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FROM REJECTION TO CONFRONTATION: A STUDY ON THE ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY PERSPECTIVE OF POLAND'S RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

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Abstract

In the field of international security studies, attention to ontological security issues has become a focal point. Ontological security at the national level manifests as the dynamic harmony between “national super-ego” and “national Id”, representing a common product in the subject relations. Ontological security crisis is the result of the failure of “national ego” regulation. Positioned in the geopolitical periphery, Poland, over millennia, has developed a distinct “national super-ego” and a strong sense of identity. However, throughout its history, Poland has repeatedly faced ontological security challenges from Russia. For Poland, Russia

has transformed from being the “other” to the “excluded”, ultimately becoming the “adversary” in Poland's ontological security. Since the “post-Cold War” era, Poland has endeavored to reshape its ontological security through internal and external measures. Ontological security provides a novel perspective for international relations research.

Keywords:

Poland-Russia Relations, Ontological Security, Polish Diplomacy, National Super-Ego

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In international affairs, security is paramount. In the 1990s, ontological security emerged in international studies. In the 21st century, it gained traction in international security studies. Recent events in Central and Eastern Europe, like the Eurozone crisis and conflicts involving Russia and Ukraine, have drawn global attention. Poland, a pivotal player, holds sway in the region. Polish-Russian relations are a key focus due to historical disputes and European dynamics. Examining Poland's stance towards Russia, ontological security elements are crucial. This paper adopts an ontological security perspective, exploring its role in Poland's foreign policy towards Russia and analyzing its impact on diplomatic decisions.

1.2 Literature Review

Beyond physical security, states strive for ontological security, achieved by normalizing relationships and fostering dependency (Jennifer Mitzen, 2006). Initially in psychology, ontological security is now explored in international relations, emphasizing the social environment's role in state identity. It's seen as a framework confirming self-existence, where "identity" is a dimension and "self" is conceptualized from a personality perspective. (Ejdus Filip, 2017) Initially explored in psychology, ontological security now emphasizes the social environment's role in state identity within international relations (Nina C.Krickel-Choi, 2024). Identity perspectives bolster ontological security, while role theory complements internal logic research by examining how international actors' security is challenged, restored, and reshaped in interactions (Stephan Klose, 2020). Historical narratives are crucial in ontological security research, shaping state identity through self-recognition, self-doubt, memory, and historical shame (Brent J. Steele, 2014). As theoretical research continues to advance, empirical analyses directly derived from the ontological security perspective are also increasingly

prevalent. In regional and country-specific studies, ontological security often serves as a research perspective for analyzing the underlying causes of a range of international issues. Relevant research covers topics such as the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, internal issues within the European Union, East Asian international politics, foreign policies, Sino-American relations, Sino-Japanese relations, international migration issues, the history of international relations, regional studies, and specific national ontological security concerns.

In the realm of international studies, the concept of ontological security emerges as a relatively recent perspective, delving into the intricacies of historical narratives and discourse surrounding self-identity. However, there remains a scarcity of research delving into the nuanced degrees of ontological insecurity and its consequential effects on state behavior. This paper endeavors to bridge this gap by delving into the intricate dynamics of Polish-Russian relations, synthesizing historical data to shed light on the complexities at play. By embarking on this journey, it seeks to not only initiate theoretical discussions rooted in the realm of ontological security but also contribute substantively to the empirical evidence within this field of study. Through this endeavor, a deeper understanding of the interplay between ontological security and state behavior can be cultivated, enriching scholarly discourse and informing policy considerations.

2. The Behavior of States under the Influence of Ontological Security

Ontological Security, originating from psychoanalytic discourse, focuses on the stability of individual or collective identity. (R. D. Laing, 2010) Introduced by Giddens in the 1990s, it examines how modern societies influence individual behavior through institutional reflexivity. This concept has spurred academic exploration in political science, offering fresh insights into identity-related research. (Anthony Giddens, 1991) Ontological security has brought new insights to political science research and triggered a series of academic explorations.

From a constructivist viewpoint, identity is a constructed entity shaped by conceptual foundations. A nation's identity stems from shared concepts rooted in diverse domestic ideologies, including historical traditions, language, culture, symbols, political systems, and propaganda. (Alexander Wendt, 1999) These shared concepts blur individual boundaries, fostering collective cognitive abilities, akin to Freud's "Id," "Ego," and "Superego" divisions in individual self-awareness. (Sigmund Freud, 2018) Similarly, states possess identity perception, exhibiting

components resembling Freud's divisions in national identity cognition. Thus, the state-level equivalents of "Id," "Ego," and "Superego" are crucial in researching national identity perception.

At the individual level, the "id" represents a cognitive state of unconsciousness, embodying aspects of "caprice, impulsivity, rebellion, lack of civility, and lack of civilization," constituting a collection of primal instincts often innate and preconscious. Similarly, at the national level, there exist inherent traits akin to classical realism's portrayal of state behavior rooted in human nature, often perceived as inherently selfish. This primal characteristic, akin to the "id," forms the bedrock of a nation's decision-making and actions, representing its primal impulses. Defensive realism asserts a state's primary goal as survival, driving an utmost pursuit of hegemony. While this perspective exhibits a zero-sum tint, it underscores essential factors in state behavior. Consequently, at the national level, the "id" can be summarized as an emphasis on self-interest, manifested in innate security instincts, power pursuit, resource contention, and identity needs. However, national behavior, in most cases, isn't solely driven by the "id" but constrained by various factors like international norms and power structures, akin to the suppression of the "id" by the "ego." Generally, the "ego" refers to cognitive aspects in a social environment. Influenced by societal surroundings, the "ego" often exhibits a repressive state towards the "id," concurrently directly engaging with the external world. At the national level, the "ego" signifies the identity cognition exhibited in the international arena, such as positioning in the global order, great power status, and membership in international organizations. Like the "id" and "ego," the "superego" is an integral part of cognition. It refers to a "self-paradigm" derived from advanced elements like religion, morality, and social sentiments. For a nation, the "superego" denotes unique traits and core values inherent in the process of forming and preserving its identity. This concept emphasizes a nation's cognition of its uniqueness, encompassing historical, cultural, and value-based elements. Such uniqueness significantly influences a nation's behavior, decisions, and interactions with other countries. The "national superego" embodies moral and ethical standards adhered to by the nation, along with universally recognized values in the international community. It also supports the nation's self-promotion in the global arena, such as being the "European country," "beacon of freedom," "Third Rome," or "guardian of peace." The formation of the "national superego" stems from a nation's historical narratives, cultural identity, prevalent religious beliefs, emphasizing a series of shared values and behavioral guidelines followed in international affairs, along with its commitment to the overall

welfare of the international community. Whether at the individual or national level, conflicts often arise between the "id" and "ego." Therefore, the "ego," while executing identity cognition, needs to regulate both the "id" and "superego" according to real norms, maintaining a relatively harmonious and consistent state of identity cognition.

The "id," "ego," and "superego" collectively construct the identity cognition of an actor and generate behavior based on this identity cognition. The "id" provides the primal drive for behavior, the "superego" offers moral support, and the "ego" mediates behavior based on real norms. As depicted in Figure 1, when actor A behaves towards actor B based on its self-identity cognition, and B acknowledges A's self-perception, it reinforces harmony between the "id" and "superego," resulting in ontological security for A. Conversely, if B rejects A's identity cognition, challenging A's "superego," harmony between the "id" and "ego" is disrupted, leading to ontological insecurity for A. Faced with ontological insecurity, the "ego" adjusts the "id" and "superego" again. Successful adjustment prompts new behavior from A to gain recognition from B, thereby regaining ontological security. However, if the adjustment fails, the opposition between the "id" and "superego" becomes difficult to reconcile, leading to an ontological security crisis. Due to the subjectivity and differences among actors, ontological insecurity is widespread in the international community, while ontological security is established or undermined through interactions. Therefore, understanding and coordinating the relationship between the "id," "ego," and "superego" enables actors to better maintain ontological security, fostering harmonious international relations.

Building upon the preceding discussion, ontological security is a form of security based on a cohesive self-narrative formed through the recognition of others, fundamentally distinct from the general notion of self-identity. Drawing from Russian grammar, self-identity refers to "Я считаю себя (I consider myself)," while other-identity refers to "Меня считают (I am considered)." In this transformation from subject to object, the "I" is differentiated into "subjective self" and "objective self," altering the verb conjugation accordingly. In studies of identity, researchers often focus on the self-positioning, interest judgment, and behavioral orientation stemming from self-identity. Due to its reflexive nature, ontological security not only clarifies self-identity but also pays more attention to the "identity in the eyes of others," or external evaluation. However, external evaluations often fail to fully align with the historical narratives embedded in the "superego" and the resulting self-identity, leading to ontological

insecurity prevalent in international interactions. This insecurity may either alleviate or intensify during interactions among international actors. When it persists and deepens after a series of interactions, ontological security crises emerge. Therefore, in ontological security research, caution should be exercised in using the term "crisis," and it's imperative to categorize international behavior under different states.

Attaining ontological security is the most desirable state, as it ensures a nation's international recognition and reputation, fostering internal political stability and societal cohesion, driving positive international engagement. However, ontological insecurity is prevalent due to international diversity and historical evolution. Internally, nations adjust their "national self" at the "national superego" level, often revising national history to restore harmony with the "national ego." Externally, nations respond to challenges to their "superego" by eliminating sources of insecurity. Strong nations pursue proactive measures like cultural dissemination, military deterrence, and economic trade, while weaker nations focus on internal cultural development to reinforce identity legitimacy, often prioritizing culture over military power. Ontological security crises mark the pinnacle of insecurity, indicating the failure of "self" adjustments. In response, the "national superego" seeks self-protection, potentially leading to inter-state conflicts, retaliatory actions, or even warfare. Overall, ontological security profoundly influences a nation's international interactions, shaping its recognition, reputation, and behavior on the global stage. Achieving and maintaining ontological security remains a crucial goal for nations seeking stability and positive engagement in the international community.

3. The Formation and Evolution of Ontological Security in Poland

Since the end of the First World War, with Poland regaining independence, it officially entered the ranks of modern nations. Tracing its origins along the long river of history, Poland carries over a thousand years of rich history. This long history has witnessed Poland's evolution through various challenges, changes, and rises. The millennium-old history has profoundly integrated into the foundation of Polish culture and national identity. This period has witnessed Poland's resistance at different historical stages, struggles for independence, and cultural flourishing. With the passage of a millennium, the Polish people's emotional attachment to their own identity has deeply rooted in this rich history. In this process, Poland's ontological security has also been deeply shaped.

From the perspective of studying Polish history, the year 966 AD can be seen as the beginning of Poland. This is because in this year, Mieszko I was baptized and began to forcibly promote Latin Christianity, laying the foundation for Poland's first dynasty—the Piast Dynasty. There were roughly three reasons for Mieszko I's baptism: firstly, influenced by Bohemian missionaries; secondly, influenced by his wife, Doubravka Přemyslovna, the daughter of Boleslav I of Bohemia; thirdly, seeking protection in the face of German threats. However, regardless of the purpose, this event was epoch-making in Polish history. In 992 AD, Mieszko I placed Poland under the protection of the Pope through the *Dagome Iudex*. Bolesław I Chrobry continued to strengthen Poland's connection with Christianity after ascending to the throne. Ultimately, Pope Sylvester I established multiple bishoprics in Poland in 999 AD through a series of measures, effectively establishing the Polish ecclesiastical province, freeing the Polish Church from German control, and further strengthening the formation of the Polish state. Over the next thousand years of development, the Catholic faith occupied an important place in Polish culture. Therefore, in 1978, the election of John Paul II as the first Polish pope caused a great sensation in Poland, and his three visits to Poland had a significant impact on Polish society. Religion and Polish history are intertwined, becoming an integral part of Polish identity and the "national super-ego," with profound implications for subsequent development.

Under the influence of the Roman Catholic Church, Latin was widely used in the daily life of the Polish people, and even became the written language of Poland at one point. Therefore, despite the common Slavic origin of Polish and other Slavic languages, Polish did not adopt the Cyrillic alphabet under the guidance of religion. Instead, it used the Latin alphabet for spelling, a tradition that eventually led to the formation of the Polish alphabet in the 12th century. Over the following centuries of development, Polish gradually evolved into the language spelled with the Latin alphabet that is used today. The influence of the Polish language expanded during the process of anti-war efforts. During the 19th century when Poland lost its independence, not only Poles but also a large number of Lithuanians and Ukrainians used Polish. Under the influence of Russian policies, the University of Vilnius was reestablished in 1803, with Polish as the language of instruction, nurturing a group of elites who used Polish as a cultural and political language. As intellectuals resisted against Russia, Polish-language poetry was used as a propaganda medium, further promoting the flourishing of Polish culture. Led by political activists, Polish culture gradually became a humanistic quality. In the history of Poland's pursuit of independence in the

19th century, factors such as the Catholic faith, the use of the Latin alphabet in Polish, and the humanistic characteristics of Polish culture collectively constituted Poland's "national super-ego," further strengthening the identity of the Polish people and realizing the construction of modern Polish national identity.

In terms of political system, Poland's democratic foundation is deeply rooted in its rich historical development. Particularly during the era of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, faced with the issue of the end of the Jagiellonian dynasty, Poland introduced a unique form of government known as the elective monarchy. This system integrated elements of federalism, confederalism, aristocratic democracy, and constitutional monarchy, presenting a diverse and flexible organizational structure. In the Polish elective monarchy, the head of state was chosen through election rather than through heredity or direct inheritance. This system granted the nobility crucial decision-making power in state affairs, reflecting a fusion of aristocracy and democratic elements. Despite some challenges such as internal divisions and disadvantages in foreign relations and leaving certain vulnerabilities from its partition in the 18th century, this system nonetheless laid the ideological and historical groundwork for the establishment of a democratic regime in the later Polish Second Republic. The experience gained from this political system also played a crucial role in Poland's return to Europe and the establishment of a modern democratic system after the Cold War. Poland drew profound lessons from its elective monarchy, providing valuable experience for the establishment of a just and representative political system, thus enabling Poland to establish a robust democratic system in the modern era.

Poland's "national super-ego" stems from Catholicism's moral influence, historical resilience, and a longing for freedom. Catholicism shapes moral values, culture, and identity. Historical struggles foster cultural resilience, evident in arts and literature. Freedom aspirations persist, rooted in historical experiences. Western civilization traits resonate deeply with Poland. Poland's identity as a Western nation is evident.(Samuel Phillips Huntington,1996) Its ontological security relies on external recognition as an independent Western state. Any challenge to its "national super-ego" triggers insecurity, prompting reactive foreign policies.

When examining Poland's ontological security within its historical narrative, we find that the country's identity is deeply rooted in its millennia-long history. Religious beliefs, cultural traits, and a yearning for freedom together forge Poland's robust "national super-ego." The Catholic faith plays a pivotal role in various stages of Polish history, influencing societal values

and establishing unique moral perspectives within the national identity. The flourishing of culture and the desire for freedom shape the resilience and spirit of resistance among the Polish people, infusing their historical culture with vitality. The democratic foundation in the political system lays the institutional framework for modern Poland, offering valuable experience for the country's return to Europe and its democratic development. Simultaneously, Poland positions itself as a Western nation, expressing "Western country" as a clear aspect of its identity. This positioning provides an important reference for Poland's ontological security, enabling it to pursue recognition as an "independent Western country" on the international stage. Overall, ontological security in Poland's historical narrative encompasses not only the security and independence of the state but also a profound sense of identity. It reflects the Polish people's reverence for their history and cultural traditions, their commitment to freedom and democracy, and their alignment with Western values. This identity plays a crucial role in international relations, shaping Poland's interactions with the world and highlighting the country's uniqueness and strong ontological security needs on the global stage.

4. The Role of Russia in Poland's Ontological Security

From the perspective of Russia's historical evolution, influenced by different religious denominations, Russia and Poland have formed fundamentally different cultural foundations. The use of written language and ethnic symbols has exacerbated their differences. In Poland's conception of national security, Russia has aroused feelings of insecurity, particularly due to its historical partitioning of Poland. This has cast Russia in the role of the "excluded" in Poland's sense of national security. With Poland's re-establishment after World War I, Polish-Russian (Soviet) relations once again became a focal point on the international stage. The Treaty of Riga following the Polish-Soviet War laid the groundwork for defining the borders between Poland and the Soviet Union. During this period, Poland successfully underwent modern nation-building, leading to a new dynamic of its "national super-ego." The Polish parliament, controlled by the central regions, emphasized territorial claims that could be assimilated into the Polish nation-state. Poland was internally divided into federalist and nationalist factions. After Józef Klemens Piłsudski's death, nationalism gained full control of the government, intensifying policies of ethnic assimilation.

During this period, the Soviet Union did not abandon its influence over Western Ukraine, leading to a power struggle between Poland and the Soviet Union in the region. This era vividly illustrated Ukraine's position on the dividing line between two civilizations, with both Poland and the Soviet Union representing distinct cultural identities. For Poland, the Soviet Union remained the "other," continuing to play the role of the "excluded" in its national security. Although this role did not improve compared to previous times, it also did not deteriorate until the outbreak of World War II. During the war, Poland was once again partitioned by the Soviet Union and Germany, and 21,857 Polish prisoners of war were executed by the Soviets, including senior officers, intelligence experts, scientists, and government officials, in what became known as the "Katyn Massacre." The Soviet Union denied involvement in the massacre until its dissolution. However, regardless of denials, the event constituted a collective slaughter of Polish elites, impacting not only Poland's subsequent development but also representing a "cleansing" of Poland's "national super-ego" from the perspective of national security.

Furthermore, Poland's long-term subjugation to the Soviet Union after World War II severely damaged its identity as an "independent Western nation," leading to a significant disruption in its historical narrative and once again challenging Poland's "national super-ego." Considering the history of Polish-Russian relations since World War II, this period represented an unprecedented threat to Poland's national security, as evidenced by events such as the Katyn Massacre and Soviet interference in Polish internal affairs. Throughout this process, Poland's ability to "self-regulate" was clearly impaired, highlighting the crisis in its national security, while tensions between Poland and Russia gradually intensified. Ultimately, Russia transitioned from being the "excluded" in Poland's concept of national security to the role of "adversary."

After the Cold War, Poland successfully freed itself from Russian control and achieved its strategic goal of returning to Europe by participating in international organizations such as NATO and the European Union. However, despite some positive developments in Polish-Russian relations during the government of Donald Franciszek Tusk, Russia's role as an "adversary" in Poland's national security has not substantially changed. The "Smolensk air crash" incident in 2010 deepened Poland's collective mourning for the "Katyn Massacre" and once again cast a shadow over Polish-Russian relations. The outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis further exacerbated Poland's distrust of Russia, coupled with the ruling authorities' emphasis on nationalism, highlighting Russia's role as an "adversary" even more. The eruption of the Russia-

Ukraine conflict in 2022 once again posed a threat to Poland's national security, prompting Andrzej Sebastian Duda to explicitly designate Russia as its "adversary" in his speeches.

Overall, deep historical imprints, cultural disparities, and political disputes have woven a complex web of relations between Poland and Russia. These challenges forged Poland's resilient national spirit and shaped a unique national identity. Russia's role evolved from being the "excluder" to the "adversary," impacting bilateral relations profoundly. Poland's mistrust of Russia is evident, exacerbated by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, sparking renewed security concerns.

5. Poland's Pursuit of Ontological Security under the Influence of Russia

The millennium-long historical evolution between Russia and Poland has led to a complex process in their relationship, transitioning from mutual heterogeneity to gradual antagonism. This historical trajectory has significantly shaped the national security perceptions of both countries, particularly in Poland, where the impact of Russia is most keenly felt on the level of national security. Presently, Poland views Russia as its most serious threat, encompassing both physical and ontological security concerns. Looking back, Russia has posed serious ontological security crises for Poland in the past. To alleviate the existential insecurity caused by Russia, the Polish government has adopted strategies from both internal and external perspectives, demonstrating its diplomatic stance towards Russia.

Building upon the preceding discussion, mitigating existential insecurity requires actions on both internal and external fronts: internally, by reconfiguring the nation's historical narratives to achieve internal harmony, and externally, by showcasing its foreign policy stance. Since the establishment of the Third Polish Republic in 1989, Poland has primarily pursued two avenues to reconfigure its historical narratives internally.

Firstly, Poland opted to inherit the legal continuity of the Second Polish Republic. After World War II, Poland, supported by the Soviet Union, established a new regime, proclaiming the establishment of the Polish People's Republic and adopting a "Soviet model" of governance. However, the Polish government-in-exile, based in London, did not recognize the legitimacy of the Polish People's Republic government. Formed during World War II, the Polish government-in-exile was marginalized by the Allies due to disagreements with the Soviet Union over the Katyn Massacre investigation. Following the end of World War II, amidst

considerations of bipolar confrontation, the Polish government-in-exile once again received support from Western countries and continued to operate from London. Throughout the Cold War, although the Polish government-in-exile did not receive widespread international recognition, it maintained the legal continuity with the Second Polish Republic government, asserting its position in law and sovereignty. Simultaneously, it emphasized the foreign origin of the Polish People's Republic government and its illegitimate existence. With the dramatic changes in Polish politics in 1989, the Polish government-in-exile expressed its willingness to transfer power to a successor government elected through democratic means. In 1990, the last President of the Polish government-in-exile, Ryszard Kaczorowski, returned to Warsaw and handed over all symbols of legal continuity of the Second Polish Republic, including the presidential seal and the original 1935 constitution, to Lech Walesa during the presidential inauguration ceremony, marking the formal inheritance of the legal continuity of the Second Polish Republic government by the Third Polish Republic government, thereby achieving the unity of Polish regime continuity. Although subsequent interpretations of this event emphasize its symbolic significance, it provided Poland with a solid foundation for ontological security. By inheriting legal continuity, Poland demonstrated the continuity of its national history and identity, maintaining its legal status on the international stage. This helped consolidate Polish societal cohesion and identity, forming a collective defense against internal and external threats.

Secondly, Poland pursued measures to strengthen nationalist policies. Due to Poland's historical subjugation by Russia, propagating national suffering became an important means for Poland to reinforce national consciousness. Meanwhile, nationalism became a tool for exploitation by Polish rulers. The ruling Law and Justice Party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) is an ideologically conservative party. Under its leadership, Poland has implemented a series of nationalist policies to strengthen national identity and shape the "national super-ego." This includes organizing numerous patriotic activities annually to promote the country's history, culture, and values. Despite criticism from external sources, the Law and Justice Party has penetrated deeply into the national values by providing extensive welfare policies to Polish citizens. Thus, the Law and Justice Party employs nationalism as a political tool to foster social cohesion and enhance national unity. The implementation of these policies aims not only to garner voter support but also, at a deeper level, to further strengthen national consciousness by emphasizing nationalism, thereby forging a robust "national super-ego" and consolidating

Poland's ontological security. The success of this strategy lies in the organic integration of the nation's history, culture, and identity, forming a shared national identity. By reinforcing this identity, Poland enhances national confidence while maintaining its independence and security in international affairs.

Combining internal integration of historical narratives and strengthening national identity with proactive diplomacy, Poland has demonstrated a cautious approach towards Russia while re-engaging with Europe, further safeguarding its ontological security. Poland's diplomatic policies are reflected in two main aspects:

Firstly, there is a shift towards integrating into the European order. For centuries, Poland has been caught between two geopolitical blocs, with fierce competition for influence in Europe. During the Cold War, the existence of the "Iron Curtain" resulted in two distinct orders in Europe, with Poland falling under the spheres of influence of both the Soviet Union and Western countries. With the end of the Cold War, Poland swiftly initiated adjustments to its European order. In 1993, Russia withdrew its troops from Poland, enabling Poland to achieve a military separation from Russia successfully. This move not only weakened direct military ties between Poland and Russia but also created conditions for Poland's independence in international affairs. Subsequently, Poland rapidly pursued accession to NATO and the European Union, becoming a member of these two crucial organizations in 1999 and 2004, respectively. This step to a certain extent marked Poland's reintegration into the European family, ensuring its physical security. Poland established closer security and economic ties with other Western countries, ensuring active participation in regional and international affairs. Additionally, joining NATO and the EU allowed Poland to successfully maintain its ontological security and clearly define its "national super-ego" as a member of the Western bloc. This helped consolidate Poland's national identity and provided a relatively stable foothold in today's complex geopolitical landscape.

Secondly, Poland has adopted a proactive anti-Russian stance in its foreign policy. Due to centuries of conflicts and tensions between Poland and Russia, Poland's ontological security is deeply threatened by Russia, leading to historical suspicions. As a result, Poland closely monitors all Russian activities in Eastern and Central Europe. Since the establishment of the Third Polish Republic, Poland has actively returned to Europe while also serving as the vanguard against Russia for Western countries. Regarding the Eastern Partnership of the

European Union, Poland actively participates in the program to highlight its role and prevent Russia from integrating the "former Soviet territories." After the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in 2014, Poland's favorability towards Russia decreased by fifteen percentage points, prompting closer military cooperation with NATO and requesting increased U.S. troops stationed in Poland. Since the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, Poland has become a key player in shaping the security order in Eastern Europe. It has helped Ukraine in various aspects, including international public opinion, refugee relief, and military support. Meanwhile, Poland has demonstrated a positive attitude towards Ukraine's accession to NATO and the EU. Whether in military cooperation with NATO or support for Ukraine, Poland's diplomatic stance against Russia is consistent with its nationalist policies. The implementation of Poland's anti-Russian diplomatic stance has highlighted its status as a "Western country," further gaining external recognition of its identity and ultimately achieving ontological security.

Poland's foreign policy embodies a comprehensive strategy aimed at ensuring national security, strengthening Western identity, and playing a significant role in regional affairs. By integrating into the European order through NATO and the EU, Poland has enhanced its international status and safeguarded its ontological security. Simultaneously, it maintains a staunch anti-Russia stance, collaborating with Western nations to counter Russian challenges, further solidifying Western identity and regional influence. Moreover, Poland pursues a regional power status, bolstering its influence in Central and Eastern Europe through extensive diplomatic efforts, easing pressure from Russia. Overall, Poland adopts a combination of internal and external strategies to address the ontological security threat posed by Russia, reinforcing national identity internally while navigating diplomatic avenues externally to mitigate external pressures.

Overall, Poland has adopted a series of integrated internal and external response strategies to address the ontological security threat posed by Russia. Internally, by reconfiguring the nation's historical narratives, especially through the inheritance of legal traditions and the strengthening of nationalism, Poland has successfully solidified national identity and social cohesion, laying a solid foundation for coping with external pressures. At the diplomatic level, Poland has effectively alleviated the ontological insecurity stemming from Russia through measures such as repositioning within the European order, actively countering Russian influence, and striving for regional power status. This comprehensive strategy demonstrates Poland's

flexibility and consistency in the complex geopolitical landscape and provides successful experience in maintaining ontological security and playing an active role in international affairs.

6. Conclusion

In the field of international security studies, ontological security, as a matter involving a nation's intrinsic perceptions, is receiving increasing attention. At the state level, ontological security manifests as the harmonious relationship between a nation's "national super-ego" and "national ego," a harmony that is often dynamic and subject to change. Feelings of existential insecurity are a common product of inter-subjective relations, and this dynamic harmony requires regulation by the "national self" to achieve. When this self-regulation fails, ontological security crises may arise. Therefore, in different states of ontological security, nations may adopt various measures to achieve ontological security.

Poland, situated on the geopolitical periphery of Europe, has been influenced by various factors such as religion, language, and history, forming a distinct "national super-ego" and strong identity. However, over centuries of history, Poland's ontological security has been repeatedly challenged by Russia, leading to severe ontological security crises. Throughout this process, Russia has evolved from being an "excluded other" in Poland's ontological security to an "adversary." Since the post-Cold War era, Poland has managed to break free from Russian influence and successfully reshaped its ontological security by implementing measures both internally and externally.

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