description of an existential threat would perhaps not have been successful but for two additional factors. First, during the massive influx of refugees into Europe in 2015, the party could point to actual scenes of chaos induced by the mass migration in places such as Budapest, where migrants camped out in bus and train stations.⁷⁴ Even more important than the headlines that summer, however, was the party's ability to weave essential Sarmatian values into its anti-migrant statements.

One factor that did not need manipulation, however, was the constant emphasis on *wolność* as a central tenet of nationhood. Common among the statements of PiS leaders, in Cap's estimation, is that "at the heart of [PiS's] rhetoric lies a strong appeal to the sense of 'independence,' which serves to invoke core elements of the national heritage in order to define and legitimize the current and future responsibilities."⁷⁵ President Kwaśniewski, it has been argued, did much the same thing in advocating for EU and NATO membership as a means for delivering Poland to its rightful destiny as an equal in the democratic community of nations. How could the same values lead to such different outcomes in the space of less than a decade? Part of the answer lies in the effective weaponization of Sarmatian values by Kaczyński and PiS.⁷⁶

⁷³ Cap, "'We Don't Want Any Immigrants or Terrorists Here,'" 381.

⁷⁴ Anemona Hartocollis and Dan Bilefsky, "Train Station in Budapest Cuts Off Service to Migrants," *New York Times*, September 1, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/02/world/europe/keleti-train-station-budapest-migrant-crisis.html>.

⁷⁵ Cap, "'We Don't Want Any Immigrants or Terrorists Here.'"

⁷⁶ Scholar Michał Mochocki notes an upsurge in Sarmatic images in the Polish mass media from 2008 onward. Mochocki, "The Sarmatian Cultural Turn in 21st-Century Poland."

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IV. UNCEASING TERROR: THE SARMATIAN POLITICS OF LAW AND JUSTICE

Unlike the United States, Poland has not suffered a direct terrorist attack in the contemporary era. However, global terrorism has had an impact on the nation's political rhetoric, with significant implications on its domestic and foreign policies.⁷⁷ This analysis focuses on three of the most pivotal events attributed to terrorism in the past decade, beginning with a plane crash that killed many of the country's leaders in 2010; continuing with the so-called EU migrant crisis from Africa and South Asia in 2015; and concluding with the death of Polish truck driver Łukasz Urban, who was killed in a terrorist attack in Berlin in 2016. The response and narrative by Poland's political leaders are then analyzed in terms of the constructed discourse, including its political goals, and the impact of this dialogue on the country's domestic and foreign policies.

A. THE MYTH OF SMOLEŃSK: A MODERN SARMATIAN RITUAL

Perhaps the most tragic national event in Poland's contemporary history occurred on April 10, 2010, when a plane carrying President Lech Kaczyński and his entourage crashed into a wooded area outside of Smoleńsk, Russia. The accident killed all 96 people on board. Although it was determined that the accident resulted from pilot error—the crew felt pressured to land the plane despite extremely unfavorable conditions—conspiracy theories immediately sprang up that alleged the crash was an act of terrorism. For the next eight years, the Law and Justice Party conducted not just annual but *monthly* commemorations of the accident. As the leader of the party, Lech Kaczyński's twin

⁷⁷ Although beyond the scope of this study, other countries in the region have also responded to real or perceived threats of terrorism by invoking a defense of homeland values against an existential threat. Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*; Cap, “We Don’t Want Any Immigrants or Terrorists Here,” 380–98; David Frum, “The Toxic Politics of Migration in the Czech Republic,” *Atlantic*, October 23, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/10/czech-elections/543669/>; Elisabeth Zerofsky, “Viktor Orbán’s Far-Right Vision for Europe,” *New Yorker*, January 17, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/01/14/viktor-orbans-far-right-vision-for-europe>; and “Relocation: Commission Refers the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to the Court of Justice,” European Commission, December 7, 2017, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-5002_en.htm.

brother, Jarosław Kaczyński, reminded the public, “He rekindled Poland’s national consciousness and restored its honor.”⁷⁸

But why would PiS go to such lengths to shape what was clearly an accident into a terrorist event, and Lech Kaczyński into a martyr for his country? Part of the reason stems from the country’s historical vision of itself as a martyr nation; after all, the plane going to Smoleńsk was taking party leaders to a commemoration of the Katyń massacre of 1940, when the occupying Soviet Army slaughtered some 22,000 Polish military leaders, academics, and politicians in an attempt to eliminate the country’s ruling elite. Another reason was the underlying politics that immediately preceded the Smoleńsk trip. Just three days before, the leader of PiS’s rival party in the government, Prime Minister Donald Tusk of the Civic Platform, had traveled to Smoleńsk for the commemoration but had pointedly not invited Kaczyński to go with him.⁷⁹

Thus were interwoven the toxic threads that produced the myth of Smoleńsk, a terrorist event that never actually happened. As Minister of National Defense (and PiS Deputy) Antoni Macierewicz bluntly stated in the year after the crash, “We were the first victim of terrorism in the 1930s, and in Smoleńsk we can say that we were also the first big victim of terrorism in the modern conflict that unfolds before our eyes.”⁸⁰ Joined with Jarosław Kaczyński’s unrelenting mourning of his brother, the nation was constantly

⁷⁸ Sieradzka, “The Tragedy That Defined Polish Politics.”

⁷⁹ The Civic Platform was then the largest party in the government and held power to appoint the prime minister and officers in the executive branch; Kaczyński remained as president because he had been directly elected to that office in 2005, a term set to expire in 2010.

⁸⁰ Part of the successful transformation of the accident into a terrorist event was the obfuscation of the alleged terrorists’ identities. Macierewicz, for example, stated that a terrorist act at Smoleńsk, “aimed at depriving Poland of the leadership that led our nation to independence,” had taken place but only implied that Russia was the terrorist agent. Marek Świerczyński, “Macierewicz: Smoleńsk był aktem terroryzmu [Macierewicz: Smoleńsk was an act of terrorism],” *Polityka*, March 13, 2016, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1654066,1,macierewicz-smolensk-był-aktem-terroryzmu.read>. Over time, PiS leadership focused on then–Prime Minister Tusk as the force behind the plot with the full backing of the European Union. Mazzini, “Poland’s Historical Revisionism.”

reminded that PiS's political opponents, never named directly but ranging from the Civic Platform to the European Union to Russia, were also enemies of Poland.⁸¹

As noted by scholar Michał Mochocki, PiS's adaptation of Sarmatic tropes was cemented by the Smoleńsk crash, which killed the self-identified Sarmatian hero, Lech Kaczyński.⁸² In the short term, this nationalist, xenophobic, and paranoid message was effective, as it helped PiS gain the upper hand over the Civic Platform in the parliamentary elections of 2015, when it won a narrow majority over its rivals. Among its campaign promises was a pledge to reopen the initial investigation into the Smoleńsk crash, a promise that was never fulfilled despite Jarosław Kaczyński's repeated statements that the truth would soon be known about the event. Eight years after the crash, Kaczyński quietly stopped appearing at the monthly commemorations of his brother's death.⁸³ Even so, in these years, the commemoration of the myth of Smoleńsk demonstrated the Sarmatian "predilection for celebrating anniversaries, monuments and rituals of all kinds," a habit that served only to sow mistrust in Poland's neighbors and its own political process.⁸⁴

The attention that PiS devoted to the fictitious terrorist event came at the expense of the government's credibility among its domestic and international critics, yet the political capital that it temporarily created for PiS was a lesson well learned by the party's leaders.⁸⁵ As the party's history in the following decade has shown, it was a lesson that it would use again and again in responding to terrorist events—or events that it could link to

⁸¹ For an alternative description of the Smoleńsk crash and its meaning—one that emphasizes the importance of the Katyń massacre in Polish historical consciousness, instead of the deliberate manipulation of the event by PiS, see Stanley Bill, "The Splintering of a Myth: Polish Romantic Ideology in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries," in *Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature and Culture since 1918*, ed. Tamara Trojanowska, Joanna Nyzynska, and Przemysław Czapliński (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), Kindle.

⁸² At the time of his death, Lech Kaczyński was campaigning for PiS with the theme song "Ballada o małym rycerzu" (Ballad of a small knight), taken from a film of one of the best-known Sarmatian works of fiction, Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Pan Wołodyjowski* (Mr. Wołodyjowski). Mochocki, "The Sarmatian Cultural Turn in 21st-Century Poland."

⁸³ Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom*; and Emily Tamkin, "Has the Clock Run Out on the Smolensk Controversy?," *Foreign Policy*, April 10, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/10/has-the-clock-run-out-on-the-smolensk-conspiracy/>.

⁸⁴ Thompson, "Sarmatism, or the Secrets of Polish Essentialism."

⁸⁵ Nżyńska, "The Politics of Mourning."

terrorism—by creating a nationalistic, xenophobic narrative based on half-truths and outright lies. As journalist Jarosław Kociszewski noted in 2018, a time when PiS had consolidated its rule, “The illiberal trend is [now] driven rather by a fear of fictitious enemies, i.e. Islamic migrants, Germans, than Smoleńsk.”⁸⁶

B. THE EU MIGRANT CRISIS: SARMATISM AND TOXIC CHRISTIANITY

Indeed, the fictitious enemy of Islamic migrants as alleged invading terrorists was the dominant response of the Polish government to the EU migrant crisis of 2015. During that year, just over one million people entered the EU illegally, with half coming from Syria. The most common means of travel was by sea from Turkey to Greece, with about 800,000 migrants making the journey that year. Most claimed refugee status from civil or ethnic conflicts in their home countries, with Syria’s ongoing civil war the greatest factor in the sudden upsurge in migration. Although bound by international conventions to claim refugee status in the first safe country they entered, most of the refugees intended to go to final destinations such as Germany, the United Kingdom, or Sweden due to job opportunities or family connections.⁸⁷

Immediately after taking office as the governing party of Poland in October 2015, PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński decried the influx of EU migrants as a security threat. Stating that Poland would not abide by its agreement as an EU member to take in some asylum seekers, he stated, “After recent events connected with acts of terror, [Poland] will not accept refugees because there is no mechanism that would ensure security.”⁸⁸ Although he offered no direct evidence of a terrorist plot linked to the EU migrant crisis and overlooked the fact that none of the migrants were attempting to reach Poland, Kaczyński’s blunt definition of the migrants as potential terrorists left no ambiguity. Kaczyński and

⁸⁶ Sieradzka, “The Tragedy That Defined Polish Politics.”

⁸⁷ “Migrant Crisis: One Million Enter Europe in 2015,” BBC News, December 22, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35158769>.

⁸⁸ Matt Broomfield, “Poland Refuses to Take a Single Refugee Because of ‘Security’ Fears,” *Independent*, May 9, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/poland-refuses-to-take-a-single-refugee-because-of-security-fears-a7020076.html>.

other PiS leaders refused to discuss the migrant crisis as anything other than a terrorist threat to the country.⁸⁹

A review of the discourse articulated by PiS leadership, including Kaczyński, Prime Minister Beata Szydło, Minister of Foreign Affairs Witold Waszczykowski, and Minister of the Interior Mariusz Błaszczak, reads like a warped and weaponized primer on the Sarmatian expression of Polish nationhood. In ritualistic fashion, these speakers have emphasized again and again that foreign migration, embodied by refugees, is a threat to the safety of the Polish nation and an attack on its freedom. In a May 2016 speech, Kaczyński directly linked “national sovereignty” to the “equal rights and social justice” and “peace, stability and economic progress” that the republic’s citizens had earned. “We derive it from our Christian heritage, the values to which our nation has been committed for centuries and to which we are committed today.” Kaczyński added, “We do not take foreign orders.”⁹⁰ The following month, Waszczykowski again placed “our freedom and security” above all other values in explaining why Poland would not follow EU policies for accepting migrants into the country. Like Kaczyński, he equated following EU directives with the abandonment of Poland’s very sovereignty: “We will be in charge in our own country,” he declared.⁹¹

PiS leaders continued with their migrants-as-terrorists rhetoric even after the EU sued Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic for abrogating their commitments to take in migrants. Party leaders were also unfazed by criticism that highlighted their hypocrisy on migrant policies as applied to the largest number of asylum seekers in the country, those from neighboring war-torn Ukraine. By 2017, migration to Poland was at a record high, with almost a quarter million foreigners applying for work permits, an increase of 258 percent from 2014. But over 80 percent of these migrants were from Ukraine, a fact the

⁸⁹ Cap, ““We Don’t Want Any Immigrants or Terrorists Here.””

⁹⁰ Cap, 388–389.

⁹¹ Cap.

PiS awkwardly ignored in its continuing anti-migrant stance.⁹² Poland's reaction to the migrant crisis damaged the country's standing in the EU, a membership that, ironically, was designed to help protect the sanctity of the country's borders.⁹³

C. THE DEATH OF LUKASZ URBAN: A SARMATIAN MARTYR FOR POLAND

With EU ties fragmenting, PiS leaders did further damage to the relationship with its largest trading partner, neighboring Germany, with their reaction to the only documented case of a Polish citizen being killed in a terrorist attack in the nation's contemporary history. The victim, Łukasz Urban, was a truck driver who was abducted along with his vehicle by a supporter of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), who then drove the truck into Berlin's main Christmas market, killing 12 people.⁹⁴ Even as the media reported the brutal nature of Urban's death, PiS leaders suggested that it was not just a terrorist act by a jihadist but one that also implicated Germany. If Urban, who was attempting to deliver his shipment of steel to a German factory a day early, had not been turned away and forced to wait overnight to complete his task, he would not have been

⁹² "EU to Sue Poland, Hungary and Czechs for Refusing Refugee Quotas," BBC News, December 7, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-42270239>; Strzałkowski, "Fortress Europe Lives on in Poland"; Jan Cieski, "Why Poland Doesn't Want Refugees," Politico, May 21, 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/politics-nationalism-and-religion-explain-why-poland-doesnt-want-refugees/>; and Frey Lindsay, "Ukrainian Immigrants Give the Polish Government an Out on Refugees," *Forbes*, September 19, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/freylindsay/2018/09/19/ukrainian-immigrants-give-the-polish-government-an-out-on-refugees/#410f6d2f4bb1>.

⁹³ Rick Nelson et al., *Border Security in a Time of Transformation: Two International Case Studies—Poland and India* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 2010), https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/100709_Nelson_BorderSecurity_web.pdf; and Applebaum, "A Warning from Europe."

⁹⁴ The terrorist was a Tunisian man who had attempted to claim asylum in Italy in 2011. After his claim was rejected, he moved to Germany, where he filed another claim under a false identity while engaging in theft, welfare fraud, and drug dealing. He later became radicalized and claimed to be working on behalf of ISIS. "Anis Amri," Counter Extremism Project, accessed August 7, 2019, <https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/anis-amri>.

killed, according to this conspiracy. Such was the account peddled by PiS-oriented media outlets both within Poland and abroad.⁹⁵

But how was an extra-territorial terrorist attack on a Polish citizen transformed from an ISIS plot into an attack by a long-standing ally and its most important trading partner on the Polish nation itself? Viewing Urban's death as a Sarmatian event provides an answer. As Mochocki notes in his analysis of the mainstreaming of Sarmatian literary themes in Poland's culture after 2000, "It was the honest and brave Sarmatian nobleman, skilled in fencing, shooting and riding who was the typical protagonist."⁹⁶ Although Urban's truck was not a substitute for a horse, the images that accompanied reports of the attack consistently showed him riding high in his cab and emphasized (the later disproved account) that he had fought the attacker even after being shot.⁹⁷ Media accounts consistently highlighted his skills as a driver who would not take even a drop of alcohol a day before he was to drive; his conscientious work habits, which, fatally, had led him to show up early to pick up his delivery; and his devotion to his wife and family. It was to his wife that he made his last (unanswered) phone call and with his family that he hoped to reunite in time for Christmas.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Typical of the articles published on white-power extremist websites are Chris Tomlinson, "'Merkel Has the Blood of My Son on Her Hands': Mother of Terror Victim," Breitbart, December 19, 2017, <https://www.breitbart.com/europe/2017/12/19/mother-berlin-terror-victim-merkel-blood-son-hands/>; and Brittany Vonow and Matt Wilkinson, "Polish Trucker 'Tried to Stop Massacre' in Berlin," Justice4Poland, December 21, 2016, <https://justice4poland.com/2016/12/22/polish-trucker-tried-to-stop-massacre-in-berlin/>. Right-wing extremist sites also claimed that Urban had complained about Berlin being "full of Muslims." John Hayward, "Łukasz Urban, Hero of the Berlin Christmas Market Massacre," Breitbart, December 23, 2016, <https://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2016/12/23/lukasz-urban-hero-berlin-christmas-market-massacre/>. In reality, Urban was turned away because of EU rules mandating rest periods for truck drivers, a fact that was ignored in the first reports of the attack.

⁹⁶ Mochocki, "The Sarmatian Cultural Turn in 21st-Century Poland."

⁹⁷ Adam Wojtasiewicz, "Zobacz, jak bohater Łukasz Urban uratował życie dziesiątkom ludzi w Berlinie: Gdyby nie on, byłaby druga Nicea [See how the hero Łukasz Urban saved the lives of dozens of people in Berlin: If it was not for him, there would be a second Nice], "Wolnosc 24, December 21, 2016, <https://wolnosc24.pl/2016/12/21/zobacz-jak-bohater-lukasz-urban-uratowal-zycie-dziesiatkom-ludzi-w-berlinie-gdyby-nie-on-by-laby-druga-nicea-analiza/>. An autopsy established that Urban died after being shot several hours before the truck attack. Initial reports spread the narrative that he had survived being shot and had rallied back to force the attacker off the main road to the market in the final moments of his life. Rachael Pells, "Hundreds Attend Funeral of Polish Lorry Driver Killed in Berlin Attack," *Independent*, December 30, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/hundreds-mourners-attend-funeral-berlin-attack-christmas-market-polish-lorry-driver-killed-lukasz-a7502481.html>.

⁹⁸ Hayward, "Hero of the Berlin Christmas Market Massacre."

Thus, it was through a Sarmatian lens that the death of Urban was described in media accounts as a chivalric death that symbolized the existential threats to the Roman Catholic Polish nation.⁹⁹ News reports claimed, despite the many unknowns related to his abduction and death, that he had fought until the end and was, in fact, responsible for the terrorist driver swerving away from the main pathway in the market, thereby preventing the death toll from being higher. Valiantly fighting a doomed battle, the truck driver was not so much a victim of terrorism as a Sarmatian hero symbolizing, once again, Poland's fight against external forces. For, as events leading up to his funeral demonstrated, this Sarmatian hero was brought down not just by a terrorist but by the machinations of neighboring Germany, the country's most crucial European neighbor and the dominant force in the EU.¹⁰⁰

An implicit criticism of German efficiency and hidebound rule-following was made explicit in the days leading up to Urban's funeral, as German Chancellor Angela Merkel was excoriated for not calling the victim's family. She was also faulted for not attending the funeral, which witnessed Polish President Andrzej Duda kneeling on the bare church floor at Urban's coffin and kissing the widow's hand in another act of chivalry.¹⁰¹ With these acts, Urban was mythologized by far-right commentators as not just a hero for fighting against his attacker but also a martyr to the Polish nation and a symbol of its

⁹⁹ The ease and immediacy with which media in Poland created the story of Urban as a chivalric hero (while ignoring central facts of the event) may show the danger of the "transformations of Polish reportage" as "reportage is being treated today as literature both by those who write it and by those who read it." Zygmunt Ziątek Ziątek, "Transformations of Polish Reportage," in *Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature and Culture since 1918*, ed. Tamara Trojanowska, Joanna Nyzynska, and Przemysław Czapliński (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), loc. 19755, Kindle.

¹⁰⁰ Piotr Buras and Josef Janning, "Divided at the Centre: Germany, Poland, and the Troubles of the Trump Era" (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, December 19, 2018), https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/divided_at_the_centre_germany_poland_and_the_troubles_of_the_trump_era.

¹⁰¹ "Łukasz Urban został pochowany: Andrzej Duda na pogrzebie Polskiego kierowcy [Lukasz Urban was buried: Andrzej Duda at the funeral of the Polish driver]," *Wprost*, December 30, 2016, <https://www.wprost.pl/kraj/10036927/lukasz-urban-zostal-pochowany-andrzej-duda-na-pogrzebie-polskiego-kierowcy.html>.

continuing victimization by the historical German aggressor.¹⁰² The acts also symbolized the rapidly deteriorating relationship between Poland and Germany, which some observers view as the most significant strategic alliance to counter Russia's influence in the region.¹⁰³ Even a year after the attack, some in Poland continued to complain that German leaders had not shown sufficient respect to Urban's family by not sending Chancellor Merkel to meet with them directly. And Urban's cousin, who owned the trucking firm that had employed him, complained that his truck had still not been returned to him, a situation that he described as "a matter of honor."¹⁰⁴

D. THE ENDURING INFLUENCE OF SARMATIAN NATIONALISM IN CONTEMPORARY POLAND

Polish responses to events of global terrorism since 2010 have baffled Western observers. Using Western definitions of the nation rooted in market capitalism, political and social liberalism, and an orientation toward the West, their analyses have failed to explain the rise and continuing dominance of the nationalistic and xenophobic PiS. When analyzed as part of the Sarmatian discourse, however, the exploitation of these three terrorist incidents during the last decade shows how deeply embedded Sarmatism is in Polish nationhood. Furthermore, it shows how its values can be linked to the contemporary nation's experience with global terrorism, real or imagined, for the political advantage of the ruling party. Until that discourse is disrupted or replaced by equally convincing rhetoric that coincides with Sarmatian values, it is not likely that the toxic elements of Sarmatism will be addressed and confronted.

¹⁰² Gareth Davies, "Polish Special Forces on High Alert as the Country's President Joins Hundreds for the Funeral of the Truck Driver Killed in the Berlin Christmas Market Massacre by ISIS Maniac Anis Amri," *Daily Mail*, December 30, 2016, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4076716/Polish-special-forces-high-alert-country-s-President-joins-hundreds-funeral-truck-driver-killed-Berlin-Christmas-market-massacre-ISIS-maniac-Anis-Amri.html>; and Frank Hofmann, "Polish Terror Victim's Parents Disappointed with Germany," *Deutsche Welle*, December 12, 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/polish-terror-victims-parents-disappointed-with-germany/a-41825312>.

¹⁰³ Buras and Janning, "Divided at the Centre."

¹⁰⁴ Agnieszka Kulikowska-Wielgus, "Polish Carrier Suspends Compensation Claims against Germany: Two Years Have Passed since Terrorist Attack in Berlin," *Trans.Info* December 18, 2018, <https://trans.info/de/polish-carrier-suspends-compensation-claims-against-germany-two-years-have-passed-since-terrorist-attack-in-berlin-119984>.

As the experience with the myth of Smoleńsk and the death of Łukasz Urban show, public rituals, especially those linked to martyrdom and Christianity, have an immediate, visceral impact on the Polish psyche. Although monthly public commemorations of a non-existent terrorist event for eight years may seem bizarre to Western observers, they have been effective in pushing PiS to ruling status by continually reminding the public of the death of PiS leaders in the plane crash. They were also effective in broadcasting an undefined conspiracy theory that allowed PiS to allege an existential threat to the nation; the ritual reinforced this idea by making the monthly ceremony overtly religious (and Roman Catholic) in nature. Likewise, the widely broadcast funeral of truck driver Urban, routinely described as a hero instead of a victim, transformed Poland once again into a martyr nation, with the president paying homage, Sarmatian-style, by kneeling on a bare floor in front of his coffin.¹⁰⁵

Likewise, the EU migrant crisis of 2015 was shaped to parallel perhaps the best-known Sarmatian moment, the Battle of Vienna in 1683. In both instances, Polish leaders specifically referred to an Islamic (or Ottoman) threat not only to Poland but also to Europe and Christianity itself. As a modern Sarmatian event, of course, PiS leaders overlooked the fact that the Ottoman Turks were actual invaders in a military campaign; the comparison of invading Turks with migrants attempting to go to England, Germany, and Sweden hardly compares. Nevertheless, the image of migrants as another coming of Ottomans was a political boon for PiS inasmuch as Sarmatian values came into play with the event.¹⁰⁶

The Sarmatian foundation of PiS's strategic response to military and terrorist threats is also seen in the current foreign policy initiative to build a massive U.S. military base on Polish soil. President Duda at first jokingly called the project "Fort Trump" in a blatant attempt to appeal to the U.S. leader's ego.¹⁰⁷ Predictably, the leaked announcement

¹⁰⁵ "Łukasz Urban został pochowany."

¹⁰⁶ Monika Prończuk, "Waszczykowski powtarza 'przekaz dnia' PiS" [Waszczykowski repeats the 'message of the day' of PiS], OKO Press, September 8, 2017, <https://oko.press/waszczykowski-powtarza-przekaz-pis-uchodzcy-czyli-migranci-czyli-terror-a-przeciez-przyjmujemy-ukraincow/>.

¹⁰⁷ Bartosz Goluch, "Amerykańska prasa: Duda sprawnie 'masuje' ego Trumpa [American press: Duda efficiently 'massages' Trump's ego]," Wiadomości, June 11, 2019, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/amerykanska-prasa-duda-sprawnie-masuje-ego-trumpa-6390918729554049a>.

was treated at first as a joke, another jab at evading the country's commitment to the EU by dealing unilaterally with the United States and a leader with a similar political platform. Based as it is on a Sarmatian ethos of making a grand show of one's warrior status, wealth, and grandeur, however, the project appears not just possible but predestined as the default response by Poland to military threats. In this sense, the country's ascension to NATO was not a natural development but rather a happy accident; it is the country's desire to build Fort Trump that is far more revealing about how Sarmatian nationalism is its most enduring value.

Although Poland gladly joined NATO as a symbol of its equality with other European nations, in true Sarmatian fashion, it haltingly accepted only the minimum responsibilities to the guild's common policies. Over time, it rejected some of these responsibilities, from accepting migrants to upholding rulings relating to civil liberties as ordered by the EU Court of Justice, as an infringement on its sovereignty. In the Fort Trump project, then, PiS leaders found a venue that allowed them, once again, to assert their freedom from EU values, allowing them to enact autocratic measures affecting the judiciary, media, and civil rights by making these moves in the name of Poland's liberty and defense of its culture.¹⁰⁸ The project also harkened back to the days of ostentatious displays of wealth by the Sarmatians, even when such expenditures were obviously foolish.¹⁰⁹ As one former U.S. official bluntly recognized, the base represents no benefit to America, to the EU, or even to Poland itself, given that Russia has no current purpose in invading Poland and every disincentive against it.¹¹⁰ Even if a Russian attack were to happen—unlikely given that its population and economy are dwarfed by that of the EU as

¹⁰⁸ For one critique of PiS's moves against an independent judiciary, see the report issued by the Council of Europe: Dunja Mijatović, *Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe: Report Following Her Visit to Poland from 11 to 15 March 2019* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, June 28, 2019), <https://rm.coe.int/report-on-the-visit-to-poland-from-11-to-15-march-2019-by-dunja-mijato/168094d848>.

¹⁰⁹ Although the promise of a \$2 billion investment seems massive, it is not so impressive compared to the cost of U.S. military personnel already stationed in Poland. Maciej Kucharczyk, "Pół miliarda dolarów w kilka lat: Wojsko USA buduje się w Polsce nawet bez 'Fort Trump' [Half a billion dollars in a few years: The U.S. military is building in Poland even without 'Fort Trump']," *Wiadomości*, April 19, 2019, <http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,114883,24680932,pol-miliarda-dolarow-w-kilka-lat-wojsko-usa-buduje-sie-w-polsce.html#a=167&c=159&t=5&g=x&s=BoxNewsLink>.

¹¹⁰ Doug Bandow, "'Fort Trump' in Poland: Why These Colors Won't Fly," *American Conservative*, March 21, 2019.

a whole—it is questionable whether the United States would respond in any meaningful way. One only has to think about America’s abstention from acting on Russia’s military presence in the Donbas region of Ukraine, let alone its occupation of Crimea.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Krishnadev Calamur, “Was Obama Too Soft on Russia?” *Atlantic*, February 15, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2017/02/trump-obama-russia-crimea/516777/>.

V. CONCLUSIONS: RESPONSES TO PiS'S MANIPULATION OF NATIONALISM AND TERRORISM

The nationalistic and xenophobic strategic responses to terrorist events (whether real or fictitious) have alienated Poland and the other Visegrád nations from their EU and NATO partners, especially Germany.¹¹² The constant refrain of lies and half-truths used by the leaders of PiS in their strategic responses have also undermined their credibility, domestically and internationally. This strategy has led to a loss in confidence by the public in their nation's institutions, including the government, the judiciary, and the media.¹¹³ The attempts by PiS to decrease its multilateral engagements with the EU and NATO while seeking unilateral agreements with the United States, for example, have arguably increased the power and influence of Russia, a historic aggressor, in the region.¹¹⁴ As Mateusz Mazzini recently noted, "Poland remains one of very few countries in Eastern Europe that does not have a mainstream political party openly backed by the Kremlin. But it does not need one. The revisionist politics of the current Polish government plays right into Moscow's hands."¹¹⁵

Looking at Poland's response to global terrorism through a Sarmatian lens may help to recalibrate its relationship with the West. Sticking to the rules laid out in *The Dictator's Handbook*, the only change that will likely alter the current trajectory is to destroy the effectiveness of Kaczyński's xenophobic and nationalistic platform that capitalizes on the rhetoric of global terrorism to maintain support among his narrow base

¹¹² Buras and Janning, "Divided at the Centre"; European Commission, "Relocation"; Frum, "The Toxic Politics of Migration"; and Katerina Linos, Laura Viktoria Jackli, and Melissa Carlson, "Hungary and Slovakia Challenged Europe's Refugee Scheme: They Just Lost Badly," *Washington Post*, September 8, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/09/08/hungary-and-slovenia-challenged-europes-refugee-scheme-they-just-lost-badly/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.44f37ef4a79c.

¹¹³ Cichocka et al., "What Inverted U Can Do for Your Country."

¹¹⁴ Buras and Janning, "Divided at the Centre"; and Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom*.

¹¹⁵ Mazzini, "Poland's Historical Revisionism."

of followers.¹¹⁶ The first step in this process will be to educate Western leaders on how Poles themselves view the history of terrorism and its actual impact, whether real or imagined, on their own country. As discussed in this thesis, understanding how Poles have experienced terrorism in the context of their nationhood will be particularly vital in reorienting this rhetoric to a more internationalist and liberal agenda.

In challenging Kaczyński's definition of terrorism, Western policymakers must emphasize Poland's place in the Western *coalition* and not just a special partner with an equally Eurosceptic United States.¹¹⁷ While reassuring Poles that its borders are sacrosanct, then, these leaders must acknowledge that the country's history has been shaped countless times by foreign forces; despite these challenges, democracy has always been a possibility. It will also be helpful to remind Polish voters and Law and Justice leaders that fighting against EU policies on supposed counterterrorism grounds will be especially harmful to the country at a time when EU infrastructure investments, which had begun after the country's admission to the EU in 2004, are set to expire.¹¹⁸

In addition to targeting Kaczyński as an agent who does not represent the best interests of his nation, Western counterterrorism policymakers may draw guidance from *Democracy for Realists* to help in a campaign to draw Poland back into the Western coalition. As the authors note, people are swayed more by current feelings about the national mood, the economy, and social issues than by actual analysis of policies.¹¹⁹ From this perspective, the ability of Law and Justice to conflate terrorism with a xenophobic

¹¹⁶ Political scientist Hubert Tworzecki observed that PiS gained 51 percent of the seats in the lower house of the Sejm with less than 38 percent of the popular vote in an election with about 50 percent turnout. He offers the opinion that PiS may effectively be governing with only 20 percent of the voting population supporting it. Tworzecki, "Poland: A Case of Top-Down Polarization."

¹¹⁷ Paul Sonne and Anne Gearan, "Poland's New Tactic for Getting a U.S. Military Base? Pitch It as Fort Trump," *Washington Post*, September 18, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/polands-new-tactic-for-getting-a-us-military-base-pitch-it-as-fort-trump/2018/09/18/5a58c17a-bb7a-11e8-b1c5-7a2126bc722c_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.2ae4d8b85ca9.

¹¹⁸ "The European Union's Budget May Soon Be Weaponized," *Economist*, January 18, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/01/18/the-european-unions-budget-may-soon-be-weaponised>.

¹¹⁹ Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels, *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

stand against immigration and all EU policies in general makes sense, even if this stance is hardly supported by economic data, historical experience, or even the rule of law itself.

Building on this idea that voters cast their votes based on their social identities, not policy preferences or ideologies, it may be possible to redefine the socio-political meaning of global terrorism to reinforce Poland's ties to the West and inhibit the trend toward isolationism. There is a crucial need, then, to address the political rhetoric of Law and Justice that defines terrorist incidents (whether real or prophesized) as attacks against Poland, specifically, making it again a martyred, isolated nation. Instead, political leaders should take every measure to confront and deconstruct the semantic fallacies of Kaczyński and others who use terrorism as a convenient trope to advance xenophobic policies. As Iana Sabtovych recently observed, "Although nationalistic moods sharpen during a crisis . . . whether these moods gain 'good' or 'bad' qualities depends on the ability of political leaders to produce and deliver a better consensus."¹²⁰ And, as Wojciech Przybylski recently asked,

PiS's base has been revived and invigorated by several conspiracy theories—from the Smoleńsk crash to a plot of liberal elites working against Poland—and within these theories everything that contradicts it paradoxically strengthens the power of the faithful in these conspiracies. But what about the voters who are in the middle and can be swayed to or away from a party guided by their own independent judgment?¹²¹

Gaining an understanding of how Poles interpret the rhetoric of global terrorism through a Sarmatian lens is only a first step in this process of productive coalition building.

Although no longer an emerging economy or a nation behind the Iron Curtain, Poland's contemporary political scene is still crucial to the fate of any Western alliance. The continuing ability of its current leaders to manipulate the rhetoric of global terrorism to further their own advantages should not be discounted by Western policymakers, but rather confronted. In this sense, the words of Czech dissident and eventual President Vaclav Havel are informative. Writing about the nature of post-totalitarian politics in his essay

¹²⁰ Sabatovych, "Does Nationalism Promote Democracy?"

¹²¹ Przybylski, "The Kaczyński Tapes."

“The Power of the Powerless,” he observed the corrosive effect of unchecked lies led to “a mere ritual, a formalized language deprived of semantic contact with reality and transformed into a system of ritual signs that replace reality with pseudo-reality.”¹²² In the fake-news world of contemporary Polish politics—alas, a malady not confined to that country—truth to power must once again be advocated with every means at hand.¹²³

Western leaders can also help Poles build on their legacy of using the power of civil society to influence its political leaders. As David Ost notes in his work *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics*, it was the introduction of non-political groups into the political process in the 1970s and 1980s that led to the democratic transformation of the nation.¹²⁴ This achievement would arguably not have been possible without the overt and sometimes covert assistance of Western leaders and institutions. The same mutual dialogue is just as vital today, a time when the political arena in Poland has become less representative, less transparent, and less responsive to the demands of its citizens for good government.¹²⁵

It should also be recognized that for all of the positive aspects of tolerance and service to humanity, there is another element of Sarmatism that is potentially quite toxic: based on its embrace of Roman Catholic Christianity (and the bulwark of such in the West) as well as its proclaimed centrality to Polish nationhood, Sarmatism carries within it the potential for xenophobia, especially against Islam. It was not by accident that the Australian man who staged a terrorist attack on an Auckland, New Zealand, mosque in March 2019

¹²² Vaclav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” in *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Central-Eastern Europe* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1985), 32.

¹²³ As Mateusz Mazzini notes, the “profoundly revisionist,” “exclusive,” and “all-encompassing” rhetoric of PiS ironically mirrors that of the Communist Party, which its members protested against. Mazzini, “Poland’s Historical Revisionism.”

¹²⁴ David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics: Opposition and Reform in Poland since 1968* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

¹²⁵ In a sign that civil society has begun to organize outside the political arena against Law and Justice, a series of protests across most major cities since 2015 have protested the party’s stand on placing political appointees in judicial positions, limiting the rights on public gatherings, banning abortion procedures, taking control of the country’s public media outlets, and “Polonizing” the financial assets of some of the country’s major banks. Applebaum, “A Warning from Europe.”

cited the Sarmatian victory of Polish-led forces in the 1683 Battle of Vienna over the Ottoman Turks in his “manifesto” as proof of Christianity’s struggle against Islam.¹²⁶

This toxic side of Christian Sarmatism is also evident in the turn toward homophobia in PiS’s campaign for the November 2019 parliamentary election. It is almost as if Kaczyński and other PiS leaders took to reading the same speech from several years ago, just replacing the word “migrants” with “gays.” Speaking out against EU rules banning discrimination based on sexual orientation, for example, Kaczyński said at a March 2019 PiS rally, “We need to fight this. We need to defend the Polish family. We need to defend it furiously because it’s a threat to civilization, not just for Poland but for the entire Europe, for the entire civilization that is based on Christianity.”¹²⁷ Thus, the toxic strain of Christianity in Sarmatism continues to permeate PiS’s world view, with equally devastating effects on the nation.¹²⁸

Integrating an understanding of the Sarmatian basis of the Polish nation, then, may allay some of the confusion that has plagued Western commentators over the past decade, especially over Poland’s invocation of the global war on terror in response to various contemporary events. Joining NATO and the EU, when viewed in light of the nation’s Sarmatian nature, did not mean that it had embraced essential Western values such as market capitalism, social liberalism, and multilateralism. It is now clear that joining these two powerful blocs did not mean it had actively decided to break with its past and take on an extensive set of international responsibilities that might curtail its own perceived

¹²⁶ “New Zealand Shooting: Gunman, Who Called Himself ‘Brenton Tarrant,’ Painted White Supremacist Icons on His Guns,” *South China Morning Post*, March 16, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/australasia/article/3001957/new-zealand-mosque-shooter-who-called-himself-brenton-tarrant>.

¹²⁷ Marc Santora, “Poland’s Populists Pick a New Top Enemy: Gay People,” *New York Times*, April 7, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/07/world/europe/poland-gay-rights.html>; and “Family First,” *Economist*, May 4, 2019.

¹²⁸ Gay bashing is not a new tactic for PiS. As early as 2013, it had encouraged its supporters to use the nation’s independence day celebrations to destroy a public art installation (with rainbow colors) in Warsaw that it falsely claimed was a symbol of gay pride. Deeming it a “symbol of evil,” PiS supporters burned the monument down. “Burning the Rainbow,” *Economist*, November 18, 2013, <https://www.economist.com/eastern-approaches/2013/11/18/burning-the-rainbow>.

liberties and freedoms.¹²⁹ Nor did it mean that the country was itself becoming more liberal or secular. Even as the country's material wealth has prospered over the last quarter century, it remains profoundly spiritual and profoundly Christian—that is, essentially Sarmatian. Any set of foreign policies toward Poland must not forget that essential value of Polish nationalism, despite the contradictions it embodies. And Poles themselves must realize that Sarmatian ideals, which led to the foundation of the modern Polish nation-state and allowed it to survive the Partitions, was also the root cause of its demise. If left unchecked, these ideals may turn the eagle's head once again from wolność to self-inflicted martyrdom.

¹²⁹ Alternatively, as Wojciech Przybylski notes in a recent essay, “Ideas have consequences. Just as it was pointless during the Cold War to accept the terms ‘socialist democracy’ or ‘people’s democracy’ as descriptions of states that were neither socialist nor of the people . . . so today should we reject the use of terms such as ‘illiberal democracy’ and ‘sovereign democracy.’” Przybylski, “Explaining Eastern Europe,” 64.

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