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The evolution of armed non-state actors: The case of Iraq

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The Evolution of Armed Non-State Actors:
The Case of Iraq

(Ahmed Sherif Samra, 900050320)
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Introduction

Formulating the discourse:

This paper will seek to analyze and gauge to what extent have armed Non-State Actors evolved in the current international system, as well as how these groups have developed their power and ambition to rival and challenge the states they exist within and also influence other states around them. Using the classical Realist definitions for power and actors in international relations an analysis will be conducted to understand the whether states have a monopoly on power in the current international system. From a classical Realist perspective disagreements within the state are corrected when policy is being developed to reflect a united vision for the state’s interests. Several changes that will be discussed further in this paper have empowered and given agency to Armed Non-State Actors to not only challenge the states that they exist within but develop relations or challenge other states in the international system.

Looking at the developments in Iraq, and to a lesser extent Syria, we can see the rapid evolution of non-state actors to challenge and threaten state hegemony. This paper will analyze two contrasting examples, the Islamic State and the Kurdish Regional Government (with its armed faction), to understand the extent to which they have challenged the classical Realist definition of both power and actors. Both groups have made major territorial gains in the past few years and have created systems for autonomous governance in areas they control. In order to do so both groups have sought to expand their economic power in order to gain further independence and autonomy. Furthermore, both groups have used their contrasting values in order to attract and create broader alliances in the international system to cement their
positions. These two groups despite their differences have both sought to create an independent state to the one they exist within and have done so despite the efforts of the Iraqi government and several states around them.

What changed in our international system?

International Relations, as a field is strongly connected to technological advancements due to the changes they bring about in the understanding of power and the behavior of actors in the international system. Nuclear weapons for instance brought about new concepts; such as nuclear deterrence that ultimately changed the way we observe interactions between nuclear powers.

The arrival and spread of the Internet has had major effects on communication and the spread of information, which is well documented. The high-level of interaction and connectivity has cemented and empowered our globalized system and economy to further transcend, and at times erode borders and languages. Cyberspace has become an alternate space for information and individuals to mobilize, far from the auspices of traditional state limitations. At this point, it is important to note that this paper does not seek to show the Internet as the reason behind these changes but merely a technological advancement that has facilitated these changes or brought them to the forefront.

The use of the Internet in 2011 at the start of the Arab Spring showed that the Internet was not merely a communication tool but a means to change the balance of power. From 2011 to 2015, the Arab Spring has highlighted the positive and negative changes that could potentially occur in the international system, particularly from a
classical Realist perspective with regards to actors and power. New forms of communication that are no longer monopolized by the state have given agency to new actors to redefine the status quo. This has extended not only in challenging the state but also creating alliances and economic interests for non-state actors. It also highlighted how state policy and our understanding of security must adapt to the changing climate.

The Internets impact:

“30 years ago humanity gave birth to one of the most disruptive forces of our time… a standard protocol to allow computers to exchange data over a network”. The Internet took time until it became a household object but the space it created became unregulated, ungoverned and a place that transcended geography or identity. In 1996, John Barlow released the “Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace” to address the attempts to regulate and govern the Internet by nation-states. In this declaration directed at governments, Barlow states cyberspace’s independence from the state. He claims that governments and countries across the world have no “sovereignty” here and proclaims cyberspace an area outside our traditional bounds of understanding. His exact words at the start of his declaration were “Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather.” Independence is a structural part of the Internet where freedom of expression and communication are paramount.

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Therefore, it is apparent through the Internet there could shift in the traditional nation-state model and subsequently the state’s sovereignty and monopoly on power. At the very least, the changes in the international system now merit a thorough look on how policy is no longer solely shaped by the state but is influenced by a myriad of smaller actors.

**Power of information before the Internet:**

The importance of information and communication is not particularly new in International Relations. In the 1990s live T.V broadcasting, raised global political consciousness to an unprecedented level; Former Defense Secretary James Schlesinger, for example, argued that in the post-Cold War era the United States came to make foreign policy in response to “impulse and image.” The 1990s was the era where the CNN effect came into power and international military intervention became strongly influenced by individual reactions to live broadcasted images. Piers Robinson coined the term “CNN effect” and highlighted that the phrase “encapsulated the idea that real-time communications technology could provoke major responses from domestic audiences and political elites to global events.”

Technological advancement moved us into a more instant, powerful, and individualized phase for information, which coupled with political upheaval has created new areas for contention between the state and other smaller actors. This became even more apparent with the Internet, which evolved to allow for even more

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instant and individualized news that decreased the monopoly of information by states or corporations, and its egalitarian model for “air-time” gave space and agency to new actors to thrive.

**Hypothesis and Objective:**

**Hypothesis:**

*The increase in power, influence and proliferation of ANSA is a functionality of state fragility coupled with new tools available for new actors.*

**Objectives:**

The objective from this paper will be using two case studies in order to decide whether our understanding of the international system must accommodate a new definition for hybrid actor that is not recognized as a state but seemingly has many of its characteristics. Even though many of these groups from a Realist perspective are not states but they do influence, challenge and at times usurp state control in supposedly sovereign areas. The ease of information alone is not the key behind these groups proliferating and augmenting their power but also the manner in which they have reacted to the developments around them.

Both the Islamic State and the KRG have made major territorial and military advancements within Iraq. The second chapter in this paper will discuss each group’s territorial advancement and gains to show how these groups have operated to gain more autonomy and legitimacy in areas previously the sovereignty of the Iraqi central government. The group’s territorial and military gains have also shifted policy towards the groups from other actors and states around them. Similarly both groups have used military power to cement their positions and potentially expand their
spheres of influence within Iraq and Syria. The Islamic State has been in open conflict with the Iraq government, while the KRG has become the most credible on the ground power that could militarily suppress the terrorist group.

The third chapter in this paper will look at the economy in the evolved form of Armed Non-State Actors and how these groups have been able create mechanisms for control in areas they have militarily gained. However what is key is how these groups have created economies to cement a network of economic beneficiaries to strengthen their own cause at the expense of the Iraq state. Whether through autonomous control over oil or the taxation system implemented in governed areas, these groups have usurped economic sovereignty of the Iraq state in several areas in order to expand their own autonomy and independence.

In the fourth chapter the paper will look at how these groups blend soft power with their economic and military, hard power. The successful blend between both tools available is from a Realist perspective how states act within the international system. Each group’s values has allowed them to create a broader network of alliances and ultimately some form of legitimacy in the international system, particularly for the KRG. The Islamic State has used its identity and values to attract other terrorist groups across the globe to be subservient to the group. This has augmented their power and presented them the ability to attack other states in the international system that may oppose them but do not fight them in the battlefield in Iraq. This has increased the group’s power, while the KRG has gained more traction and credibility, as well as allies in the international system due to their values and valor in battling the Islamic State in Iraq.
The case studies will be used to show the evolution in power for Armed Non-State Actors and how changes in the international system accommodate this evolution. In the concluding remarks we will look at how the international system has become more susceptible to empowering Armed Non-State Actors and how the Realist definition for Actors and their power needs to be amended slightly in order to understand and react to the new threats in the international system.

Understanding the changes in the international system is imperative in order to better shape policy, both on the regional and international level, to curb potential threats to our current world order. It is also important to note that shaping policy to these changes will allow states to effectively pursue their interests. Global security is built on the state as a building block, and our progress towards state security, human security and international security is predicated on this model. A change to this building block has had, and will have further impact on global, regional and individual security. By taking into account changes in the international system we will see a growing need to adjust state behavior and policy, as well as reflect on the current and potential threats to global and regional security.
Chapter 1: Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

In this chapter of the paper I will define from the Realist perspective – the concepts of power and actors, and the struggle for power in the international system, followed by the definitions and parameters we have given to non-state actors and their role in the international system. It is also important to highlight the recent studies and discussions on the existence of hybrid actors that operate in a field between states and non-state actors.

It is important to also show the specific conditions in Iraq that allowed these groups to become empowered. By looking at the two case studies we will see how these actors challenge state authority and its monopoly on power from the Realist perspective. The argument will highlight the evolution in non-state actors and how they have challenged these definitions.

The Treaty of Westphalia:

Three hundred and sixty seven years ago, the treaty of Westphalia was signed and it paved the way for territorial sovereignty and nation-states, demarcated by borders. In the centuries after Westphalia it became the ordering principle of *actors* in international relations. States established internal monopolies on power, ideas and money, while also deciding what could enter into their borders. The treaty gave birth to our modern day idea of the nation-state from which our international system has been largely based on. The United Nations, established in 1945, acts as an international organization for and comprised by nation-states, which allows very little
representation or recognition for other potential actors. Membership and recognition of new states or governments in the United Nations can only occur through existing member states. The treaty of Westphalia, over 300 years later, even the setting of a multilateral organization has created a very state-centered system that did not consider the idea of the nation-state could come under these new threats.

What is Realism?
The conceptual framework used in this analysis will be Realism in juxtaposition with the current developments and changes in the international system. The analysis will look to use three principal assumptions within Realism to analyze the evolution of non-state actors to accurately define this new form of actor. These principles will be juxtaposed with the current developments and influence posed by the Kurdish Regional Government and the Islamic State, and consequently the region as a whole.

Realism deals with the concept of the state as the key unit of analysis in international relations and non-state actors have not yet gained the ability to be analyzed as independent actors. The case studies used in this thesis will look at the Islamic State and the Kurdish Regional Government’s ability to challenge and threaten their own and other states in the region. These groups have rivaled the state on the economic, militaristic and cultural front. At times these groups have been able to act and collude with other actors in the region with complete autonomy. Unlike, other non-state actors they have been able to control territory, create independent economies, enhance military capabilities, and find ideological support, some external recognition and domestic systems for control to govern their territory.

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The state is described and defined as a unitary actor in the theory of Realism. The state is encapsulated by a metaphorical black box and we do not need to look much inside this box to analyze the international world. Exceptions can occur but occur merely to reinforce the rule that states are unitary integrated actors, according to Realist theorists. When exceptions do occur within the state, the assumption made by Realism is that the state takes corrective actions to bring these alternative views under state authority. This means that the state higher authorities intervene in crucial issues were to correct actions in way either to re-integrate alternative views or reassert state authority. The developments over the past few years on the global level, and particularly the Middle East have brought into question this traditional Realist understanding of the state as a unitary actor in international relations.

The notion of actor in Realism is a concept mostly centered on the state. However, in the past few years’ non-state actors have both proliferated and grown in power. Their relations with regional and international players have made them a challenge to the state. These actors are no longer merely a challenge on the political level but have threatened the states economic and military power. There is little from the Realist perspective that acknowledges the role or power of non-state actors. This shift has been coming but has taken a fast paced turn of late. Parag Khanna discusses in her article Startup Sovereigns and book “Mega diplomacy” that the non-state actors, terrorist groups and corporations are empowered technologically, militarily and economically like never before. There is no real insistence by the literature for Realism to incorporate this shift in power and roles in international relations. How do

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we define states and their monopoly of power? Is this definition sufficient? Do states remain the centralised source of power?

**Why Realism?**

Realism is a prevalent theory in International Relations that is state-centered in its approach. The theory focuses on a state’s monopoly on power and authority, and views the whole international system from an entirely state-centric approach. Therefore, this paper would like to juxtapose this theory with the current developments in the international world and specifically the two aforementioned case studies in order to highlight the changes (if any) that have occurred on how we view the international system.

In the previous chapter the key concepts in Realism such as power and actors, which are central to the argument and research being conducted for this paper were mentioned. Realism is the perfect barometer to gauge the evolution in Non-State Actors in order to truly understand whether a fundamental change has occurred. Realism views the world from a very state-centric approach that focuses primarily on power and in the past has disregarded problems within the state due the structure of the international system visa vie power. Power can no longer be looked at from a linear perspective, now non-state actors have amassed a great deal of power and in specific instances can challenge or usurp state authority contrary to Realist ideas.

Despite the discussion on the lack of malleability on Realist definitions, the tools of analysis provided by Realism still provide a rich source for analysis. Realism is a strong theoretical approach that analyses the world in specific considerations that have rung true for decades. However, current changes in the international system need
a more flexible and malleable definition in order to improve analysis and consider new variables and actors in the international system and the threats they pose.

The Realist definition of Power:

Realism does not have a set definition for power, even though as mentioned before, it is a key concept. However, there are two different definitions among Realists that are key. The first is that power is the “sum of military, economic, technological, diplomatic, and other capabilities at the disposal of the state” and the second is that power is “relative to the capabilities of other states”.¹⁰ For the purpose of this paper we will use the more encompassing definition for power as a sum of capabilities at the disposal of the “state” in order to gauge the Islamic State and the KRG in a more expansive definition. This will allow us to analyze how the two actors have evolved and whether this will necessitate an adjustment of our perceptions of these actors and their powers in the international system, while considering their economic, cultural, diplomatic and military strength. However, it is important to note due to the nature of the two case studies that they will be measured in great deal with neighboring states therefore there will be some examples that highlight their relative power to other nation-states.

In his book Paradox of American Power, Joseph Nye discusses that for a state to obtain the outcomes it desires, it should have certain capabilities or resources. He stated that these resources could now be summarized in population, economic strength, military force and political stability, but in the past the main gauge was a

state’s ability for war. Nye’s definition includes both hard and soft power because of the developments in the international system, whereby war is less frequent and other forms of power come into play. For Nye, ‘hard power’ is seen as both military and economic, while ‘soft power’ is the ability to get others to do what you want. Antonio Gramsci stressed that the importance of soft power is in an actor’s ability to establish themselves as a preference for others based on their “intangible power resources, such as attractive cultures, ideologies, and institutions”.

For the purpose of this thesis the focus will be on power as a sum of all state capabilities, while there will also be comparisons with neighboring states in order to properly gauge the power of these new non-state actors in the international or regional scene. At the moment the lines in the Middle East particularly between Iraq and Syria and to a lesser extent border areas in Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia are points of contention. There are coalitions and skirmishes on borders between non-state actors and states in a changing Middle East landscape. Even though Joseph Nye is not a Realist this will be the definition to be used in order to highlight the need for a new malleable definition and this could be the benchmark for an amended definition for power and actors in the international system within the Realist paradigm.

How does Realism view the State?
From the Realist perspective the state is the key unit for analysis in an anarchical world with no central legitimate authority. Non-State Actors and International

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Organizations aspire to be independent actors but ultimately fall short of being significant or independent actors in the international system.\textsuperscript{14} They fall short due to the lack of necessary tools and legitimacy to be actors in the international system. Even the current multilateral system exemplified by the United Stations derive its power and financing for state actors, which shows there is little room for other actors in the international system.

From a Realist perspective what occurs inside the state is unimportant for the international world. The state is viewed as a black box that is opaque to the international system but is analyzed as an integrated unit in the international world. Exceptions could occur to this rule, but Realists view these exceptions as opportunities for the state to correct situations within the state and repose itself as an integrated unitary actor.\textsuperscript{15} The state is also a rational actor that pursues its interests with a purpose and design policy based on what can achieve their objectives. The main concern for states is their own preservation and security; the issue of security is not only the priority on the national level but also on the international level. Global and international security are the main concern and are the most dominant issues in world politics. Essentially the international system is a struggle for power among different state actors in the international system.\textsuperscript{16} Machiavelli, during the fifteenth and sixteenth century, introduced the concept of ‘Realpolitik’ and that states operate in order to gain, maintain and expand power.\textsuperscript{17} These definitions of actors will be

\textsuperscript{17} Niccolo Machiavelli. The Prince. Translated by Thomas Bergin.
applied in order to measure the extent the Islamic State and the Kurdish Regional Government have challenged or even usurped state authority.

The rise in the number of Non-State Actors:
Interest in the issue of Non-State Actors began in the 1970s as there influence began to influence specific countries within the international system. A book written by Joseph Nye and Robert O Keohane discussed how transnational actors had been sidelined from the general discussion within the international system and were considered to be only domestic issues that do not influence the international system. In this book they outlined the different types of non-state actors from multinational organizations, trade unions and revolutionary groups and discussed their impact and influence on the international system. At the time those actors were not considered to be a challenge to states in the international system but the discussion was being made that they do play a part in complementing a state’s foreign policy and their role is consigned to an extension of state power. However, these groups began to amass large amounts of financial power that allowed them to be at times autonomous from states but not to the extent where they sought their own independence.

Another book entitled Non-State Actors and Authority in the Global System published in 2002 began to classify non-state actors based on their relationship with the states they exist within and the degree of autonomy they have. In the book the authors described Non-State Actors as groups that do not have territory to govern and operate within one or two states, without a diplomatic body and with no political,

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economic or identity based agenda.\textsuperscript{19} Non-State Actors have always been part of the international discourse after the second world war but in the past few years these groups have gained further as this paper will work to highlight. The case studies used in this paper show groups that have been able to govern large territories and create political, cultural and diplomatic bodies in order to challenge and threaten the state they exist within.

For the purposes of this paper there will be a more contemporary definition of non-state actors taken from a working paper from a conference in 2015. The definition was provided by the Geneva Call conference working paper presented by the Centre for security, development and the rule of law “NSA is defined as any organized group with a basic structure of command operating outside state control that uses force to achieve its political or allegedly political objectives”.\textsuperscript{20} The definition for NSA is heterogeneous and not all of those groups have the same characteristics and this paper will seek to argue that some have evolved behind others to move behind our traditional understanding of this. This working paper was alluding to this change and the subsequent challenges it poses on those living in states with powerful NSAs operating. This paper looks to marry the ideas on the evolution of NSAs with the current on the ground developments in order to show and highlight another level of evolution whereby these groups occupy territory, govern and act autonomous from the state.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{19} Geoffery R.D, Andreas Bieler Underhill and Richard A Higgott, Non-State Actors and Authority in the Global System, (London:Routledge,2000)

\textsuperscript{20} DCAF and Geneva Call, DCAF 2011, DCAF Horizon 2015 Working Paper.}
As in the past, “technological revolutions – from farming to manufacturing, and industry to information – have catalyzed tensions over authority, as new communities seize opportunities for control.” The Internet as a vehicle, empowered media and allowed for more information access, while also hosting online spaces for ideas to spread and people to mobilize, albeit virtually at first. The Internet does have limitations and can only be looked at as a vehicle rather than a catalyst for change in the international system. The Internet like nuclear weapons in the 1950s did not completely overhaul the international system but built new ideas and paradigms within the system and changed preconceived notions on traditional military power.

This was evident in the Middle East, during the Arab Spring period in particular. Decades of authoritarianism in the Middle East had limited public expression, mobilization and connectivity, until Tunisia’s revolution. These new spaces allowed people to mobilize, organize and oppose state authority under the guise of an entire global population, which received live updates directly from individuals’ not just media outlets. This new type of power represented by information and its ease of access allowed “alternative authorities to flourish – and in some places, even directly challenge state sovereignty”. Competition within states is greatly increasing with rising power among “corporations, NGOs, religious groups, terrorists, and other groups who are today, financially, militarily and technologically empowered like never before”. Cyberspace has provided a platform for individuals to connect and find common interests that at times challenge state authority. It is a virtual space that is not completely controlled by the state and where the state does not have a

monopoly and this has empowered individuals to organize, mobilize and connect within the state and across its borders.

A group of hackers from across the world named ‘Anonymous’ embody a new stateless entity that challenges state authority.24 During the war on Gaza in 2013, they launched a cyber attack on Israel, and days later shifted their attention to former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi after a constitutional declaration gave him excessive executive powers.25 This shows that these new groups are at times unbounded by the interests of any single state and represent a new form of identity. According to a study by Tufts University’s Itamara Lochard the “number of autonomous armed militias in the world vastly exceeds the number of sovereign states by a factor of at least 10, the Internet is used more to challenge governments than reinforce their power, and transnational networks funnel resources and confer credibility on non-state domestic groups that pursue their own agendas- including challenging the state”.26 The high number and relative power for these groups has only increased in the past few years and will continue to provide a threat towards states as these groups gain more agency from new tools.

The information revolution has provided potentially a new era where armed militias or small groups can acquire economic and social capital, as well as military power to challenge the state. This is a process that is not in the making but is occurring at the moment on the ground in several areas across the globe, albeit in different forms. For instance, Russian separatists in the Ukraine have had a major impact on the state and

its interests. In another form, groups such as ‘Anonymous’ (made up of individuals across the globe) have repeatedly attacked nation-states virtually in order to influence, and at times, punish their policies. The information revolution allows new spaces for actors to occupy, that in turn help connect individuals with similar interests, which at times can be aimed at challenging state authority. The Iraqi case that is used in this paper is a prime example of how smaller groups have used these tools, as well as lapses in security to assert themselves and challenge the Iraqi state.

Definitions of Power and Actors in the International Relations- have they changed?

This paper will not seek to gauge the power of the Internet, but it is used only as an advancement that allowed new actors to emerge, mobilize and strengthen their positions among and within nation-states. The paper will look at the conditions that allowed for new actors to emerge, but more importantly how those actors operated and whether that signals a change in our understanding. It will also highlight how our lack of adjustments towards these new actors has impacted our policies and security.

In order to adequately analyze whether groups like the Islamic State, or the Kurdish Regional Government (hereafter KRG), have been able to challenge states and become actors in the international system we must first choose our definition for actors. Realism’s major assumption is that states are the most important actor in an anarchical world, and represent the “key unit of analysis whether one is dealing with ancient Greek city-states or modern nation-states”. Exceptions to this can occur in Realism but these exceptions reinforce state power rather than work against it. For

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instance Realists consider political differences within a state to be an exception and are ultimately resolved authoritatively, and the state will then speak with one voice that represents the state as a whole with no other voices. 28 Using this definition for political differences within the state, the two case studies of the KRG and the Islamic State within Iraq will be utilized in order to understand whether these groups are challenging the Realist definition. Both groups have acted autonomously and independently from the Iraqi state, contrary to the Realist notion that exceptions are corrected by the state, to provide a united front when addressing the international world.

For Realists, power is a core concept but there is no one definition for power. Power could be classically looked at as military power, but in the current system there must be a more encompassing definition for power. 29 For instance, Joseph Nye has distinguished between both, hard power (economic/military), and soft power, referred to as cultural dimensions or values that shape identity and a state’s ability to diplomatically influence others in the international system. For the purposes of this research paper the definition to be used will be Joseph Nye’s term of “smart power”, which is the “integral blend of hard and soft power assets, used effectively to advance the state’s purposes”. 30 The reason behind the use of this definition is that in a highly interconnected world the chances of full-scale war have been mitigated in the past 50 years. Power is no longer only viewed from the perspective of hard power and

therefore the integral blend between both hard and soft power is essential to navigate through this interconnected global structure.

The definition of power alone does not suffice, but we must address a core principle that is the struggle of power, which from a Realist perspective is the driver of our international system. Han J. Morgenthau stated, “International Politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power. Whatever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim or means to an end”.31 Through the analysis of our two case studies, we will focus primarily on applying the smart power definition on the Islamic State and the Kurdish Regional Government to show how these non-state actors have state-like properties.

**Spotlight on Iraq: The Islamic State and Kurdish Regional Government**

The Islamic State, in the midst of the sectarian crisis in Iraq and a revolution in Syria, amassed considerable military power and wealth that took the global population by surprise. The vacuum created across Syria and Iraq allowed the group to make significant gains, but unlike other terrorist groups, the aspirations of the Islamic State were not limited to conducting operations. Iraq and Syria highlighted how these groups capitalized on the vacuum and used tools to attempt and subsequently achieve their idea of controlling large territories out of both Iraq and Syria. A decade ago this was unthinkable, terrorist groups often based their survival on rough terrain that states had no use for, but the Islamic States control over Mosul showed a sharp change in strategy for these groups. Prior to this lapse in Security the Middle East and particularly Iraq was lauded as a security center with an apparatus that controlled a

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highly volatile state albeit ruthlessly. The State monopolized power and left very little to for small actors, however the surge in technology as well as a lapse in security has created a new environment of instability that has seen non-state actors thrive.

The Islamic State now governs half the territory in Syria and a large part of Iraq, posing more than a challenge to two sovereign states.\textsuperscript{32} The group has ideologically been able to create its own identity with supporters from across the globe. Soufan group a security consultancy firm recently released a report that the number of foreign fighters has risen since June 2014 from 12,000 to 27,000 in Syria alone. The report claims the Islamic State has fighters from 86 countries, and surprisingly the third country on the recruitment numbers is Russia.\textsuperscript{33} This specific statistic highlights the group’s pull outside the Middle East region. The group’s pull and control has caught international attention with an international coalition launched to combat them. This ability to challenge the state and also attract individuals highlights the cultural dimension of their power. I have chosen the term “Islamic State” in order to highlight the group’s ambition that extends further from Iraq and Syria, which is why I have not used the term “ISIS”. Originally the group was named ISIS naming themselves the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria but after their expansion they have represented their growing ambition in their chosen name.

As a reactionary consequence of the rise of the Islamic State, the Kurdish Regional Government has found them embroiled in a highly violent struggle for power in Iraq. Iraq’s central government was caught completely by surprise, not only by the power,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{32} ISIL 'controls half' of Syria’s land area. (2015, June 1). Al Jazeera.
\end{itemize}
but by the rationality of the Islamic State in governing territory and absconding Iraqi military equipment. The Iraqi militaries weakness has forced the Kurdish Regional Government to fend for themselves and protect their already marginalized ethnic minority. The KRG has independently sought international arms and economic aid, dealing directly with nation-states. Germany first, followed by Great Britain, France and Italy have all in 2014 agreed to supply the Kurdish Peshmerga in their fight against ISIS, independently from the Iraqi government. Peshmerga, which means one who faces death, is the armed militia for the KRG and provides protection in Kurdish areas. The struggle for power in Iraq has empowered, rather than weakened the KRG, and have in several instances been the most successful ground fighting force against the Islamic State. This highlights that the power of non-state actors within Iraq has rivaled or at times surpassed that of the state and brings into question the Iraqi states monopoly on power.

These two case studies show the increased challenges to state authority, sovereignty and even territorial control, and bring into question the efficacy of arguments that the state holds the monopoly on power and control of its territorial sovereignty. It is therefore important to understand the current dynamics in order to properly maintain global security and devise policies that are suited to the international climate and to deal with our current crises. In light of the technological advancements, this paper will look to examine the extent of change in the classical Realist concepts of power and actors in international relations. This thesis will use the cases of the Islamic State and the Kurdish Regional Government to postulate how the classical Realist view of power and actors could be changing to accommodate a new form of hybrid actor. The

34 “Germany to Supply Arms to Kurds Fighting IS in Iraq.” BBC NEWS, September 1, 2014.
two contrasting cases in Iraq shed light on how new *actors* can challenge the state’s sovereignty and its monopoly on *power*, as well as our view on what we consider *actors* in the international system. From these two case studies we will be able to extrapolate to what extent Non-State Actors and Armed Non-State Actors NSA/ANSA have evolved, which will highlight whether we will need to adjust our understanding of “actors” and “power” and the potential impact of this shift in power on global security.

**Research Methods and Tools:**

*Nature of the Research:*

The type of research that will be conducted will be an analysis of the potential shift in Realist definitions of actors and power in international relations by using the case studies of the Islamic State and the Kurdish Regional Government (and its Peshmerga fighting force) and by evaluating recent developments within Iraq. This research aims to identify if these two actors in the past couple of years have merited a case to challenge the Realist definition for actors and their relative power, or at the very least merit a re-analysis of our view on Non-State Actors.

*Tools:*

**Literature Analysis:**

Focus on the literature that discusses Realist definitions of power and actors, while also using secondary sources to track developments of the Islamic State and KRG in Iraq. The research will use Realist theorists and their views of the international system with an updated definition for power as per Joseph Nye, while also comparing the groups on traditional more military focused definitions of hard power. Literature will focus on the advancements and threats posed by
these groups during 2013 and 2014 as a direct challenge to the Iraqi state and neighboring countries.

Each section on the Islamic State and the KRG will look at the military, economic, technological and diplomatic strengths of each group over the past few years. This analysis will look to juxtapose the power amassed by these groups in relation to the surrounding states in the region to postulate whether these actors have breached an area between nation-states and non-state actors.

**Comparative Analysis:**

The KRG and the Islamic State both operate within Iraq and can extent to parts of Syria, however the groups are entirely different. The reason both those two were used was to highlight how different non-state actors can amass similar power in the current international system. Each group is analyzed through their economic and military strength, as well as their cultural values.

The differences between both groups highlight how different groups with major value differences can succeed in the current international system to challenge state authority. This is meant to showcase that there is no set formula for how Armed Non-State Actors gain power but highlights that the main concepts on power in Realism still ring true even if the definition for “actors” needs to become more malleable in order to consider these groups as influencers on the international system.

The groups have been compared on three crucial levels, military, economy and cultural values in order to highlight their success in the use of soft and hard
power in the international system. The ability of those groups respectively to gain new territory and build economic systems within the areas they govern coupled with developing specific values that attract alliances within the international system has been compared to highlight the advancement made by these groups.

**Limitations:**

There is a major obstacle in conducting a comparative study such as this in adequately measuring the variables on a long stretch of time. The advances made by the Islamic State are recent and their current position is changing on a day-to-day basis. The Kurdish Regional Government has the same inherent problem; the quick changing landscape in Iraq makes it hard to gauge their relative power. As a result the ability to properly gauge the challenge and threats created by these new armed non-state actors poses a problem in reaching a substantive conclusion due to the changing landscape and international involvement.

Distinguishing between the situation for these two case studies, between both Iraq and Syria, is also problematic. The rise of the Islamic State and its subsequent chaos has created a fluid situation between both Iraq and Syria in which it is hard not to consider specific situations in Syria as they directly affect Iraq. This is especially the case with the Islamic State; in fact the advancements made by the group in Iraq are a direct consequence of their ability to use the crisis in Syria to attract and recruit radical fighters into Iraq and throughout the region. While the Kurdish Regional Government is central to Iraq's fighting forces, the Peshmerga have conducted different operations to protect their
region in Syria. Throughout this paper, the attempt will be made to only include Syrian examples when the situation in Iraq is directly affected, or when the situation has had a direct affect on the situation in Syria. In both these instances it will show the relative power and influence amassed by these two groups, not only to affect the government in Baghdad but also Syria, and as a result the region as a whole.
Chapter 2: Increased Military Power for Armed Non-State Actors

Background on the Islamic State and the Kurdish Regional Government

It is important to analyze the shift in relative power of armed non-state actors and how this shift in power has, altered the parameters of how we traditionally perceive non-state actors from the lens of Realism. This section of the paper will focus on the increased military power for the Islamic State and the Kurdish Regional Government and how this increased power has allowed both groups to gain significant territory in Iraq. This territory was undeniably part of the Iraqi state but that land has been quickly occupied and controlled by new actors in the region.

Before looking at the present day developments in Iraq and the increased military power for these two groups, it is important to acknowledge the conditions in Iraq that created the opportunity for these groups to augment their power. The Islamic State in part was the product of the 2003 U.S occupation and the dismantling of the Iraqi army that had previously been loyal to Saddam Hussein. This was later compounded by the policies adopted by the government of Nouri Al-Maliki that were largely sectarian and resulted in thousands of innocent deaths and tens of thousands of Sunni prisoners.

The U.S occupation in Iraq was not militarily the toughest invasion for the United States, but the tension and anxiety it caused resulted in what was the most testing phase of the occupation, the insurgency. The U.S struggled to create a
stable Iraq in the backdrop of repeated attacks, not only on U.S security forces, but also attacks aimed at U.S allies. This manifested in the bombing of the Jordanian embassy in 2003 for instance. Jordan, being a U.S ally, was attacked and that isolated the United States in the post-war Iraq era. However, between 2007 and 2008, the United States made promises to the Sunni tribesmen of Iraq to combat this terrorist insurgency. The promises were about inclusion in the political system of post-war Iraq, alongside the Sunni tribesmen (The Sunni awakening movement), which allowed the U.S to crush the Al-Qaeda presence in Iraq. The Sunni awakening was a coalition of tribes in Iraq that helped defeat Al-Qaeda in North-Eastern Iraq in 2003.

After the agreements between the Sunni tribesmen and the U.S., the Maliki government began to be formed and American presence began to decline, particularly the military. The withdrawal of U.S troops in December 2011 sparked a new chapter in Iraq. Nouri Al-Maliki became suspicious and began to imprison and call for the arrest of several high-ranking Sunni politicians. This led to widespread protests across Iraq as the Sunni population began to feel threatened. The protests were met by brutal measures from the government and slowly became infiltrated by smaller groups of a more radical persuasion and this made the Maliki government even more violent in its response. Mass arrests and targeted politicians became a regular occurrence and this pushed the Sunnis in Iraq to feel increasingly vulnerable, no longer having a strong U.S presence to balance the situation.
In 2011, the Syrian civil war began to escalate as rebel forces started to clash with the Assad regime. As the revolution in Syria became increasingly violent, the remnants of Al-Qaeda in Iraq began to shift towards Syria in order to combat the Assad regime. This became the genesis of what is now known as the IS, and it is through Syria that this group was able to expand its influence. The Sunni awakening but suddenly had a new playing field heavily demoralized those who had participated in the insurgency in Iraq and the brutality of the Assad regime allowed them to recruit and expand.35

The Islamic State today is estimated to control half of Syria as the group pushes back the Assad regime towards Damascus. As of September 2014, the group is estimated to have between 22,000 and 32,000 fighters according to the U.S Director of the National Counterterrorism Center. At the time, the land controlled by the group was compared, by the U.S official, to the size of the United Kingdom but a few months later it is believed the group lost a quarter of that territory.36 The number is constantly changing as the battle rages on in both Syria and Iraq between ISIS and the government, and other non-state Actors. In a relatively short period between 2011 and 2014 the group has been able to control large parts of Syria and replicated this in Iraq. Two large Sunni cities are now under ISIS control in Iraq and this has allowed the group to create a hub between both countries to move fighters, ammunition, supplies and resources. This connection is what now forms the informal economy and military supply route for the Islamic State. The Islamic State's mission is to re-establish in their eyes the

36 MATTHEW G. OLSEN, “DIRECTOR, NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM CENTER.”
Islamic Caliphate and spread it across the globe, for the time being their goals are more Realistic and are about maintaining the territory they govern. In the future, this territory they govern will allow the group to indoctrinate more followers and fighters particularly amongst children who will only view the world from their lens.

**What about Kurdistan?**

Iraqi Kurdistan and the Kurdish Regional Government in particular is a completely different group that found new autonomy in post-occupation Iraq. The Kurds are a marginalized ethnic minority rather than a radical terrorist group, they have historical and cultural links to many in the mountainous region of Iraq, Syria and Turkey. They began to cultivate political autonomy, which this ethnic group had never enjoyed in Iraq. It is important to acknowledge these conditions, not to generalize these examples across the globe, but to show how and why the dynamics in the international system have changed for certain smaller groups in certain areas that hope to challenge state authority. It is undeniable that there are specific conditions in Iraq that may not exist elsewhere in the world.

Iraqi Kurdistan has a different history and ideology to that of the Islamic State. There are about 5.5 million Kurds in Iraq and 1.7 million in Syria, while there are another 23 million in Turkey and Iran. The Kurds are considered by many to be the largest ethnic identity that does not have a state. After the United States occupied Iraq and elections had taken place, Iraq became a federal system. As a
result the Kurds gained autonomy in their own region (Erbil, Dohuk, Sulyamanyeh and Halabja) with their own government and quasi army, the Kurdish Peshmerga.

Despite this newfound autonomy, the Kurds lacked true independence, a dream that the group had for decades. The threat posed by the Islamic State and its challenge to the Iraq state has left the central government in Iraq and its military in tatters. The Iraqi military’s collapse in the face of IS has put pressure on the Kurds but also provided an opportunity for the Kurds to defend their own territory and people. The Prime Minister of the Kurdish Regional Government, Nechirvan Barzani explained, “The situation after Mosul is completely different... You can't go back to the same structure, the same system, because Iraq is now a failed state. There is no Iraqi nation. But independence won’t be offered to us, we'll have to take it.”37 This statement made in 2014 highlights the stark shift of conditions in Iraq and how actors within it view the nation-state. The conquest of Mosul signaled a major shift for the crisis and for the Islamic State. The crisis was further exacerbated as now the Islamic State controlled a city the size of Houston and the potential ramifications in the future remain clear. The city runs the cities schools and hospitals and to many will remain the only source of power in those areas until they are defeated.

This background on both groups is meant to highlight how these factions had previously existed in Iraq and looks at how their roles have evolved in the current Iraq. The powers of the KRG or terrorist groups like ISIS were limited in

the past. The KRG may have had autonomy but it remained part of a larger Iraqi framework, while IS was merely a part of Al-Qaeda with no prospects of truly challenging a nation-state in an outright military conflict. Even at the height of the insurgency the battle was more guerrilla-like with bombings and IEDs being used to disrupt the Iraqi state not challenge it. For the Kurds, geopolitical considerations and scattered populations across four countries (Syria, Turkey, Iran and Iraq) made it difficult to seek independence. The developments in Iraq between 2011-2015 largely brought about by the Islamic State have shifted the balance of power and future for both these actors.\(^{38}\)

**The battle for Mosul:**

The Islamic State operated for almost two years before the fall of Mosul. The group had moved from Iraq to Syria in order to latch onto the growing discontent in Syria and the oppression of the Assad regime. However, it was not until 2014 that the group received international attention. On March 10\(^{th}\), 2014 the Islamic State launched an attack on the city of Mosul in the Nineveh province in Iraq and successfully took control of the city.\(^ {39}\) Mosul is the second largest city in Iraq and the manner and ease in which the Islamic State took over the city sent shockwaves around the world, as the group declared the end of the Sykes-Picot agreement and the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate.

This terrorist group had made a large and surprising gain that highlighted the weakness of the Iraqi government and its military. Reports indicate that ISIS

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launched a small attack that consisted of around 800 fighters on 30,000 Iraqi troops who abandoned their posts, weapons and positions to flee. Many security reports suggest that the group had not initially planned to overtake Mosul but had only done so to disrupt the situation. However, the groups were surprised at the speed with which the Iraqi army had fled and how, with a quick readjustment, a terrorist group now controlled a city the size of Houston with 2 million residents.

The collapse of the Iraqi military in the face of such a small number of fighters showed the weakness of the Iraqi state. This was an army that the United States had supplied with over $25 billion dollars worth of equipment and training. It augmented a growing concern in the Middle East over the fragility of the nation-state in the region. The state is virtually considered to have a monopoly on power within its territories and while some exceptions do occur they are ultimately corrected. The situation in Iraq and with the Islamic State is a direct challenge and a situation where state sovereignty has been usurped in several areas. Terrorist organizations have always been a constant threat to governments in the Middle East and all over the world. The attack on Mosul was different as this group was able to fulfill a promise made by all Jihadist groups, and that is to establish from their perception an Islamic Caliphate. This was a dangerous move and the control the group had in Mosul allowed it to expand its military and human capital. In March 2014 the group known as ISIS showed that a Non-state actor could challenge the states territorial sovereignty and win. The group remains in control of Mosul over a year on and has added territory as well.

despite its war with the Kurds, Iraqi government and an international coalition led by the United States.

This attack on Mosul not only demoralized the Iraqi army but it augmented IS’s military. There were a large number of potential heavy and light weapons which were abandoned by Iraq’s military, while over the past decade the U.S had supplied them with thousands of armed vehicles and tanks, which are now under IS control. Haider Al- Abadi, Iraq’s Prime Minister, stated that “we lost 2,300 Humvees” in Mosul and that alone is estimated to be worth $1.5 billion in military equipment. As a replacement to the equipment ransacked by IS, the U.S agreed in December 2014 to re-arm Iraq with over $12.4 billion worth of heavy arms which shows the large amount of military equipment the group was able to get a hold of. U.S army Lt. Col. Ralph Peters stated that the group had seized thousands of U.S equipment and now operates with the same equipment that had been supplied to the Iraqi army. The relative power between the Iraqi military and IS has shrunk with both groups using similar equipment.

The attack on Mosul was the moment of recognition, not only for the Islamic State, but also for our view on global order. States are perceived as the main actor and they hold a monopoly on power and will correct irregularities within the State. The attack on Mosul and the continued occupation of Mosul shows that small-armed groups can rival or even usurp state territorial sovereignty. Even though Iraq was under occupation, this was a military that was heavily funded and trained by the United States. Almost overnight IS became more influential on the ground in Iraq than the government. This is no longer merely a terrorist
group that engages in explosive operations and suicide bombings but an actor that seeks to maximize its power through military superiority and territorial gains. Mosul was not the end and the group continued to expand in both Iraq and Syria simultaneously challenging both the Syrian and Iraqi governments.

On August 7th, 2014 the U.S formed a coalition in order to conduct air strikes on IS territories to halt the rapid advancement of the group. Coalition airstrikes may have alleviated some of the pressure on the Iraqi government but ISIS advancements still continue. It is important to note that IS does not seem to conform to the traditional model of actors in the international system. It is being handled like a rogue state with an international coalition formed to combat it even though it is supposedly a minor group within both Iraq and Syria. Non-State Actors rarely require major international coalitions to halt their power and this is a new development in the international world. The power they have amassed, particularly on the military front through equipment and operational experience has made this group both wealthy and battle hardened. IS has amassed power similar to several states in the region and are arguably stronger than the governments in Syria and Iraq, with now large areas under IS control across both states. The need for an international coalition highlights how our perception of non-state actors and their power in relation to states has shifted. There is now a global campaign with several countries and major powers involved to combat this group, which has thus far proved resilient.

This military power and challenge to the state was not a one-time thing; on May 17th, 2015 the group took over the city of Ramadi, the capital of the Anbar
province in Iraq, almost a year after overtaking Mosul\(^{41}\). The Islamic State is capable of challenging the Iraqi state in a prolonged conflict over a long period of time. This has happened while the group has also intensified the conflict and war efforts in Syria against the Assad regime. A terrorist group is now fighting a war on two fronts with two sovereign nations and there is a global effort aimed at defeating the group that is comprised of dozens of states. The previous statements would be lauded impossible just a few years ago but are now a stark reality of a very different global system we now live in.

The city of Ramadi, in similar fashion to Mosul, was over-taken by 200 Islamic State fighters facing almost 10 times that amount of Iraqi military stationed in the city\(^{42}\). The control of Ramadi meant that by May 2015, the group controlled half of the Syrian territory and a third of the territory in Iraq. Alongside Ramadi, the group also gained control of the last Syrian operated border crossing between Iraq and Syria, the ancient city of Palymra.

The take-over of Ramadi showed that the Islamic State is not only concerned with making symbolic attacks but rather to control and govern. The city of Ramadi is only 80 miles away from the Iraqi capital of Baghdad which allows the group to connect its territories and create logistical support for fighters between both Iraq and Syria\(^{43}\). Along with Palymra there is now an economic and logistical route for the group to funnel its resources across the two states. The control of another large province in the Sunni region of Iraq demonstrates that


\(^{42}\) Jeremy Bender. “ISIS Now Controls a Supply Route from Syria’s Largest City to Iraq’s Capital.” Business Insider

\(^{43}\) Jeremy Bender. “ISIS Now Controls a Supply Route from Syria’s Largest City to Iraq’s Capital” Business Insider.
the Islamic State can not only withstand international coalition airstrikes but can also contest areas with the Iraqi government. This area was contested for months with the Iraqi military but finally fell in May 2015 to allow Islamic State control again. Ramadi is not only a strategic victory for the group but allows them to connect their territorial expansion and also serves as a recruitment base and a logistical hub to maintain their fight against the Iraqi state, despite international efforts.

The Battle for Kirkuk:

For the Kurdish Regional Government the collapse of the Iraqi military was catastrophic. The Kurds had been largely marginalized by the Iraqi state for decades and the collapse of the army in the face of IS left no expectations among the Iraqi Kurds for protection. The Kurds did have autonomy and a quasi-military organization but threats like ISIS are supposedly a prerogative of an organized military that is supported with equipment and technical expertise. This crisis may have alarmed the Kurds at first but in every crisis there is an opportunity, and in the battle for Kirkuk we analyze how the Kurds have improved their position and power in Iraq today. It is strange to think that the emergence of ISIS could potentially empower other actors in the region. ISIS is seen as a destabilizing force but their assault on the Shiite-led governments (whether in Iraq or Syria) has allowed opportunities for other actors to grow. ISIS has also overrun other small minorities, like the Yazidis, but the organization and structure of the Kurdish Peshmerga has allowed them to prosper in the face of the Islamic State. The Kurdish Peshmerga are a well-drilled fighting unit that is
in name and practice “fearless” and they also represent a more stable force to the Islamic State in many areas within Iraq.

Kirkuk is an interesting example to analyze. It is predominantly a Kurdish area with a large amount of Kurds living in this area for decades but had never been under Kurdish control. Even during the federalization of Iraq, Kirkuk remained part of the greater Iraq and not under the auspices of the Kurdish Regional Government. Kirkuk is rich in oil and probably one of the major reasons it was not so graciously handed over to the Kurds. In 2012, an attempt to arrest a Kurdish man by federal Iraqi agents resulted in a gunfight with KRG security forces, which left one civilian dead and 8 others wounded. This incident resulted in months of stand-offs between the Kurdish forces and the Iraqi government. The dispute was finally resolved and peace was brokered by the United States in order to calm the situation among ethnic groups in the region.\(^4^4\) The standoff in 2012 is important as it shows the long struggle for Kirkuk between the government and the Kurds, and also highlights the strategic importance of that province. It is also important to note that this standoff with the central government did not result in the Kurds having control over Kirkuk.

2014 had seen the dynamics change in Iraq. The emergence of the Islamic State sent the Iraqi military into a scramble, as it was seemingly unprepared for the speed, ferocity and doggedness of ISIS. The highly sectarian nature of the Iraqi government saw their attempts for control in areas backed by other ethnic groups grow weaker. The situation is highly complicated but ultimately quite

\(^{44}\) “Kurds Fight for Control of Kirkuk: The Battle for Iraq (Dispatch 3).” In Dispatch. Vice News.
simple; the Iraqi military was seen to be an extension of Shiite led influence, which was largely rejected by the Sunnis, some of which aided ISIS against the government, but also by the Kurds. The Kurds are a more secular pro-western power in Iraq that choose to rely on its own Peshmerga forces for safety and security. In 2014, in order to protect their own ethnic groups alongside minority Turks and Arabs in Kirkuk, the Peshmerga forces entered the province of Kirkuk to combat ISIS for control. It is important to note that the Iraqi military under immense pressure across Iraq abandoned the 12th division army base at Kirkuk without notification and left the entire population of Kirkuk in the face of ISIS. The Iraqi military and government had suffered several losses and seemed to prioritize other areas with more sectarian importance to channel their security forces. The result is that the area of Kirkuk for over a year has been under the control of the Kurdish Peshmerga forces an area this ethnic group had thought of as part of Kurdistan for decades.45

When Falah Mustafa Bakir, Head of Foreign Relations for the Kurdish Regional Government, was asked about the significance of Peshmerga’s control of Kirkuk, he replied, “Kirkuk has been the symbol of our oppression, the symbol of our depravation and our symbol of denial of the rights of the Kurdish people”.46

Kurdish government officials understand the significance of Kirkuk for the Kurdish population, as well as the current dynamics in Iraq that could allow for expansion. Ultimately, the withdrawal of the Iraqi army has diminished their authority in Kirkuk, and in that vacuum, the Peshmerga has provided security

and authority over areas previously unequivocally part of the Iraqi government administration. It is true that tensions had existed in this area, but the KRG, despite its autonomy in other areas, did not consider Kirkuk as part of Kurdistan despite the longing for control in this majority Kurdish area.

The local population and the KRG understand that the traditional balance of power between them and the Iraqi government has fundamentally shifted. The situation in 2012 of a standoff between the government and the KRG (and Peshmerga) is no longer relevant. At the time, Article-140 of the Iraqi constitution could provide an opportunity for the local populations to take a referendum on whether Kirkuk as a province would like to join the Kurdish Regional Governments and fall under its administrative control. Article-140 specified “three phases for implementation that includes normalization, a census, and a referendum on Kirkuk and other disputed areas. The government was to start by taking appropriate steps for the normalization phase, including re-joining detached districts and sub-districts to Kirkuk governorate, and completing this phase no later than 29 March 2007. The census phase was to be completed by 31 July 2007, and the referendum phase by 15 November 2007.” This Article was never implemented and part of the standoff between the Kurds and the Iraqi military in 2012 was a direct result of this delay by the Iraqi government.

It is apparent that there was no real intention by the Iraqi government to allow for a referendum on this disputed area with 5 years worth of delay, followed by U.S brokerage that removed Peshmerga troops from Kirkuk. In 2012, in terms of

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47 “Iraqi Constitution.”
power the Iraqi military/government remained firmly in control and the Kurds remained powerless to overturn their authority, even in regions with a majority Kurdish populous. In his interview with Vice News, Head of Foreign Relations Mr. Bakir referenced the “change in realities on the ground” that have allowed Kurds to claim areas that in his mind are rightly part of Kurdish territory. The KRG felt betrayed by the Iraqi government and that constitutional commitments to allow for a fair and free referendum over the administration of Kirkuk had been purposely delayed in order to avoid relinquishing authority and territory. This interview was in 2014 and the situation on the ground has not changed greatly, there seems to be an agreement among the KRG and the Peshmerga forces that Kirkuk will remain firmly under their control. Both Mr. Bakir and Nakib Abdulla cite the abandonment of the Iraqi army to their bases and posts as unequivocal proof that local populations should be represented in order to protect their populations. Both also stated with clarity and conviction that they would not give up the area of Kirkuk if the situation changes in Iraq and the Islamic State is defeated.48

Michael Knights is a Lafer Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He specializes in the politics and security of Iraq. He has worked in every Iraqi province and most of the country’s hundred districts, including periods embedded with Iraq’s security. He discussed the importance of Kirkuk from a military and economic perspective and how hostile forces control over Kirkuk severely limits Kurdish power and puts the entire region of Kurdistan under threat. From a strategic perspective, Kirkuk is highly important and this does not

take into account the oil, which will be addressed in a later chapter. Kirkuk is the narrowest area of Iraqi Kurdistan and has been used as an area for government incursions into the region. Kirkuk acts as a link between two of Kurdistan’s most important cities, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, and control of Kirkuk by the government or ISIS would divide the Kurdish region in half.49

The dynamic and balance of power on the ground in Iraq has been changing significantly from 2012 to 2015. Armed Non-State actors on the ground have, as a result been able to make significant military, and ultimately territorial, gains. Unlike ISIS, these gains have long been in the eyes of Kurds in Iraq and due to state fragility the group has acted quickly and decisively to augment its power and sphere of influence inside the Iraqi state. The Iraqi state, on the other hand, has not challenged this new status quo; in fact with the situation in Kirkuk, the state abandoned its responsibilities and gave up its authority to the KRG and Peshmerga. As a result of this exodus it is hard to envision a situation whereby Kirkuk could return to the Iraqi state and the KRG has explicitly made this clear. It is hard for an armed non-state actor that has sought independence for years to suddenly give up a 40% increase in their autonomous territory with the vast resources available in Kirkuk to support an independent nation in the future.50

Control of territory in the aftermath of military gains:
Territory and authority over a given area is sovereignty. This is a key cornerstone of the international system and this sovereignty is often solely

afforded to nation-states. However, the situation in Iraq has brought about new variables to consider in our understanding of authority, power, sovereignty and legitimacy. The territorial gains made by armed non-state actors in the Middle East during the period between 2011-2015 have been massive but none have been as surprising as in Syria and Iraq.

The Islamic State has created a structure that no other terrorist group has constructed and has acted very much in the state model to maintain control over territories they have gained; a year on they have remained in control of Mosul and expanded further into Ramadi. The Kurdish Regional Government already had a strong federalized system that allowed them to run their region semi autonomously. The key difference is lies in the way in which these non-state actors have exercised sovereignty and authority over these new territories. In these next sections the paper will examine the structure created by ISIS in order to govern and control territories gained, as well as connect them with other areas controlled in Iraq and also Syria. On the other hand, we look at how the KRG has quickly has integrated newly acquired territory in order to augment their power for a very possible independent Kurdish state.

**How is the Islamic State structured?**

The proposition made in this thesis is that the Islamic State occupies an area between traditional state actors and non-state actors. The group operates in a new area of international relations that we are just seeing the potential threats of and in other cases potential opportunities. Hisham Al-Hamami is an Iraq based
expert on Islamic groups that identified the organizational structure of the Islamic State for the Wall Street Journal in order to highlight the highly developed and state-like apparatus being created by the Islamic State to manage territory under their control. This piece of information was created on September 8th, 2014 and many developments have either affected or enhanced their standing but the Islamic State still uses this structure to govern its areas across two sovereign nations. Territories controlled by the Islamic State in 2014 governed around 8 million Syrians and Iraqi’s with an estimated 100,000 loyal to the group.

Abu Bakr Al-Boghdadi who the group named Caliph in 2014, acts as the “commander and chief” supported by two former Generals under Saddam Hussien that make-up the key decision making body of the organization. Beneath the two key advisors to the Caliph are 12 governors that operate the 12 territories controlled by the Islamic State, alongside 9 councils that act as ministries and report to Abu Bakr’s deputies. These councils legislate laws with other councils that handle religious and familial disputes in controlled territory, while a military council oversees the groups gained territory and on going fighting, and in parallel the financial council operates as the Islamic States treasury.51 The group also has a defense, security and intelligence council that is aimed at protecting the Caliph and is operated by Abu Bakr-Al Anbari a former major-general under Saddam Hussien with three other high ranking officers that also served under Saddam.52 The influence of former Saddam military men who

held high-ranking positions has created a strong military understanding of territorial control and resource management that has allowed the group to expand across Syria and Iraq.

This structure cannot be underestimated as this central and federal command allows the group to maximize its power and influence across the areas it has controlled. Local populations are able to find basic needs under their leadership despite the groups brutally authoritarian control. The structure of the Islamic State is set up very much like a state in order to maintain control and authority over newly acquired territory. The group has realized that fear is not their only tactic in control over territory and have used the different resources available in each province controlled to create networks across Iraq and Syria that allow them not only to control seized territory but to have further ambition to expand, despite coalition airstrikes and the Iraqi military. The recruitment of both high-ranking officials and army personnel from the military under Saddam Hussein (disbanded by the United States) has augmented the terror group’s ability to coordinate military operations with strategic resources to further increase their power.

The structure of the Kurdish Regional Government

For the purpose of this paper I will not take a look at the overall structure of the Kurdish Regional Government. The administrative levels of the KRG were outlined before the emergence of the Islamic State and the collapse of the Iraqi army in Mosul and other areas. There is an agreed upon semi-autonomous
Kurdish region already approved within the Iraqi constitution. This paper will focus on how the KRG seeks to increase administrative control over new areas, such as Kirkuk and how this shows an independent and unilateral decision that is independent from the Iraqi government and army.

On the political level, the KRG quickly set up a political office in Kirkuk for its parliament in order to connect the Kurdish citizens and other citizens in Kirkuk with the KRG. This is an attempt by the KRG to connect Kirkuk with areas already under their federal control and put more pressure on the Iraqi government to either relinquish control over the area or implement the referendum over Kirkuk's control that had planned to take place in 2007. Youssaf Muhammad, the speaker for the Kurdish parliament, stated in 2014 that the aim of the political office “is to become a bridge between Kirkuk and the Kurdistan Regional Government” and “the people of Kirkuk could share their needs and complaints directly with Erbil through the new office and “their delegates can reach the Parliament in Erbil through this local branch”.\textsuperscript{53} This is to extend Kurdish authority over this region and to complement Kurdish military control over Kirkuk, that is 24,000 officers strong with a political base that could help to improve the chances for Kurdish independence and Kirkuk’s annexation legally in the future. This is an attempt to formalize and legitimize this new area acquired by the KRG as of the past year the area has been de facto under Kurdish control.

The shift in the balance of power and the emergence of new actors

This chapter is focused on the military and territorial advancement made by the terrorist group ISIS and the Kurdish Regional Government during the current crisis in Iraq. As previously mentioned both these groups have been able to utilize the situation in Iraq and the weakness/fragility of the Iraqi military and government to cement their place within Iraq. This chapter has only focused on the power gained through military means and how these groups have either created or expanded their territorial sovereignty. The following are the main points that have been addressed and compare both groups in this regard:

1. **State fragility and relative power:** The fragility and weakness of the Iraqi state, specifically for this chapter on the military front has allowed non-state actors to amass power in areas where the state has left a vacuum. In the case of the Islamic State their attacks on the Iraqi military in Mosul and Ramadi allowed the group to control an area the size of Houston and Iraq’s second largest city. A year from their assault on Mosul the group remains firmly in control and Mosul with 2 million citizens can become a resource for recruitment and territorial sovereignty for the group alongside its other gains. For the Kurds (KRG), the situation is quite different, as they are part of a recognized federal area within Iraq but the fragility in Iraq has allowed the group to strengthen its position and ultimately come closer to fulfill aspirations for the Kurds, which is their own independent state.

2. **Balance of power:** Iraqi military equipment abandoned by troops in both Kirkuk and Mosul have been taken up by these groups and have resulted in a major shift in the balance of power and the struggle for power in Iraq today. This has allowed both groups to not only have territorial control but also a
balance of power with regards to military equipment vis-a-vis the Iraqi army and each other. This point is crucial as non-state actors are always seen within a context where the state has complete monopoly on power. There have been instances where groups (like the FARC) in Colombia where firepower is relative or equal to the government. However, the major difference is not solely the military balance of power but also the territorial control that allows these groups to sustain prolonged conflicts, despite international efforts.

3. State-like structures: The Kurdish Regional Government has moved swiftly to integrate and connect areas that have long been desired to be under Kurdish control. They have set up political offices and economic ties between Kirkuk and Erbil (government headquarters) in order to strengthen their hold on the area. The Islamic State has developed a new system for terrorist groups that has been replicated by other groups like Boko Haram. The structure created by the group is very much state-like and the establishment of an “Islamic Caliphate” allows the group to attract further recruits ideologically. Augmented by their military control over territory the group has been able to provide local populations with basic needs, energy and a sense of stability. The group has created judicial, executive and legislative councils in order to resolve disputes, divide resources and maintain control in their areas.

4. Expansion and ambition: Realism views that any discrepancy between the state and actors within the state are resolved internally. The state produces a unified front to the international world and exceptions are often corrected by the state. This is no longer the case in Iraq and the Iraqi government has lost significant territory and power in the face of the Islamic State but also has seen the KRG increase their power. The KRG has now become a full partner with
the government to combat the Islamic State and has often become the strongest force on the ground facing ISIS. This will no doubt have serious implications on the role of the KRG in Iraq’s future and will diminish the state’s authority in disputed areas. The Islamic State like any rational actor has aimed to expand its power using the military and economic resources available to the group at the expense of the Iraqi government for the most part. This expansion and ambition by the group is not only a result of state fragility but increased strength and military power that has allowed the group to rival and challenge the Iraqi state. For the Kurdish Regional Government, the aims have always been an independent Kurdistan but their attempts historically have been far from fruitful. However, the collapse of the Iraqi army in areas like Kirkuk have given the group an opportunity to gain more territories and exercise sovereignty over territories that had previously been disputed between them and the Iraqi government.

The balance of power has ultimately changed in Iraq and whether ground is regained by the Iraqi army is no longer relevant. Today armed non-state actors are the main actors within Iraq and the Iraqi military and government plays a more reactionary role. Advancements made by the Iraqi government are mostly the result of the international coalition; air strikes and question marks are raised over whether the state will be able to regain its authority in large areas. The monopoly of power in Iraq has also been severely damaged, and other groups in Iraq not only challenge the state but also have usurped its control and authority in several areas. The following chapters will further add to this reality by highlighting the economic, diplomatic and ideological strengths of these non-
state actors over the Iraqi state. Territorial sovereignty in Iraq is no longer monopolized by the Iraqi state that much is certain.
Chapter 3: The evolution in the economics of armed non-state Actors

In 2003, Joseph Nye developed the concept of “smart” power in order to dismiss misconceptions on how only soft power could be used to influence foreign policy. Power is the ability of an actor to influence the behavior of others in order to get what they initially want. According to Joseph Nye there are “three basic ways to do this: coercion, payment, and attraction.” In the previous chapter we dealt with the coercion element; coercion is based on the use of military force in order to achieve outlined objectives and force other actors to accept new or different realities, which as proven by both case studies have been done in Iraq. Hard power, to Joseph Nye, is both the coercive and payment aspects that allow actors to navigate the international system in order to achieve goals.54 This chapter will focus on the payment aspect and the economics behind these two-armed non-state actors in order to understand their level of autonomy, sovereignty and relative power within the state of Iraq and amongst neighboring states in the Middle East region. There is also the question of legitimacy and how these economies are now, not only fighting the legitimacy of the Iraqi state, but also empowering the legitimate rule of these groups in areas under their control.

The power of oil in Iraq:

Oil has always been a major source of power and tension in the Middle East region and particularly in Iraq. Iraq’s vast oil resources allowed Saddam Hussein to remain in control of the Iraqi state for prolonged periods of time. A look at the

oil economy in Iraq in 2015 shows that a lot has changed. A low global oil price alongside the insurgency led by ISIS has had severe economic repercussions on the Iraqi state. The on-going conflict between the Iraqi state and ISIS will require increased security/military expenditure from the Iraqi state even though oil export revenues are collapsing, forcing the government into deficit.

According to Professor Frank Gunter a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute:

“In the eleven years since the U.S.-led invasion overthrew Saddam Hussein, Iraq has faced brutal conflict and sharp drops in oil prices but – until mid-2014 – never both at the same time. Following the destruction of the Golden Mosque, Iraq descended into what many analysts saw as a full-fledged civil war in 2006-7. However, not only was a large proportion of Iraqi security expenses paid for by the United States but also world oil prices rose sharply. Combined with a gradual increase in oil export volume, this resulted in a substantial growth in government revenues. And when oil prices collapsed in 2009, the level of violence and associated expenses was the lowest since before the 2003 invasion. The recent combination of an acceleration in violence and an oil price collapse is unprecedented.”

The increased violence and drop in oil prices has harmed the Iraqi state but empowered new actors in the Iraqi scene. The Central government in Iraq is dependent on oil revenues to control territory and provide services to local citizens. This new wave that began in 2014 saw the Iraqi state face extreme violence from the terrorist group, ISIS, coupled with lower oil revenues. This

meant that the government’s financial capability to deal with threats being posed was declining rapidly. In the backdrop of this global oil drop, groups on the ground began to take over control of large areas that have oil reserves that has only served to restrict the power of the Iraqi government.

Iraq has a unique relationship with oil and 95% of government revenues are primarily from oil exports, which is now severely under threat. The focus thus far has been on the Iraqi state and not the KRG or ISIS and the reason being that it is crucial to understand where the state of Iraq draws its power. Power, as mentioned previously, is relative, and the struggle for oil control and black market sales in Iraq is pivotal in understanding the shift in the balance of power on the ground. The Iraqi states’ lack of control and the empowerment of other groups have shrunk the gap not only in economic power but consequently military power. Soft power (ideological and cultural) is also ultimately affected by the economic leverage or limitations of any actor.

**The Kurdish Regional Government and economic autonomy:**

The KRG’s struggle is quite different from that of the Islamic State. The group had attained semi-autonomy in a federal system in the post- Saddam period. The Iraqi constitution states that the KRG must share its own oil production with the rest of the country and be reimbursed with 17% of the national budget. The issue of oil has been a point of contention for quite some time but many believed, in December 2014, that the fight against ISIS persuaded the Iraqi government and the KRG to come to an agreement. Many considered this agreement a
landmark and a much-needed point of cooperation between both actors in the fight against ISIS. The dispute began over the remuneration that the KRG received for the oil it had pumped to Baghdad that flew well short of the expected value. Each side has blamed the other for the breakdown in relations and the deal, the weakening Iraqi government is not able to properly care for its Kurdish citizens, which has in turn forced the Kurds to guarantee their survival by using the resources available to them.

Over the last year, government payments to the KRG have been inconsistent and the Baghdadi government has accused the Kurds of selling this oil illegally. The Kurds suffer from low ammunition and lack of funds to pay their fighters and local operations due to the join-war effort with the government against ISIS. The KRG’s Minister of Planning stated, “Baghdad knows very well we are selling oil - we have to pay people's salaries,” and “five million Iraqi citizens have been cut off from their rightful share of the nation's resources. This is a threat to the stability and the sustainability of the region.”56 There might be a dispute between both parties but the KRG acts as though it will need to be independent from the Iraqi central government to ensure its own peoples survival.

On July 1, 2015 the KRG took the unilateral decision to begin exporting oil without the consent of the Iraqi central government. The group is estimated to be producing around 600,000 barrels a day, according to KRG government spokesperson, Safeen Dizayee. The KRG plans to develop oil fields in the area of

Kirkuk that the group took over, estimated to be around 45 billion barrels.\textsuperscript{57} The issue had always been how to find buyers for that oil when the contracts were not fully legal due to the disagreement with the central government, but the KRG has been able to bypass that. The current priority for the KRG is not to settle its dispute with the governments and await delayed payments but to fund the current Peshmerga fighters defending Kurdish territory. The challenges facing the Kurds such as displaced people in Kurdish territory is estimated to cost the government around $1.4 billion dollars, a number that the semi-autonomous region must find. The majority of Kurdish workers are employed by the KRG, adding an extra burden on the regional government to provide for salaries, which it has not done since April 2015.\textsuperscript{58}

Even prior to the official announcement, the KRG was selling oil to other states. Israel is believed to have imported 19m barrels of oil between May and August 2015 that are estimated to be around $1 billion dollars. More importantly, this accounts to more than 77\% of Israel’s needs, which are around 240,000 barrels per day.\textsuperscript{59} Another 17\% of the oil produced in Northern Kurdistan was delivered to Cyprus. The KRG has been able to both, create dependency for Kurdish oil in some states, and use other networks to expand their oil trade in order to fund themselves independently from Baghdad. Government Spokesperson Safeen Dizayee stated in a recent interview that the Kurdish government has agreed to


\textsuperscript{59} David Sheppard, John Reed, and Anjli Raval. “Israel Turns to Kurds for Three-quarters of Its Oil Supplies.” Financial Times, August 23, 2015. Accessed September 22,
sell as much as $5billion in government bonds in order to improve its infrastructure.  

There are important developments to consider with regards to the oil dispute between the KRG and the central government of Iraq. The first is that the KRG now independently runs and operates a large amount of oil in Northern Iraq. The KRG have also added the Kirkuk fields to their own oil supplies, considering the evacuation of the Iraqi army from that area after the Islamic State attack. Kirkuk was not part of the Kurdish portion of oil prior to its “annexation” by the Kurds, so the Kurds through this conflict have enhanced their position. The second is that the KRG has taken this decision unilaterally during a time where cooperation with the central government is needed. However, the decline in state support for the northern Kurdish areas, the high number of refugees in Kurdish areas, and the unpaid Kurdish Peshmerga forces has forced the KRG to abandon the deal that was agreed upon in December 2014.

**Rentier economy and the struggle for control:**

ISIS's control over strategic oil resources began in Syria where the group has a far larger portion of the oil wells under their control. Long before ISIS expansion into Mosul, the group’s leaders had envisioned that oil would provide a strategic tool for them to implement their Islamic State. The group’s Shura Council identified oil as fundamental for their survival first and then as a tool to augment their power as an Islamic Caliphate, as well as weaken the Iraqi central

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government. When looking at the structure of ISIS and the former high ranked officials who served under former President Saddam Hussein, it is not surprising that ISIS has adopted a strategic state-like military approach in order to gain and then maintain territorial control and sovereignty. The group has also worked on a way to create legitimacy for the Islamic State in areas the Iraqi Shiite-led government had frequently marginalized. The main producing oil well for ISIS is in Syria in the Eastern Deir Ezzor Province, which produces somewhere between 30,000 – 40,000 barrels a day. ISIS also controls a large oil field in Mosul, an area they have militarily occupied. ISIS controls the Qayyara field near Mosul that produces alone around 8,000 barrel’s a day. These numbers only show one oil well in Syria and do not take into account the advancements made by the group in Iraq.

In Iraq, as of August 2014 the group was estimated to produce around 72,000 barrels of oil a day, according to Platts, an oil commodities news service. In the months after Platts report, it was estimated that ISIS was fully in control of 18 cities in Northern Iraq, a region that holds around 17% of Iraq’s oil reserves. Prior to the U.S invasion in 2003, Iraq was the world’s second largest oil producer and had 10% of the world’s proved oil reserves, second only to Saudi Arabia. Therefore, for a group of 40,000 fighters to control 17% of Iraq’s oil reserves is majorly significant. This allows the group a great deal of financial clout in order to augment and expand their sphere of influence in Iraq and across

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Syria. It has been reported that the group in 2014 was making around $1 million a day from illicit oil revenues. The actual number for the group’s oil production is hard to pinpoint due to the large illegal trade market that is hard to accurately gauge. Even though U.S and coalition air strikes have targeted the “ISIS economy” since 2014, it is believed that these campaigns have slowed down, but not halted the ISIS oil economy.64

According to Iraqi officials and smugglers, the group now holds large oil reserves and an illegal trade empire that allows the group to smuggle oil across to Syria, Jordan and Iran. The group moved swiftly once capturing territory to utilize the oil fields in order to grow its economic output. Reports estimate that ISIS has a large wage bill for their fighters, which need to be constantly replenished in order to keep up the fighting and territorial control in both Syria and Iraq. Estimates state that Islamic State fighters earn about $500 dollars a month, while military commanders earn roughly $1200.65 This phenomenon is not dissimilar to a state in practice as it generates revenue from resources and distributes them among those employed by the “central entity” and this allows the group to retain and expand the amount of fighters.

The trade networks used by the group are not particularly new and the group has tapped the trade routes used by smugglers in Iraq for decades. The guardian interviewed Sami Khalaf, a former Iraqi intelligence officer under Saddam

Hussein, and now smuggler on the operations between Iraq and Jordan. Khalaf explained a highly developed network that allowed smugglers to buy oil tankers carrying around 26-28 tonnes of oil for $4,200 and sell those same tankers in Jordan for around $15,000 providing a large revenue stream for smugglers. Khalaf, now living in Jordan’s capital Amman, explains that each smuggler moves around 8 tankers a week and a lowly $650 bribe allows them to go across borders in Jordan.\textsuperscript{66} ISIS control of the Anbar province in Iraq, that has Mosul as a city, was a major move towards amplifying their trade network as it allows ease of access through to Syria and also Jordan.

Oil for ISIS is not solely used for profit-making or increasing export revenue but has also been used in seizing territory to power electricity and distribute among local citizens, namely those living under ISIS control in order to maintain loyalty in areas under their jurisdiction. A report by the financial times on October 14, 2015 showed that as trade regional countries scrutinized networks, the group has moved to use fuel as a mechanism for population control.\textsuperscript{67} The group will often sell the oil to traders and smugglers within ISIS controlled territories where it is estimated traders make $10 profit from each barrel. The financial times details a highly developed and organized system where oil is produced, refined and sold to traders in quick fashion. This expanded network is a mechanism whereby ISIS can restore economic normalcy in areas it controls under Iraq and Syria in order to maintain and empower its legitimate rule. The


citizens living in areas now under ISIS control had been marginalized and repressed, therefore the groups economic power is the carrot to the groups military stick.

The strength of the oil economy is not only in that it empowers the group financially, it also adds pressure on the coalition and those fighting ISIS in a precarious position. While it may be prudent to block financial gains for the group, there is a debate among the U.S and its Arab allies that bombing trade routes and networks could alienate the local populations living under ISIS control. Even those living under the Islamic State authority understand the importance of oil, as one business man near Aleppo remarked, “Everyone here needs diesel: for water, for farming, for hospitals, for offices. If diesel is cut off, there is no life here,” says a businessman who works near Aleppo. “ISIS knows this [oil] is a winning card.” The group's understanding of this close relationship between everyday livelihood and control is the cornerstone of the groups power in areas under its control. Compounded with the previous history in those areas of marginalization and repression it is not inconceivable that many current and future youth could view these areas as no longer part of Iraq or Syria.

ISIS has around 10 million citizens in areas under its control. This is a staggering amount of citizens for a terrorist group. Many within those areas might not believe in ISIS ideology but have to deal with a de facto situation of ISIS control.

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This gives the international coalition and the Iraqi government a huge predicament in both fighting ISIS and not alienating a marginalized group of Sunnis even further. Despite international efforts “dozens of interviews with Syrian traders and oil engineers, as well as western intelligence officials and oil experts, reveal a sprawling operation almost akin to a state oil company that has grown in size and expertise despite international attempts to destroy it.”69 This quasi-oil company could allow the ISIS group to implement a rentier state model, which allows the “state” to use a specific commodity to generate a large proportion of its “national” revenue. This is not too dissimilar to the many states in that specific region (Levant/Gulf) in the Middle East. The economic power matched with territorial control and military parity could see ISIS prolong the conflict.

In the past, groups like Al-Qaeda had depended on foreign sponsors who had ideologically identified themselves with the group. However, ISIS is different and has used oil to not only increase export revenue but also to gain a lot of influence for captive markets under the groups control, in order to satisfy the vast demand that exists for this commodity. The strength of ISIS extends to a point where even other non-state actors that are at war with them are dependent on ISIS for oil, which is a strange but empowering pheromone for the Islamic State. A Syrian rebel commander, interviewed by independent journalists for the Financial Times, made a shrewd observation, “it makes you laugh and cry. But is anyone

else offering to give us fuel?”, and inherently this is the predicament. While ISIS is a terrorist group that ideologically scares most people, there are many that must deal with the group in order to survive. This is the personification of coercion and payment power outlined by Joseph Nye, which is the ability of actors to shape or set the priorities for other actors around them.

ISIS seeks statehood and this can be seen quite clearly in how the group utilizes its oil, but also in the manner in which they have constructed their oil industry. The group is highly focused on recruitment through headhunting former oil experts in areas they occupy to continue to run and maintain operations in the area. This shows a shift in strategy from former terrorist operations and a trend towards nation-state building. They are also focused on creating a human resources department that review IS recruits in order to find specific experts to enhance the groups hold over oil. After the fall of Mosul, IS Caliph Abu-Bakr Al Baghdadi made a speech where he not only called for fighters but also engineers and other professionals to join the group, which shows a strong understanding on how to achieve statehood or at the very least maintain this conflict with the Iraqi state. It is believed that the group recently had recruited an Egyptian engineer who lived in Sweden to manage the Qayyara field in Mosul. This human recruitment strategy is extended to other fields and industries that will be dealt with in other areas of this paper. The aim to create a state or an “Islamic Caliphate” is not merely rhetoric and events on the ground highlight a long-term

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strategic vision that thus far has surprised the international community and particularly the Syrian and Iraqi government.

Decentralized oil production among its governors has also been key in order to escape major losses through air strikes. Even though “oversight of the oil wells is carefully controlled by the Amniyat, ISIS’ secret police, who ensure revenues go where they should — and mete out brutal punishments when they do not. Guards patrol the perimeter of pumping stations, while far-flung individual wells are surrounded by protective sand berms and each trader is carefully checked as he drives in to fill up.”72 ISIS is focused on governance and therefore must have clear oversight to meet objectives and maintain all areas under their mandate. A raid by the United States in May 2015 killed a chief oil operator for ISIS named Abu Sayaf (a Tunisian); through this raid, the U.S uncovered “documents (that) laid, bare a meticulously run operation, with revenues from wells and costs carefully accounted for. They showed a pragmatic approach to pricing too, with ISIS carefully exploiting differences in demand across its territories to maximize profitability”.73 Arguments can be made that ISIS will never achieve statehood but the group’s goals and functions resemble a fully functioning state.

Oil has been divided and managed in an elaborate decentralized system that is held accountable by a central authority that has a security force to monitor oil revenue and production. They savvy to analyze and scrutinize their trade networks in order to find the most profitable areas as well and that is in essence

how a company would analyze their revenue streams. It must be taken into account that this operation is being run while the group remains embroiled in a conflict on two fronts with, both the states of Syria and Iraq, as well as air-strikes from the international coalition. The group has created an important oil industry that even those who are in conflict with ISIS must succumb to surviving through ISIS. It is important to note, "the militant group’s oil and gas authority now oversees them, the Damascus government still pays their wages. Thousands of civil servants have similar arrangements in ISIS-controlled Syria and Iraq, where locals risk long and dangerous drives to pick up their pay in Baghdad."74 The group is providing services and utilizing this as a propaganda tool for citizens, while having the government’s pay, which strengthens their legitimacy and weakens the government’s finances. Therefore, the question that must be asked is how long governments can continue the fight if even they are empowering ISIS, albeit indirectly.

Taxation equals representation?

Taxation has been a cornerstone of state and nation building. States differ on the levels of tax they implement. It depends on the economic and/or political system, as well as the relative geographic resources available to the state. The notion of “taxation equals representation” is a term used to describe how citizen-paying tax affords them representation in the overarching government. It allows citizens in different districts to choose representatives that represent both their everyday needs, as well as potentially their ideological leanings through elections. Tax

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plays an integral role in governance and legitimacy is often inherent in the social contract between citizens and state.

In an interview with Business Insider, Jonathan Schanzer, Vice President for research at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, stated that “taxes” have become a racketeering industry that allow groups to tax and loot their citizens. ISIS's survival is linked closely to their territorial control rather than oil revenues as is perpetuated, and the group will continue to find new territories to control.\footnote{Pamela Engel. "The ISIS Economy Just Got a Huge Boost." Business Insider, June 1, 2015.} Oil has been discussed as the major source of income to the group probably due to the impact ISIS control on oil, reflected on international oil markets. However, apart from the oil sector, the group has carefully crafted a taxation network to control, gain further legitimacy and expand further. RAND corporation in 2014 estimated that the group had raked in around $600 million from taxation in areas under their control. As of the fall of Mosul in June 2014, assets under ISIS control had been estimated to be worth around $875 million.\footnote{Sarah Al Mukhtar. "ISIS Finances Are Strong." The New York Times, Middle East sec. http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/05/19/world/middleeast/isis-finances.html.}

As a result of weak states in both Syria and Iraq, several large areas have fallen under ISIS control for over a year – Mosul in Iraq, Palymra and Raqq a in Syria to name but a few. ISIS understood the importance of connecting their governance with their local populous in a brutal taxation system that gives citizens a choice between starvation and ISIS loyalty. Abu Mujahed, a man who fled with his family from Deir al-Zor in Eastern Syria, spoke to the Atlantic on the firm grip
ISIS has over the local economy. The cost of basic utilities like electricity and water, as well as basic foodstuffs has soared under ISIS rule by almost 1000%.\textsuperscript{77}

ISIS pays those loyal to the group amounts that can cope with the rise in inflation, which bends people to their power through the need to survive. In Palmyra, upon overtaking the city, the group executed government soldiers and left their body in the streets. After looting the city and imposing taxes, the group “fixed the power plant, turned on the water pumps, held meetings with local leaders, opened the city’s lone bakery and started distributing free bread.”\textsuperscript{78} This provided the perfect carrot and stick strategy – mass executions acted as the stick frightening civilians from action and the taxation provided ISIS the means to improve services and consequently co-opt local citizens. In the weeks that followed, the Syrian government conducted airstrikes that destroyed some of the services and ISIS then used this as a tool to increase the anti-government sentiment among Palmyra citizens. This tactic in Palmyra in Syria worked and around 1200 fighters joined ISIS with no other economic alternative for survival, according to local residents.\textsuperscript{79}

**Economic power and state building:**

Hard power is the combination of military and economic power, coercion and payment. In entirely different respects the terrorist group known as ISIS and the


Kurdish Regional Government have usurped economic power from the Iraqi state. Both groups have made rapid gains while the Iraqi state has collapsed:

**Autonomy:** These Armed Non-State Actors act completely autonomous from the state in terms of their own security and defense. ISIS controls large areas in both Iraq and Syria using the state’s resources to co-opt their own citizens. The group’s economic power has allowed them to remain in conflict and in some areas has forced the state to provide them with services. The Kurdish Regional Government is exercising this power through its oil sales, as it can no longer depend on the Iraqi government to allocate its fair share in the national budget. Both groups have utilized resources in their territories and created an independent economy that does not answer to the government in Baghdad.

**Networks:** Illegal and/or illicit trade is often difficult to sell and that is why in the past, smaller groups have needed states to negotiate energy deals. In the case of the Kurdish Regional Government that is no longer the case. Their oil is being sold in several areas across the Middle East and the Mediterranean with partnered states, such as Israel and Cyprus. The Islamic State has created an intricate parallel illegal trade that allows the group to use their illicit finances, as well as a taxation system that builds resemblance to a state.

**State building:** On one hand, the KRG have used the dispute and potential opportunity with the Iraqi central government in order to invest the resources in northern Iraq to the people in those areas. A weakened Iraqi state will not be
capable to coerce the KRG to submit revenue and thus we see a clear move towards an independent economy that no longer factors the central government in Baghdad. On the other hand, the Islamic State is quickly developing a rentier and tax system that will allow the group to fund and maintain its control in areas it has occupied. The major threat is that ISIS is now slowly becoming the legitimate power in many of its areas as both citizens and enemies of ISIS depend on the group for survival.
Chapter 4: Exporting Values in the 21st century

“To influence the behaviour of others in accordance with one’s own ends” and “man’s control over the minds and actions of other men” is power, that is what Joseph Nye proposed is soft power. Values and cultural traits define specific states and reflect their power in the international system allowing to attract and persuade other actors that identify with those values. Identity has always been an important part of the international political system during every era. The cold war very much polarized the world into two opposite camps; the United States and its western allies on one side and the Soviet Union and its satellites on another. The U.S and Soviet Union had different values that allowed them to influence other actors and ally itself with other states augmenting their power in the International system. States do not exercise this influence merely through military and economic strength but also through other dimensions which are less quantifiable; such as values. Joseph Nye argued as much in the 1980s, the strength of states would hinge on their ability to use both their soft and hard power to maneuver a new highly interconnected international system. It is important to note that it is the careful use of both hard and soft power that enhances the strength of any state and there are times where each type of power can be used to further a “states” interest.

In 2006, Joseph Nye clarified this further with regards to his concept of soft power, which he introduced in an article to foreign policy in 1990. This article is particularly

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important as it looks at both the limitations and the malleability of soft power, the article is also written against the backdrop of the U.S invasion in Iraq that highlighted the limits of the U.S’s hard power in Iraq. Economic power had been perpetuated as soft power particularly when the U.S looked for options on how to deal with Iran’s nuclear program but the impact of something such as sanctions cannot be considered soft when one looks at the consequences for the local populous. The United States has often used its companies, churches, foundations, civil society organizations, think tanks and universities to project their values and ideas across the globe with a great deal of success.\textsuperscript{82} However as Joseph Nye explained in his article, soft power is often difficult to use. The notion that American resources strengthen American power is not necessarily true, Coca-Cola and jeans may be widespread but they do not directly impact U.S power. Such an opinion would stem from the confusion between “resources and behaviour”.\textsuperscript{83} State governments can direct investment towards cultural exchange programs, broadcast capabilities and diplomacy that can promote but not control popular culture in other areas. The reason behind this is that soft power is most often independent of government control – universities, think tanks and civil society is filled with individuals that seek to be on the outside of formal government institutions.\textsuperscript{84}

In the final portion of the 2006 foreign policy article written by Joseph Nye he discusses the efficacy of soft power in relation to terrorism, in light of U.S policy in Iraq. The notion that the U.S can through soft power influence Al-Qaeda leadership is refuted and the larger aim should be that the United States empowers moderates to


\textsuperscript{84} Joseph ,Nye. "Think Again: Soft Power." Foreign Policy, February 23, 2006..
overcome the radical minority in the Middle East. A memo from Donald Rumsfeld in 2003 asked the question “are we capturing, killing, or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrasas and the radical clerics are recruiting, training, and deploying against us? That equation will be very hard to balance without a strategy to win hearts and minds. Soft power is more relevant than ever”. Hard power is no longer completely capable of controlling let alone projecting power across the entire international system. The situation in Iraq post the American invasion was a great example of this.

The United States failed to inspire or promote their values and as a result other values and forms of identity have gained traction. The government left behind from the United States abandoned the promises that had been made and the values the U.S touted to the local populous and within that vacuum different values became more powerful. A decline in the credibility of those values and identity being promoted causes other ideas to gain greater credibility and promote its own ideas in the vacuum available. Policies taken by the United States and the government of Iraq in the post-Iraq invasion have in tandem created an environment where moderate values have declined in the face of more radical ideas. Radical ideas create for many an alternate universe and channel people’s frustration towards a common enemy and goal.

In Iraq you can analyse how different groups have used the vacuum in order to promote their own agenda within the Iraqi state to great effect. The Kurdish Regional Government does not hold the same radical ideas as the Islamic State but the failure of U.S promises to provide democracy, strengthen rule of law and create equal rights

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across sectarian lines has pushed actors within Iraq to promote their autonomous identities and values. The KRG has its own ethnic identity that hoped would be integrated into a broader Iraqi state that allows different groups to co-exist in a tense multi-ethnic backdrop. The Islamic State on the other hand became the personification of Donald Rumsfeld’s fears as the group ramped up recruit and territory, unlike the U.S, and now other allies in the region succeeded in capturing the minds and hearts of many marginalized and disgruntled young people not only from within Iraq but across the globe.

**How has soft power aided Armed Non-State Actors in Iraq?**

*Values and culture:*  
The West has long seen the Kurds as an ethnic group with the potential to be a pro-west partner in the Middle East region. However, the overarching Kurdish problem has always been an obstacle as well as their relationship with Baghdad. The Kurds represent the largest ethnic group that is currently stateless and their secular, capitalist pro-western outlook has attracted many to their cause, particularly after the ISIS threat ensued Iraq. The KRG in Iraq has throughout the past five years steadily become a more reliable actor in Iraq that enjoys international support that is autonomous and independent from the Iraqi state. That support is linked as much with the groups military control on the ground as it is to their values that is considered attractive to many across the globe.

The Kurds as an ethnic identity are not so easy to define. In the blurred lines between Iraq and Syria they are represented by different groups that have values that do not all coincide. This has been an obstacle for decades that has thwarted the Kurds for
establishing their position in the international world and consolidating a state. It is an ethnic group that inhabits the mountainous regions across Syria, Iraq, Iran and Turkey and numbers around 30 million. The group speaks Kurdish a language similar to Farsi but unlike the Iranians, they are predominantly Muslim Sunnis.

The Kurds had sought independence since the 1920 Serves deal that stated the group should be granted an independent nation within a year in southeast Turkey and the hope that areas in Iraq and Syria would join. Attaturk’s rise alongside Turkish nationalism squashed Kurdish hopes for independence in which a fight with Turkey crushed Kurdish hopes. In Iraq, the situation was different where Kurdish autonomy was somewhat recognized but uprisings were brutally quashed, particularly 1988 when Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons. Syria on the other hand often aided the PKK (armed Kurdish group in Turkey) against the Turks but stripped Syrian Kurds from their national citizenship. In Iran, both the Shah and the 1979 revolutionary government have routinely suppressed Kurdish aspirations for independence. In 1982, former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein remarked that he was not worried about Kurdish independence because “hopelessly divided against each other”.

There has always been infighting among the different Kurdish movements across these lines that put their position of independence weaker.

Even though this scattered ethnic group has a common struggle there have been little significant attempts to encapsulate their identity and common values into statehood. The situation has changed dramatically since then and the Kurds now have an opportunity not witnessed since 1920. The latest parliamentary elections in Turkey

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held on June 7th, 2015 saw the Kurdish People’s Democratic Party (HDP) pass the 10% threshold and gain 13% of the votes and 79 seats in the Turkish parliament.\textsuperscript{87} This stopped the ruling AK party in Turkey to gain the needed absolute majority, which has not been an occurrence in recent years. This is the first time the Kurds have been able to pass the 10% threshold and could see an avenue for possible peace talks arranged with the Turkish government and the armed Kurdish PKK. This is an important step towards legitimizing their claim albeit within the context of the Turkish state.

The gains made by the Kurds in Turkey are also aided by significant gains made by the Democratic Union Party’s (PYD). The PYD is the Kurdish political party in Syria that is aided by its fighting force the YPG in the struggles against the Assad and the Islamic State. The PYD has battled Turkey for decades and while it is making gains on the territorial front in Syria its sister group in Turkey is making unprecedented electoral gains. In the battle for Kobane – the Kurds in Syria as in Iraq have proved to be the most successful and disciplined fighting force on the ground. The PYD and the YPG have also managed to capture western hearts and minds during the battle for Kobane, namely through YPG’s women fighters that have showcased the Kurds as a different culture to a typically patriarchal Middle East society.\textsuperscript{88} The YPG fighters and their democratic party’s increasing international support could ultimately translate into recognition. Looking at the overall conditions in Iraq and the surrounding region it is apparent that from 2014 to 2015 the Kurds as an ethnic group have made significant progress towards their quest for statehood and recognition.


Influencing policy-making:

In Iraq, the Peshmerga forces have also proved to be an able actor in the fight against ISIS, while the Iraq state has faltered. Whether as a result of the pro-western stance the Kurds have historically held or due to the rising threat of ISIS, the KRG/Peshmerga have been able to garner further international support. Germany was the first of many states to begin active support for the Kurds in Northern Iraq in September 2014. Germany has a long-standing position not to deal arms in active conflict zones but the threat of ISIS and the pro-western outlook of the Kurds pushed Germany to begin sending weapons. German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen stated that supporting the Kurds is in “our security interests” in order to fight a common enemy, which is ISIS. 2014 began a new chapter for the KRG whereby the group was no longer strictly bound by the Iraqi state. Indeed, the Iraqi state has come under severe criticism for its (Shiite) sectarian militias that fight ISIS and cause many in Sunni areas to support ISIS. The KRG have used their position and values to persuade western leadership to shift policy in order to support them in northern Iraq. According to the German Defence Ministry, they have supplied the Kurds with around 1,800 tons of ammunition, equipment and supplies that have gone to the Kurdish Peshmerga as of May 2015. The group has also received strong support from Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu, as well as calls from Israel’s strategic minister for the West to arm the Kurds, as well as other pro-western regimes in the face of mounting terrorist threats in the Middle East region. The support being

offered to the KRG is growing with each passing day and many of those who have shifted their policies to support the Kurds are major influencers in the international system.

The United States is heavily involved in Iraq for over a decade and through policy firmly supported a unified Iraq, which meant little to no support for the Kurds. In fact, in late 2014 James Jeffrey, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq between 2010 and 2012 stated, “The unity of Iraq is absolutely essential both for longstanding U.S. policy and for regional stability; for American credibility and predictability with other partners; and for defeating IS”. Washington is treading a thin line since there are other U.S allies, namely Turkey and the Gulf that do not want to see U.S support for the Kurds. The U.S was committed to supporting the national army and not regional militias that could ultimately sway the monopoly of power held by the Iraqi army. However, the KRG and Peshmerga on the ground are slowly readjusting realities and showcasing their credibility in the fight against ISIS. The U.S had backed the Iraqi army with $25 billion to support 109 military brigades, while they had only provided $92 million for 8 Peshmerga brigades. Today a quarter of the 109 brigades have disintegrated and many of their equipment taken up by ISIS, while the 8 Peshmerga brigades remain intact.

The present situation in Iraq is quite different from U.S rhetoric. As a result of changes on the ground and the growing threat of ISIS the United States has pushed towards supporting the Kurdish Peshmerga. Beginning in 2015 the U.S military

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trained another three brigades for the Peshmerga and spent more than $350 million equipping them for battle with ISIS. This is not a small shift; the U.S has almost quadrupled previous spending on the Peshmerga and has recently outlined a strategy to work directly with the Peshmerga forces. On October 22nd, 2015 the Pentagon announced a cooperative mission with the Kurdish Peshmerga that rescued around 70 hostages with 20 from the Iraqi military in joint operation with the Kurdish Peshmerga. This did not only signal real military cooperation among the groups but also marked the first US troops were involved in direct ground combat in Iraq since the war against the Islamic State group was launched in August 2014.94

In May 2015 a Washington visit by KRG President Massoud Barzani showed the change in tide. In the previous visit three years prior, Washington had refused to back a cross-sectarian May 2012 effort, led by Barzani, to oust Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. A scheduled 5-minute meeting this time around with President Obama extended into an hour-long strategic discussion on the situation in Iraq. The Kurds also enjoy a large support base in the U.S congress, a key tool for improving relations with the U.S, while the Pentagon has both cooperated in a mission and allocated a U.S air base in Kurdish territory to run operations. According to Michael Knights, a senior fellow at the Lafer Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, highlighted that the only obstacle for the Kurds remains the White House and the National Security Council and both are subject to change in 2017. Easing the U.S pressure in Iraq in the short-term has made strategic allies in its quest for both

autonomy and international recognition.\textsuperscript{95} The change in the U.S executive in 2017 could be the catalyst to the Kurds getting closer to the U.S relations that are not closely linked to the Baghdad government.

The situation for the KRG in Iraq and the Kurds people in a broader context has not seen fundamental changes. There has been slow and steady progress towards multilateral support within the international community, while the KRG utilise media attention and the growing crisis in Iraq to stake their claim for autonomy. Recent cooperation with the United States and growing support in Europe could translate in the future to a genuine platform for recognition and independence. The current situation in Iraq is akin to war and like the Second World War; the Kurds will be subject to how the conflicts are settled. It is important to note that with territorial gains in both Syria and Iraq, as well as a parliamentary milestone in Turkey, the Kurds are better positioned than ever before.

The Kurds in Iraq and also in Turkey and Syria have begun to sway the tide of international support. The PKK in Turkey was long considered a terrorist group by the United States – a reality that is slowly fading. The YPG in Syria who are supporters of the PKK have outlined to the West what potentially a Kurdistan in the Middle East could look like – pro-western, capitalist and cooperative with Israel. These values will aid all the Kurdish movements in Syria, Iraq and Turkey in seeking broader international support in a time of upheaval in the Middle East. It is not inconceivable that the current territorial gains in Iraq and Syria could see the divided Kurdish movements consolidate their efforts for independence in the post-conflict.

The Islamic State: Fulfilling the Al-Qaeda prophecy

Until the attack on Mosul, ISIS was considered to be a terrorist organization like its predecessors across the Middle East, like Al-Qaeda. However after overtaking Mosul in June 2014, the group proclaimed the start of an Islamic Caliphate and proclaimed group leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi as its Caliph. The idea of the Islamic Caliphate is as much instilling the group’s legitimacy as is their military, territorial and economic gains. The Caliphate refers to the political system that was developed during the Prophet Muhammad and the heyday for the Islamic Empire. The root of this ideology is a cornerstone for the group’s legitimacy and expanding power.

This is something that the international community has not understood and has led to strategic miscalculations when dealing with this threat. Major General Michael K. Nagata, the Special Operations commander for the United States in the Middle East stated that “We have not defeated the idea,” and that “We do not even understand the idea”.96 Our inabilities to understand the values and beliefs that extend the power of the group have and will continue to hamper efforts to fight the group on the ground.

The roots of this ideology can be found in Wahabism or Salafism, the more rigid interpretation of Islam that is the basis of rule in Saudi Arabia. In fact, many countries in the Arab world have followers that prescribe to this specific form of interpretation of Islam. Wahabism doctrine espoused "One leader, One authority, One mosque: submit to it, or be killed" and that has the precise outlook for ISIS on the current state

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of the Islamic world.⁹⁷ The Saudis under Abdel Aziz fought this idea to instill more power into the monarch and move towards a more conservative social, political, theological, and religious da’wa (Islamic call).⁹⁸ Wahabism was seen for a time to be a counter measure to Ba’thism, Nasserism and Socialism by Saudi Arabia and the West during the Cold War.

Unlike Al-Qaeda – the group ISIS has used the Takfiri Salafist ideology in a much more ruthless manner in order to instill fear in areas it holds and also attract people by showing themselves to be less compromising than Al-Qaeda. The Takfiri doctrine allows the group to dish out excommunication in order to “purify” Islam from apostates. The group uses codes and allusions that refer to specific traditions and texts of early Islam to garner legitimacy in Sunni Muslim areas.

As a result of this doctrine the group has continually executed “apostates” usually Muslims, and commit mass executions almost every few weeks. However, the group has exempted some groups from such treatments such as Christians who are allowed to remain in areas so long as the pay Jizya, a special tax.⁹⁹ Intertwine of Islamic scripture and domestic policy allows the group to both use ruthless power and strategic compassion with other religious groups to maintain control. At the same time it has put all Arab leaders, including Muslims who abide by western ideals and Shiites, as marked for death. The group has used early ideas from the Prophets conquest in order to legitimize slavery, crucifixion and beheadings. The link between policy and religion is how the group gains further legitimacy among followers and

also to attract potential followers that are not in the areas the group controls. In October 2014, the ISIS magazine Dabiq took up the debate of whether Yazidis are apostates and thus marked for death or merely pagans that are game for enslavement. An excerpt from the article highlights how Islamic verses and Sharia are interpreted to legitimize policy:

“Yazidi women and children [are to be] divided according to the Shariah amongst the fighters of the Islamic State who participated in the Sinjar operations [in northern Iraq] … Enslaving the families of the kuffar [infidels] and taking their women as concubines is a firmly established aspect of the Shariah that if one were to deny or mock, he would be denying or mocking the verses of the Koran and the narrations of the Prophet … and thereby apostatizing from Islam.”

Absolutism is a key area for both ISIS’s power and attraction. Al-Qaeda in the past had avoided specific issues, such as slavery or actively calling everyone apostates. The reason behind this is that Al-Qaeda had hoped to garner public sympathy and focused on issues that could rally more people, such as the removal of U.S troops from Saudi Arabia. ISIS does not tread carefully in the same manner and that is key to how they have usurped Al-Qaeda. The group is methodical in following the word of God to the book in a manner that shows no political compromise or strategic thinking. In September 2014, Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the Islamic State’s chief spokesman called for attacks on westerners across the world saying “smash his head with a rock,” poison him, run him over with a car, or “destroy his crops”.100 Even though the statements show a religious way of thinking, the rest of his speech was

riddled with legal scripture and theological discussion to legitimize these ideas to followers.

The values and identity created by the Islamic State may to many seem ruthless, backward and barbaric but the group has purposely constructed this identity to “inspire” and “unite” Sunnis in Iraq, Syria, the broader Middle East and those living abroad. Many of the arguments made throughout this paper focus on marginalized communities within the Arab world as the reason behind the group’s successes, however the group has also attracted followers in Europe and the U.S. Previous militant leaders have always attempted to attack weak states or institutions but ISIS has taken this a step further and has created a new “state” that ascribes to their values and view of the world. Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, ISIS leader has been able to fuse militant ideology with a territorial state to become a Launchpad for future expansion.101

The caliphate proposes an alternative to western society and this speaks to those who may feel alienated, worthless and without purpose. A British jihadist released a video in July of 2015, entitled as Eid greetings from the Islamic Caliphate, said of the Caliphate “You’re not living under oppression. ... You’re not living under kuffar [unbelievers]. ... We don’t need any democracy. ... All we need is shariah”. 102 A report on Women migrants to ISIS found a similar theme “estrangement from Western society and anger at perceived injustices against Muslims worldwide, together with a strong sense of religious calling and an unwavering faith in the

rectitude of the newly emerging caliphate, form the basis for why these women journey to ISIS”.103 This among many other narratives highlight the fault in viewing those who join ISIS as victims and points to broader ideological and idealistic values that push individuals to not only join but to view the idealism in ISIS’ actions. French Newspaper Le Monde highlighted that a quarter of French foreign fighters in Syria are from non-Muslim backgrounds. A survey of British Jihadis by researchers at London’s Queen Mary College pointed out that there is no link between poverty and ISIS, in fact many of the recruits held high-level university degrees.104

The groups attraction is not only concentrated to individuals. The groups values and ideas, as well as the physical establishment of a “caliphate” or state-like entity has allowed the group to garner further support in other areas. Other terrorist groups with Islamic ideological roots have also taken up a religious act of mubaya, which is the act of pledging allegiance. Nigerian group Boko Haram that controls several towns in Northeast Nigeria has become one of the largest groups to pledge fealty and allegiance to the Islamic State. The video released by Boko Haram had many of the ISIS hallmarks and contained the groups allegiance statement in French, English and Arabic.105 Egypt’s ouster of Muslim Brotherhood leader and then Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi caused widespread Islamist protests across Egypt and saw the terror group Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis that operates in Sinai to attack the state. Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis has also announced allegiance to the Islamic State becoming one of the

103 Erin Marie, Saltman, and Melanie Smith. “‘Till Martyrdom Do Us Part”.” Institute for Strategic Dialogue.
largest groups to pledge allegiance outside of Iraq and Syria.\textsuperscript{106} Somalian terror group Al-Shabab have also joined those pledging fealty and announced that they have conducted several terrorist operations at the request of the group. The group also leveraged some of its Somali fighters in a promotional video to court those fighting to Al-Shabab to join ISIS.\textsuperscript{107} The Russian caucus has also seen militant groups in Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria pledge allegiance to ISIS and their caliph.\textsuperscript{108}

The Kurdish Regional Government focused its efforts on providing a pro-western actor that is reliable in the fight on the ground against the Islamic State as a means to legitimize its position and expand its sphere of influence. It has also used these allies to improve its position and protect its own people with weapons and supplies. The West now looks at the KRG as a partner and other Kurdish movements with less skepticism than in the past. ISIS has used a similar model to spread its influence, while it may not have the western appealing ideology. The group has moved towards the Al-Qaeda model of franchising and decentralizing its leadership to spread its influence in new areas. The allegiance claim is derived from religion and the notion that the Islamic Caliph must be followed and obeyed. The religious rhetoric and the legalities derived from Sharia interpretations by the group are how the group attracts recruits and brings operating terrorist groups under its sphere of influence.

There has been much made about the use of modern forms of communication by ISIS to attract recruits and spread its ideas. This paper will not delve much into the


\textsuperscript{108} "Russia’s Caucasus Islamists ‘pledge Allegiance’ to ISIS." Al Arabiya, June 24, 2015.
intricacies of their media platform but it is important to note that information dissemination is a key instrument for any state to maintain control. Culture is often spread through communications channels and it is those ideas that are most dangerous. The groups ideas have influenced many other terrorist groups and individuals to join the group or aid the group. The use of video to appeal to Al-Shabab in Somalia is one example as is the Dabiq magazine that ISIS releases online to promote and discuss ideas within the “Islamic Caliphate”. In his 1945 essay, George Orwell discussed the notion of military and media supremacy and the idea that larger weapons and TV stations strengthen autocratic regimes, while smaller weapons strengthen the weak.109 The more readily available media communication tools have empowered weaker/smaller groups to have a voice and in the case of ISIS this can have disastrous effects. The democratization of media has in a sense empowered those who are readily prepared to destroy democracy.110 The monopoly on information is no longer centered with nation-states and now smaller groups can challenge the state in this endeavor.

The group has used this power to influence actors into taking policy decisions. The execution of Japanese journalist prompted long-standing sentiment in Japan to re-arm and become a military force once more.111 The social media element is particularly power in allowing the group to recruit foreigners, women and Muslims from other areas of the Arab world. However, the most disturbing and significant of their usage is those videos that have children as part of executions and beheadings in the Caliphate. Named the “cubs of the caliphate” these children are born to foreign fighters, born to

local fighters, abandoned children, coercively taken and those volunteering to join ISIS. These children and those living under ISIS controlled areas in the future will continue the values and beliefs of the group in which they have barely known any other alternative to. The large number of refugees and displaced persons within Iraq makes this an increasingly likely scenario and one that could empower the group even further in the future.

Values, Identity and state formation:

The state is comprised of many things, territory, economy and people. Culture and values is a hard issue to quantify but Armed Non-State Actors have amassed a lot of this in the present.

Values and power: The KRG has used their western leaning ideas to influence actors to aid the group in its struggle against a common enemy. It is inconceivable that images of Kurdish women fighters in Syria or Peshmerga aiding Yazidi minorities has not impacted western policy towards the Kurds. This cultural power has allowed the group to enhance its standing in the current Iraq and possibly bring the Kurds a step closer to an independent nation in the near future. ISIS on the other hand, chose to pose itself as an alternative to western ideals and through its ruthless doctrine has attracted like-minded individuals and groups to join its cause. ISIS may be considered a terrorist organization but the shifts it has made in territory, military prowess, economic leverage and cultural power has transcended the power of similar groups. It is not inconceivable that if the group were left to exist they could ultimately instil

their own version of the “Hermit Kingdom” that opposes western ideals and remains detached from realities in an enclosed vacuum.

**Soft power:** Media has long been the power of nation-states but its democratization has allowed individuals to disseminate their ideas and values to the world with ease. States and corporations no longer control media in the same manner and while that has had positives it has empowered smaller groups. The KRGs sacrifices and rhetoric prompted many in the western world to reconsider the western position on the Kurds, while ISIS has used the very same media to increase its following and disseminate its ideas.
Concluding remarks

The coordinated attacks in Paris on November 13th, 2015 highlighted ISIS’s ability to retaliate to international coalition airstrikes with coordinated attacks in the city capital. The attacks left 127 individuals dead and several hundred injured and pushed France to declare a state of emergency something that had not happened since the Nazi occupation left in 1944.\(^{113}\) Paris was not the only city affected on the same day, two suicide bombers in Beirut also killed around 50 individuals in a predominantly Shia area. Over a week prior to that a Russian airplane flying out of Egypt and carrying tourists was brought down leaving over 200 individuals injured.\(^ {114}\) ISIS has not only expanded its territory and influence but the expected brand of terror generally associated with terrorist groups. These attacks were targeted and have impacted policy that those have taken and could potentially take in the near future.

In the very same week the KRG was able to take control over the city of Sinjar in Iraq that was held by ISIS for 15 months.\(^{115}\) In a short frame of time we can see that the major development coming out of Iraq have come through the non-state actors within the state. Sinjar saw cooperation by U.S air strikes and Kurdish Peshmerga forces and what is now seemingly a newfound alliance in the Middle East region. The quest for statehood for both these groups may end in failure, however the most recent history and events show a trend for increased power among Armed Non-State Actors.


The two examples were purposefully chosen to be different in order to highlight how different non-state actors can amass power in the current international order. The Islamic State is a terrorist organization that has utilized a power vacuum in Iraq to fulfill the prophecies of groups like Al-Qaeda in establishing an Islamic Caliphate. The Kurds (KRG) are an ethnic group that have long sought independence and autonomy. Both groups represent marginalized and oppressed individuals in the backdrop of a weak Iraqi state. A weak Iraqi state has played a role in empowering those groups alongside a changing international order. These armed non-state actors have readily available tools that give them agency to prosper at times at the expense of nation-states.

In the vacuum of Iraq, both groups amassed military strength and used it to make territorial gains on the ground. Those gains are within the internationally recognized Iraqi state but are now governed almost entirely autonomously by both groups. Military power from a Realist perspective is monopolized by the state, while in Iraq the state seems to be the weakest actor on the ground. Economic power is also another extension of hard power and that too has been slowly contested by Armed Non-State Actors. Soft power now through media democratization is more readily available tool for ANSA that allows these groups to create allies and expand influence. The KRG has used this tool in order to leverage new allies in the war torn Iraq, while ISIS has found more followers for its own ideology in the heart of Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

Joseph Nye argued that “smart power” is the blend between soft and hard power that serves a states interests and in that respect the KRG and Islamic State have shown a
model for armed-non state actors to challenge state authority. The main question is whether these new ANSA with state-like capabilities can be considered states within the international system. Stephen Walt in an opinion piece for Foreign policy postulated the hypothetical stay of the Islamic State. He argued that international actors had not recognized many “revolutionary” states in the past; the U.S did not recognize the Soviet Union after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution but eventually shifted when they stuck around. The United States and United Kingdom built large empires on values that are not too dissimilar to the Islamic State, the Native Americans and Scottish may attest to that. However, in the same manner in which the new world has empowered them, the new international system has specific norms that the Islamic State will not adhere to and therefore will be fiercely fought. Indeed, international efforts have more or less consolidated their efforts to combat the group and Russian-American cooperation could be the start of a concerted effort to eradicate the group.

The short answer is that the Islamic State does not have the sticking power in today’s international system to remain in power. Another point from Stephen Walt maintained that the Soviet Union could impose its ideas due to the red army, while ISIS relies on only 30,000 troops. This is not a number capable of maintaining control of those areas under routine air strike and coalition attacks. The economy behind ISIS, while strong for a terrorist group, produces between $4 billion and $8 billion. This puts the group on par with Barbados, not exactly a super power capable of fighting the global community. The annual revenues of the group are around $500 million, which make up only one tenth of that of Harvard University. The terrorist group relied on surprise

\[116\] Walt, Stephen. “What Should We Do If the Islamic State Wins?” Foreign Policy.

\[117\] Walt, Stephen. “What Should We Do If the Islamic State Wins?” Foreign Policy.
and while they remain a force to contend with at the moment, it is inconceivable to see the group gain statehood and international legitimacy.

The situation for the KRG and the broader Kurdish issue is quite different. The group's economy and military power is quite comparable to ISIS, however the conclusion is quite different. This is in large part due to the increased importance of soft power in our international system. Culture and values have become an integral part of international recognition and while the military and economic gains by the Kurds have strengthened their cause, it is the identity and values they espouse that strengthen their future. Looking at the map of the Middle East today it is not inconceivable to see a Kurdistan arise, particularly with the success of the KRG in Iraq. The quest for statehood seems possible for the Kurds and the use of hard power has aided this but it is the blend of soft and hard power as Joseph Nye stated that would allow the Kurds to move from being an Armed Non-State Actor to a state.

The Islamic State will not become a state. However it has changed our perception of states and their relative power. Monopolization of hard and soft power is seemingly a thing of the past in some areas. States are under more pressure to maintain control and legitimacy. Armed Non-State Actors have evolved and while they may not be considered states, they can no longer be viewed from the Realist perspective as an exception that will be corrected by the state. Non-State Actors are no longer merely minor actors on the international stage, as evident by the situation in Iraq they can influence policies and behavior. The success or failure in building a state is inconsequential when such groups command power to rival nations in the international system.
In a highly interconnected world and with more agency for smaller actors in the system there are risks for global security. These groups do not merely impact the situation within their state but can often amount power to disrupt entire regions or command global attention. In order for the international world to manage and maintain global security it must consolidate the evolution of ANSAs in order to formulate policy to deal with rising threats. The threats posed by ISIS can be felt in several countries with recent attacks in Paris, Beirut and Cairo. The KRG on the other hand has shifted western policy not only on their own position but the entire Kurdish people. Even the PKK in Turkey have seen the U.S become more lenient towards them after KRG success in Iraq. Power in the International system is no longer completely monopolized by states and ungoverned spaces can provide a platform for armed non-state actors to challenge state authority.
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