

## **Analyzing Middle Eastern Armed Non-State Actors' Foreign Policy**

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### **Abstract**

Within the Middle East several armed non-state actors challenge the (nation) state system by controlling a territory, claiming a monopoly of violence and pursuing a Foreign Policy. Some scholars suggest that new paradigms are needed, as state-centric Foreign Policy Analysis paradigms do not fit these actors. This study indicates that existing, traditional approaches – the Rational Actor Paradigm, the Organizational Behavior Paradigm and the Governmental Politics Paradigm – prove sufficiently equipped to provide accurate analyses on Middle Eastern armed non-state actors as long as the analysts applying them are aware of both strengths and constraints of each approach.

**Keywords:** armed non-state actors, Middle East, Foreign Policy Analysis

### **Introduction**

The rise of non-state actors in international relations (Aydinli 2013, 2) affects world politics, in particular Middle Eastern politics. Not only the self-proclaimed Islamic State, but other examples, such as Hezbollah and the Kurdish regions in both Iraq and Syria, have entered the field of international affairs. (Gunter 1997, 1) By their mere presence, these organizations challenge the idea that '[n]on-state actors can only flourish within a relatively peaceful and stable international system, with an underlying consensus about the rules of international interaction and the legitimacy of the state units.' (Josselin and Wallace 2001, 4) Not only did these non-state actors emerge in a dynamic time in which state authority was lacking, they also have militias available by which they can control a specific territory from which they pursue Foreign Policies.

This study explores whether a new paradigm is needed to grasp these developments in the region. Or are Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow right in their claim that the three paradigms on Foreign Policy Analysis they describe 'can be applied beyond foreign policy to the domestic policy of national governments; state and local governments; nongovernmental organizations.' (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 7) This quote implies that the existing, traditional state-centric paradigms can also be used to analyze Middle Eastern armed non-state actors, and many other.

In order to examine whether a new paradigm is actually needed, this study first will look into the increasing relevance of Middle Eastern armed non-state actors. Then follows a short overview of traditional Foreign Policy Analysis paradigms as mentioned in the *Essence of Decision. Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (1999) by Allison and Zelikow. Additionally,

these paradigms will be placed in a Middle Eastern context to explore whether they can be applied to armed non-state actors in that region.

The overall aim of this study is to contribute to the discussion on how to analyze armed non-state actors' Foreign Policies, in particular regarding a Middle Eastern setting. Therefore, this study should be seen as a starting point for further research. Potential avenues for future research include exploring applicability of Foreign Policy paradigms to non-state actors in general and to individual cases in the Middle East in particular, in which different approaches are compared to one another by studying a single case. (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 144) Such approaches should contribute to a better understanding of armed non-state actors in world politics. As they do exert influence in this arena, either by themselves or indirectly by influencing state actors, Foreign Policy Analysis needs to include non-state actors. (Baumann and Stengel 2013, 490–91)

*Societal relevance: Increasing role of armed non-state actors*

It is the potential to use violence that creates more leverage for these non-state actors compared to those without such capacity. It is reminiscent of Joseph Stalin's response to the Pope suggesting the Soviet Union should stop harassing Catholics: 'The Pope? How many divisions has he got?' (Moran 2006, 1) Assuming a zero-sum situation the increasing influence of armed non-state actors implies the loss of influence of state actors. Specifically, within the Middle East regimes were challenged by armed non-state actors regarding the use of violence and control over a specific territory. (Hinnebusch 2014, 26) Ulrich Schneckener argues that these armed non-state actors contest statehood itself, including all its institutions. (Schneckener 2006, 35) The increasing power of armed non-state actors means that the state phenomenon becomes less relevant. That does not only concern the position within a territory, but from that territory towards the external world as well. As such, these armed non-state actors pursue Foreign Policies. (Gunter 1997, 1) This means these actors have regional relevance and should be included in political analyses and policy recommendations concerning the Middle Eastern region. One step further is to include armed non-state actors in politics. Although it might be politically sensitive, historical research suggests that including these actors in political processes proves the most successful way to end conflict with regard to a specific kind of armed non-state actors, who are terrorist groups. (Jones and Libicki 2008; Kurth Cronin 2009) Understanding the dynamics within Foreign Policy decision-making by Middle Eastern armed non-state actors is a first step.

*Scientific relevance: lack of research regarding armed non-state actors*

Rainer Baumann and Frank Stengel conclude in a literature review on Foreign Policy and non-state actors that only in the 1990s attention in non-state actors increased in the study of international politics (Baumann and Stengel 2013, 506) They notice that many scholars stick to traditional topics, although they do observe some developments that actually include non-state actors in the analyses. (Baumann and Stengel 2013, 509) Baumann and Stengel suggest to 'examine how decisions are made across policy fields and arenas [...] and to what extent and how exactly NSAs [non-state actors] are involved.' (Baumann and Stengel 2013, 511) In addition to that, 'foreign policy analysts should start analyzing decision making in these different settings and probe to what extent their models are applicable, how they could be modified, etc.' (Baumann and Stengel 2013, 512)

Seemingly rather paradoxically, research on non-state actors tends to be state-centric. As non-state actors' presence in and influence on Middle Eastern regional politics is recognized, the emphasis in research regarding non-state actors so far was not so much on these actors themselves, but more on their effect on states' monopolies on violence. (Aydinli 2013, 2–3; Josselin and Wallace 2001, 12) Remarkably, '[w]hen it comes to nonstate actors, however, we have far less comprehensive research on what they are, how they interact and how they may be changing over time. If we accept that a policy shift is occurring, we must develop a deeper understanding of this form of agency,' (Aydinli 2013, 2) especially due to an increasing involvement of (armed) non-state actors in world politics. (Aydinli 2013, 2; Mishali-Ram 2009, 73) In his study on the changing situation in the Middle East after the rise of IS – and consequentially the stronger position of Kurdish armed non-state actors both in Iraq and Syria –, Michael Gunter argues that 'this situation will call for a new paradigm to classify and understand the changing geopolitical reality of the Middle East.' (Gunter 2015, 78)

### **Armed Non-State Actors**

Within the field of international relations, non-state actors are recognized as increasingly important players. Actually, non-state actors existed before states did. (Baumann and Stengel 2013, 490) Now a 'transfer of authority from the state to various NSAs [non-state actors] of various kinds' happens, including in the field of Foreign Policy (Baumann and Stengel 2013, 490) In some cases non-state actors operate as 'autonomous actors that can have a serious impact on world politics.' (Baumann and Stengel 2013, 490)

#### *Non-State Actors*

Criteria differ among scholars on what constitutes a non-state actor. Most approaches towards actorness include a capability for making decisions or policy and the ability to actually implement those decisions or policy. (Aydinli 2013, 4) A non-state actor obviously is not a state entity. In addition to that, 'shared interests' and longing to be recognized by other actors usually are part of the academic concepts on non-state actors. (Aydinli 2013, 4)

Daphné Josselin and William Wallace define non-state actors based upon three criteria. Firstly, it concerns organizations that operate independently from the authorities. Secondly, it acts within a cross border network. Finally, it aims to influence political decision-making. (Josselin and Wallace 2001, 3–4)

Baumann and Stengel adopt a typology of non-state actors based upon territorial scope and legal status. Territorial scope refers to whether the actor operates within or beyond the state's borders, while legal status indicates whether the actor operates in the private or public sphere. (Baumann and Stengel 2013, 492–94) In practice, their taxonomy is problematic as categories overlap or cases do not fit in any category. (Baumann and Stengel 2013, 493–94) Basically, all examples mentioned in this study so far prove problematic. IS, Hezbollah, the Kurdish regions in Iraq and Syria started as transnational actors, but eventually did behave as state actors within a certain territory or territories by claiming monopoly of violence (Hinnebusch 2014, 26) and raising taxes (and in case of IS even referring to itself as 'state'). This is true for the example of the Catholic Church as well, as it rules over the Vatican City State. Whether an actor is state or non-state is sometimes highly contested. In general, what apparently usually distinguishes non-state actors from state actors is that non-state actors are not recognized as states by other states.

*Increase in non-state actors*

The international arena evolves and new non-state actors arise. Seyom Brown labels it 'polyarchic – a highly interactive and interdependent, yet decentralized, system of many kinds of actors, large and small, state and non-state.' (Brown, 2016, p. 244; italics in original) Furthermore, Brown observes a 'relative rise in power of the non-state actors,' which can join coalitions with state actors in a dynamic system of highly unpredictable relationships. (Brown 2016, 244) In his analysis, Brown refers to Hedley Bull's concept of New Mediaevalism, as the polyarchic system is rather familiar to the European system in the Middle Ages. Brown emphasizes that apart from the nation states, thousands of non-state actors have fighting capacity as well. (Brown 2016, 245–46)

A similar tendency is observed by Ersel Aydinli, who describes a transfer of power from states to non-states. According to Aydinli, the state will eventually lose its predominance within world politics. (Aydinli 2013, 1)

Moisés Naím observes a decrease of power among traditional actors in numerous fields, including international politics. Instead so-called micropowers arise, 'small, unknown, or once-negligible actors that have found ways to undermine, fence in, or thwart the megaplayers, the large bureaucratic organizations that previously controlled their fields.' (Naím 2014, 51) The reasons are three developments labeled by Naím the 'more,' 'mobility,' and 'mentality' revolutions. The 'more' revolution concerns the increasing population, whom on average live better lives and are higher educated than previous generations, which makes these people more difficult to keep in check. This, according to Naím, is further increased by the improved availability of transportation and communication compared to before – the 'mobility' revolution. The 'more' and 'mobility' developments contributed to establishing huge middle classes in societies all over the world. Within these middle classes expectations of people increased, while authorities were incapable to fix those needs, thus creating political turmoil. (Naím 2014, 54–65)<sup>1</sup> The fragmentation of power extends into international politics too. Perhaps not officially recognized, non-state entities carry out 'de facto foreign policy.' (Naím 2014, 97)

Although it is impossible to exactly quantify the influence that non-state actors exert in world politics, scholarly attention and academic works indicate that non-state actors have become more important at the expense of state actors. Some armed non-state actors even challenge states authority.

*Armed non-state actors*

Focusing on military developments, Naím observes that technological developments proliferate beyond states to non-state actors, which means states lose their military superiority over the latter. (Naím 2014, 123) In addition, Brown states that a consequence of the polyarchic world system is use of proxies (state and non-state actors alike) in military campaigns. (Brown 2016, 247) This indicates that with respect to military power, armed non-state actors increasingly gain importance at the cost of state actors.

According to Schneckener, what distinguishes armed non-state actors from other non-state actors is that they are might use violence to obtain a goal. (Schneckener 2006, 25) Additionally, he observes that by contesting the state's monopoly on violence, many of these non-state actors have a troublesome relation to international law. Furthermore, many armed non-state actors participate in transnational networks, which offers these organization leverage within world

politics. (Schneckener 2006, 28) This suggests that armed non-state actors are able to pursue a credible Foreign Policy.

Regarding terminology, within the academic literature, both ‘armed non-state actor’ is used (for example Aydinli 2013, 1–21) and ‘violent non-state actor.’ (for example Schneckener 2006, 23–40) The remainder of this study will use ‘armed non-state actor’ however. The reason for this choice is that ‘armed’ refers to an observable capability that is or might be applied. ‘Violent’ refers to a behavior that is subjective; it depends on the observer whether an action is qualified as such, or not. Of the examples provided in this study so far, it is clear that IS, Hezbollah and the Kurds in Iraq and Syria are all armed – all four have the possibility to apply violence to achieve a specific goal –, whereas the contemporary Catholic church is not. Depending on the stance of the observer, discussion could arise on whether these examples should be considered violent or not. The focus within this study is on armed non-state actors as it is especially this type that gained traction within current Middle Eastern affairs.

*Typology of armed non-state actors*

Usually five or six categories of armed non-state actors are discerned. Aydinli uses six categories: ‘(1) insurgents, (2) other domestic militant groups, (3) warlords/urban gangs, (4) private militias/military companies, (5) terrorists and (6) criminal organizations.’ (Aydinli 2013, 4) Schneckener adds two more categories, bringing the total to eight. His typology of armed non-state actors is indicated in table 1.

*Table 1: Schneckener’s typology of armed non-state actors. (Schneckener 2006, 30)*

	<b>Change vs status quo</b>	<b>Territorial vs non-territorial</b>	<b>Physical vs psychological use of violence</b>	<b>Political vs economic motivation</b>
<b>Rebels, guerrillas</b>	Change	Territorial	Physical	Political
<b>Militias, para-militaries</b>	Status quo	Territorial Non-territorial	Physical Psychological	Political
<b>Clan chiefs, big men</b>	Status quo	Territorial	Physical	Political
<b>Warlords</b>	Status quo	Territorial	Physical Psychological	Economic
<b>Terrorists</b>	Change	Non-territorial	Psychological	Political
<b>Criminals, mafia, gangs</b>	Status quo	Non-territorial	Psychological	Economic
<b>Mercenaries, PMCs/PSCs</b>	Indifferent	Territorial	Physical	Economic
<b>Marauders, ‘sobels’</b>	Indifferent	Non-territorial	Psychological	Economic

## Analyzing Middle Eastern Armed Non-State Actors' Foreign Policy

According to the taxonomy, the examples mentioned in this study can be categorized. Here again categorization proves difficult. Depending on the argumentation, IS, Hezbollah and the Kurds in both Iraq and Syria could be labeled as different types of armed non-state actors.

### *Analyzing armed non-state actors*

Baumann and Stengel argue that '[s]ince there do not seem to be theoretical reasons for not taking on NSAs [non-state actors], the question then is: are there inherent methodological problems that stand in the way of analysing NSAs from an FPA [foreign policy analysis] perspective?' (Baumann and Stengel 2013, 502) The authors indicate that non-state actors might be more challenging to analyze, for example because they do not have the obligation to make all key documents publicly available. Although terrorist organizations seek media attention via (social) media, they operate in a covert fashion. (Baumann and Stengel 2013, 503)

Although analyzing such armed non-state actors might prove challenging, essential information containing intentions of state actors is not always available for the public either. Moreover, even though there are no obligations for non-state actors to make key documents publicly available, such organizations not only *have* such documents, they *do* become publicly available occasionally. (for example Al-Tamimi 2015) In some cases the documents themselves might not pose the biggest challenge. Rather the outline of the organization, mapping which sub-organization fits where and has written the specific documents might be more of an issue. Here, leaked documents might be useful too. (for example Reuter 2015) The obvious problem with such documents is verification whether they are authentic. Here triangulation with other sources might prove useful; by using documents that the armed non-state actor already made public, like propaganda materials, by secondary sources and observing actual behavior.

Such sources can be analyzed by using a specific framework. Aydinli developed one based on existing frameworks. His Autonomy, Representation and Influence-framework assesses armed non-state actors. In the framework armed non-state actors are analyzed and compared along the criteria of autonomy, representation and influence. Autonomy here is seen as the position on two continuums that indicate the distance from a state and the distance from a state-centric system. Representation is the extent to which the armed non-state actor is able to attract support, while at the same time it keeps the organization manageable to avoid overstretch. The final element of the framework, Influence, is indicated by sustainability and impact of the armed non-state actor. All factors are placed on continuums, which together describe the characteristics of the armed non-state actor (Aydinli 2013, 5–16) It is the influence, or the impact, of armed non-state actors on other regional actors – either implicitly or explicitly – that makes studying the phenomenon relevant from a Foreign Policy perspective.

However, the framework does not provide much more than a mere description of an armed non-state actor. Within the Middle East, it is armed non-state actors such as IS, Hezbollah and the Kurds in Iraq and Syria that by their sheer ability to use violence can control territory in which they can claim a monopoly of violence. From their position, these armed non-state actors will somehow interact with other actors; they pursue Foreign Policies. (Gunter 1997, 1)

### *Summary on armed non-state actors*

Academics tend to agree that non-state actors increase in number and influence. Armed non-state actors have an ability to use violence. This enables armed non-state actors to challenge or claim a monopoly of violence within a specific territory. Exactly that happened in several

instances in the Middle East. Examples include IS, Hezbollah and Kurds in Iraq and Syria. Defining and categorizing armed non-state actors however is problematic and analyzing them has been merely descriptive so far.

## **Foreign policy**

Armed non-state actors increasingly appear as actors within international politics. This leads scholars like Jeremy Black and Michael Gunter to wonder whether the traditional approaches for analyzing Foreign Policy – assuming it to be the monopoly of state actors – still suffice. (Black, 2016: 243; Gunter, 2015: 78) In an earlier study on the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, Gunter already argued that non-state actors pursue Foreign Policies like states do. (Gunter 1997, 1)

As mentioned before, Schneckener observes that most armed non-state actors tend to work via transnational networks, providing them leverage. (Schneckener 2006, 28) This is in line with Gunter's conclusion regarding non-state actors' Foreign Policies. (Gunter 1997, 1) While acknowledging that new developments occur in international relations, Black puts the observations in perspective by emphasizing that so far the state is the most effective type of governance. He adds that states will tend to dominate domestic and foreign politics, also because states are essential for creating identity. (Black 2016, 272) The approach Black takes is reflected in most definitions of Foreign Policy.

### *Foreign Policy*

Foreign Policy concerns 'the stuff of international relations.' (Russett and Starr 1996, 162) It might be described as the collection of implicit and explicit goals with regard to challenges abroad, relations with other states, and the collection of strategies and tactics to accomplish these goals. (Everts 1996, 9) Less specific are definitions like 'strategies used by governments to guide their actions in the international area' (Goldstein 1999, 147) or 'a set of guides to choices being made about people, places, and things beyond the boundaries of the state.' (Russett and Starr 1996, 163) Raymond Hinnebusch offers a description: '[a] state's foreign policy role implies an identity and defines orientations toward neighbors (friend or enemy), toward great powers (threat or patron), and toward the state system (revisionist or status quo).' (Hinnebusch 2014, 28)

Most definitions and descriptions above illustrate instrumental and thus rational approaches. These reflect (neo-) realist approaches towards foreign affairs, later on in this study indicated as the Rational Actor Paradigm. In line with that approach, all definitions and descriptions mentioned above can be labeled state-centric. Replacing any reference to the state as the essential actor within any of the definition would make them more appropriate to use in case of (armed) non-state actors. In that perspective D.J. Gerner's definition, following from the description of Foreign Policy Analysis that is mentioned below, is spot on: 'intentions, statements, and actions of an actor – often, but not always, a state – directed toward the external world.' (Gerner 1995, 18) In this rather broad definition the 'external world' for an armed non-state actor would mean every person or entity that does not belong to the armed non-state actor itself. The 'intentions, statements, and actions' are how the Foreign Policy actually takes shape either explicitly or implicitly. Explicit behavior would include statements or specific actions, like acts of violence or sanctions. Implicit behavior could be other actions, for example by *not* doing something, and intentions that are found through Foreign Policy Analysis.

*Foreign Policy Analysis*

Continuing on Gerner's definition above, Foreign Policy Analysis focuses on 'intentions, statements, and actions of an actor – often, but not always, a state – directed toward the external world and the response of other actors to these intentions, statements and actions.' (Gerner 1995, 18) The analysis is either descriptive, evaluative, or analytical. (Gerner 1995, 18) Descriptive research reconstructs facts regarding to Foreign Policy, whereas evaluative research wonders about the intentional and unintentional outcome of Foreign Policy. Analytical research focuses on input from different actors on Foreign Policy decision-making processes. (Gerner 1995, 18)

Allison and Zelikow – whose paradigms will be central within the remainder of this study and will be described below – explain their study to be both descriptive and evaluative. (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 3n†)<sup>2</sup> Allison and Zelikow do not provide a definition or description of either Foreign Policy or Foreign Policy Analysis, even though they do stress the importance of their study for Foreign Policy Analysis. (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 9) Each of their three paradigms, or conceptual models, would provide a different definition of Foreign Policy. Allison and Zelikow do define Policy: 'the realization in a number of particular instances of some agent's objectives.' (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 16) The decisions being taken presuppose 'a decider and a choice among alternatives with reference to some goal.' (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 16) Research indicates three factors affect decision outcomes: (1) the occasion in which a choice is made, (2) the individual, and (3) the organizational environment in which the individual operates. (Haney 1995, 101) Basically, the paradigms of Allison and Zelikow reflect these factors. Although different paradigms or variations are presented elsewhere (for example Mintz and DeRouen 2010), the paradigms as presented by Allison and Zelikow are widely known – *Essence of Decision* is considered a classic within Foreign Policy Analysis – and relatively simple to apply. Therefore these models are suitable for testing their applicability for non-state actors.

*Allison and Zelikow's Paradigms*

Graham Allison elaborated in his article *Conceptual Models and 'The Cuban Missile Crisis'* (1969) on the premise that 'that marked improvement in our understanding of such events [crises] depends critically on more self-consciousness about what observers bring to the analysis.' (Allison 1969, 689) What he meant was that an analysis is not only influenced by the observations, but by the way an analyst looks at those observations as well. Allison spoke of the implicit "conceptual lenses" through which he [the analyst] looks at the evidence.' (Allison 1969, 689) This implies that one and the same event can be assessed rather differently; the resulting analysis depends on which conceptual lens the analyst applies. (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 3)

Allison's 1969 article served as a prequel to his 1971 book *Essence of Decision. Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, in which he studied the Cuban Missile Crisis three times. Each time he used one of the conceptual models to analyze the crisis, leading to different conclusions. (Allison 1971) Regarded a classic in political science and Foreign Policy Analysis, a second, revised edition of *Essence of Decision* appeared in 1999, co-authored with Philip Zelikow. (Allison and Zelikow 1999) This second edition will be the main point of reference for the remainder of this study.

Allison and Zelikow observed that Foreign Policy is typically studied using what they call the *Rational Actor Paradigm*, or *Model I*. This model assumes events to be the result of intentional behavior of international actors, typically nation-states. (Allison and Zelikow 1999,



23) It is most appropriate in analyzing ‘long-term policy trends’ (Crockatt 1996, 162) and strategic issues. (Mintz and DeRouen 2010, 8) But sometimes, international actors appear to behave counter-productive towards their own interests (Tuchman 1984, 4), and the Rational Actor Paradigm then seems unable to explain specific decisions. Next to the Rational Actor Paradigm, Allison and Zelikow identify two alternative models, which they labeled the *Organizational Behavior Paradigm*, or *Model II*, (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 143) and the *Governmental Politics Paradigm*, or *Model III*. (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 255) These emphasize the institutional contexts in which Foreign Policy is shaped. (Crockatt 1996, 162) Model II recognizes that within international actors different organizations exist, each with their own interests, acting according to their own procedures and cultures. Model III studies outcomes of decision-making processes, which are regarded as bargaining processes among key decision-makers. (Allison 1969, 690)

### *Model I: Rational Actor Paradigm*

The Rational Actor Paradigm is the classic way analysts of foreign affairs use to explain international relations. (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 4, 26, 29) Model I-type approaches in Foreign Policy Analysis like neo-realism argue that states act as unitary entities. Non-state actors are less important. (Mouritzen 1997, 66) ‘[A]dherents of the realist paradigm usually do not consider nonstate entities as important actors in major world events because they do not believe that nonstate actors wield sufficient power to affect global disputes.’ (Mishali-Ram 2009, 57) The main concern of nation-states was ‘military and territorial security.’ (Rothgeb 1995, 37) To these dimensions economic security by economic interdependence was added in – primarily Western – developed countries since the second half of the twentieth century. (Rothgeb 1995, 33–48)

Not only does Model I assume actors within international affairs to be unitary actors – typically, but not necessarily, nation-states –, these actors behave according to plausible cost-benefit calculations within an anarchic environment. (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 27; Mintz and DeRouen 2010, 6) Allison and Zelikow describe this ‘consistent, value-maximizing choice within specified constraints’ as rationality. (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 18 italics in original) Such rational decision-making happens along four consecutive steps: (1) specify the goals, (2) decide which alternatives could achieve these goals, (3) evaluate these alternatives, and (4) choose the most efficient alternative. (Bendor and Hammond 1992, 305) Model I’s rationality suggests the actor is a-political; the decision-maker – personifying the actor – chooses whatever is the best option for the actor and does not take into account any political considerations. (Ripley 1995, 87)

The challenge for the Rational Actor Paradigm is its assumption that reliable information is available to weigh alternatives and calculate an optimal outcome. Information in the field of Foreign Policy is almost always blurred though. (Mintz and DeRouen 2010, 26) Furthermore, decision-making shows cross-cultural differences (Mintz and DeRouen 2010, 144), which Model I ignores. A Western-based cost-benefit calculation might not hold in the Middle East (Mintz and DeRouen 2010, 145; Said 1978), at least not in its narrow interpretation. A rather broad interpretation of rationality as ‘the strategic pursuit of stable and ordered preferences’ (Mintz and DeRouen 2010, 59) instead of the narrow focus on material gains or power (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 18) might be helpful here.

*Model II: Organizational Behavior Paradigm*

Allison and Zelikow argue that within Model II 'organizational behavior constrain [-s] "rationality."' (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 156) Standard operating procedures (SOPs) provide guidance to the decision-makers for the course of action instead of optimization. (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 156) The SOPs are the organization's solution to deal efficiently with frequently recurring challenges, based upon past experiences. Adaptations occur incrementally and exceptional challenges are 'attached to the least objectionable solution or else the process breaks down.' (Ripley 1995, 87) Critics of Model II pointed out that in some cases the SOPs in fact might be enabling instead of restraining. (Mintz and DeRouen 2010, 74–75)

The Organizational Behavior Paradigm assumes the international actors to be a conglomerate of different sub-units, relevant for a specific field instead of regarding international actors as unitary organizations. Each sub-unit acts following its own culture and procedures. (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 144) This model – new at the time in implementing organizational theory into Foreign Policy Analysis (Bendor and Hammond 1992, 309) – fits in a broader approach of Foreign Policy Analysis that takes into account how bureaucracies, their sub-cultures and procedures influence decisions being taken by individuals working on the organization's behalf. (Barner-Barry and Rosenwein 1985, 253; Gerner 1995, 23; Mintz and DeRouen 2010, 71) Of much influence to this approach was the article by Charles Lindblom called *The Science of Muddling Through*, in which the author recognized that organizations create methods to cope with complexity and uncertainty. (Barner-Barry and Rosenwein 1985, 242–43; Lindblom 1959, 79–88; Mintz and DeRouen 2010, 73–75)

*Model III: Governmental Politics Paradigm*

The Governmental Politics Paradigm assumes decisions within international relations to be the compromised result of contentious politics among the key individuals. Each individual involved acts according to his or her own assumptions, beliefs, expectations and experiences, (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 255) knowing well the other frequent participators. (Ripley 1995, 88) The outcome of the contentious politics is that none of the participants controls the outcome. (Welch, 1992, p. 122) This paradigm fits in an approach that studies how decision-makers belief systems explain Foreign Policy choices. (Gerner 1995, 24; Mintz and DeRouen 2010, 8)

Traditionally – that is the Model I-approach –, the cognitive approach was neglected within Foreign Policy Analysis. The reason for this was that decision-makers were supposed to act rational. So there was no urgency to investigate their perceptions and how these influenced the decision-making process: '[a] cognitive approach challenges much of Western thought and practices premised on the assumption of individual rationality,' (Rosati 1995, 50) stressing the decision-makers' perceptions of the environment as these will affect the choices taken. Scholars found that the Rational Actor Paradigm was unable to explain decisions taken in complex situations such as crises. (Rosati 1995, 50) Compared to Model I this Model III intends to be a more realistic approach in which the limits of human decision-making capabilities is included. (Mintz and DeRouen 2010, 8) Another distinction is that Model I assumes one reality. Based upon developments in natural and neurological sciences, Model III contests that assumption and argues that either no such thing as *a* reality exists, or that more realities exist. Nevertheless, even if all individuals perceive entities in a different way, than that is reality. In theory, reality might not be observable by anyone, but still it is there. (Searle 1995, 149–97)<sup>3</sup> In other words: 'we make

*descriptions* that the actual world may fit or fail to fit. But all this implies that there is a reality that exists independently of our system of concepts.’ (Searle 1995, 166 italics in original)

Applying Model III poses a great challenge for analysts as it is ‘simply too complex.’ (Bendor and Hammond 1992, 314) First of all it is important to map key players involved. (Rosati 1995, 60) Then for each of the key players their idiosyncratic belief system needs to be developed to enable an explanation of their individual decision-making process.

### *Merging the models?*

Instead of applying any of the different models separately to a single case, could these models be used together? Allison and Zelikow claim that ‘the models can be seen as complements to each other,’ adding that ‘[e]ach, in effect, serves as a search engine in the larger effort to identify all the significant causal factors that determine an outcome.’ (1999, 392) This seems acknowledged by Model I’s so-called metaphysical realism: an objective reality, which does not depend on perceptions of observers, but which those same observers will only understand by using ‘conceptual/theoretical lenses.’ (Mouritzen 1997, 70–71) That reality is usually described in dichotomies such as ‘domestic-international, order-anarchy, peace-war, internal-external, agent-structure, realism-idealism.’ (Peterson 1995, 169) In many analyses state-non-state is a similar dichotomy. As indicated earlier, reality might be more complex.

Metaphysical realism implies that factors belonging to different levels of analysis might be added to one another to provide a sufficient explanation. (Mouritzen 1997, 74–75) Alex Mintz and Karl DeRouen, who present their poliheuristic model as integrating a rational and a conceptual approach, adopt a similar view. It consists of a two-step process. ‘In the first step, the decision maker reduces the set of alternatives while using cognitive shortcuts. In the next step, the rational approach is used to select from the remaining alternatives.’ (Mintz and DeRouen 2010, 78)<sup>4</sup> Approaches like the poliheuristic model indicate that research on merging different paradigms is work in progress still.

Whereas Allison and Zelikow position the paradigms simultaneously, paradigms can also be regarded to be successive as different assumptions form the basis for each of the models; there is ‘no rational ground for comparing paradigms.’ (Guilhot 2015, 4, 14) In that perspective, Allison and Zelikow’s argument that the models act complementary (1999, 392) then contradicts with the different concepts they use for each of the three models. Empirical research might clarify whether the models can be combined into one.

### *Summary on Foreign Policy*

Foreign Policy is typically approached in a state-centric fashion. That approach should be expanded as non-state actors, in particular armed non-state actors, enter the scene and become more influential. Therefore, using Gerner’s definition of Foreign Policy Analysis as focusing on ‘intentions, statements, and actions of an actor – often, but not always, a state – directed toward the external world and the response of other actors to these intentions, statements and actions’ (Gerner 1995, 18) is appropriate here. The three paradigms of Allison and Zelikow – *Rational Actor Paradigm*, *Organizational Behavior Paradigm*, and *Governmental Politics Paradigm*, or Models I to III, respectively – describe three different ways to look at the actors mentioned in Gerner’s definition. As Allison and Zelikow claim, the paradigms can be applied to non-state actors too. (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 7) Whether the models can be combined into one generic model remains under discussion.

## Middle Eastern armed non-state actors' Foreign Policies

This part of the study questions whether the three abovementioned paradigms of Allison and Zelikow could be applied to analyze the Foreign Policies of Middle Eastern armed non-state actors.

### *Model I*

Foreign Policy Analysis is typically conducted in a Model I-approach. (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 4) Take for example an anonymous paper on whether the Kurdistan Region in Iraq actually pursues a foreign policy. The paper concludes that the Kurdistan Region in Iraq as a 'de jure a non-state'. ("Iraqi - Kurdistan. Does the Kurdistan Regional Government Have a Foreign Policy?" 2014, 13) actually has a Foreign Policy based upon economic ties and foreign representations abroad. ("Iraqi - Kurdistan. Does the Kurdistan Regional Government Have a Foreign Policy?" 2014, 14) It shows that Foreign Policy can be observed without actually having much official documents available. Instead, the analysis relied on generic statements via the internet and secondary sources. The paper mentions the Kurdistan Regional Government as a *pars pro totem* for the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, which is regarded a unitary, rational actor. As such, the paper fits in a model I-approach of an armed non-state actor.

Similar approaches are adopted in other analyses, which usually is already indicated in the titles. Examples include 'Islamic State attacks two energy plants in north Iraq, kills five' (Mahmoud 2016), 'Hezbollah is learning Russian' (Corbeil 2016) or 'Syria conflict: Kurds declare federal system.' ("Syria Conflict: Kurds Declare Federal System" 2016) In these cases the armed non-state actors are primarily presented as unitary organizations that act according to cost-benefit calculations.

Typically, questions in a Model I-approach considering armed non-state actors would include:

- [1] What are the objective (or perceived) circumstances that the [armed non-state actor] conceives as threats and opportunities [...]?
- [2] What are the [actor's] goals [...]?
- [3] What are the objective (or perceived) options for addressing this issue?
- [4] What are the objective (or perceived) strategic costs and benefits for each option?
- [5] What is the [actor's] best choice given these conditions [...]?' (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 389–90)

The model might oversimplify and Hinnebusch' reflection on states might apply to armed non-state actors in the region as well: '[f]oreign policy making in the MENA [Middle East and North Africa] region is immensely complicated by the high level of incongruence between states and identity. While realism assumes the congruence of national identity and the state (thus nation-states), and hence imagines states as cohesive units whose policymakers pursue the "national interest," in the MENA region no such national interest can be assumed.' (Hinnebusch 2014, 9) Model I-approaches tend to attribute Foreign Policy decisions – statements or acts – to the whole actor, while these might be explained better by focusing on a sub-organization and its procedures, or on key individuals' belief systems. Again, starting from a state-centric position, Hinnebusch acknowledges that Middle Eastern policymakers behave according to the threats they perceive, and thus basically realist. He stresses that some realist assumptions do not work in the

Middle East, where states are no unitary entities, but consist of several sub-groups. Within the region there might be a difference between national interest and regime interest, which is reflected in Foreign Policy. Hinnebusch argues that the realist approach does not cover the complexities that Middle Eastern Foreign Policy decision-makers have to deal with. He mentions it is not only regional power politics among states, but also transnational factors like cross-border identities that have their influence on Middle Eastern Foreign Policies. (Hinnebusch 2014, 1–3) Translating these remarks to armed non-state actors like IS, Hezbollah and the Kurds in Iraq and Syria, all can be considered internally fragmented. Model II assumes Foreign Policy decisions to be the result of a sub-organization within an armed non-state actor that acts according to its own procedures.

### *Model II*

Applying a model I-approach, the paper on whether the Kurdistan Region in Iraq actually pursues a foreign policy mentioned above does not consider in detail the political fragmentation of Kurds in Iraq. (“Iraqi - Kurdistan. Does the Kurdistan Regional Government Have a Foreign Policy?” 2014) A model II-approach of Foreign Policy would consider the difference between the two main political parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Although the Gorran-party gained influence as the third party in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, it lacks the security apparatuses and militias that KDP and PUK do have. (van Wilgenburg and Fumerton 2015) It seems consistent with an observation by Hinnebusch that within Middle Eastern states the military and intelligence services are usually more important than foreign services.’ (Hinnebusch 2014, 31) Nevertheless, KDP and PUK do have their own foreign representations and foreign relations. (“Foreign Relations - Kurdistan Democratic Part, KDP” 2016; Sleman 2016) It might be expected that within the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, the Kurdish militias and intelligence services, together with the foreign representations, influence Foreign Policy, each organization applying its own standard operating procedures. As such it would confirm the statement by Allison and Zelikow that Model II can be applied beyond states to other entities as well. (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 7) Research applying a Model II-approach on the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, in particular its Foreign Policy that includes its fighting forces, intelligence services and foreign relations is lacking so far.

The same is true for Syrian Kurdistan where the population is politically highly fragmented. (for example Arafat 2016) Similarly, although there is some evidence on how IS has been organized internally (Reuter 2015; Lister 2014; Barrett 2014), there is no conclusive study yet on its Foreign Policy from a Model II-perspective. Only regarding Hezbollah some research is available. (for example DeVore and Stähli 2014)

Model II-approaches are rare when it comes to Middle Eastern armed non-state actors. Typically, questions in a Model II-approach considering armed non-state actors would include:

- ‘[1] Of what organizations (and organizational components) does the [armed non-state actor] consist [...]?’
- [2] What capabilities and constraints do these organizations’ existing SOPs [Standard Operating Procedures] create in producing *information* about international conditions, threats and opportunities?
- [3] What capabilities and constraints do these organizations’ existing SOPs create in generating the menu of *options* for action?

- [4] What capabilities and constraints do these organizations' existing SOPs establish for *implementing* whatever is chosen?' (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 390 italics in original)

*Model III*

Referring to states, Hinnebusch remarks that '[i]n the Middle East, normally the leader makes the decisions, but other interested actors do try to influence him, such as presidential advisers, senior military and intelligence officers, key cabinet members, party apparatchiki, and foreign ministry officials. As the "bureaucratic politics" model argues [...], each of these actors may propose different policies shaped by their special roles and material interests.' (Hinnebusch 2014, 31) Equal processes are assumed to take place among armed non-state actors within the region. As such, that would acknowledge the claim by Allison and Zelikow that Model III is applicable to other entities than states too. (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 7)

As indicated, Model III is complex. (Bendor and Hammond 1992, 314) Actually determining who are the relevant policymakers involved, might prove a huge challenge, (Rosati 1995, 60) especially if the outline of the armed non-state actor is not clear yet. Oftentimes, Model III-studies focus on the leader or group of leaders to keep research feasible and deal with its complex outline. Examples of such studies include Osama bin Laden's decision-making as the leader of Al-Qaeda. (Mintz and DeRouen 2010, 92) Similar studies have been conducted to analyze Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah. (Mintz and DeRouen 2010, 87, 170)

Typically, questions in a Model III-approach considering armed non-state actors would include:

- [1] *Who* plays? That is, whose views and values count in shaping the choice and action?
- [2] What *factors* shape each *player's* (a) perceptions; (b) preferred course of action; and thus (c) the player's stand on the issue?
- [3] What *factors* account for each *player's impact* on the choice and action?
- [4] What is the "action channel," that is, the established process for aggregating competing perceptions, preferences, and stands of players in making decisions and taking action?' (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 390 italics in original)

*Concluding remarks on Middle Eastern armed non-state actors' Foreign Policies*

The three paradigms offered by Allison and Zelikow provide different views – whether the analysis concerns states or Middle Eastern armed non-state actors. Analysts need to be aware of the different opportunities and constraints of each of the models. The Model I-approach is dominant within Foreign Policy Analysis (Mintz and DeRouen 2010, 6) and that appears to be true, for Middle Eastern armed non-state actors too. It means that sometimes Foreign Policy decisions are attributed to the whole organization, while it might be more accurate to explain it by focusing on a sub-organization and its procedures, or on key individuals' belief systems. Analysts should choose the paradigm that best fits their needs, or use a combination. Specific questions belonging to each paradigm can be asked with regard to Middle Eastern armed non-state actors as good as for state actors.

## Conclusion

This study explores how to analyze Middle Eastern armed non-state actors. Armed non-state actors have an ability to use violence, which enables them to challenge or claim a monopoly of violence within a specific territory. Exactly that happened on several occasions in the Middle East. Examples include IS, Hezbollah and Kurds in Iraq and Syria. Defining and categorizing armed non-state actors however is problematic and analyzing them has been merely descriptive so far.

As the role of this type of actors within the region increases, the need for tools to analyze such actors emerges as well. Foreign Policy is typically approached in a state-centric fashion. Some scholars argue that new paradigms are needed. Another solution is to expand existing approaches to non-state actors, in particular armed non-state actors. Gerner's broad definition of Foreign Policy Analysis as focusing on 'intentions, statements, and actions of an actor – often, but not always, a state – directed toward the external world and the response of other actors to these intentions, statements and actions' (Gerner 1995, 18) is appropriate for that purpose. The three paradigms of Allison and Zelikow – *Rational Actor Paradigm*, *Organizational Behavior Paradigm*, and *Governmental Politics Paradigm*, or more conveniently Models I to III, respectively – describe three different ways to look at the actors mentioned in Gerner's definition. As Allison and Zelikow claim, the paradigms can be applied to non-state actors too. (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 7)

Analysts need to be aware of the different opportunities and constraints of each of the models. As Allison and Zelikow state: 'the resulting analysis depends on which conceptual lens the analyst applies.' (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 3) This seems true whether an analyst looks at state or to non-state actors. The Model I-dominance within Foreign Policy Analysis seems to hold for Middle Eastern armed non-state actors too. It means that sometimes Foreign Policy decisions are attributed to the whole organization, while it might be more accurate to explain it by focusing on a sub-organization and its procedures, or on key individuals' belief systems. Allison and Zelikow observe in that scholars implicitly use a specific paradigm when analyzing foreign policy. Applying one or another paradigm – or a combination – decides which questions can be asked and thus the outcomes that can be reached. (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 3) Therefore, their claim that the paradigms they identified can be applied to other actors as well (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 7) is relevant for analyzing (armed) non-state actors.

### *Additional benefits of using existing paradigms*

From a practical point of view, it is challenging to establish a clear line between state and non-state actors. As the examples mentioned in this article indicate, these non-state actors can to some extent be considered state actors as well. Some of them even label themselves a state, like IS. With the difference between state and non-state actor so difficult to discern, and actually more moving on one spectrum, analyzing state and non-state actors by using the same paradigms seems appropriate.

An additional benefit of using existing, well-known paradigms for analyzing armed non-state actors is that the paradigm can be applied for comparative research between these and state actors. Moreover, using these paradigms enables analyses of interaction between state and non-armed state actors, which can be expected to occur more often due to the increasing role non-state actors will play in world politics, as is the case for Middle Eastern armed non-state actors.

*More research needed*

In order to strengthen the claim made in this study, the paradigms need to be applied to explain Foreign Policies of Middle Eastern armed non-state actors. In that perspective, this study can be considered a prequel for future research, in particular on the armed conflict between IS and the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. In that case, two Middle Eastern armed non-state actors pursued Foreign Policies to their most extremes by waging war with an existential character against each other. That research has to point out whether the paradigms lead to accurate Foreign Policy Analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> This is reminiscent of Relative Deprivation Theory as explained by Ted Robert Gurr in *Why Men Rebel* (fortieth anniversary edition). Gurr argues that people become politically active out of frustration when there is a perception of an increasing gap between expectations and the actual situation. (Gurr 2011)

<sup>2</sup> Using a different categorization to describe the activities that Foreign Policy analysts conduct, Allison and Zelikow explain that *Essence of Decision* mainly looks at description and explanation, and consequentially also prediction.

<sup>3</sup> Searle differentiates between social reality, in which epistemically facts exist, that need human institutions in order to exist, and ontological reality, that is there, even if humans cannot observe it.

<sup>4</sup> This approach is in line with psychological theories that explain decision-making to take place in two interacting systems in the brain, one using instincts and one using ratio. (Kahneman 2011)



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