

**SECURITY IN INTERNATIONAL AND INTERNAL  
DIMENSION**



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## PRETEXTS AS THE MOTIVES FOR TRIGGERING ARMED CONFLICTS AND STATES PARTICIPATION

In the study of armed conflicts, attempts to answer the question of what causes them hold a prominent position in social sciences. Since the dawn of time, the cause of wars has been a subject of interest for scholars and politicians. This is evidenced by the views and findings of philosophers, theologians, sociologists, economists, lawyers and political scientists, from Antiquity, through the Middle Ages and modern times, to contemporary research on two methodological approaches i.e. Polemology and Peace Research.

By making relevant generalizations, one can distinguish several approaches, trends and theories. In theistic theories, especially but not exclusively in the monotheistic religions, it has often been suggested that war is a result of supernatural forces and an instrument of God's will on Earth. Supporters of the biological approach believe that, although human beings are endowed with reason, in their behavior they are primarily guided by innate instincts. Therefore, wars are the result of insatiable human desires. Aggression and fighting are part of the human disposition, which is most clearly expressed in the maxim *Homo homini lupus est*. It is also believed by some that, as in the animal kingdom, competition between species and individuals takes place, in which the strongest wins. This led to the belief in the existence of natural and unavoidable causes of wars. In an extreme, somewhat perverse form, a social Darwinist approach was present in the Nazi doctrine. On the other hand, the American sociologist and cultural anthropologist, Marvin Harris, conducting research on 'primitive wars' of peoples at a less advanced stage in the development of their civilizations concludes that there is no reason to refer to man's bloodthirsty instincts to understand why wars are so common in human history. The results of his research show that "[w]ar is part of an adaptation strategy related to specific technical, demographic and ecological conditions" (Harris, 1985: 83).

In yet another approach, the population factor has been cited as the basic source of wars and armed conflicts. The conviction that increased birthrate, and the resulting disproportionate growth in the population (increasing in a geometric progression) relative to their access to food (growing in an arithmetical progression) is the cause of wars gained a prominent role. Along with the progressing desacralization of views on the causes of wars, more and more importance was given to economic factors.

It has also been suggested that wars are caused by private ownership of the means of production and antagonistic contradictions. In Marxist-Leninist theory, the class-related nature of politics is emphasized, with the indication that war is a continuation

of politics by means of violence, which the ruling classes of belligerent states are engaged in long before the outbreak of war. In this course of reasoning, war is treated as a regular historical phenomenon.

In the classification of the causes of wars, there are very different criteria still used, allowing groups of different factors which trigger conflicts to be identified (see e.g. Łoś, 2010: 21–44). In practice, however, states have often tried to justify or even explain their participation in war by citing vital national interests or *raison d'état*. In lofty declarations, it was emphasized that *salus rei publicae suprema lex esto* (good of the republic/state is the supreme law). Irrespective of theoretical findings and practical actions, war was regarded as an inherent attribute of state sovereignty, a natural, inseparable part of human life and a generally recognized policy measure practiced by participants in international relations. War remained 'a typical pattern of behavior throughout human history.' Its causes were varied: territorial disputes, racial tensions, prejudice, competition and trade restrictions, the desire for military power and conquest (Kohn, 1998: 5). In analyzing the phenomenon of armed conflicts while not going deeply into their inherent determinants, theories of war caused by accident were constructed. Cases of states stumbling into armed conflicts which they did not intend were also pointed to as evidence (Bell, 2007: 23).

This was until, as a result of natural progression, a legal ban on wars was formally introduced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In accordance with the provisions of the fundamental document of international law, the Charter of the United Nations, *ius ad bellum* (the right to war) is ultimately banned. However, it is worth remembering that wars continued despite this. In the documented history of mankind, a period of some 5,559 years, from ancient times until 1939, there were over 14,500 wars (Howard, 1990: 5). Also, since World War II, there have been several wars treated as major armed conflicts in which military forces under two or more governments were fighting for an extended period of time, for the purpose of defeating the opponent and enforcing certain demands and claims (Scruton, 1983: 489). The pretext for using force could be provided by the aforementioned reasons, but also by giving the armed operation the appearance of legality by invoking 'the invitation of the authorities' of the attacked state, as was the case of the military operations by the Warsaw Pact states in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the invasion of the Soviet Army in Afghanistan in 1979. In wars fought in the period 1945–1990, including local, regional and internal armed conflicts, between 12 and 35 million people are estimated to have lost their lives (Pióro, 1990: 79).

When the Cold War ended, it was hoped, somewhat optimistically, that the era of wars would end at the same time. However, although the number of interstate armed conflicts has decreased, the 1990s saw an increase in armed operations in the form of civil wars, which have claimed more than 5 million lives (Annan, 2000: Sec. IV, par. 192–193). In the broad diapason of the causes of armed conflicts, those which were present in the past still dominate, several of which repeatedly coincide (Malendowski, 2003: 18). Therefore, the question of wars remains topical and is still the subject of increased interest for the various currents of contemporary political thought. It remains the subject of analysis, investigations and findings, as well as the detailed exchange of views. For the most part, they are intellectually coherent and result from effective logical inference.

One of the many examples could be the debate on the wars of the future, which recall the findings of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Swiss general and military writer. In his works on strategy and martial art, Henri Jomini (1779–1869) referred to the experience of his era, distinguishing the following wars: defensive, offensive, those resulting from alliances, intervention, invasive, ideologically motivated, civil, religious, on two fronts and opportunistic (*Wojny przyszłości*, 2014: 11). It was this last case, opportunistic wars, that played a particular role in the history of mankind. The history of armed conflicts has witnessed many examples of the use of particular situations as a pretext to start military operations. Some of these pretexts were specific events and situations which occurred regardless of the expectations or will of the states interested in starting a war, or joining one that was already underway. On the other hand, some of them (a pretty substantial number at that) were pretexts contrived, even fabricated, to justify and explain participation in military operations. To be more specific, it should be clarified that the word ‘pretext’ etymologically derives from Latin (*praetextus*) and means a false reason made up to hide the true cause.

A good and relatively recent example of such behavior is the second major war of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which occurred in the Persian Gulf in 2003 (Malendowski, 2006: 331–352). At the beginning of this century, Iraq spearheaded the group of states which had biological and chemical weapons and were suspected of attempting to gain access to nuclear weapons. This knowledge was obtained after the sensational flight of two of Saddam Hussein’s sons-in-law to Jordan. One of them had been in charge of the Iraqi program of building weapons of mass destruction prior to fleeing, and had valuable information about the size and significance of the weapons. The information was considered credible, especially as it indicated the place of installation of the weapons (Clinton, 2004: 617).

In the period 2001–2002, the United States intensified pressure on the Iraqi government to abandon their nuclear program, disclose the scale of their arsenal and submit to international control. UN mechanisms were used to this end. As a result, Iraq provided extensive documentation about its military potential, which the United States did not consider sufficient. After all, President George W. Bush, in his presidential address, stated that the United States had a sovereign right to use force to ensure its own national security. He said that Iraq had had enough time to disarm itself but it still had weapons of mass destruction which could be given to terrorists. While criticizing the operation of the UN Security Council which failed to fulfil its obligations, the President pointed out that the United States “had matured [enough] to fulfil its own” (*Czas wojny*, 2003: 15). This meant that the United States was ready for war with Iraq. In February 2003, the Secretary of State, Colin Powell, gave a speech to the UN Security Council in which he presented evidence of Iraq’s possession of weapons of mass destruction. It was based on information provided to the US by the Italian intelligence services about the alleged purchase by Iraq of several hundred tons of uranium oxide in Niger, which could be used to produce a nuclear bomb. The main source of knowledge on Iraq’s stocks of weapons of mass destruction (biological weapons) was an Iraqi engineer in exile, Rafid Ahmed Alwan al-Janabi, code-name *Curveball*, who, in the information he provided about the details of the biological weapons program, in very mild terms, had concocted a story in order to overthrow the dictatorship in

Iraq. There are reasons to consider this as one of the greatest scams in the history of intelligence (Chulov, Pidd, 2011: 24–26). It does not change the fact that it served as a pretext to attack Iraq. It turned out, however, that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (CIA, 2005: 7). The search for weapons of mass destruction was discontinued after a few months, and the CIA report stated explicitly that Iraq did not have biological or chemical weapons reserves and that its nuclear weapons program had been abandoned before the armed intervention by the United States (Otto, 2004: 220–227). Not only was the armed intervention in Iraq wrong, and illegal, as it was not authorized by the UN Security Council, but its pretext is inadequate and dubious, being based on the lies of only one man. The United States had been preparing to attack Iraq much earlier, knowing that it could be easily defeated. As Stephen Tanner pointed out, “all you had to do was come up with a reason to attack” (Tanner, 2007: 210).

The Iraqi case is an important contribution to establishing the role of the pretexts used to start wars. This is not an isolated case – it has its precedents. For obvious reasons, one cannot refer to all of them, or even to most, but a dozen or so can be treated as the most emblematic. Throughout the history of armed conflicts, the Trojan War described by Homer in the 24 songs of his Attic epic may be considered a classic example of a war started on a false pretext. The historical value of the epic has been confirmed by numerous archaeological studies. Though some doubts still persist, the Trojan War is thought to have taken place around 1190 BC. In the Greek myth, it was caused by an alleged love affair and a scandal over a violation of the sacred law of hospitality and, subsequently, an act of retaliation. Paris, the son of the King of Troy, kidnapped Helena, the beautiful wife of Menelaus, King of Sparta. Deeply insulted and vengeful, Menelaus set off with his allies to Troy. The Greek fleet carried one hundred thousand warriors to Asia Minor, near the western mouth of Hellespont (Dardanelles) connecting the Aegean Sea with the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea. Irrespective of differing assessments, whether or not Helena had been abducted, or had eloped from her husband as an unfaithful wife, it was because of her that the siege of Troy occurred. One could say she was a *femme fatal* – a woman who brought misfortune and led to the war which ended with the defeat of Troy. On the basis of current knowledge, however, it can be concluded that this was the first clash between Europe and the Orient in history. The fall of Troy, which controlled the Black Sea trade in various valuable goods, allowed the Greeks to gain access to Hellespont and to set up colonies along the entire eastern trade route. Hence the opinion of Robert Graves that “the Trojan War is a historical event and, no matter of its immediate cause, it was a trade war” (Graves, 1974: 601). In addition, Troy belonged to the Hittite confederation located in the north-western territory of Asia Minor. The confederation threatened the Greeks, who were competing with the Hittites for regional hegemony. Troy paid the price for this competition (Epos, 2016: 78).

Moving from Antiquity to modern times, the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648) deserves attention. It was fought between the Habsburg Emperor and the Catholic princes of the Holy Roman Empire gathered in the Catholic League, supported by Spain and the Netherlands, and Protestants from the Protestant Union, allied with France, Sweden, Holland and Savoy. It was triggered by growing competition between the European great powers and an economic crisis. The most important role was played by re-

ligious conflict. Religious differences divided the Holy Roman Empire into Protestant and Catholic states. Similar divisions were also revealed in Bohemia, swept by a wave of Protestantism. During a meeting of Bohemian Protestants with the Emperor's governors at Prague Castle in 1618, a brawl ensued. Protesters against violations of religious liberties, representing different Bohemian classes, threw the imperial governors out of the window. This episode went down in history as the "Prague Defenestration" and became the direct cause of the longest and bloodiest war in modern Europe. It was carried out in an extremely brutal way. The poorly paid army plundered towns, looted and burned entire villages and murdered women and children. "The most unbridled and inhuman rabble from all over the world was enlisting in the army in which they expected to get the biggest booty. It was forgotten for a long time that it was a matter of faith" (Gombrich, 1999: 231). During the thirty years of the war, the Emperor's representatives thrown out of the window were probably forgotten.

One of the best known instances of provoking an armed conflict is the Ems Dispatch, fabricated by Otto von Bismarck in 1870, which was offensive to Napoleon III and provoked France to declare war on Prussia, because this dispatch was considered a *casus belli* (Wawrykova, 1980: 493). As a result of the French armed forces suffering a series of defeats, a provisional government of national defense was formed in Paris, Emperor Napoleon III was dethroned and the Third Republic was declared. On the basis of the Treaty of Frankfurt in 1871, the winners took over Alsace-Lorraine, forcing France to pay a large sum in reparations. The same year, the King of Prussia became the German Emperor. This act was intentionally carried out at Versailles. In this way, the defeated France was humiliated and lost its dominant position in Europe (Castleden, 2008: 370).

In 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe, one of the best known formal pretexts for starting a war was the assassination of the heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Habsburg Archduke Franz Ferdinand, in Sarajevo in June 1914. Serbia was suspected of inspiring the assassination, but it was carried out neither at the request, nor with the explicit consent of, the government (Hoffman, 2001: 21). Austria-Hungary, supported by Germany, did not hold any evidence to support its suspicions, but gave Serbia an ultimatum, including the statement that the assassination had been planned in Serbia and that the perpetrators received weapons and bombs from Serbian officers and officials (*Ultimatum*, 1954: 318). The ultimatum contained demands which the Serbian authorities could not meet in full. This led to the declaration of war on Serbia. A domino effect was triggered; Russia, Germany, France and subsequently the United States joined the war, the true cause of which was the accumulation of contradictions in the great powers' interests. This had been noticed, and they had been warned much earlier. For example, Jean Jaures did so repeatedly (Jaures, 1970: 885–940). The assassination of this prominent French pacifist on July 31, 1914, and his funeral, became a harbinger of war and a symbolic farewell to peace. A bloody and devastating war broke out, which changed the balance of power in the world. After it ended, the trigger which caused it was barely remembered. "It was only known that from the ashes resulting from collective madness, it was necessary to build a new order in Europe" (Kissinger, 1996: 231). A pretext was used to provoke this madness.

After World War I, a new order was introduced in Europe, known as the Versailles System, which was overseen by the League of Nations, whose mission was to pro-

mote the development of cooperation between nations and to ensure peace and security among them. However, the security system of the League of Nations did not protect the international community from armed conflicts. Still, as before, the belligerents avoided declaring their true motives and flimsy pretexts were given instead.

In the international arena, Japan became more active. This 'newcomer' was more and more clearly aspiring to join the group of great powers (Rostow, 1987: 831). Japan confirmed its aspirations in its victories against China (1895) and Russia (1904–1905), symbolized by the defeats of the Russian land army in the battle of Mukden and the destruction of the fleet near Tsushima. Japan's awareness of its own strength and the vulnerability of Russia and China strengthened nationalist and militarist tendencies. The idea of creating 'a zone of prosperity of Great East Asia' on the Asian continent, controlled by Japan, was born. The first steps in the implementation of this idea were taken at the beginning of the 1930s. In 1931, the Japanese armed forces provoked the Mukden Incident and invaded Manchuria, China, which was rich in mineral resources (*Proces*, 1951: 8). In 1932, an independent state of Manchukuo was created in this Chinese territory, with the last Emperor of China, Puyi, as the president of this state. Two years later, the Japanese proclaimed the empire of Manchuria, under the name of Manchukuo, which was entirely under control of the Japanese military authorities, and enabled them to establish military hegemony in East Asia. The Chinese authorities filed a complaint to the League of Nations, which set up a special commission (the Lytton Commission) to determine whether an act of aggression had occurred in this case. The Commission report confirmed that an act of aggression had indeed taken place and demanded the return of Manchuria to China (Larus, 1965: 91–117). Japan rejected these proposals and, in 1933, left the League of Nations. In 1937, Germany, Italy and Francoist Spain recognized the Empire as a subject of international law. Poland did the same the following year (Czubiński, 1999: 37).

Another pretext used by Japan to start a war was the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in 1937, during maneuvers by the Japanese armed forces in the suburbs of Beijing. The Japanese demanded that the local Chinese military authorities agree to search for a missing soldier in Wanping. The refusal to grant permission, and the alleged firing on Japanese troops near Beijing became a direct pretext for the commencement of hostilities. Soon, the Japanese army of 250,000 soldiers was already operating in China. While there was not enough evidence of a deliberate provocation, this does not change the fact that the above-mentioned incident started the Japanese-Chinese war (Palmowski, 2008: 191). After the occupation of Nanjing, then the capital of China, the Japanese committed atrocities killing about 300,000–340,000 people. They were burned and buried alive, quartered and tortured in sophisticated ways, children were impaled on bayonets, 80,000 Chinese women were brutally raped (the Rape of Nanjing) and private property was plundered. To this day, the Japanese still fail to recognize the atrocities they committed in Nanjing as genocide (Nadolski, 2015: 60–65).

In late 1930s there were a few more cases in which states took military action based on weak pretexts. Each time they tried to hide the real reasons, acting so that the blame for causing the war fell entirely on the victim of aggression.

The first, well-known in the history of Poland as a pretext for provoking war, was the notorious Gleiwitz incident. This is a classic case of a fabricated pretext in the



form of a fake military operation. At the behest of the head of the Third Reich, Adolf Hitler, the Wehrmacht and the SS carried out subversive action under the code name Himmler. It was prepared by the chief of the police and the SD, Reinhard Heydrich, and the chief of Abwehr, Wilhelm Canaris. On August 31, 1939, a group of SS men dressed in Polish uniforms, commanded by Alfred Naujocks, took over the German radio station in Gleiwitz. The broadcast was interrupted, the Polish national anthem was played and an anti-German speech lasting a few minutes was given in Polish. Then the radio station building was demolished and, when withdrawing, the attackers left behind purported evidence of the assault – the corpse of a concentration camp prisoner dressed in a Polish uniform, given the codename “canned goods,” behind. After firing a few shots, the attackers withdrew from the radio station (Bernaś, Mikulska-Bernaś, 1964: 11–18). At the same time, as planned, a group of SS men playing the role of Polish saboteurs, again disguised in Polish military uniforms, attacked and burned German customs offices in Hohenlinden and Geyersdorff, also leaving behind “canned goods.” The German propaganda used these provocations to confirm the alleged will of Poland to provoke war. The SS operations were treated as justification and evidence warranting aggression against Poland. Germany announced that it was Poland that had committed an act of aggression (Moczulski, 1972: 196). In order to attack Poland without declaring war, it was argued that all possible political solutions for a peaceful settlement to the unbearable situation on the eastern border of Germany had been exhausted and hence the decision to resolve the situation by force was justified (Czarnecki, 1961: 174). This argument was used as if international law did not exist, such as the provisions of the German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact (Berlin, January 26, 1934) which was intended to remain in force for ten years. International law requires the acceptance of commitments to only settle disputes peacefully and prevent the use of violence in dealing with disputes (*Deklaracja*, 1958: 360). A significant fact here cannot be ignored. In 1934 the Germans, had already begun working on a plan to attack Poland under the code name Fall Weiss. Ultimately, the truth about the perfidious lie which served as a pretext to start World War II came to light only during the trial before the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg against the principal German war criminals (1945–1946).

Another example of a pretext used to justify aggression is an incident which occurred a few weeks later, after German provocations and the attack on Poland. On the night of September 17, 1939, the Polish ambassador in Moscow was called to the Office of Foreign Affairs and an attempt to hand him a note with the justification for the decision regarding the Soviet attack on Poland was made. The ambassador did not accept the note and a few hours later the Red Army entered the territory of Poland. In its note, the Soviet government stated that the German-Polish war had revealed the internal collapse of the Polish state and the Polish government had broken down, showing no sign of life. The statement that the Polish state and its government had ceased to exist was of particular importance. This would have meant that treaties concluded by a now non-existent state had lost their legal force, and also ceased to exist. In this situation, the USSR felt obliged to help the Belarusian and Ukrainian population living in Poland and to take their lives and property under its protection. In the later justification for the Soviet attack on Poland at the end of October 1939, Vyacheslav Molotov said

that “[...] mention must be made of the military defeat of Poland and the collapse of the Polish state. The ruling circles of Poland had often boasted about the ‘stability’ of their state and the ‘might’ of their army. However, one swift blow to Poland, first by the German Army and then by the Red Army, and nothing was left of this ugly offspring of the Versailles Treaty which had existed by oppressing non-Polish nationalities. The ‘traditional policy’ of unprincipled maneuvering between Germany and the USSR, and the playing off of one against the other has proven unsound and suffered complete bankruptcy” (*Referat*, 1990: 112).

The arguments used by the Soviet authorities were deceitful. Although the Polish government had left the country, there was no act of surrender. Warsaw defended itself until September 28. In addition, the Polish government continued to operate in exile. There was no collapse of the Polish state, which still existed as a subject of international law. Therefore, treaties concluded by Poland: the Peace of Riga (Riga, March 18, 1921), the General Treaty for Renunciation of War (the Kellogg-Briand, Paris, August 27, 1928), the Litvinov Protocol (Moscow, February 19 1929) and the Soviet-Polish Non-Aggression Pact (Moscow, July 25, 1932) remained binding. In the latter Pact, its signatories renounced war as a tool of national policy, and agreed to refrain from any aggressive actions or assaults, alone or with other states. Any assault violating the whole and territorial integrity or independence of the other participating state was considered contrary to the obligations of the Pact. In the event of an attack on one of the signatories by a third state or a group of states, the other state undertook not to provide assistance or support to the attacking state, either directly or indirectly. In the light of later events, the provisions of Article 3 acquire particular importance: “Each Contracting State is obliged not to take part in any agreement concerning openly hostile aggression towards the other States” (*Pakt o nieagresji*, 1958: 344). The Soviet attitude to the principle of *pacta sunt servanda* is reflected in the German-Soviet Non-aggression Pact of August 23, 1939 (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact), especially in its additional secret protocol which actually provided for the fourth partition of Poland. After the aggression against Poland, it was confirmed in the German-Soviet Frontier Treaty of September 27, 1939, with the assumption that “Poland will never be reborn as an independent state” (Moczulski, 2009: 913–915). Pointing to Germany and the USSR, which unscrupulously made use of fabricated pretexts to commit acts of aggression, one cannot overlook the fact that Germany, in violation of the provisions of the Non-aggression Pact, attacked another signatory of this pact in June 1941, arguing that the Soviet government had decided to start a war by concentrating the Red Army on Germany’s new eastern border. As it turned out, any pretext can be used to trigger a war if need be.

The Soviet Union’s pretext for the assault against Finland followed a similar spurious pattern. In 1939 after the aggression against Poland, the Finnish authorities declared strict neutrality. However, the Soviets repeatedly expressed concerns about the danger of using the territory of Finland as a base for aggression against the USSR, especially since the Soviet-Finnish border was just over 30 kilometers from Leningrad. On this basis, the Soviet side made proposals to the Finnish government to conclude an agreement on mutual assistance, to lease part of the Finnish territory to the Soviet Union, to exchange territories and to perform bilateral demilitarization along the Soviet-

Finnish border on the Mannerheim line which was a defense system against potential Soviet aggression. Finland rejected all these proposals and, during military negotiations between Great Britain, France and the USSR in Moscow in August 1939, it declared that it did not want Soviet help in the event of an attack on Finland. All Soviet proposals were unacceptable because they would completely deprive Finland of its defensive capabilities. After several months of unsuccessful negotiations, in November 1939, the USSR denounced the Soviet-Finnish Non-Aggression Pact of 1932 and recalled its diplomatic and consular representatives from Finland (*Historia dyplomacji*, 1982: 24–28). After these steps one could expect only one thing, for which, as usual in such cases, an excuse was necessary. And this was indeed the case. On November 26, 1939, the Soviet authorities accused Finland of shelling a town of Mainila using artillery, which caused the deaths of several Soviet soldiers from the border guard and the wounding of several others. The shelling was in fact a provocation by the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD). According to the assessment of the Soviet Marshal Kirill Meretskov, the direct cause of the commencement of hostilities was the crossing of the USSR border by Finnish troops and the transfer of saboteurs (Mierieckow, 1971: 199). In this situation, after finding the responses to these allegations from the Finnish side unsatisfactory, on November 30, 1939, the Red Army of roughly a million soldiers attacked Finland. The Winter War began; despite the heroic resistance of the Finns it ended with forced peace in Finland, the shift of its border to the west and north and the loss of 35,000 square kilometers of its territory (Cieślak, 1983: 272–275). The case of Soviet aggression in Finland was investigated by the League of Nations, from which the Soviet Union was expelled in December 1939 due to the invasion. In 1941, Finland joined the German attack on the USSR.

One of lesser known cases of provocation to start a war by the USSR is widely described in literature as The Six-Day War in the Middle East in 1967, when Israel attacked the Arab states. In general, when demonstrating the peaceful nature of Soviet policy, it was emphasized that the USSR had strongly urged Egypt not to start a war. However, it turns out that the Soviet authorities knew about Israeli preparations for the manufacturing of nuclear weapons and they planned to provoke Israel into a war with the Arab states. As part of its support for its Arab allies, the USSR would bomb a nuclear research center in Dimona in the Negev desert, as well as oil refineries and water reservoirs. In order to carry out this plan, the Arab states were given fabricated information about alleged military preparations by Israel to start a war with them. There was also false information about the concentration of Israeli troops on the border with Syria. The Arab states took this false information at face value and undertook political and military preparations for war with Israel. However, as part of Operation Focus, Israel launched a pre-emptive strike and defeated the armies of Egypt, Syria and Jordan within a few days. The very rapid and unexpected defeat of the Arab troops thwarted the Soviet plan (Borucki, 2011: 124–126).

The United States is also among the states that have often used dubious pretexts to participate in wars. The use of pretexts, in a sense, is deeply embedded in US history. This is related to an incident that has gone down in history as the Boston Tea Party. After the British Parliament passed the Tea Act in 1773, which was detrimental to the interests of Americans, a conflict was caused in Boston by an invasion of British ships

by a group of American men, disguised as Native Americans, who threw a load of tea overboard. In response, the British government decided to implement military reprisals that led to the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War in 1775 and the proclamation of independence (Castelden, 2008: 282–283). This was an extremely unusual case, in which this pretext led not only to war but to the creation of a new state.

However, the aforementioned case of US participation in the Iraq War in 2003 is to some extent the culmination of a whole series of similar incidents throughout its history. Some of these pretexts were created without the direct participation of the US, although some were deliberately engineered and some are hard to assess unambiguously.

The first was the US war with Mexico in 1846. Mexico refusing to consent to an unfavorable change of the border demanded by the United States was used as a pretext. There are reasons to consider the trigger of the American-Mexican conflict as a pretext for which US President James K. Polk had waited, or perhaps even directed himself (Jones, 2002: 212). The declaration of war against Mexico was justified by a supposed border infringement and an armed attack. This statement was less than truthful, because the clash had occurred on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande border river. The United States won the war, which was not evenly matched. This was the biggest win in US history in the war for territories (*Skrywane przestępstwa*, 2016: 42). As a result, Mexico lost half its territory, losing Texas and territories of the future states of New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, California, Colorado, Arizona and part of Wyoming to the US (Roberts, 1991: 104). The annexation of the territory was legalized in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 by paying Mexico 15 million dollars.

The second case is the Spanish-American war in 1898. In January of that year, during the Cuban uprising against Spanish rule, the battleship *Maine* from the American navy entered the port of Havana on a courtesy visit. In unexplained circumstances, an explosion occurred on the battleship which caused it to sink, killing over 200 seamen. Although the true cause of the explosion has never been established, the Spaniards were blamed. Under the slogan “Remember the *Maine*,” war was declared. The American armed forces fought with Spain in the Atlantic and the Pacific. The US armed forces invaded the Philippines, then Cuba, and finally Puerto Rico. Defeated, Spain surrendered its authority over Cuba and handed over Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines to the United States (Gordon, 1950: 263). As a result, in late 19<sup>th</sup> century the US expanded its sphere of influence beyond the western hemisphere (Asprey, 1975: 179–187).

When World War I broke out in 1914, the United States declared neutrality in the first days of military operations, which it initially observed strictly. The pretext that acted as a stimulus leading to the US decision to join the war was the sinking of the British transatlantic steamship *Lusitania*. This large cruise liner was torpedoed by a German U-20 submarine without notice in May 1915 on the way back from America, near the coast of Ireland. The ship sank with nearly 1,200 passengers on board, including more than 120 US citizens. This provoked outrage in world and American public opinion. Until then, most Americans had been against US involvement in the war. This attitude underwent a gradual change, especially after subsequent attacks by the German submarine fleet on passenger ships. *Arabic*, a British steamer, was also sunk

with American passengers on board. The following year, a German U-Boat sank *Sussex*, a French passenger ship whose American passengers were wounded. In March 1917, a German submarine torpedoed and sank *Vigilantia*, a US ship, with its crew. Eventually, the American public accepted the necessity of the US launching hostilities, and the American Congress decided to act. In the final stage of World War I, in a critical situation for the Allies, American troops landed in Europe. As the American historian Maldwyn A. Jones remarked: "It is certainly the U-Boat action that drew the United States into war. Without it, none of the crises was serious enough to trigger an armed conflict with Germany" (Jones, 2002: 478). The question remains as to why the German submarine did not torpedo a battleship instead of *Lusitania*, a passenger ship. A hypothesis that the catastrophe was planned by the British and Americans, who deliberately sacrificed passengers, indirectly answers this question. The German battleship fired only one torpedo but there were two explosions on *Lusitania*, which could mean that it was carrying ammunition. This was done deliberately so that, after flooding the ship, US public opinion could be influenced to approve of the US decision to join the war (Największe, 2017: 29). This is what happened and, on April 6, 1917, the US declared war on Germany.

After the outbreak of World War II in 1939, just five days after Germany's attack on Poland, the United States declared neutrality, as in World War I, and maintained this position until 1941. The attitude of the US was radically transformed by the attack by Japanese naval aviation on the American air and sea base in Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on December 7, 1941. The following day, the US Congress declared war on Japan. This is related to the often-quoted statement by President Franklin D. Roosevelt that "December 7, 1941 will go down in history as a day of shame." In the course of the Japanese strike, which lasted only two hours, five battleships were sunk, and around a dozen other battleships were damaged: cruisers and destroyers. Over 270 American aircraft were destroyed at airports. Human casualties amounted to 2,400 killed and 100 wounded (*Historia drugiej wojny*, 1979: 506–523). In one day, the US Navy lost three times more people than in the two previous wars combined, the Spanish-American war of 1898 and World War I. The United States suffered the greatest defeat in its history and was drawn into the war. The attack on Pearl Harbor has been discussed in abundance in literature. Many authors have thoroughly investigated the political and strategic purpose of the attack, the state of preparation for defense, the operation of the command and communication system, the intelligence operation and the impact of the attack on American public opinion. It has often been pointed out that the attack could have been avoided or, at least, better preparations could have been made to fight it off. Evidence was found that the commanders of the navy and land forces took into account the possibility of a Japanese strike on the base in Hawaii and it was discovered that the basic plan of Rainbow 5, the sea war of May 1941, discussed the probability of such an attack (Maszlanka, 1971: 325).

The analyses and assessments of the causes of this defeat also revealed the responsibility of President Roosevelt and his close civilian and military collaborators, who knew that a Japanese attack would take place. However, they deliberately allowed the attack to be a surprise, in order to overcome American reluctance to enter the war. The American President told Winston Churchill that he would "do everything possible

to provoke a situation that would allow the United States to enter into conflict.” It is suspected that there was evidence confirming that the President knew of the Japanese intention to attack. Also, it is worth mentioning that in 1999 the US Senate acquitted Hawaiian military commanders by recognizing that the US authorities had not provided them with all available information (*Tajemnice*, 2016: 214).

The belief that the US government had deliberately allowed the attack on Pearl Harbor to take place was considered false for a long time. American historiography has most often pointed out that, although the US was dragged into the war by Japan, the most important task was to defeat Nazi Germany (Jones, 2002: 585). It is also emphasized that the Pearl Harbor attack was a big mistake on the part of Japan, because it forced the United States to enter into the war, which ended with the defeat of both Japan and Germany (Gordon, 1950: 316). However, even during the war, six investigations were made regarding this attack, and after the war a special commission was set up to determine whether the US President had intentionally concealed his knowledge of Japan’s preparations to attack, in order to gain a pretext to declare war. No evidence of the President’s responsibility was found. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Robert B. Stinnett published a study describing the events that led to the attack on Pearl Harbor, including the policy of provocation by President Roosevelt. Stinnett obtained access to American intelligence and diplomatic materials, and on this basis he came to the conclusion that the authorities had known about the attack and nothing had been done to prevent it – conversely, it had been decided earlier to withdraw all warships from the North Pacific. The author states that “[t]hroughout 1941, provoking Japan to commit an overt act of aggression was the main assumption of Roosevelt’s policy, even the decisive motive of all the President’s actions towards the Empire” (Stinnett, 2001: 23). The collection of photocopied documents included in this study features a memorandum from Commander Lieutenant Arthur H. McCollum from October 7, 1940, proposing of a plan of eight actions that would provoke Japan to commit a public act of aggression. Stinnett only found this document in the archives of the US Navy (Box 6, Record Group 38, Military Reference Branch, Archives II) in 1995, 50 years after the war. When analyzing the situation in Europe and the Pacific region in an immaculately logical manner, the Lieutenant, who had penned the document, concluded that an immediate US naval operation against Japan would deprive it of the ability to help Germany and Italy during the invasion of Great Britain and force Japan to take up the fight against the US under extremely unfavorable conditions. Declaring war on Japan seemed to be the most effective way to defeat Japan and eliminate it from the Pacific, before Germany and Italy were ready for an offensive against the United States. Due to the then attitude of American society, the US would not be able to declare war on Japan, so eight relevant actions should be taken. In the conclusion, A.H. McCollum stated that “[i]f Japan commits a clear act of aggression as a result of these measures, it is for the better. We must be prepared for war to break out anyway” (*ibid.*: 293). On each of the proposals contained in this document, R. B. Stinnett sees President Roosevelt’s ‘fingerprints’ and cites documented information on breaking Japanese codes and about American provocation and erasing its traces, including the decision to destroy all written evidence relevant to the explanation of the background to the attack on Pearl Harbor (*ibid.*: 24, 277–283). It should be added, however, that the hypothesis

of deliberately provoking Japan to attack is now being questioned, and the intelligence service of the United States have been blamed for being ineffective (Weir, 2011: 297). Irrespective of whether or not there was a provocation, this pretext was successfully used by the United States to enter the war.

After World War II there were also many cases of using false or contrived pretexts to conduct war and secret operations by special services. As a rule, when deciding on military action, attempts were made to obtain clear motivations that could justify and explain the use of force. The US often decided to use its armed forces citing “vital interests” of the US and using pretexts. This was often the case in the western hemisphere which, according to the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, was treated as a zone of American influence. In 1965, American troops intervened in the Dominican Republic under the pretext of protecting US citizens in that country. The real purpose of the American troops was to prevent the victory of an uprising that was considered to be a revolution directed by communists (Majewski, 1972: 210–217). This intervention confirmed the US determination not to allow its influence in its traditional sphere of domination to be reduced or the creation of another communist government, as well as Cuba, in the western hemisphere.

The next armed invasion occurred in Grenada in 1983, after the *coup d'état* launched there and the assassination of the Prime Minister. The Marine Corps, Land Forces and Navy Commandos and 82<sup>nd</sup> Parachute Division troops landed on the island. The decision to use the armed forces was justified, as had been the case on previous occasions, on the pretext of defending a thousand American citizens, including medical students staying in Grenada. The Grenadian army supported by Cuban soldiers and workers opposed the invasion forces, but it was overwhelmed by the strength of the American troops. Soon, citizens of Cuba, the USSR, the DPRK, Libya, Bulgaria and the GDR were detained. Realizing the growing communist influence in Grenada, the United States carried out an armed operation, thereby preventing Grenada from becoming a stronghold of the Eastern bloc (Kohn, 1998: 189).

In the 1980s, tension continued and conflict in US-Panama relations intensified. The escalation of tension peaked in December 1989, when the National Assembly of Panama adopted a declaration of war with the United States. There was also an incident during which an American soldier died in Panama, which could not be treated as a *casus belli* just yet. Nevertheless, the decision to invade was made and on December 26, 1989, and the operation under the code name Just Cause was carried out. The invasion was justified, among other things, by the need to protect 36,000 American citizens in Panama and capture its President, Manuel Noriega (Iwanek, 2013: 218–219). The US managed to maintain control over the Panama Canal until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the case of military operations in the western hemisphere, regardless of the pretexts used, the United States followed the principles of the Low-Intensity Conflicts strategy, in order to achieve well-planned objectives (Malendowski, 1991: 35–37).

The best known pretexts for war in the recent history of international relations probably include the Gulf of Tonkin Incident that led to America's disastrous decision to attack North Vietnam on August 7, 1964. The US Congress adopted a resolution on maintaining international peace and security in Southeast Asia, authorizing President Lynden B. Johnson to take all steps necessary, including the use of force, to assist

members or states that were under the protection of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) (Shafritz, 1988: 258). This meant that he was authorized to use force in the event of an attack on US troops and to prevent further aggression, and granted an unlimited mandate to conduct a war in Indochina. On the basis of this resolution decisions were made regarding the bombing of North Vietnam and engaging the US armed forces in direct combat operations against the Vietcong partisans in South Vietnam. This was actually a quasi-denunciation of the war on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, although it was not an official declaration of war. In the preamble of the resolution, it was noted that the naval units of the Vietnamese communist regime, in violation of the principles of the UN Charter and international law, deliberately and repeatedly attacked US ships which were lawfully in international waters and thus created a threat to international peace. The Vietnamese attacks were part of a deliberate and consistent aggression campaign carried out by North Vietnam against neighboring countries and other nations connected by a collective security treaty (SEATO). The US strove to help the nations of Southeast Asia and did not have any territorial, military or political ambitions towards this part of the world, but only wanted to allow these nations to develop in peace and shape their own destinies. In this regard, the US Senate and House of Representatives decided in a US Congress meeting that “they completely approve and give full support to the President as Commander-in-Chief of the US armed forces in taking all necessary measures to repel the armed attack against the United States forces and prevent further aggression” (Aneks VI, 2000: 592). The resolution was preceded by an American espionage operation under the code name De Soto, launched on July 17, 1964, and carried out to locate and identify North Vietnamese radar devices and describe maritime communication routes that could be used to transfer weapons and supplies from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. This operation was synchronized with a subversive operation by South Vietnamese commandos on two North Vietnamese islands, who were to attack the radar systems installed there. At the end of July the American destroyer USS *Maddox* entered the Gulf of Tonkin. USS *Ticonderoga*, an aircraft carrier, had arrived earlier at the mouth to the Gulf. On August 2, the first Tonkin incident occurred. Shots were fired from the destroyers in the direction of the approaching North Vietnamese torpedo boats and airplanes from the aircraft carrier were summoned, and they sank two cutters and damaged another. The second Tonkin incident took place two days later when USS *Maddox* and destroyer USS *C. Turner Joy* again encountered North Vietnamese warships in the Gulf of Tonkin, with which, as was officially stated, combat contact was made. At that time, on the orders of President Johnson, retaliatory attacks were carried out by bombing North Vietnamese fuel depots and listening stations. The United States maintained that incidents occurred in the extraterritorial waters of the high seas when North Vietnam violated the law of the sea. However, the Vietnamese side claimed that it was a provocation, and the incidents took place in the territorial waters of North Vietnam. At the beginning of March 1965, on the basis of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, the United States joined the bombardment of North Vietnam as part of Operation Rolling Thunder (Asprey, 1975, Vol. II: 1135–1137). The US attacks continued intermittently until the end of December 1972 and led to the forced resumption of negotiations in North Vietnam, concluding with the signing of the Paris Peace Accords on January 27, 1973, which laid the ground for



the interruption of military operations and the withdrawal of American troops from Indochina. In 1970, the US Congress decided to withdraw the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. The Resolution itself stipulated that it would expire upon the recognition by the President that conditions of peace and security existed in the region, guaranteed by the United Nations. The option of an earlier termination of the Resolution on the basis of a relevant resolution by Congress was not ruled out either. President Richard M. Nixon, during whose term in office the Vietnam War ended, many years later denied that in 1964 a provocation had taken place as a cynical measure to obtain the authorization to start a war. "The incident that occurred in the Gulf of Tonkin was not the cause of our intervention in Vietnam just like the sinking of *Lusitania* was not the reason for our involvement in the activities of World War I. [...] We did not join in this war because there were two sea engagements but because North Vietnam tried to control all of Indochina" (Nixon, *absque nota*: 74). Also, one American neoconservative spiritual leader, Norman Podhoretz, maintained that there was no deliberate provocation, which does not mean that the North Vietnam attack would not have been used by the US "as a good excuse to act," especially since President Johnson had already considered the possibility of expanding military operations against North Vietnam (Podhoretz, 1991: 72–78). Both opinions quoted here seem to be accurate for one reason; regardless of whether or not there was a provocation in the Gulf of Tonkin or if it was just a coincidence, this situation was used as an excuse to achieve pre-planned military objectives. In this context, the decision of the US Congress in 1970 to withdraw the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution is of particular importance. It was not until 2005 that the Pentagon documents were declassified. Their content shows that there was probably no incident. The weather made it impossible to see anything, let alone launch an attack against another battleship (Cohen, Salomon, 2012).

In the case of events that have a significant impact on the state of international peace and security, attempts are sometimes made to explain their causes with conspiracy theories. This is particularly true of the United States. The foundation of collective identity, patriotism and the specific messianism of the American society is the conviction of its own perfection and greatness ("We are the greatest"). However, the very same society is highly susceptible to opinions, suspicions, circumstantial evidence, suggestions and claims of authors who see a conspiracy in every event, especially if the event cannot be unambiguously evaluated. As Daniel Pipes pointed out, "[c]onspiracy theories – the fear of non-existent conspiracies – flourish in the United States" (Pipes, 1998: 15). This is confirmed by the conviction in some circles of American society that the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in September 2001 was the result of a conspiracy by an American government seeking a pretext to attack Afghanistan and Iraq. Even if there was no such conspiracy, many believe that the government knew that the attack would take place and there was no attempt to prevent it. Guided by the lust for a war which had already been drawn up, the US was waiting for a pretext that could be used to gain approval for an armed intervention. In the case of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, many questions, charges and assessments were made, but so far no evidence has been provided that it was a result of a conspiracy in the United States, in which terrorists were used instrumentally (Wernicke, 2011: 58–61). This does not change the fact that it was an excuse to attack Afghanistan.

In some cases, ‘pretext’ seems to be a euphemism. This is indicated by the opinion that some American military operations are based on lies, including the Spanish-American war in 1898, the Vietnam War in 1965, and the Iraq War in 2003. In 1898 and in 1964, “attacks on American ships were faked,” and in 2003 the US claimed that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction but soon the lie came to light, which exacerbated the wave of criticism against the United States (Kiedy, 2011: 27). Such behavior weakened the credibility of the USA. On the other hand, the United States pursuing imperialist policies strengthened and consolidated its superpower position. In just ten weeks, the modern American fleet allowed the US to defeat Spain in 1898. It entrenched American influence in areas which had been under Spanish domination and enabled the US to expand its sphere of influence beyond the western hemisphere (with its annexation of the Philippines) for the first time in history. Joining World War I enabled the United States, at least for some time, to get rid of Germany – a dangerous competitor in the superpower rivalry. As a result of World War II, the US gained the status of a superpower. The war against Iraq in 2003 allowed the United States to maintain and consolidate control over the oil-rich Middle East.

At this point only one reflection comes to mind. After all, it was Niccolò Machiavelli in the 16<sup>th</sup> century who advocated the use of means that bring glory as well as those that bring disgrace. The most important are the interests of the state. Assessing such behavior in moral categories, it is only the assessor and evaluator that can judge them as immoral. Decision-makers, guided by the superior category of the national interest, usually do not suffer from moral dilemmas and have no scruples, although they certainly know that they are in violation of the ethos of the norms, principles and rules of conduct which govern the behavior of members of the international community that recognize and approve them. Such values and moral norms are intended to protect the world from anarchy, disorder and chaos. This course of reasoning does not, however, determine what is more important: idealism or realism. It does not make it easier to find out, as Hugo Grotius tried to do it, in which circumstances the use of deceit or lies is reprehensible and unethical, and in which serves higher purposes (Grotius, 1957: 208–224). The question of whether there are some objective criteria to determine what these higher purposes are, and who would make the assessment, is also open. In connection with these doubts, Michael Walzer’s statement may be used: “wars often start earlier, before the fight takes place” (Walzer, 2010: 143). In light of this observation, the meaning of pretexts as the motivating cause of armed conflict becomes clear.

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## ABSTRACT

The causes of armed conflicts are a subject of constant interest to the social sciences. This has resulted in many theories and findings regarding the selection of different criteria in determining conflict-triggering factors. In international practice, states decide to declare war citing reasons connected with the state or vital national interests. Sometimes, the true motivations for the use of force are hidden. The history of armed conflicts includes many cases of using contrived pretexts or outright lies to start a war. External circumstances which were beyond the control of the state starting the war and which did not depend on the state's will and actions have been used as pretexts. Some of the pretexts, however, were deliberately fabricated to justify and explain military operations. States taking advantage of pretexts to use force can be observed from the time of the Trojan War to the attack on Iraq in 2003. Among the countries using pretexts to start a war, the superpowers occupy the leading position – they claim higher purposes, despite the fact that there are no objective criteria upon which to establish their superiority over the conventions of morality and international law.

**Keywords:** pretexts, armed conflicts, states participation

## PRETEKSTY – MOTYWEM SPRAWCZYM WYWOŁYWANIA I UDZIAŁU PAŃSTW W KONFLIKTACH ZBROJNYCH

### STRESZCZENIE

Przedmiotem stałego zainteresowania nauk społecznych, jest zagadnienie przyczyn konfliktów zbrojnych. Zaowocowało to wieloma teoriami i ustaleniami dotyczącymi doboru różnych kryteriów, w ustalaniu czynników konfliktogennych. W praktyce międzynarodowej państwa decydują się na podjęcie działań wojennych, powołując się na rację stanu lub żywotne interesy narodowe. Niekiedy prawdziwe przyczyny użycia siły są skrywane. Historia konfliktów zbrojnych zna wiele przypadków wykorzystania pretekstów, czyli zmyślonych powodów do rozpoczęcia wojny. Jako pretekst były wykorzystywane obiektywne sytuacje, na które państwo rozpoczynające wojnę nie miały wpływu i nie zależały one od ich woli i poczynań. Natomiast niektóre z pretekstów zostały celowo sfabrykowane, by uzasadnić i usprawiedliwić działania militarne. Takie postępowanie państw, z wykorzystaniem pretekstów do użycia siły, można zaobserwować od czasu wojny trojańskiej, aż do ataku na Irak w 2003 r. W gronie państw korzystających z pretekstów do wszczynania wojny, czołowe miejsce zajmują mocarstwa. Powołują się one przy tym na cele wyższe, mimo że nie ma zobiektywizowanych kryteriów pozwalających ustalić ich wyższość nad normami moralnymi i normami prawa międzynarodowego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** pretekst, konflikty zbrojne, udział państw

