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Doctoral Dissertation

**International Relations and Foreign Policy
in the Middle East:
PLO, Hizbullah, and KRG as Statelike Actors**

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**Διεθνείς Σχέσεις και Εξωτερική Πολιτική στη Μέση
Ανατολή: η Οργάνωση για την Απελευθέρωση της
Παλαιστίνης, η Χεζμπολλάχ και η Περιφερειακή Κυβέρνηση
του Κουρδιστάν ως Δρώντες με Οιονεί Κρατική Υπόσταση**

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*To Aya, my gardenia
and the love of my life, Giannis*

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International Relations and Foreign Policy in the Middle East: PLO, Hizbollah and KRG as Statelike Actors

Keywords: armed non-state actors, statelike actors, neoclassical realism, foreign policy, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Hizbollah, Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO)

Abstract

This thesis examines the foreign policy of statelike actors; that are entities that blur the line between state and armed non-state actors. It employs neoclassical realism, which hereto has been firmly state-centric, arguing that the approach and methodology of neoclassical realism has the explanatory power to better understand statelike actors' foreign policy on a regional level.

The thesis explores the foreign policy of three different yet similar actors; a national liberation movement, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO); an Islamist political party and an Islamic social movement, Hizbollah; and a secessionist movement, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Despite their diverse nature and aspirations, these three actors display a high level of stateness, including the ability to conduct foreign policy, without possessing international legal recognition.

Drawing from neoclassical realism, the thesis identifies specific intervening variables – the leadership's perception of the system, its strategic culture, the state-society relations and institutions—while introducing an additional variable; the notion of territoriality. In turn, the thesis explores, first, how these intervening variables interact and engage with the structural system and stimuli (independent variable) in producing foreign policy choices (Type II) and, second, whether the statelike actors' foreign policy produces structural outcomes (Type III).

The thesis demonstrates that in all foreign policy choices the leadership's perception, strategic culture and territoriality play an equally important and decisive role in the statelike actors' foreign policy choices. Conversely, foreign policy institutions have no impact. Moreover, given the monocracy of these actors, state-society relations have a medium-level impact, except when their relations are on the verge of collapse, which delegitimises the leadership, rendering the state-society relations a decisive variable. Finally, the thesis shows that statelike actors' foreign policy impacts regional dynamics but does not produce structural outcomes *per se*.

Διεθνείς Σχέσεις και Εξωτερική Πολιτική στην Μέση Ανατολή: η Οργάνωση για την Απελευθέρωση της Παλαιστίνης, η Χεζμπολλάχ και η Περιφερειακή Κυβέρνηση του Κουρδιστάν ως Δρώντες με Οιονεί Κρατική Υπόσταση

Σημαντικοί Όροι: ένοπλοι μη-κρατικοί δρώντες, δρώντες με οιονεί κρατική υπόσταση, νεοκλασικός ρεαλισμός, εξωτερική πολιτική, Χεζμπολλάχ, Περιφερειακή Κυβέρνηση του Κουρδιστάν, Οργάνωση για την Απελευθέρωση της Παλαιστίνης (ΟΑΠ)

Περίληψη

Η διατριβή εξετάζει την εξωτερική πολιτική των δρώντων με οιονεί κρατική υπόσταση – δηλαδή των οντοτήτων που κινούνται στην γκρίζα ζώνη μεταξύ κράτους και ένοπλου μη-κρατικού δρώντα. Ως θεωρητικό υπόβαθρο χρησιμοποιεί τον νεοκλασικό ρεαλισμό, ο οποίος μέχρι τώρα ήταν πρωτίστως κρατικο-κεντρικός, υποστηρίζοντας ότι η συγκεκριμένη προσέγγιση και μεθοδολογία διαθέτει επεξηγηματική ισχύ για την καλύτερη κατανόηση της εξωτερικής πολιτικής των προαναφερόμενων δρώντων σε περιφερειακό επίπεδο.

Η διατριβή διερευνά την εξωτερική πολιτική τριών διαφορετικών αλλά παρόμοιων δρώντων: ενός εθνικο-απελευθερωτικού κινήματος, την Οργάνωση για την Απελευθέρωση της Παλαιστίνης (ΟΑΠ), ενός ισλαμιστικού πολιτικού κόμματος και κοινωνικού κινήματος, τη Χεζμπολλάχ και ενός αποσχιστικού κινήματος, την Περιφερειακή Κυβέρνηση του Κουρδιστάν. Οι τρεις δρώντες –παρά τη διαφορετική φύση και στόχους τους και την απουσία διεθνούς νομικής αναγνώρισης, διαθέτουν πλήθος στοιχείων κρατικής υπόστασης– συμπεριλαμβανομένης της ικανότητας άσκησης εξωτερικής πολιτικής.

Η έρευνα, αντλώντας από τον νεοκλασικό ρεαλισμό, προσδιορίζει συγκεκριμένες παρεμβαίνουσες μεταβλητές: τον τρόπο αντίληψης του συστήματος από την ηγεσία, τη στρατηγική της κουλτούρα, τις σχέσεις κράτους-κοινωνίας και τους θεσμούς. Επιπλέον, εισάγει μια ακόμη μεταβλητή, την έννοια της εδαφικότητας. Στο συγκεκριμένο πλαίσιο διερευνά, πρώτον, πώς οι παρεμβαίνουσες μεταβλητές αλληλοεπιδρούν με το δομικό σύστημα (ανεξάρτητη μεταβλητή) κατά τον καθορισμό επιμέρους εξωτερικών πολιτικών (Τύπου II) και, δεύτερον, εάν η εξωτερική πολιτική των δρώντων με οιονεί κρατική υπόσταση παράγει αποτελέσματα σε επίπεδο συστήματος (Τύπου III).

Η διατριβή καταδεικνύει ότι σε όλες τις επιλογές εξωτερικής πολιτικής η αντίληψη της ηγεσίας, η στρατηγική κουλτούρα και η εδαφικότητα παίζουν εξίσου σημαντικό και αποφασιστικό

ρόλο στις επιλογές εξωτερικής πολιτικής των δρώντων με οιονεί κρατική υπόσταση. Αντίθετα, οι θεσμοί εξωτερικής πολιτικής αδυνατούν να παράγουν οποιοδήποτε αντίκτυπο. Επιπλέον, δεδομένης της μονοκρατορίας των δρώντων με οιονεί κρατική υπόσταση, οι σχέσεις κράτους-κοινωνίας έχουν μεσαίο αντίκτυπο σε όλες τις περιπτώσεις. Εξάιρεση αποτελούν οι σχέσεις που βρίσκονται στα πρόθυρα κατάρρευσης, γεγονός το οποίο απονομιμοποιεί την ηγεσία, καθιστώντας ως καθοριστική μεταβλητή τις σχέσεις κράτους-κοινωνίας. Τέλος, η εξωτερική πολιτική των δρώντων με οιονεί κρατική υπόσταση επηρεάζει μεν τις δυναμικές σε περιφερειακό, αλλά αδυνατεί να παράγει δομικά αποτελέσματα.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AANES	Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria [Rojava]
AHC	Palestinian Arab Higher Committee
AIPAC	American Israel Public Affairs Committee
ASALA	Liberation of Armenia
CC	Central Committee
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
DoP	Declaration of Principles
EC	Executive Committee
FLN	Algerian National Liberation Front [Front de Libération Nationale]
GUPS	General Union of Palestinian Students
ICP	Iraqi Communist Party
IDF	Israeli Defense Forces
IHC	Islamic Health Committee Association
IKF	Iraqi Kurdish Front
IMK	Islamic Movement of Kurdistan
IRGC	Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
IRL	Islamic Resistance in Lebanon [al-Muqawama al-Islamiya fi Lubnan]
IS	Islamic State [Dawlat al-Islamiya]
ISI	Islamic State of Iraq [Dawlat al-Islamiya fi Iraq]
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria [Dawlat al-Islamiya fi Iraq wa Souriya]
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party [Iraq]
KDP-I	Kurdistan Democratic Party in Iran
KDPP	Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party
KDP-S	Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria
KNA	Kurdish National Alliance
KNC	Kurdistan National Council (parliament)
KNF	Kurdistan National Front
Komal	Kurdistan Islamic Group
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq

KRM	Kurdistan Referendum Movement
LAF	Lebanese Army Forces
LF	Lebanese Front
LNМ	Lebanese National Movement
MAN	Movement of Arab Nationalists [Harakat al-Qawmiyin al-‘Arab]
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MGRK	People’s Council of West Kurdistan
MIT	Turkish National Intelligence Organisation
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NFZ	No Fly Zone
OFFA	Oil-For-Food Agreement
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territories – West Bank and Gaza Strip ¹
PASOK	Kurdish Socialist Party
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
PMF	Popular Mobilization Forces [al-Hashd al-Sha’bi]
PNA/PA	Palestinian National Authority/Palestinian Authority
PNC	Palestinian National Council
PPK	Kurdistan Workers’ Party
PSA	Production Sharing Agreements
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
PYD	Democratic Union Party [Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat]
SAMED	Palestine Martyrs Works Society
SNC	Syrian National Council
STL	Special Tribunal for Lebanon
TAL	Transitional Law for the Administration of Iraq
UNEF	United Nations Emergency Force
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

¹ Please note that the Gaza Strip is not occupied since 2005. However, after the Israeli disengagement, both Israel and Egypt have imposed an air, sea and land blockade intermittently between 2005 and 2006 and continuously since 2007 and continue to do so at the time of the writing.

UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
Wafa	Palestinian News Agency
YPG	People's Protection Unit

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A Note on Translation and Transliteration

All translations from Arabic and Greek to English are my own, unless noted otherwise.

A simplified form of Arabic transliteration has been used throughout the study, mainly referencing the transliteration style of the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES) in this regard. As such, diacritical marks have not been used, with the exception of the apostrophe to indicate the letters *ayn* and *hamza*.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Exploring statelike actors' foreign policies

Numerous scholars have debated the applicability of International Relations (IR) theories to explain states' external behaviour and foreign policy outcomes (Carr, 1981; Mearsheimer, 2001; Morgenthau, 1950; Waltz, 1979; Wendt, 1999). Despite the state-centric approach within the field of IR, many scholars have recognised the need to expand the study of IR and foreign policy on armed non-state actors (Baumann & Stengel, 2014; Buzan & Little, 2000; Hill, 2015; Stengel & Baumann, 2017). While there is a flourishing literature on what constitutes actors that blur the lines between state and armed non-state actors (Bahcheli, Bartmann, & Srebrnik, 2004; Caspersen & Stansfield, 2011; Florea, 2014; Pegg, 1998), hitherto, less attention has been given to examining their external behaviour.

To this end, the ambition of this study is to contribute: first, to the IR literature that links foreign policy with IR in relation to statelike actors and, second, to the Middle East literature by examining entities that have trappings of statehood but have not attained international legal recognition in the classical sense of a Westphalian state (Krasner, 1999). To this end, this dissertation aspires to apply neoclassical realism on three different statelike actors: namely, Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), a national liberation movement, Hizbullah, an Islamist political party and an Islamic social movement, and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), a secessionist movement. It addresses two sets of questions: the first set engages with the extent to which neoclassical realism has an explanatory power to examine statelike actors. The questions posed on this set are: What constitutes a statelike actor, and what determines its foreign policy? To what extent can their foreign policy choices impact the structural system? Can the external behaviour of an actor on a system level be better understood by incorporating the domestic intervening variable? If so, which variables determine the actor's behaviour? The second set will engage with more empirical questions, ultimately informing the first set. More specifically, it will examine – among others – the controversial policies of these statelike actors; for instance, what led Arafat to support Saddam during Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, whistle opposing states like Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and others, who are PLO's supporters? Why did Hezbollah enter the war in Syria, risking its already feeble legitimacy? Why did KRG establish foreign relations with Turkey

counterintuitively to the ‘Kurdish Cause’ or risk losing territory by holding the independence referendum in 2017?

These questions will evaluate the relevance of the dissertation’s two-fold arguments: first, that armed non-state actors are able to conduct a foreign policy, and, second, that neoclassical realism may shed light on what determines the foreign policy of armed non-state actors with statelike characteristics. This specific theoretical framework provides a reinvigorating IR approach to the Middle East by merging the unit-level relevance within the systemic-level analysis (from classical realism and neorealists, respectively) – and maintaining the structural primacy – resurfaces the structure/agency nexus. In addition, incorporating statelike actors will challenge the limits of IR beyond the fixation on great powers and the rigidity of structural limitations. The space offered by neoclassical realism exposes the latter’s explanatory power. The importance of studying these actors within an IR framework is multifaceted. Similar to states that may be categorised as great, medium or small, not all armed non-state actors have the same relevance in the international or regional system. Thus, it is essential to filter out those armed non-state actors with the capacity to act similarly to states. The conceptualisation of statelike actors will group together a number of flourishing classifications of those armed ‘non-state’ actors closer to the state in the state/non-state spectrum. The rubric of *statelike actors* provides a more inclusive categorisation in the hope that it is applied more universally to classify those armed non-state actors that impact the system and are thus ‘greater’ and more organised than other armed non-state actors. It should be noted that this flexibility is not a product of reductionism; it is required to explore the specific characteristics that differentiate statelike actors from other non-state actors. However, it specifically provides epistemological and empirical advances within the neoclassical realist approach.

Similarly, the study contributes to a better understanding of the Middle East in relation to IR theorisation from a structuralist-based approach. In this sense, the research contributes not only to Area Studies by applying the IR theory of neoclassical realism in the Middle East but also within the IR field itself, as it offers the space to restore the balance in the asymmetry between IR and Area Studies. This study contributes to the existing literature gap regarding ‘lesser states’ as opposed to great or potentially hegemonic powers. With the current empirical case studies and an elaborate application of the theory, the research will bring at least a part of the explanatory power of IR theory in general and neoclassical realism in particular in the region. This is due to the fact

that this theoretical framework can embed the Middle East's particularities in a more general foreign policy theory and IR, breaking away from exceptionalism.

1.2. Understanding Foreign Policy and International Relations

Foreign policy is defined as “the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually but not exclusively a state) in international relations” (Hill, 2015, p. 4). In this sense, an actor – which can range anywhere within the state/non-state spectrum – can conduct foreign policy; yet, the debate within the IR and foreign policy literatures revolves around which factors determine foreign policy behaviour. Are these factors located within the domestic or the structural realm, reflecting a more general debate regarding the agency/structural nexus? Within the realm of foreign policy study, two major divergent traditions have evolved within the literature. The first is the IR approach, which gives primacy to the international system and systemic-level factors in examining the threat and opportunities that shape actors’ external behaviour. These structuralist approaches, mainly realism and liberalism, tend to disregard unit-level analysis (Carlsnaes et al., 2013, pp. 298-235). This occurred as a result of the way in which IR theories are broadly understood. The actor’s behaviour is purely a result of structural dynamics rather than on a national and domestic level (Waltz, 1996, p. 54).

The most prevalent approach among Middle Eastern experts has been social constructivism (Wendt, 1999) and its variations (Carlsnaes et al., 2013, pp. 157-158). On the other side of the structure/agency nexus, many scholars focused on *Innenpolitik*. This second tradition, which follows an agency-institution approach, posits that domestic factors are primary determinants of foreign policy formation. More specifically, these approaches examine the role of foreign policy and decision-making (Holsti, 1970; Snyder et al., 2002) revolving around cognitive (Hudson, 2005, 2010; Hudson & Vore, 1995), bureaucratic (Allison, 1969; Halperin & Clapp, 2007), and perspective (Jervis, 1998) approaches.

Both traditions are limited in linking the study of foreign policy and IR. These divergent trends are also mirrored in Middle Eastern scholarship. IR theories have been tested against Middle Eastern states. The works of John Mearsheimer (1983) on conventional deterrence, Stephen Walt (1997) on alliance theory and Benjamin Miller (2002) on great power crisis behaviour, to name a few, have contributed to the IR of the Middle East. Similarly, Middle East scholars have also attempted to apply systemic-level variables to explain specific outcomes in the region; namely,

Shibley Telhami (1990) on Camp David; Ian Lustick (1997) on the absence of Middle Eastern great powers; Gerges (1994) on the superpowers in the Middle East, Michael Barnett (1993; 1995) on inter-Arab politics, Sayigh (2000), Sayigh and Shlaim (1997) on the post-Cold War implications to the region and, finally, Brown (2004) on the study of diplomacy of Middle Eastern states.

It may be argued that the Middle East literature on foreign policy is more focused on the Innenpolitik and agency-institution-based approaches rather than on the international dimension due to the notion of exceptionalism, a tendency that is not only predominant in the West but also within the region itself (Halliday, 2005, p. 14). In fact, one of the greatest contributions of the foreign policy of the Middle Eastern states “has been from the perspective of the several discrete parts (the states) rather than from that of the whole (the system)”, thus it did not provide an IR theory (Brown, 2004, p. 304). Consequently, the foreign policy literature on the Middle East is primarily based on various Innenpolitik approaches. The works of Telhami and Barnett (2002) and Owen (2002) have contributed significantly to the Middle East literature regarding the domestic variables that inform foreign policy outcomes, moving drastically away from the system-orientated analysis. Similarly, the works of Ayubi (1994), David (1991) and Mansour (2016) have focused on foreign policymaking and leadership. It is important to note that the foreign policy approach in developing countries tends to opt for an approach that examines the leadership and ideology (nationalism and religion) variables instead of institutions, bureaucracies, and legislatures in formulating foreign policy. The scholars mentioned above may be categorised under the umbrella of Innenpolitik approaches because they inform foreign policy outcomes and external behaviour via domestic variables at the expense of the systemic-level analysis.

Similarly, the study of statelike actors’ foreign policy gives primacy to the agency rather than structure and remains state-centric. The Kurdish region in Iraq, for instance, has inspired the study of statelike actor’s foreign policy and has established a trend of correlating states’ and non-state actors’ foreign policies (Avineri, 2005; Çandar, 2009; Charountaki, 2012; Dalay, 2017; Gunter, 1997a; Gunter, 2015a; Gunter, 1997b; Gürbey, Hofmann, & Seyder, 2017; Kirmanj, 2014; Mohammed & Owtram, 2014; Natali, 2010; Soguk, 2015; Voller, 2014; Zadeh & Kirmanj, 2017). Setting aside the typical de facto state literature of the Middle East that focuses on the cases of Palestine (in the post-Oslo era) (Anziska, 2018; Jung, 2004; Segal, 1989) and KRG (Charountaki, 2012; Kirmanj, 2014; Mohammed & Owtram, 2014; Soguk, 2015; Voller, 2014; Zadeh &

Kirmanj, 2017) and the attempts to compare the two in historical, state-building and foreign policy terms (Avineri, 2005; Gürbey, Hofmann, & Seyder, 2017), the literature on statelike actors' foreign policy is scarce. Recently, drawing from the Innenpolitik tradition, there have been studies that have used Allison's (1969) and Allison's and Zelikow's (1999) foreign policy models (Rational Actor Paradigm, the Organisation Behaviour Paradigm and the Governmental Politics Paradigm) on statelike actors in the Middle East (Van den Berge, 2016). This is not to say that there is no literature on statelike actors and foreign policy. For instance, part of Hill's (2015) work provides a study of foreign policy in the 21st century and attempts to engage with statelike actors' international behaviour. Nevertheless, he focuses on the foreign policy models of the states toward statelike actors, which he rubrics as *transnational actors* (TNA), rather than examining statelike actors' foreign policy behaviour. By the same token, the statelike actors' role within the international system is examined under the prism of either how to treat the statelike actors (Podder, 2013), or anatomising them (Aydinli, 2015; Baumann & Stengel, 2014; Englehart, 2016; Stengel & Baumann, 2017; Valensi, 2015; Zohar, 2016) or being as foreign policy tools of states (Kausch, 2017), shunning away from the statelike actors' agency in their international behaviour. Yeşiltaş and Kardaş (2017) focus on Kurdish armed non-state actors and, particularly, PYD/YPG, attempting to trace the foreign relations of these statelike actors towards regional and global powers. Although they did not propose a foreign policy model, Yeşiltaş and Kardaş (2017) suggest four frames as explanatory parameters, namely, organisational structure, military management, political representation power, and structural factors to indicate their relations with the local actors (Syrian Kurds), regional actors (Arabs, Turkey, and Syrian regime) and, finally, international actors (US, EU and Russia).

While the effort to examine statelike actors' foreign policy within an IR framework is still novel, perhaps due to the divergence of the international and Innenpolitik approaches, many IR theorists and Middle Eastern scholars have been prompted to produce a theoretical framework that would integrate the unit-level (primarily referring to states rather than armed non-state actors or statelike actors) in a way or another to the systemic level analysis in explaining foreign policy outcomes of states. To this end, one of the most prominent works within the Middle East literature is Hinnebusch's and Ehteshami's (2014) work "*The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*". More specifically, Hinnebusch attempts to fill the gap between the structuralist and agency-based approaches by positing that "neither view is wholly supported by the empirical evidence from the

Middle East. Rather, [...] neither state features or systemic forces alone but the interrelation between a state's specific position in systemic structures and its particular internal features determines its foreign policy behaviour" (2003, p. 121). Hinnebusch's (2003) and Ehteshami's (2014) approaches provide an insightful understanding of Middle Eastern states' foreign policy within the IR realm. Similarly, the foreign policy approaches of Korany and Dessouki (2008) examine four components of foreign policy points: domestic environment, foreign policy orientation, decision-making process and foreign policy behaviour. It is noteworthy that Korany and Dessouki (2008) approach has been characterised as a "modified 'neo-realist' approach" (Halliday, 2005, p. 26). In fact, Hinnebusch and Ehteshami (2014) and Korany and Dessouki (2008) introduce variables that are in line with the neo-classical realist approach. However, they do not follow a certain methodology of the neoclassical realist theorists (Brown, Lynn-Jones, & Miller, 1995; Christensen, 1996; Lobell, Ripsman, & Taliaferro, 2009; Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016; Rose, 1998; Schweller, 1998; Wohlforth, 1993; Zakaria, 1998). They do, however - like the neoclassical realists - attempt to adjust the shortfalls of realism and neo-realism in explaining foreign policy. Nevertheless, even though when seen under the prism of the evolving realist school of thought, Hinnebusch and Ehteshami (2014) and Korany and Dessouki (2008) works may be positioned closer to neoclassical realism (Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016) within the IR approaches, they do not provide a theoretical framework that can substantiate a comprehensive analysis of statelike actors or armed non-state actors' foreign policy. This is mainly due to the fact that structuralist approaches tend to be too rigid to apply on the Middle East Area as they tend to dismiss the particularities of the region. In this sense, neoclassical realism provides space for the particularities to be included in the explanatory scheme.

1.3. Why the Middle East?

The significance of the Middle East within the international system has been proven time and again. From the era of the 'Eastern Question' (Halliday, 1988) to the multi-layered competition between the great powers during the Cold War era, which rendered the Middle East the most penetrated region in the international system (Brown, 1984), the Western powers are involved in the Middle East more than any other region. The regional crisis that came with globalisation peaked at the end of the 20th century (Ehteshami, 2007), reaching its crescendo in the 21st century with the Arab uprisings that swept the region in 2011. The Middle East has received even more

attention after Al-Qaeda's 9/11 attacks, followed by the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. As a result, the scholarship became dominant on how to counter terrorism and armed non-state actors. At the same time, according to the data presented by Florea (2014, pp. 792-793), de facto states have emerged in the region, while they seem to retreat in the rest of the world, particularly in the post-Cold War era. It may be argued that this is due to the fact that the region, similar to other parts of the Third World, has witnessed intense conflicts and numerous wars.

Contrary to popular belief, the Middle East as a region is the third in armed conflict frequency after Africa and Latin America. Within the context of the region's colonial and post-colonial reality that has cultivated a sovereignty gap, which translates into an authority and legitimacy gap, the region has a particular inclination towards wars and conflicts. Whether this may be attributed to multiple factors from the uneven distribution of capabilities (Waltz, 1979), the quest for hegemony (Mearsheimer, 2001), legitimacy deficit during the state-building formation (Hudson, 1977), identity/territory divergence and retarded nation-building (Hinnebusch, 2003) to state-to-nation asymmetry (Miller, 2006), it has produced a number of non-state (armed) actors, with different levels of 'stateness' in the state/non-state spectrum.

Nowadays, the regional distribution of the de facto states, armed non-state actors and, by extension, statelike actors remain prevalent in the MENA region; from the ethnic and national liberation movements such as KRG in the Kurdish region of Iraq and PLO in Palestine to states within states and non-state military actors such as the People's Protection Unit (YPG) and Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria, PPK in Turkey, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine and Al-Hashd al-Shaabi (the Popular Mobilization Forces-PMF) in Iraq and the Salafi-jihadi movements such as Al Qaeda and its various branches throughout the region and the 'Islamic State' (IS) in Syria and Iraq and everything in between. Each of these actors has affected the regional system, and, despite their different ethno-religious backgrounds and diverse modes of operation, they share significant similarities vis-à-vis their statelikeness and level of statehood.

It is crucial to build on and take into account the approaches established by the regional experts because, in order to examine statelike actors' external behaviour, the regional factor is equally as influential as the international one. In this sense, one needs to take into consideration the region's *particularities*, a tendency rather prevalent within Area Studies (Binder, 1958; Gause III, 1992; Korany, 2011, 2008). Withal, these same scholars, along with others, have argued - time and again - that there is an interconnection between IR and Middle East Area Studies. The Middle

East ‘intuitively’ provide a fertile ground for theorising IR, especially in the post-Cold War era (Valbjørn, 2004). The regional Middle Eastern politics provide “an important reservoir for theorising and for contributing to broader debates in international relations” (Telhami and Barnett 2002: 22). These new arguments have come to deter how the region was conceptualised as the deathbed of structuralist IR due to the fact that the particularities of the region are not given agency and not taken into account. It is noteworthy to mention that the divergence and the disciplinary gap between the fields of IR and Area Studies originated in the 1960s and 1970s, when IR’s inclination moved away from decolonisation towards Cold War power politics, ignoring the Third World (POMEPS, 2015). Thus, it is no surprise that IR scholarship tends to find its theories less prevalent when examining the Middle East and is inclined toward a more exceptionalist understanding of the region.

This is why in our venture to apply the neoclassical realist approach to statelike actors, it is necessary to incorporate the ‘particularities’ or “regional idiosyncrasies”, as Valbjørn (2004, p. 56) of the Middle East as they affect the function of the actors that compose the region as well as the interaction between them. Nevertheless, it is important that this process of inducing the regional particularities within an IR framework must be conducted in a regulated manner rather than in a *sui generis* manner, as they are not only a concrete reality of the region but also, the international system generates them. Thus, these particularities, which may be defined as trends that stray from the norm, are not exclusive to a singular sub-system, nor does their relevance halt at the sub-system level. Instead, they belong to the international system. Ultimately connecting the study of the regional system with IR, as Thompson (1973) points out, “a mutual exchange could only benefit our current understanding of world political behaviour. [as it may offer...] [A]n equally excellent opportunity for gaining further insight through comparative analysis”(1973, p. 91).

However, the norm in examining the international system, especially from an IR structuralist-based perspective, more often than not, focuses on the nation-state, with primacy on great or potentially hegemonic powers. When these theories are applied to the external behaviour of actors in the sub-system of the Middle East, the conceptualisation usually reveals ‘anomalies’, which are interpreted as ‘particularities’, related to the very function of the modern nation-state. The nation-state in the Middle East is best explained by Miller (2006) in his work regarding the variations in the level of violence in the region. He prompted the concept of state-to-nation balance,

which he defines as the “division of the region into territorial states and the national aspirations and political identifications of the region’s peoples” (p. 666). In the Middle East, this asymmetry is vivid, given that the concept of nation-state and nationalism was alien to the political structure and culture of the region (Roussos, 2007). It is argued here that the divergence between state and nation in the Middle East shapes and defines the sub-system of the Middle East. The state-to-nation asymmetry concept (Miller, 2006, 2007, 2008; Roussos, 2007) yields abundant information on the state system's nature and the actors that comprise it, indicating that nation-states are not the only actors that define the system of the region. This asymmetry creates a vacuum that allows statelike actors to have an equally important role in the system and function with statelike characteristics (Roussos, 2007, p. 7). In order to pave a path to IR in the region, this study integrates the particularities of the system into the understanding of the foreign policy of statelike actors within the regional system. Although this study is area specific, the practice of integrating variables of the regional particularities into an IR approach is not exclusive to the Middle East. Other sub-system examples have engaged with the continuity of the international/sub-system nexus (Karaca & Yüce, 2017; Roussos, 2007). Each region has its own characteristics, histories and balance of power, which may be characterised as particularities, meaning that it reveals ‘anomalies’ related to the very function of the modern nation-state. However, these various regions are what comprise the international system. The domination of the IR field by great nation-state actors has concealed the significance of the sub-system regions in IR theory and, by extension, the role of other types of states. In sequence, despite the role of statelike actors, which in practice interact with the state actors on the ground and comprise a preoccupation to the other actors, including major international and regional powers, are not taken into serious account on the conceptual dialects in the IR scholarship.

As will be demonstrated in chapter two, the nuances of neoclassical realism lie precisely in the fact that it can systematically encompass the particularities of a region without exposing it to exceptionalism. This occurs from the very composition of neoclassical realist methodology, which introduces a more agency-based lens, opening the ‘black-boxed’ actors (intervening variables). This approach, similar to other realists, also gives primacy to the relevance of the structural system (independent variable). It presents a number of domestic and agency-based elements (intervening variable) such as the leadership’s perception of system, strategic culture, state-society relations and institutions. Withal, the dialectics between the independent variables of

the system in a given period of time and the intervening variables, which carry agency, suggest that this theoretical framework provides nuances within the realist school of thought as well as the conceptualisation of IR of the Middle East.

1.4. Structure of the dissertation

In order to test the neoclassical realist approach to statelike actors and their foreign policy, the next chapter will provide the theoretical framework of neoclassical realism as proposed by Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell (2016). The chapter will also include an elaborate definition of what constitutes a statelike actor and the importance of treating these entities like any other state. Neoclassical realism hitherto has been mainly applied to greater states and only recently been tested on smaller states; there is no precedent on how it may be applied to statelike actors. To this end, the author will illustrate the definitions and present the theoretical tools: structural stimuli, clarity of the system, leadership's perception of the system, strategic culture, state-society relations and institutions. The author introduces an additional intervening variable – territoriality – which seems to play a vital role in these entities' foreign policy. The last sections of chapter two will demonstrate the importance of the case studies and provide a detailed methodology of how the theoretical tools will be applied to each case study.

The following chapters are divided into three parts, each containing two chapters. Each part will correspond to each case study. The first chapter of each part (chapters 3, 5 and 7) will trace the main elements that render PLO, Hizbullah and KRG, respectively statelike actors, frame, detect and analyse the intervening variables and illustrate how they have gradually carved their own space within international and regional politics. The second chapter of each part (chapters 4, 6 and 8) will examine four foreign policy choices of each statelike actor, respectively, under the prism of neoclassical realism.

More specifically, Part I, Chapter 3 will demonstrate the international and regional dynamics that fostered the creation of the PLO as well as how these dynamics from 1948 until the 1970s shaped the strategic culture of PLO and its leadership's perception. It will frame what constitutes PLOs leadership, what dictates the relationship with its constituency and what are the decision-making mechanisms, diplomatic machinery and institutions. Chapter 4 will examine PLOs foreign policy was affected by the dialectics between the structural opportunities and restraints on the one hand and the intervening variables on the other: namely, the author studies

PLOs stance during the Egyptian-Israeli peace negotiations in Camp David in 1977, Arafat's unilateral declaration of independence in 1988, PLOs reaction to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and finally PLO's position on Madrid and Oslo through 1990-1993.

Part II, Chapter 5, will delve into the trajectory of the Shia community in Lebanon that prompted the inception of Hizbullah as a militia group. It will illustrate how the subsequent evolution of Hizbullah into a political party and movement rendered it a state-within-a-state within a decade. Hizbullah's internal organisation, its relationship with Iran, and US involvement in the region after 9/11, all shape Hizbullah's leadership and relationship with its constituency. After defining the intervening variables' trends, Chapter 6 examines Hizbullah's war against Israel in July 2006 and its different foreign policies during the Syrian crisis between 2011 and 2017.

Part III, Chapter 7 will trace Iraqi Kurds in international politics throughout the first half of the 20th century. The dual power centres of the Iraqi Kurdish leadership and their relationship with their constituencies are vital elements of the political organisation of KRG. Their interaction with Iraq, Turkey and Iran, as well as with the US, equally shaped the leadership's perception and, at the same time, presented a pattern in KRG's strategic culture. Finally, chapter 8 will examine KRG's foreign policy towards its neighbours, particularly Turkey. The emergence of the Islamic State triggered an unprecedented situation for the Kurds, leading to several new foreign policy practices: KRG's mediation role in Northern Syria and the Iraqi Kurdish expansion of its military apparatus. While Barzani's reluctant stance to effectively aid Syrian Kurds during the siege of Kobani and his decision to hold the independence referendum in 2017 will also be subject to scrutiny.

Finally, the last chapter will provide the findings of this dissertation. Chapter 9 will evaluate the extent to which neoclassical realism applies to statelike actors. The role of each intervening variable – leadership's perception of the system, strategic culture, state-society relations, institutions and territoriality – will be assessed. Although they cannot be measured, the author will provide an overview of the level of relevance in the foreign policy of statelike actors and their impact on the regional system.

Chapter 2: The Theoretical Framework

2.1. Bridging International Relations with Foreign Policy: Neoclassical Realism

Neoclassical realism emerged out of the external/internal nexus of the behaviour of the actors in the international system from a realist perspective and resolved some of the shortfalls of classical realism and neo-realism. Based on the works of Christensen (1996), Schweller (1998), Brown, Lynn-Jones, and Miller (1995), Zakaria (1998) and Wohlforth (1993), Rose (1998) points out that “the impact of systemic factors on a given country’s foreign policy will be indirect and more complex than neo-realists have assumed since such factors can affect policy only through intervening variables at the unit level” (1998, p. 146), while he argues that “foreign policy is primarily formed by its place in the international system and in particular by its relative material power capabilities”. To this end, Rose (1998) essentially introduced a blueprint of neoclassical realism, aiming to further advance the realist school of thought by addressing its shortfalls, particularly in the field of foreign policy. In order to do so, the neoclassical realists started considering the leaders' perceptions or other domestic factors to explain specific foreign policy outcomes. Notwithstanding, in terms of *realpolitik*, it is quite radical. The ‘malleability’ of neoclassical realists in regards to the structure/agency nexus was the attempt to open the state’s black box. In this sense, it gave a higher relevance of state agency within the international political realm, without sacrificing the structural primacy. This offered an element of agency to the actors, a rather not traditional approach within the structural-based realists’ school of thought. The very fact that neoclassical realism attempts to open the black-box of the unit from a structuralists lens is what renders it a distinct research program within the IR scholarship and a logical extension of the realist school of thought (Rathbun, 2008).

More specifically, neoclassical realism provides elements from the broader tradition of *Realpolitik*, *Innenpolitik* and some elements of the critical approach of constructivism to produce outcomes and processes of foreign policy (Sterling-Folker, 2006). The first ‘versions’ of neoclassical realism focused more on explaining anomalies. This came to be known as Type I. In an effort to evolve and ameliorate the approach, neoclassical realists consolidated a new approach (Type II) that sought to explain foreign policy. Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro (2009) introduced Type II, which provides general models of foreign policy behaviour and responses to international

outcomes. Contrary to Type I, introduced by Rose (1998) to explain foreign policy anomalies and/or deviations from structuralist approaches, Type II explains a broader range of foreign policy choices and grand strategy adjustments. Neoclassical realists argue that they are not at odds with realist understanding that actors have little foreign policy choice when confronted with clear and imminent threats, a relatively rare situation. Instead, what is more common is that “when the international environment does not present a clear and imminent threat, states often have a range of policy options to choose from, rather than a clearly optimal policy dictated by international circumstances” (Lobell, Ripsman, & Taliaferro, 2009, pp. 280 - 299). This is where the neoclassical realists develop a set of variables that stem from the *Innenpolitik*, also known as domestic unit variables, which encapsulate domestic orientated factors such as “the worldviews of leaders, the strategic cultures of the states they lead, the nature of the domestic coalitions they represent, and domestic political constraints on their ability to enact and implement various policy alternatives” (Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016, p. 29). Even though, when the range of choices of the actors is very limited, the external systemic conditions are usually more determinative, the style or timing of the actors’ response is affected by domestic unit-level variables. In this sense, Type II explains that the foreign policy choice of an actor is not solely a product of systemic stimuli but also of the state and its domestic variables. In this sense, the interaction between the systemic and domestic variables provides a Type II theory – or rather theories – of foreign policy.

Having said that, Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro (2016) put forth Type III, which attempts to examine international outcomes, given that Type II could explain foreign policy choice in a certain period of time (short-medium term) but was not able to generate an IR theory. Type III is an accumulation of the explanatory range of neoclassical realism, whose scope is to “add explanatory power to the structural realist skeleton” by integrating agency or domestic variables that *intervene* with the choices of states (Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016, p. 31).

The neoclassical realists, to remain true to the study of IR and the realist school of thought, strove to produce a research programme that would go beyond the theories of foreign policy and explain how the external behaviours of states may impact structural outcomes. As mentioned above, Type II offers insight into foreign policy and grand strategy, but from the medium to long-term, Type III can examine the more significant impact of the external behaviour of states and their foreign policy on the structural outcomes. What is of significant importance here is the element of time. When examining a policy response/choice within a particular timeframe, it is

imperative to identify whether it prescribes Type II – meaning short to medium term – or Type III – medium to long term. This implies that in some cases, the international outcome (Type III) may not be evident as a result of a certain policy examined (Type II) unless it is examined on a longer timeline. Consequently, neoclassical realism brings foreign policy back into the IR field and offers more space to the agency of the state in the IR scholarship.

Today, neoclassical realism (Lobell, Ripsman, & Taliaferro, 2009; Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016; 2000, 2004) has expanded into an approach that can provide fertile research ground that “explain[s] political phenomena ranging from short-term crisis decision-making, foreign policy behaviour, and patterns of grand strategic adjustment of individual states, to systemic outcomes, and ultimately to the evolution of the structure of the international system itself” (Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016, p. 14).

There is no contention among realists, including the neoclassical realists, that the external behaviour of an actor is “shaped first and foremost by its power and position in the international system and, specifically, by its relative share of material capabilities” (Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016, p. 56). However, neoclassical realists include domestic unit variables. Largely based on Van Evera’s (1997) work, neoclassical realists identify three variables overall: the independent variables, which lay within the international or regional system level; the intervening variables, which lay within the domestic level and, the dependent variables, which is the foreign policy outcome. In other words, neoclassical realists engage with all three levels of analysis, namely, first-image (domestic), second-image (actor) and third-image (system).

Contrary to the traditional realist school of thought, which maintain that the actor is solely directed and constrained by the structural system, the neoclassical realists maintain that the policy choice of actors is not exclusively attributed to the international environment. This results from a long tradition within IR and structuralist approaches that consider the unit (actor) a black box. In fact, neorealists have black boxed the state much more than the classical realists, stating that “states [as we know them] are not and have never been the only international actors. [...] In defining a system's structure, one chooses one or some of the infinitely many objects comprising the system and defines its structure in terms of them” (Waltz, 1979, p. 93). As Hobson (2000) has noted, within the structural approach, the ‘state’s’ agency is relatively low in international relations as opposed to its relevance within the domestic realm (p. 17). approaches. Neoclassical realists propose that although the nature of systemic stimuli (international/regional level) has causal

importance and primacy, this independent variable should be combined with domestic political factors that affect the intervening processes of perception and decision-making.

Neoclassical realists claim that the domestic variables (intervening variables) act as “transmission belt that channel, mediate and (re)direct” pressures from the system, thus affecting foreign policy outcomes (Schweller, 2004, p. 164). In this sense, the additional value of neoclassical realism lies in its approach to explaining the essential elements of foreign policy and external behaviour, such as the “varied motives of states, and the motives of their constituent components” (Telbami, 2002, p. 170) and translating or filtering the systemic pressure through intervening variables on the unit level (Lobell, Ripsman, & Taliaferro, 2009; Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016; Sterling-Folker, 2004). This filter, which functions as a “transmitter belt” (Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016) or a “third image reversed”, because it combines “the standard three levels-of-analysis, neoclassical realism allows one to consider what factors are most relevant and how they are interacting to produce behaviours, outcomes, and political trajectories” (Sterling-Folker, 2004, p. 19). According to the three levels of analysis, the first image (domestic) focuses on the groups, society, social beliefs and practices as sources that shape and define the foreign policy of an actor (Byman & Pollack, 2001; Mercer, 1995; Wohlforth, 1993). The second image (state) focuses on how foreign policy is primarily shaped by the actors' organisations and structures, including state institutions, political parties and interest groups (Christensen, 1996; Schweller, 1998; Snyder, 1991; Zakaria, 1998). Finally, the third image (system), which is the bedrock of neorealists analysis, which bases the understanding of the external behaviour of the actor solely of its position within the system. In this sense, neoclassical realists are considered to examine the external behaviour in a more holistic way because they incorporate all the images; thus, the third image in reverse, as it cuts across all three levels while maintaining the primacy of the third image (system level). More specifically, Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell (2016) categorise trends within the first image and second image under four variables, namely, leadership's perceptions of the system, strategic culture, state-society relations and domestic institutional arrangements, stipulate the effect they may have on how the actor processes and responses to systemic pressure.

The very study of statelike actors within an IR framework will fill the hole in the realist and structuralist approach in IR with respect to the agency. Neoclassical realism provides an epistemological balance between agency and structure. Despite giving primacy to the structure, it

introduces within its methodology agency-based variable by opening the ‘black-boxed’ actors (intervening variables) so as to examine the dependent variables – the foreign policy. It defines the structural system as the independent variable while the intervening variables stem from domestic/agency and unit levels. The dialectics between the independent variables of the system in a given period of time and the intervening variables, which carry agency, suggest that this theoretical framework provides nuances within the realist school of thought.

Nevertheless, realists have frowned upon the incorporation of unit-level variables and the lack of producing a grand theory. For instance, Stephen M. Walt, have noted some shortfalls of neoclassical realists regarding the ad hoc manner of incorporating the domestic variables (2002, p. 211). Similarly, Shiping Tang points out that neoclassical realists “do not share an integrative framework for analysing the process through which states formulate and implement policies”, instead, he correctly adds that “each author develops his/her own explanatory framework without to build upon each other's work” (2009, p. 800). This vast gamma of different methodologies within the neoclassical realist approach is perhaps the reason why many accuse is of lacking theoretical structure and thus epistemologically degenerative (Legro & Moravcsik, 1999). In fact, Kevin Narizny (2017), perhaps the harshest critic of neoclassical realism, accused the recent scholars of neoclassical realists – such as Schweller, Taliaferro, Lobel and Ripsman – of straying too far away from Gideon Rose (1998) and not being consistent with the realist paradigm, implicitly accusing them of implementing the domestic variables the wrong way and of having incorrect interpretations (2017, p. 156).²

Having said that, neoclassical realism has been applied largely to great powers, a rather prevalent tendency within the realist school of thought of IR. Even within the Middle East, neoclassical realism in applied to ‘greater’ states such as Iran (Juneau, 2015). The question that arises at this point is whether a similar approach as proposed by Hinnebusch and Ehteshami (2014) and Korany and Dessouki (2008) that link foreign policy and international relations can be used beyond the state-system to explain the foreign policy of statelike actors; such as the PLO, Hezbollah and KRG, within an IR approach. And more importantly, can that be done in a manner where a foreign policy model can be produced to explain the foreign policy on statelike actors as

² Interestingly, some neoclassical realists have engaged extensively with Kevin Narizny’s criticism. For more see the correspondence him and Davide Fiammenghi, Jeffrey Taliaferro, Steven W Lobell, and Norrin E Ripsman amongst others (Fiammenghi et al., 2018).

actors within the regional system, and, by extension, the international politics? While these intervening variables are quite explicit when it comes to examining states which are internationally recognized – whether great or small states, when examining the relevance of armed non-state actors and as subjects of analysing neoclassical realism, it is required to delve deeper into how these variables are framed. This is not to suggest that statelike actors require a different analytical focus. However, in order to substantiate that statelike actors fulfil the requirements to be analysed like any other actor in the international system, a process of defining, framing and detecting elements must be undertaken.

2.2. Conceptualising statelike actors

Any entity, beyond an internationally legal recognised Westphalian state as established in the 17th century, that operates outside state control, with a political organisation and capable of violence to operationalise objectives has been considered some sort of armed non-state actor.³ Within the state/non-state spectrum, the statelike is close to the former than the latter. The current thesis does not intend to provide a theorisation of statelike actors—as it is beyond the scope of the research. However, a conceptualisation is necessary in order to be able to examine the behaviour of these units and their interaction and interplay with the regional system. The selection of the term statelike actor in the current study is due to the fact that it more inclusive to a larger variety of armed non-state actors that lean closer to the state/non-state spectrum. Most importantly, the term statelike actor allows us to overcome the fixation on the *de jure* recognition that exists within the *de facto* states' literature. In fact, statelike actors do not necessarily have to have an ambition for statehood, nor do they have to have a conscious pursuit to claim or to aspire independence like a *de facto* state (Florea, 2014), an unrecognized state (Caspersen, 2013) or a secessionist movement (Coggins, 2011), whose ultimate goal—by definition—is independence and international legal recognition. This explains the mainstream and classical IR scholarship's preference of *de facto* states over other types of statelike actors. A clear example of why state-building is not always a conscious process, nor does it necessarily need to have a statist ambition or intention for statehood, may be found in the work of Sayigh (1997b). In the process of tracing the evolution of PLO during

³ For more on the discussion on the concept of state in IR see Chen (2001); Jackson (1990); Stirk (2005, 2015)

the late 1960s and early 1970s, he points-out that state-building can occur without there being a conscious or consistent motivation for statehood or statist (1997b, p. 217). Thus, the characteristic of statist ambition is not a decisive factor or element for a statelike actor. Similarly, Lemke (2008) points out that APE's independence can refer to either its autonomous organisation, its perception of being independent or simply being recognised via agreements or treaties by singular states. But even more importantly, to counter the significance of claiming statehood, a once de facto state or an unrecognized state may at some point become a state within a state or perhaps a 'black spot' (Caspersen, 2013, p. 12), which deems the conscious intention of statehood a secondary goal of how an statelike actor functions. Even if an statelike actor has intention to pursue a legal international recognition, the "nonrecognition does not condemn an entity to death or oblivion" (Krasner, 1999, p. 70). Omitting the criteria of claiming international legal recognition from conceptualising a statelike actor, automatically prohibits us from using the terms that has been closely associated with it and, at the same time, it allows us to include cases such as states within states.

To delve into the conceptualisation of statelike actor's and given that these actors are arguably much closer to states than non-state, this thesis will put forth and combine the criteria of Max Weber (1978) and Stephen Krasner (1999) to substantiate certain required criteria and offer a definition of statelike actor's. In line with the realist tradition in regard to the state, Weber's and Krasner's understanding of the state is popular among scholars and, particularly, among political realists (Carr, 1981; Gilpin, 1981; Morgenthau, 1950; Waltz, 1979). The concept of statelike actor, similar to the concept of the state as defined by Weber, which only fully developed in the 20th century, is best defined "in terms which are abstract from the values of the present day since they are particularly subject to change" (1978, p. 56).

The statelike actor definition maintains the essential criteria of Weber in order to indicate a high degree of 'stateness', which regards institutionalised rule structure with the ability to rule authoritatively, the administrative and legal order, implement central decisions for a collectivity and, finally, the claim of the monopoly legitimate use of physical force within a given territory and, more importantly, the ability to use violence. It is those non-state actors that have developed an advanced political, organisational body and an armed branch that stimulates certain aspects of sovereignty that makes them more similar to the Westphalian state. In extension to Weber's (1978) work, Charles Tilly (1990) rationale links state-building and state-making with war-making and

highlights the importance of the ability to use violence as the monopolisation of the coercive means.

By the same token, the notion of territoriality is an essential feature. Lemke gives primacy to the non-state actors with control over a territory and their capacity to claim territory that is respected and/or defended by others stakeholders (Lemke, 2008, p. 779). Charles Tilly also emphasises the importance of the actors' trait to claim and control a certain territory as a state has "relatively centralized, differentiated organisations the officials of which more or less successfully claim control over the chief concentrated means of violence within a population inhabiting a large, contiguous territory" (Tilly, 1985, p. 170). The ongoing mobility of borders produced numerous entities that are not the classical recognised sovereign states due to their inability to consolidate power over a defined piece of territory. As a result, many scholars attempted to define actors that are not officially recognised as states by taxonomising them in relation to the territory they control (Kingston & Spears, 2004, p. 15). Thus, the hypostasis of entities, and, by extension, their level of 'stateness', depends on their ability to control a particular territory. Nevertheless, as we will examine in the case of the PLO in Lebanon, the notion of territoriality must be examined in a more nuanced understanding given that the violence over territory occurs "in spatial orbits that are both smaller and larger than the nation-state, at times cross-cutting countries and regions to create new networks of obligation and reciprocity that can only be understood when the spatial correlates of their action and allegiance are spelled out" (Davis, 2009, p. 242). In this sense, it is important that statelike actors have direct control over a specific territory regardless of whether it is the territory they seek to attain control over or use a specific territory to operate in order to gain or regain control over another territory. In a way, it is similar to the notions of *de facto* states or, as Stanislawski (2008) referred to them, 'almost-states' as opposed to quasi-states (Jackson, 1990) or 'as-if-states', which have a *de jure* recognition and are "full-fledged actors on the international scene, but cannot perform the basic functions of a state such as controlling their territory or holding a monopoly on the use of force in their area" (Stanislawski, 2008, p. 317). By the same token, statelike actors do not only have sufficient control over a territory but also of a certain population, where they can mobilise resources.

In fact, the aforementioned elements of political organisation and territory can be translated in the degree and form of sovereignty. Sovereignty is shared between states and non-state actors—particularly, armed non-states—that occupy competing spheres of authority (Krasner, 1999). The

notion of sovereignty is a key characteristic in order to understand statelike actors' position in the state/non-state spectrum. The four types of sovereignty, as classified by Krasner's (1999) will assist in better defining the statelike actor as sovereignty may help identify what actors are considered statelike among the actors that are germane to international politics due to their statelike characteristics as opposed to those actors that are inconsequential to international politics. While statelike actors are deprived of international legal and Westphalian sovereignty, their domestic sovereignty and interdependence sovereignty render them relevant to international politics. In Krasner's own words, "the organisation of authority within a state and the level of control enjoyed by the state are not necessarily related to international legal or Westphalian sovereignty" (Krasner, 1999, p. 12). This implies that domestic and interdependence sovereignty may suffice to establish dominion within a system. More specifically, domestic sovereignty refers to the actors' ability to command the formal "organisation of public [and political] authority within a state and to the level of effective control exercised by those holding authority" (Krasner, 1999, p. 9). However, what renders an actor even more relevant to international politics is its interdependence sovereignty, which refers to the ability of public authorities to control transborder movements as the state's inability to regulate and control "what passes across its borders, it will not be able to control what happens within them" (Krasner, 1999, p. 13). Finally, an important element of statelike actors is their ability to exert foreign relations, which requires their acknowledgement of the existing order. In terms of Realpolitik, an actor acknowledges the existing order by having power-seeking and capability-maximizing tendencies within the system. Statelike actors have an external behaviour and have the ability to execute foreign policy. This can be traced through their interactions and communication with other entities; such as states, other armed non-state actors and even regional and/or international organisations (whether that is in an official capacity or not). Despite the fact that statelike actors do not necessarily have a conscious statist ambition, their interaction within the international political realm renders them part of the system and are arguably equally substantial units as the 'Westphalian' states. Consequently, statelike actors have come to carve their own space within the scholarship given that these "non-state actors with control over a territory need to be treated as a distinct category of sovereign actor, more akin to other nonstate systems that have always coexisted and competed with the nation-state" (Mampilly, 2012, pp. 43-44). This coexistence and competition between armed non-state actors and states are more often than not seen in the Middle East, Central Asia, Caucasus and Africa, where Westphalian states'

foundations are unstable and state structures have not been able to dominate nor hold portions of its territory and the populations.

The term statelike actor can incorporate many armed non-state actors but not all. Contrary to the state, there is no universal definition for an armed non-state actor (Bellal, 2020). Nonetheless, in general terms, the minimum criteria that render an actor an armed non-state actor, as Krause and Milliken (2009) posit, are “a minimal degree of cohesiveness as an organisation (to be distinguished as an entity and to have a name, to have some kind of leadership)” (2009, p. 203) as well as the capacity to exert violence. As a result, the various rubrics used to identify such actors— either non-state armed actors, violent non-state actors or military non-state actors—are usually dependent on a specific theoretical framework to satisfy various disciplines and approaches brought to bear by different authors. Furthermore, as these armed non-state actors evolve, not only in terms of organisation but also in terms of time (meaning longevity) and space (territoriality), the rubrics evolve. For example, what was once an armed non-state actor, later it may evolve into a separatist state. In this sense, based on their objectives and internal organisations, the taxinomisation of armed non-states actors vary from shadow-states (Reno, 2000), black-spots (Stanislawski, 2008), insurgents (McColl, 1969), terrorists (Sheffer, 2005) to separatist states (Lynch, 2004), states-within-states (Kingston & Spears, 2004) unrecognized state (Caspersen, 2013; Caspersen & Stansfield, 2011; Coggins, 2011; Kolstø, 2006), de facto states (Bahcheli, Bartmann, & Srebrnik, 2004; Florea, 2014; Pegg, 1998). Nevertheless, a de facto state or an unrecognized state is not necessarily a state-within-state. They are, however, statelike actors. In other words, the term statelike actor aims to incorporate various entities with a high level of ‘stateness’ regardless of whether they seek international legal recognition. In the spectrum of actors between non-state actors, on the one end, and Westphalian states, on the other, it may be argued that these actors are positioned somewhere between the middle and towards the state end of the state/non-state spectrum. Nevertheless, this must be a cautious procedure. Given that the term non-state actor is usually used to describe actors that are also categorised as warlords, militias, paramilitary forces, insurgencies, terrorist organisations, criminal organisations and youth gangs (Williams, 2008), it is quite hazardous lumping all the armed non-state actors is one and only rubric. The coding of statelike actors lies in the state-like characteristics of these armed non-state actors. These characteristics are exposed in their internal composition – institutions, territory,

sovereignty, mobilisation and political organisation – as well as in their external behaviour – foreign policy.

While armed non-state actors are treated as *sui generis*—implicitly or explicitly conceptualised as anomalies of the international system, some armed non-state actors bear more state characteristics than others. In turn, the tendency within the IR scholarship gives primacy to the Westphalian state; the statelike actors that have been central to the IR literature are either quasi-states or de facto states. Nevertheless, in practice, statelike actors are closer to de facto states rather than quasi-states as the latter enjoys international legal recognition but lacks internal sovereignty. De facto states, on the other hand, display trappings of statehood without international legal recognition. They exhibit internal and domestic characteristics of state-building and also form external relations with other actors be it states or non-states. More specifically, the IR literature has focused on those statelike actors that display four broad aspects that reflect its statelike features, namely, sovereignty, political organisation, which is closely linked to state-making, territoriality, and the process of international legal recognition. The way in which an actor engages with these four notions overall determines the level of ‘stateness’ and, by extension, the position within the state/nonstate spectrum. For instance, unrecognised states are closer to the state in the state/nonstate spectrum vis-à-vis other de facto states such as states-within-states. That is due to the fact that although states-within-states impose effective control over a territory with organisational and institutional processes (Kingston & Spears, 2004, p. 16), they lack the intention for international legal recognition.

Initially, with the end of the Cold War, there has been a systematic pre-occupation in academia via-a-vis the armed non-state actors—be they religious-orientated armed non-state actors (Mendelsohn 2005) or ethnic-orientated armed non-state actors (Mishali-Ram 2009), or liberation movements (Lemke, 2008, 2011) in an effort to establish a coding for the actors beyond the sovereign recognised states. To this end, a large range within IR literature (Bahcheli, Bartmann, & Srebrnik, 2004; Caspersen, 2013; Caspersen & Stansfield, 2011; Kingston & Spears, 2004; Lynch, 2004; Pegg, 1998) tends to focus on and describe the internal composition of a vast array of statelike actors. It is noted that even scholars such as Roeder (2007) and Florea (2014), which focus on the de facto independence, tend to also emphasise on the internal their political institution and organisation. This is because these features inform us on the level of sovereignty, the notion of territoriality and the process of recognition or the non-recognition which in turn, informs us on

the level of stateness. Similarly, Kolosov and O'Loughlin (1998) and Dahlman (2002) use the term 'pseudo-states', Chorev (2007) 'semi-states' and Geldenhuys (2009) refers to entities such as Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno Karabagh, Kosovo, Somaliland, Taiwan, Western Sahrah among other as 'non-recognized' and/or 'contested' (2009, p. 26). These numerous rubrics' scope is to identify the distinct sovereignty of these entities, which certainly expose internal sovereignty and even a level of external sovereignty. What is more, the prefix or suffix of 'state' refers to the combination of territorial space, the monopoly on violence and political authority. Thus, this study to incorporate various of these rubrics chose to identify these actors as statelike. It should be noted that although to some extent the conceptualisation of statelike may be applied to multinational corporations, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) International Organisations, regional organisations and so forth, this study focuses on those actors that have a structural political authority, over a constituency within specific territory claiming the monopoly on violence, who seek to contest the established authority over its people– e.g., PLO from Israeli occupation or Jordan, Hizbullah from Lebanon, KRG from Iraq .

Another trend that has been considered important within the IR scholarship is the armed non-state actor/security nexus. This is mainly due to the fact that some of these actors have managed to gravely challenge the international community's monopoly on violence (Krause & Milliken, 2009). In this sense, there is a scholarship that addressed the external behaviour of statelike actors and their war-making aspect as they impact warfare and are increasingly involved in violent conflicts; armed non-state actors have attracted much attention in the previous decades. The security and conflict studies have focused on the violent and military aspects of armed non-state actors (Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007; Sarkees, Wayman, & Singer, 2003; Van Creveld, 1991; Weinstein, 2005).

In a rather dispersed manner, many authors have described the tendencies of armed non-state actors that mimic or attempt to perform similar to the behaviour of a state as 'statelike'. Principally, the 'statelikeness' of an armed non-state actor is attributed to the actor that is in a phase of state-building. Only when the notions of sovereignty, territoriality, de facto independence and, finally, the actors' stance regarding recognition are fully and bluntly revealed, the scholars are then able to categorise them under a certain type of statelike actor; such as, secessionist, state within a state, unrecognised state and so forth. Hitherto, the very term statelike actor has not been coined to rubric a particular armed non-state actor. Yet, it has been inspired by Sayigh (1997b)

work, who examines the establishment and evolution of the Palestine Liberation Movement (PLO) from 1949 to 1993, although he uses the term as a description 'state-like' only twice (Sayigh, 1997b, pp. 95, 666) . Most literature regarding the PLO refer to the unrecognised state of Palestine or the de facto state of Palestine commencing from 1993. However, Sayigh's (1997b) historical account of the Palestinian movement provides a blueprint of how a movement can develop into an statelike actor; he illustrates the different aspects that rendered PLO a de facto state even prior to the Oslo Agreements in 1993-1995. While Sayigh (1997b) did not intend to offer a theoretical framework of statelike actor's or armed non-state actors for that matter, Sayigh's work provided an alternative analysis of PLO within a regional and international context, demonstrating and indicating precisely the characteristics that allows a movement or an armed non-state actor to develop and evolve into an statelike actor. Sayigh's (1997b) traces a number of state-building characteristics of PLO. He engages with the notion of imagined community, the internal composition, the development of a political body, the military and financial recourses and the capacity of exercising foreign policy, which allowed the PLO – an armed non-state actor - to attain state-like practices. Other empirical examples that although they lack the theoretical bedrock to develop a theorisation of statelike actor, they are prominent. A case in point is the work of Lemke (2008), who has introduced the notion that some armed non-state actors—which he rubric's as Autonomous Political Entities (APE)—are more state-like referencing such actors in South America (Lemke, 2008) and in Africa (Lemke, 2011).

By the same token, the current study does not intend to provide a theorisation of statelike actors—as it is beyond the scope of the research. However, a conceptualisation is necessary in order to be able to examine the behaviour of these units and their interaction and interplay with the regional system. The selection of the term statelike actor in the current study is due to the fact that it more inclusive to a larger variety of armed non-state actors that lean closer to the state/non-state spectrum. Most importantly, the term statelike actor allows us to overcome the fixation on the *de jure* recognition that exists within the de facto states' literature. In fact, statelike actor's do not necessarily have to have an ambition for statehood nor do they have to have a conscious pursuit to claim or to aspire independence like a de facto state (Florea, 2014), a unrecognized state (Caspersen, 2013) or a secessionist movement (Coggins, 2011), whose ultimate goal—by definition—is independence and international legal recognition. This explains the mainstream and classical IR scholarship's preference of de facto states over other types of statelike actors. A clear

example of why state-building is not always a conscious process nor does it necessarily need to have a statist ambition or intention for statehood may be found in the work of Sayigh (1997b). In the process of tracing the evolution of PLO, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, he points-out that state-building can occur without there being a conscious or consistent motivation for statehood or statist (1997b, p. 217). Thus, the characteristic of statist ambition is not a decisive factor or element for a statelike actor. Similarly, Lemke (2008) points out that APE's independence can refer to either its autonomous organisation, its perception of being independent or simply by being recognised via agreements or treaties by singular states. But even more importantly, to counter the significance of claiming statehood, a once de facto state or an unrecognized state may at some point become a state within a state, or perhaps a 'black spot' (Caspersen, 2013, p. 12), which deems the conscious intention of statehood a secondary goal of how an statelike actor functions. Even if an statelike actor has intention to pursue a legal international recognition, the "nonrecognition does not condemn an entity to death or oblivion" (Krasner, 1999, p. 70). Omitting the criteria of claiming international legal recognition from conceptualising a statelike actor, automatically prohibits us from using the terms that has been closely associated with it and, at the same time, it allows us to include cases such as states within states.

The neoclassical realist theory incorporates the domestic and unit level analysis into the understanding of international politics from a structural realist approach is nuance. This process of opening the black-box of the unit allows us to examine the neoclassical realists approach on statelike actors. In fact, empirically, this approach has been tested up-to-date solely on great powers, a rather prevalent tendency within the IR scholarship and, particularly, within the realist school of thought. Having said that, the proponents of neoclassical realism argue that it may also be applied to "lesser states" (Lobell, Ripsman, & Taliaferro, 2009, p. 4). Due to the incorporation of unit-level variable, it provides abundant space to examine a plethora of actors; be it international corporations, unrecognized states, states with limited statehood, non-state actors or even more contemporary entities that blur the lines between state and non-state actors. As Florea (2014) put it "[f]rom spaces controlled by separatist rebels or antiregime militias to areas of limited statehood where the writ of governments is tenuous at best, the international system displays a complex architecture of fragmented authority" (p. 669). More specifically, given that "realist logic can be applied to other kinds of anarchic systems. [as...] it is the absence of central authority, not any special characteristics of [recognized] states, that causes them to compete for power"

(Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 414) and for their survival (Waltz, 1979, p. 121), this study proposes that statelike actors may be examined within the theoretical framework of neoclassical realism.

2.3. The Relevance of the Case Studies

Within the literature, PLO, Hezbollah and KRG have been subjected to various categorizations from a national liberation movement, a state-within-a-state to a de facto state, respectively. While abundant research has been conducted on PLO, Hezbollah and KRG, they are more often than not seen armed as non-state actors in different contexts among the broader IR scholarship. However, in all but name, these actors' practices and structural characteristics are usually associated with that of a state actor, bringing them closer to the state end of the state/non-state spectrum.

This reality has driven some Middle Eastern scholars – in contrast to IR scholars - to implicitly or explicitly deal with these actors as statelike. Yazid Sayigh (1997b) in almost all his works, overtly treats PLO as statelike (even before PLO was officially recognised as the sole representative of the Palestinian people); by the same token, KRG has been treated as a quasi-state (Natali, 2010; Voller, 2014). Notably, Hezbollah, which may seem the odd one out, has had similar acknowledgement of statelike elements, despite the dominant literature regarding it as a mere proxy of Iran (Friedman, 2018; Hoenig, 2014; Levitt, 2014; Norton, 2014). A smaller number, mainly, constructivist scholars such as Mansour (2017a) and Valensi (2015) have characterized Hezbollah, not a “normal” non-state actor, statelike or a state within a state (Kindt, 2009). Yet again, it may be argued that each of the aforementioned cases have been dealt as *sui generis* with a lens of exceptionalism.

In fact, although PLO and KRG have been compared as actors that claim for international recognition (Avineri, 2005; Gürbey, Hofmann, & Seyder, 2017), PLO is examined as such after returning from exile 1995. On the contrary, this study will examine PLO's external behaviour from 1978 until the Oslo Agreement 1993, which at the time was not viewed nor considered a de facto state. Thus, the examination of PLO as a statelike actor, much like encapsulated in the works of Yazid Sayigh (Sayigh, 1989, 1997b; Sayigh & Shlaim, 1997), further challenges which armed non-state actors may be statelike. On the other side of the spectrum, KRG—more like a de facto state—offers a more accessible case study for the research project. KRG emerged as a de facto state more clearly prevail after the US invasion in 2003. The statelike attributes became more pronounced, given its contextuality regarding its ethnic Kurdish element, but also its distinct

organisational function and autonomy, albeit limited, are consolidated in Iraq's constitution. Finally, Hezbollah was tenaciously selected for this study precisely because, in contrast to PLO and KRG, it does not seek recognition for statehood. This is to substantiate that statelike actors are not solely the actors that pursue the international legal recognition of statehood. Instead, it is their very function as a state. Noticeably, the case of Hezbollah differs from the other two case studies, not only because it does not aspire statehood but also because the backbone of its inception was neither national nor ethnic but rather religious/sectarian and party oriented. This automatic consideration of Hezbollah as being part of another genre of actors will further substantiate the statelike argument and their relevance in IR.

The relevance of these case studies lies both in the stark differences between the three actors and their similarities, which are expressed in the common denominators that display sovereignty aspects - territory, population and authority – rendering them apt examples of statelike actors. In fact, their longevity is also relevant. This is why actors such as the Islamic State (IS) may not be included in the study. Beyond their ability to exert foreign relations, all three actors have a concrete organized political authority, a constituency, institutions, claim monopoly on violence, distinct territorial features, resourcefulness to mobilise and their acknowledgement and recognition of the existing order. These features can inform the theoretical framework of neoclassical realism. In other words, the political authority and the practices of the leadership can illustrate a pattern in the strategic culture and perception, the relationship with the constituency, and the institutions.

2.4. Methodology

The main theoretical tools of this study will focus on the four broad categories of intervening variables – leadership's perception of the system, strategic culture, state-society relations and institutions as well as the notion of territoriality. These variables will allow statelike actors – that are known to be a product of particularities – more suitable subjects for a greater theory analysis. The four clusters proposed by neoclassical realists align with the efforts of Middle Eastern studies scholars such as Hinnebusch and Ehteshami (2014) and Korany (2008), who introduce analogous variables to incorporate the particularities of the region and the dynamics that define the leaders' perception on a domestic and international level. More specifically, although Hinnebusch and Ehteshami (2014) differentiate between foreign policy determinants, foreign policy making and foreign policy behaviour, the variables that shape them cut through the three levels of analysis. By

the same token, Korany (2008) introduces a fourfold scheme – in order to systemically categorise the variables that shape the foreign policy; namely, domestic environment, foreign policy orientation, decision-making process, and foreign policy behaviour – which stems from all three levels of analysis. While the variables used by the aforementioned scholars to indicate the relevance of the first and second image are significant in understanding the foreign policy of actors, the approach of neoclassical realism offers a more methodical and systematic IR framework to examine the external behaviour. To a certain extent, the intervening variables will include both the many of the aforementioned particularities of the region and also open the black-boxed actor, offering more insight of external behaviour within the IR scholarship. Neoclassical realism’s intervening variables – the leader’s perception of the system, its strategic culture, state-society relations and institutions – along with the variable of territory will inform the study of the level of stateness of the empirical case studies but also on the degree of which they impact foreign policy behaviour.

The leadership’s perception of system is assumed to be the most important variable primarily due to the fact that it indicates what are the opportunities and constraints of the system on which the actor will act. However, the structural system is – more often than not – is vague or blur during a shift of either international or regional dynamic academic exercise. In other words, to what degree can the leadership identify the opportunities, information, signals and constraints presented by the system at any given moment? (Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016, pp. 46, 48, 50). During the short and medium term of foreign policy process it is relatively much less clear for the leadership than in the medium to long term. Conversely, the lack of clarity allows the strategic culture to inform the foreign policy.

When examining states, strategic culture may be examined in different way: from “organisational culture, such as that of the military as a bureaucratic organisation, and a broader notion of strategic culture such as entrenched beliefs, worldviews, and shared expectations of a society as a whole” (Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016, p. 66). However, in the cases of statelike actors the tendency of monocracy and authoritarian tendencies within the political organisation of its leadership is drawn on the practices and pattern of one figure or at best a small committee. What renders the identification and framing of the strategic culture of statelike actor’s leadership even more accessible is the fact that their leadership is unchangeable, either because they stay in power

for life or when they step down, they are replaced with someone from within the same circle. In this sense, the strategic culture is equally as important and pronounced.

Another set of variables that needs to be examined is the state-society relations. The main source of power of statelike actors, beyond its military activity, may be observed in its relationship with its constituency, PLO with Palestinian people, KRG with Kurdish population in northern Iraq and Hizbullah with the Lebanese Shia. In addition, their capacity to provide a number of services and build various domestic institutions establishes a clientelistic and dependent relationship with the society. In examining the foreign policy behaviour, this variable is focuses on the how the state institutions relate to financial and societal groups by examining the “the degree of harmony between the state and society, the degree to which society defers to state leaders on foreign policy matters in the event of disagreements, distributional competition among societal coalitions to capture the state and its associated spoils, the level of political and social cohesion within the state, and public support for general foreign policy and national security objectives” (Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016, pp. 70-71). In the case of statelike actors, like states, they do have the power to mobilise and harness power in terms of legitimacy but due to the nature of the political authority in most cases the clientelist relations between the state and the society provides a buffer for the leadership in case of disagreements on a certain foreign policy. However, when the harmony dictated by the clientelist relations is disrupted, the society tends to channel its concerns on domestic issues rather than foreign policy.

While statelike actors have institutions that foster the state-society relations, such as financial, educational, legal, health, infrastructure and so forth, the institutions of foreign affairs are usually disconnected from the society. In fact, the authoritarian nature of statelike actors’ leadership would imply that the leadership would act autonomously from society when it comes to foreign policy. By the same token, the study will examine the role of foreign affairs institutions. Even though, their primary aim is to establish presence in the international political arena and interaction with other actors, do they provide a bureaucratic process to facilitate foreign policy implementations? Would the nature of the leadership imply that the process in place is bypassed? If so, that would render these institutions obsolete as they have no procedural value in the foreign policy formulation and implementation.

Conversely, the notion of territoriality seems to be a more relevant variable in the statelike actor’s foreign policy behaviour. First, territory is a prerequisite for the stateness of the actor, but

given the vulnerability and/or contestation of the claim of territory, the status of the territory has an impact on the foreign policy choice. In various instances the territoriality is constant. PLO's domination in parts of Lebanon, Hizbullah's in southern Lebanon and KRG in northern Iraq. However, the status of territoriality whether that is the mobility of territoriality, in the case of PLO, for instance, from Jordan to Lebanon to Tunis and then to the Occupied Palestinian Territories/OPT), the threat on territorial sovereignty by Salafi-Jihadist on Hizbullah's stronghold and ISIS occupation of KRG's territory, do inform the foreign policy behaviour. Thus, like the other variables, territoriality to will be examined to access its role in these actors' external behaviour.

Statelike actor's will be at the center of the theoretical framework to empirically test the relevance of neoclassical realism. In order to examine the foreign policy of statelike actor's and study the extent to which they affect the regional and/or international system, this study will deploy a structured, focused comparative analysis (George & Bennett, 2005) of the three case studies. To this end, each case study will be examined separately. In order to examine PLO and its foreign policy from Camp David Accords 1978 until the Oslo Accords 1993/1995, Hezbollah and its foreign policy during the July War 2006 and the Syrian crisis between 2011 and 2017 and KRG and its foreign policy towards Turkey between 2005 and 2016, during the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and the referendum of 2017, the study will delve into the process of substantiating the degree of stateness that renders each case study a statelike actor.

For each case study, I will trace the regional and international dynamics that fostered the creation of these entities. It will be followed by identifying the formation of organisational structures of the leaderships, power dynamics within the leadership, the territorial sovereignty and their institutions that connect them with the constituency. In their effort to emerge the statelike actor's leadership display a pattern of behaviour and reflexes vis-à-vis the regional and international dynamics; thus, tracing the strategic cultural elements of the leadership. It also establishes the dynamics of the state-society relations and the importance of institutions in maintaining the relations. At the same time, it will identify the institutions that have similar functions as a foreign ministry or departments of foreign relations that are vehicles of how these actors want to be portrayed abroad. Thus, the first chapters of each part will open the 'black-boxed' actors to examine the images and perceptions of the leaders, strategic culture, state-society relations and domestic institutional arrangements.

After having established the composition of the statelike actor, the neoclassical realist's approach will be employed to examine the three main variables – independent, intervening and dependent. The independent variable is the regional system – which incorporates systemic and structural modifiers such as clarity of the system and the nature of the environment in terms of restrictive and permissive nature of the system. The intervening variables are categorised as the perceptions of the system, strategic culture, state-society relations and domestic institutional arrangements. The interaction and engagement of the independent and intervening variables will inform on the dependent variable, which is the foreign policy choice.

To this end, it is required to briefly lay out the dynamics of the Middle East, given that the case studies are geographically within the Middle East, which represents the system and, by extension, statelike actor's theatre of operation. The Middle East is viewed as a subsystem, with identifiable boundaries, as part of the international system, with its own systemic properties and with distinct trends in interaction or relationships (Buzan & Waever, 2003; McClelland, 1966; Thompson, 1973). Like in the international system, the subsystem of the Middle East is constantly evolving. Different notions have dominated the dynamics of the state-system of the region in different points in history. Different systemic particularities were dominant in different eras. The emergence of the Gulf countries as regional powers after the 1973 war, the Egypt-Israeli treaty isolated Egypt after 1979, the Islamic Revolution of Iran gave birth to a Shia' crescent in the region and the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s and, finally, the United States invasion in Iraq as the aftermath of 9/11 are drastic configurations in the Middle East. Each had various implications on the actors' foreign policy as these realities had a systemic impact on the region and, by extension, they impact the independent variables of clarity and permissive/restrictive environment. The Middle East's independent variables will differ when examining each case as they offer a different degree of opportunities and restrictions to each actor. For instance, in the case study of PLO, the system was more defined by the aftermath of the 1973 October war, while in the case of KRG, the system had a different balance of power as a result of Saddam's fall by the aftermath of the US invasion in Iraq in 2003. In the case of Hezbollah, the system's balance of power had drastically changed with the Syrian crisis that brought the region to a shadowed bipolarity by the involvement of Saudi Arabia and Iran – as external powers - into its civil war. In this sense, the layout of the system's characteristic in each case will coordinate the independent variable of clarity and permissive/restrictive environment between each case study.

To examine the intervening variables, the study will focus on particular figures such as Yasser Arafat, Hassan Nasrallah and Masoud Barzani when examining the PLO, Hezbollah and KRG, respectively. The ultimate decision-making is usually concentrated on one leader or a small group of people that head the political and military branch of these entities. This is a mandatory task to construe the notion of perception of the structural modifiers, as they are the ultimate decision-makers. Moreover, the fact that the leadership and authority is concentrated in the hands of one leader or a small group, which hold the same positions for life or to say the least for multiple decades, allows the study to trace a pattern of behaviour. In this sense, the way Yasser Arafat and his party (Fateh) engage with other actors dictates PLOs strategic culture or Nasrallah and his council dictate Hizbullah's strategic culture. Conversely, KRG has two centres of authority; Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Masoud Barzani and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by Jalal Talabani. Undoubtedly, the study will also delve into the latter; nonetheless, given KDPs dominance within KRG, Barzani dictates KRGs strategic culture. Interestingly, Talabani and PUKs politics become relevant only when the KDP-PUK relations are on bad terms. In that case, the strategic culture is contingent to their dynamics.

In addition, the author will use the dispersed yet rich literature to frame not only the strategic culture but also the state-society and institutional engagement of the actors in question. For the PLO, a major part of the study will rely on the work of Yazid Sayigh (1989, 1997b; 1997), Although Sayigh's research scope differs gravely from the current study's, he gathered exceptional archives. He had access to Arafat's documents, PLO's central operations room logbook and unpublished memoirs and personal accounts of PLO members. In addition, he had access to the PLO research Centre magazine, *Shuun Filastiniyya* (Palestinian Affairs) between 1971 and 1993⁴. The author will also use numerous primary sources found in the digital library of Institute of Palestinian Studies and books published by the active political figures such as Hanan Ashrawi, and Rashi Khalidi. It will also recourse to interviews published and broadcasted by news outlets (e.g., Al-Jazeera).

Similarly, Hizbullah has numerous publications, reports and almost all of the speeches of Hassan Nasrallah. The study will use three main sites *AlahedNews*, *al-Moqawama al-Islamiya – Lubnan* and *al-Manar*. It will also recourse to interviews published and broadcasted (e.g., al-

⁴ Some of the issues of *Shuun Filastiniyya* magazine may be found online and will be cited accordingly.

Mayadeen). The composition and operational capacity of Hezbollah and its relation to the society may be retraced on a number of works (Azani, 2011; Daher, 2016; Early, 2006a; Haddad, 2006; Hamieh & Mac Ginty, 2010; Nasrallah, Noe, & Blanford, 2007), including the published work of Naim Qassem (2012), Hizbullah's second-in-command. In regards to Hizbullah's activities in Syria especially between 2012 and 2014, the study will base the analysis on the report published in the Institute for the Study of War by Marisa Sullivan (2014), which has remarkable and detailed account of Hizbullah's clandestine military activity in the Syrian crisis.

Finally, interviews of key figures from both KDP and PUK will be used to frame the perception and strategic culture of the Iraqi Kurdish leadership, some of which have been conducted by the author during the field research in Iraqi Kurdistan shortly before the Battle of Mosul operation (Aqra & Eleftheriadou, 2016). Similarly with the other case studies, the author will use speeches and statements from sources such as Xebet newspaper (KDP-owned newspaper) and KRGs official website.

Substantiating the intervening variables of perception of the system, the strategic culture, state-society relations and domestic institutional arrangements of these three case studies regulates the cases in a way that allows us to compare and contrast these actors, regardless of them being observed in different periods of time and in different sets of the systemic milieu in each case study. In turn, this will allow the study to produce findings that will inform on the dependent variables. The dependent variable itself is the foreign policy choice. With the conceptualisation of Type II neoclassical realism, the dependent variable is a result of the synergy between the independent and intervening variables. Thus, albeit maintaining the primacy of the independent – the structural system – the author will examine what *determines* and *shapes* foreign policy of each of these statelike actors? Is there consistency among the three cases? If so, can there be a grand model for statelike actors? In addition, the author will also attempt to go beyond the short-medium term foreign policy behaviour of these actors and examine whether these foreign policy choices and behaviours have an impact on the systemic outcome on a regional level in the medium-to-long term so as to test the relevance of Type III neoclassical realism on statelike actors.

Part I - PLO

Chapter 3: PLO as a Statelike Actor in the System

3.1. Introduction

In the post-colonial era, the Middle East had become a theatre of operation of the US-Soviet Cold War, amidst an Arab cold war, all of which both regional and external players had attempted to side-line the Palestinian question from the Nakba (Catastrophe) in 1948, with the creation of the state of Israel, until the inception of the PLO in 1964. More specifically, in the period from 1948 until the 1967 Six-Day War, the Palestinian issue was a secondary aspect within the general Arab-Israeli conflict as there was no solid nor consolidated Palestinian leadership. The drastic regional changes between the period after the Six-Day War and the aftermath of the October War in 1973 ignited an opportunity environment for the Palestinian movement to carve its own nominal and political space. After 1967, the Palestinian issue was no more “at the total mercy of the host governments” (Cobban, 1984, p. 197), mainly due to the lack of leadership and structural weaknesses of the Palestinian diaspora and the Israeli repression within historic Palestine. These three phases of war and peace incorporate defining elements within the regional geopolitical reality. As such, not only do they illustrate the gradual relevance of the Middle East region to international politics and its sub-regional dynamics, but they also pave the way for tracing PLO’s external behaviour evolution.

While maintaining the structural primacy in understanding actors’ external behaviour and foreign policy choices, this study will also delve into some internal aspects of the statelike actors, focusing on those ‘state’ mechanisms that gear foreign policy. For example, what was the mechanism of the PLO that allowed it to stand on a podium in 1974 at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly? What were the main factors that allowed an armed non-state actor to be treated as a statelike actor? Which parts of PLO’s internal composition and consolidation reflect its external behaviour? The answers to these questions pave the way to a better understanding of how neoclassical realism may be applied to statelike actors.

In order to better understand the structural environment that was able to foster PLO’s initiatives, the following section will outline the international dynamics vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian question. The second part of the section will delve into the regional dynamic that created the space for the inception of the PLO, as well as the organisational and institutional power it attained, which will reveal the leadership’s perception of the system and its

strategic culture. The third section will focus on PLO's notion of territoriality mainly through the 1970s, its relationship with its constituency (state-society relations) and PLO's domestic institutions and decision-making process that became a launching pad for an active foreign policy. Thus, it will substantiate the characteristics of the PLO as a statelike actor and provide a blueprint on the factors that geared the diplomatic machinery that followed the 1974 speech.

3.2. When the Time is ripe for the Olive Branch

On November 13, 1974, Arafat stood at the UN General Assembly, uttering what came to be known as a historic speech, “[t]oday I have come bearing an olive branch and a freedom-fighter's gun”(Arafat, 1974). For the first time, the PLO announced its willingness to proceed with a political settlement to achieve its political aspirations. In the summer of the same year, the Palestinian National Council (PNC), PLO's legislative body, had established a ten-point plan “political programme that committed the PLO to the 'national authority' slogan” (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 342). The plan was blessed by the regional powers, with the exception of Syria. During the Arab League summit in Rabat the same year, the Arab leaders had officially handed the Palestinian issue to the Palestinians and limited the traditional role of the Jordanians, naming the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The ‘Gun and Olive Branch’ speech was considered a landmark for the Palestinian foreign policy and a concrete turn toward diplomacy—a first for a non-head of state to give a speech in the UN General Assembly.

In the days leading to the speech, Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) took the streets to demonstrate in favour of the PLO. The UN decision to invite Arafat to give a speech was welcomed by 105 to 4, with only 20 abstentions (Tessler, 2009, p. 485). This signalled that the Palestinian question had become an international concern. In fact, the General Assembly had granted the PLO the UN observer status. For the first time since 1948, the Palestinian question was an issue in the hands of the Palestinian leadership, as opposed to other Arab regional leaders; as Farouq Qaddoumi, the equivalent of a foreign minister of the PLO, “we, the sons of Palestine, have the right to direct our affairs according to our will” (Al-Qaddumi, 1988, p. 6).

While the year 1974 marks PLO's international achievement in diplomacy, PLO's foreign policy in the previous decade provides insight into several factors and variables; namely, the realm of the systemic structure of the system (independent variables) as well as Arafat's perception of

the system, political style and the strategic culture (intervening variables). By the same token, the emergence of the Palestinian issue is directly related to the establishment of the Israeli state and its implications on the region, particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict. Thus, the synthesis of factors that contributed to the PLO becoming the sole representative of the Palestinian people and their cause reveals a lot of the opportunities and constraints of the sub-system of the Middle East, which, undoubtedly, came to engage with the international system and its dynamics.

3.3. The International Dynamics

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was not an issue of contestation among the great powers at the time; both the US and the Soviets had granted it *de jure* recognition. The US viewed that a partition of Palestine on the basis of the UN resolution 181 of 1947—dividing Palestine into a Jewish State and an Arab State with Jerusalem as *corpus separatum*—would require peacekeeping forces that would deter any Soviet expansion (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 17). By the same token, the Soviet's political objective was to eliminate any western influence from the region (Golan, 1990, p. 11). Along the same lines, the US, with Eisenhower's doctrine in 1957, "pledged US assistance to friendly states in the region threatened by *communist subversion*" (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 19), which was triggered by the Suez Crisis in 1956, fearing for an escalation of another Arab-Israeli conflict. Until then, the Cold War between the US and the Soviets did not bear any weight on the Palestinians or the Arab states. It may be argued that the second Arab-Israeli war hauled the Cold War into the region, reshuffling the great powers' involvement and interest in the Arab world. The US and Soviet mediation in resolving the Suez Crisis further marginalized the French and British domination in the Middle East. The US and the Soviet interests in solving the Arab-Israeli conflict did not include the Palestinian aspect of the conflict at the time; it was not until much later that the Palestinians would come to occupy the centre stage of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

3.3.1. The Superpowers in the Middle East

The regional competitive dynamics overlapped closely with the divergence of US and Soviet policies in the Middle East. In turn, the Arab regimes realized the new opportunities offered by the Soviet-US rivalry, utilising the superpowers' desire to gain influence in the region. For instance, Egypt was one of the region's first states to develop the politics of diversification following the Suez Crisis. While Egypt was receiving US aid, the Soviets established an alliance with Egypt in

the post-Suez crisis era.⁵ The close ties between Egypt and the Soviets inspired other Arab radical nationalist regimes in Syria, Iraq and Algeria, to name a few. Kremlin's logic was to offer "friendship treaties" that entailed "trade credits, military advisers, and the rest" (Kennedy, 2010, p. 391), especially to counter and antagonize Washington's support to, first and foremost, Israel but also other US allies such as the Arab monarchies, Iran and Turkey. Notably, despite the rivalry between the US and the Soviets to expand their influence in the region to the extent that it contained the other, the two continued to cooperate through the UN Security Council when it came to great Arab-Israeli wars—the Suez Crisis in 1956, the Six-Day war in 1967 and the Yom Kippur in 1973—with convergent policies on limiting the escalation of the conflicts (Sayigh & Shlaim, 1997, p. 11).

The competition sharpened after the Suez Crisis as the Soviets gradually established their foothold in the region. Its support to the aforementioned Arab regimes went well beyond arming them with Soviet weaponry by supporting them politically and financially. This is not to say that the Arab radical states became Soviet proxies; far from it. In fact, the Soviets could not influence the regional regimes to the extent they desired. Perhaps due to the "leeway" Moscow provided to the Arab states to take initiatives (Sayigh & Shlaim, 1997, p. 11), it partially allowed Arab regimes to establish the politics of 'playing off' the superpowers. Consequently, this leeway generated volatility in the Egyptian and Syrian policies and became of great concern to the Soviets. The Soviets reconsidered the cost-benefit calculations regarding their political and financial involvement (Golan, 1990, pp. 95-96), especially in the case of Egypt after the defeat in the 1967 war.

The new regional realities created the impression that "detente reduced the scope for countries such as Egypt to manipulate superpower rivalry to their advantage" and that "[a]llignment was likely to be more effective, especially given [Cairo's, and particularly, Sadat's] added belief that the US held 'all the cards' in the region" (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 320). When Sadat was appointed to office, the balancing of politics was even more pronounced. Sadat opted to establish a US negotiation track during the 1973 war. On the one hand, before the 1973 war, Cairo had reached

⁵ According to Sayigh (1997b), right before Nasir's nationalization of the Suez Canal, in 1956 'US abruptly withdrew an offer of aid to finance the construction of Egypt's Aswan Dam' because Nasir opposed the Baghdad Pact and recognized the People's Republic of China. Also, Nasir reached an agreement with the World Bank that gave it considerable say in Egyptian economic management (1997b: 25).

out to Washington to mediate for a political settlement with Israel regarding the Sinai. On the other hand, Sadat was haggling his relationship with Moscow. Initially, Sadat had announced a “freeze” in the Soviet – Egyptian relations and expelled Soviet advisors from Cairo in 1972 over a disagreement regarding weaponry and arm action to regain the Sinai (Golan, 1990, p. 82). During the 1973 war, however, he bargained his way to access Soviet weaponry and broke off the Cairo–Moscow relations again after the war (Herrmann, 1987, p. 421).

The 1973 war had opened the way for an even greater US involvement in the Arab–Israeli conflict, “first to supply arms to Israel and prevent it being defeated, and then to bring about a balance of forces conducive to a settlement” (Hourani, 2005, p. 419), and, by extension, in the region. This coincided with the redirection of US policy in the region, which allowed Kissinger “to monopolise for the United States the external diplomatic initiative concerning the Arab-Israeli problem, excluding the Soviets, and if possible also the Europeans, from any meaningful diplomatic role in the region” (Cobban, 1984, p. 59). At the same time, the Soviets had come to realize that “there might [...] actually be greater benefits than costs to a [political] settlement” as opposed to a military one, which would entail the Soviet participation, and, in turn, “Moscow might thus obtain formal, international recognition of the legitimacy of its interests and presence in the area” (Golan, 1990, p. 98). To this end, the US and the Soviets joined their efforts to launch the Geneva conference in 1973 to resolve the Arab–Israeli conflict based on UN Resolution 336, which would include the Palestinian question (Quandt, 2010, p. 138). The multilateral framework of the Geneva talks could not withstand the numerous regional issues. After a prolonged shuffling diplomacy on the part of the superpowers, only Egypt, Jordan and Israel attended the talks.⁶ While the talks successfully proceeded with a disengagement agreement between Israel and Egypt and Israel and Syria, they failed to reach an all-comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Howbeit, Washington was gaining more prestige in the region, as Kremlin failed to persuade its Arab friends into joining the negotiations, such as Syria, weakening the Soviet bargaining power in the region. Having said that, the new joint US-Soviet initiatives had revealed an interest in the Palestinian question, unlike in the previous decades, incorporating it as part of the negotiations on the Israeli-Arab conflict.

⁶ For a detailed account on the Geneva Conference see Quandt (2010, pp. 138-150)

The confrontation between the US and the Soviets had not de-escalated in the broader region, which remained important in containing each other. Be it the Soviet policy towards Israel, the Soviet arm supply to the Arabs, the Soviet airlift to Ethiopia, the dispatch of combat forces to Afghanistan in December 1979 or even the Iranian Islamic Revolution and the Yemeni wars; all would have significant consequences in the rivalry of the superpowers (Sayigh & Shlaim, 1997, pp. 9-11). Nevertheless, despite the Soviet's aggressive competition to maintain its foothold in the region, by the end of the 1970s, the US had emerged as the more substantial power (Quandt, 2004, p. 59), and the mediation of the Arab-Israeli conflict seemed to be entirely in the US' hands.

The new role of the US in the region was marked by the American mediation for an Israeli-Egyptian agreement (Camp David Accords) in 1979, which was seen as a unilateral accomplishment of Washington under Carter's administration (Simes, 1979, p. 46). However, this first peace agreement in the region could not disregard addressing the Palestinian issue. In 1975, the Saunders Documents indicated the first signs of US interest in a resolution regarding the Palestine question (Buheiry, 1978). Howbeit, the Palestinian issue was superficially addressed within the framework of the Israeli-Egyptian agreement, where the provisions on the West Bank and Gaza Strip were vague. On the one hand, the gradual changes within the administrations of Carter, Reagan and Bush were expressed by their position regarding the Israeli settlements. While Carter referred to the latter as 'illegal', Reagan and Bush referred to them as obstacles, while many administrations had left the issue untouched before and after. Nevertheless, given the surge in pro-Israeli public opinion, the Palestinian issue remained a contested issue. It was not until the impasse of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 that heightened even more the US interest in resolving the Palestinian question as it was directly linked with the regional developments and the trajectory of the Palestinian question in the international arena.

3.3.2. The Palestinian Issue on the International Arena

Since the British handed down the Palestinian issue to the UN in 1947, unsurprisingly, the Palestinian issue was addressed under the prism of 'refugee management' in a venture to maintain a certain level of stability in the Middle East. More specifically, in February 1947, Britain announced that the Palestinian problem and, possibly, the territory would be transferred to the UN. A special session of the General Assembly created ad hoc committees; the most notable ones, the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) and its 11 members, set off for Jerusalem and the

Conciliation Commission for Palestine in the same year. These materialized the UN Resolution 181, which recommended the partition of historic Palestine in favour of Israel. Even when the UN Security Council adopted the famous Resolution 242 after the Six-Day War of 1967, which for the first time condemned Israel for its territorial acquisitions, it addressed the territorial dispute within the Arab-Israeli conference in general. Despite the UN's encouragement to proceed with a general Arab-Israeli settlement on the basis of the borders prior to the 1967 war and the recognition of Israel on the part of the Arabs, the Palestinian issue once again reflected a refugee concern solely. Even until the October War of 1973, the international community's approach significantly overshadowed the Palestinian issue's political aspect. The breakthrough in the international community came with Yassir Arafat's Chairmanship of the PLO and, more specifically, when he gave the 'Olive Branch speech' in 1974 at the UN. In the aftermath of the speech, the UN took various steps in recognizing the plight of the Palestinians; namely, by forming the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP) in 1975, a working group that intended to promote the idea of national independence, self-determination, sovereignty as well as the right of Palestinian refugees,⁷ by adopting the Resolution 3376 granting the PLO the observer status in the UN and by granting the same status in UNESCO in 1974.

This shift in the UN signalled that the Palestinian issue finally exceeded the notion of 'simply a question' primarily within the sub-system of the Middle East that grasped the attention of the great powers. In fact, the Palestinians issue, by the 1970s, was concretely entangled in the Arab-Israeli conflict, as the Palestinians were becoming a threat and having an impact on the regional developments. The trajectory of the Palestinian issue on the international scene reflected its course on the regional level. The Middle East region as a sub-system constrained the Palestinian issue at the hands of the Arab regimes. It was not until the late 1960s—with the drastic regional developments—that an opportunity environment was created for the scattered Palestinian movement to carve its own political space in the regional and international arena.

3.4. The Middle East and the Palestinian Question

In the post-World War II era, the Middle East was defined by two main axes: first, the establishment of the Israeli state and the subsequent, violent Nakba (Catastrophe) that the

⁷ For more on the UN and international law on the Palestinian issue see Quigley (2010)

Palestinian indigenous population had to endure in 1948; and, secondly, the competition for hegemony among the various states that comprised the sub-system of the Middle East. On the one hand, ever since the end of the French and British mandates, the Arab regimes had an obsession with unity, mainly as a means to confront the newly established Israeli state. On a nominal level, this unity was expressed by forming the League of Arab States in 1945, commonly referred to as the Arab League. On the other hand, in practice, these Arab regimes were so consumed in their own state-building processes that shaped the way “in which Arab governments interacted with each other and conducted foreign policy in general” (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 13). Thus, their interaction was defined by the intra-Arab struggle for hegemony within the region, shaping the dynamics and structures between 1948 and the mid-1960s. These two main axes overshadowed the Palestinian agency, creating more constraints than opportunities.

In the eyes of the Arabs, the establishment of the State of Israel generated two interlinked issues within the region: the ‘Israeli’ and the ‘Palestinian’. The former was the security threat posed to almost all Arab regimes. The ones that shared a border with Israel were vigilant of its inherited tendencies of territorial maximalism. The Palestinian issue, however, generated a multi-layered dynamic with multiple implications. In this sense, there is a clear distinction that occurs between the Palestinian issue—under the prism of the refugees that were violently displaced across the region, the Palestinian question—a rallying point for the Arab states in the Middle East, and the Palestinian statehood—a process of state-building for the Palestinian people. Although Arab politics equally overshadowed all these three different aspects of the Palestinian issue, they had different levels of implications. On the one hand, a massive influx of over 750,000 Palestinian refugees dispersed into Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt following 1948 sufficed to render the Palestinians a domestic concern for these host states. After Israel claimed its independence, fewer than half of the Palestinians were able to remain in their original homes; with Jordan and Egypt administratively managing the West Bank with 350,000 Palestinians and Gaza with 70,000-100,000 Palestinians, respectively (Peretz, 1977, p. 56). For some Arab regimes, the Palestinian refugee issue constituted a threat, which led to the systemic marginalization of the Palestinian refugees in these states—some more than others.⁸ Despite the differences in the degree and manner of the imposed repression, all of these Arab host states conducted various policies that would

⁸ The marginalisation in Egypt and Lebanon was more intense than in Syria and Jordan.

detach the Palestinian refugees from the indigenous populations, not only socio-economically but also in terms of independent political organisation (Hamid, 1975, p. 91; Sayigh, 1997b, pp. 665-666).

On the other hand, the concern for Palestinian refugees was not synonymous with the Palestinian question, which lingered between symbolism and the national interest of the Arab states. On a discourse level, the Palestinian question was used as a card by Arab regimes to demonstrate “their patriotic [Arab] credentials and of embarrassing [regional] rivals” (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 94). The symbolism of the Palestinian question stemmed from the devotion of the Arab streets to the Palestinian Cause. In fact, the Arab people cited that the loss of Palestine was “a prime reason for the overthrow of the 1948 regimes in those countries during the four years following the disaster of 1948” (Cobban, 1984, p. 196). In addition, within a post-colonial Arab discourse, the Palestinian issue was internalized by the Arab conscious as the new colonial issue.

At the same time, this is not to say that the Arab regimes did not view the occupation and colonization of Palestine as an Arab matter. Between coups and challenging economies that came along with the post-colonial process after their independence, Israel was seen as a threat but not a primary threat. This was evident right from 1948, when the Arab states “provided limited resources” for the 1948 war and “prevented thousands of [Arab] volunteers from joining their newly established irregular salvation army (Jesh il-nahda il-araby)” (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 14), which was formed for the specific occasion. Understandably, the newly independent nations of the region (Transjordan and Iraq in 1932, Lebanon in 1943, Syria in 1946, and Egypt in 1953) were still in a fragile condition, given that they were financially and military dependent on the former colonial powers, which supported Israel. Nevertheless, the Arab League reactivated the Palestinian Arab Higher Committee (AHC) in 1946, which was initially founded in 1936 by various Palestinian political parties but was idle for nine years. The AHC came under the control of non-Palestinian Arabs (Shlaim, 1990, pp. 37-38), indicating that the Palestinian agency was inhibited during the Nakba. On the international level, the Palestinians’ chance for statehood was deprived as this opportunity was offered to the Jewish community (Sayigh, 1997b, pp. 7-10). On a regional level, the Nakba was the beginning of the political suppression and instrumentalization of the Palestinian question and the Palestinian people—whether refugees or not—leading to “even greater social fragmentation than had existed in pre-war Palestine” (Peretz, 1977, p. 56) that lasted for approximately two decades. A confrontation with Israel would entail the Arab states jeopardising

their state-building process, which was based on the goodwill of the former colonial powers. This fear hindered and/or co-opted any genuine effort of the Arabs to assist the scattered Palestinians in fulfilling their national aspirations.

The Arab regimes' struggle for hegemony within the region further overshadowed the Palestinian issue. The political rivalry between Arab states in the Middle East was crystalized in 1958, which came to be known as the 'Arab cold war', pinned by Kerr (1967); competition between the Arab republics and the Arab monarchies that initially stemmed from "personal grudges among Arab leaders" (Khashan, 1997, p. 158). The possibility of unity between Iraq and Syria in the late 1940s brought all the monarchies to agree to the Arab Collective Security Pact in an effort to prevent it. Under King Faruq, who was at odds with Syria, Egypt led the Arab Collective Security Pact. Even after 'Abdel Nasser came to power in Egypt, the Egyptian-Iraqi rivalry further increased after the Iraqi-Turkish military Pact. While the union between Egypt and Syria, under the United Arab Republic, did not last for longer than three years (1958-1963), the military coup in Iraq and, a month later, in Syria brought to power the Ba'athists, who were ideological rivals with Egypt's Nasserism. Incongruously, the notion of pan-Arabism thrived during this period, pitting the reactionary states of the region with the progressive ones.

Pan-Arabism reflected two overlapping principles: anti-colonialism and revolutionary socialism, which both claimed not only to represent but, more importantly, to own the Palestinian cause. In this sense, the Palestinian issue attained a value in the region encapsulated in the rhetoric of Arab unity and pan-Arabism that emerged in 1950, rendering the Palestinian question a rallying point among Arab leaders that would validate their hegemony in the Middle East. By the same token, the Palestinian refugees were instrumentalized by the Arab states, as they were viewed as "the most easily manipulated constituency that Arab politicians possessed" (Sayigh, 1977, p. 21). There were Palestinians that mobilized and recruited large numbers to support the host regimes' political projects. The Arab regimes made it particularly hard for the Palestinian to have the political freedom to develop their own agenda regarding their national aspirations. On the contrary, any project or initiative vis-à-vis the independent political Palestinian aspiration was hindered by the Arab leaderships for fear of triggering a war with Israel. In various instances, the regimes attempted to influence and stall any Palestinian venture until the mid-1960s.

An example of such is the Movement of Arab Nationalists [Harakat al-Qawmiyyin al-'Arab] (MAN) that was launched by Palestinians in Beirut, which mainly consisted of Palestinians

from all over the region. In the early 1950s, MAN intended to give primacy to the Palestinian issue within Pan-Arabist rhetoric, opposing the Ba'athists in Syria and the Hashimites in Jordan.⁹ When Abdel Nasser rose to power and given his strong pro-Palestinian rhetoric, which was centred on the liberation of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), MAN's members in Egypt were increasingly influenced by Nasserism, ultimately leading to an ideological rift within the movement and, particularly, with its members in Beirut, (Baumgarten, 2005, pp. 28-29). MAN could not attract a large base as it was so consumed with the infighting of its own ranks, hindering it from delivering any practical results. Nevertheless, even ideologically, at the end of the 1950s, MAN failed to lead a Palestinian-oriented agenda and delved into the regional ideological contour. MAN was weakened further as many of its members who desired to continue a more Palestinian-oriented agenda independently from Egypt's influence decided to split and create new groups; some of the most prominent ones were the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP).¹⁰ At the same time, other Palestinian factions emerged, such as the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Harakat al-Tahrir al-Watani al-Filastini), most commonly known as Fateh,¹¹ who also desired to establish a Palestinian political movement independent from the Arab regional politics. This ideological shift among the Palestinians away from Pan-Arabism may be attributed to three facts: first, within the first decade of the Nakba 1948, the Arab regimes and their ideologies failed to counter-balance Israel and, by extension, failed to provide any positive results for the Palestinians be in the diaspora or the West Bank and Gaza (OPT); secondly, the regional developments triggered by the (first) Arab cold war in 1958 made it clear that the Palestinian cause was not to be prioritized by the Arab regimes, and finally, Israel's plans, in the same year, to build the National Water Carries and expand its resources entailed further marginalization of the Palestinian issue. It was clear to many Palestinians that the commitment of the Arab regimes to the Palestinian cause

⁹ MAN's members were influenced by AUB professor Constantine Zurayk (1948) work '*The Meaning of the Disaster*'. MAN considered the Arab regimes and the Arab political system of the time as the sole responsible for the occupation of Palestine. Thus, in order to liberate Palestine, MAN propagated for an Arab revolution on a regional level. This ideological framing directed all the MAN efforts against the Arab regimes' politics rather than Israel's politics. For more see Baumgarten (2005)

¹⁰ For more on how PFLP and DFLP developed ideologically see Kazziha (1975)

¹¹ It is not worthy to note that since the inception of both Fateh and MAN, they differed in one central ideological principle. While the former viewed the liberation of Palestine as the launching pad to Arab unity, the latter believed that the Arab unity would pave the way to the liberation of Palestine.

would “always [be] tempered by a pragmatic concern for their own national interests”, as Baker (1978, p. 37) puts it.¹²

Beyond the struggle for hegemony in the region, the Israeli threat was not equally dangerous for all the Arab states. The bordering states—Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Syria—were more alarmed than other states in the region. However, even among the bordering states, the dynamics were different. For instance, in the early 1960s, before the Six-Day war, while the Israeli-Syrian border witnessed constant clashes (Tessler, 2009, p. 359), the Israeli-Egyptian border was kept peaceful due to the presence of 3,400 UNEF troops, even though there were occasional incidents off the Sinai coast (Morris, 2011, p. 347). Israel’s resource exploitation was not limited to historic Palestine. In the 1950s, Israel started building a project to divert the headwaters from the Jordan River. By 1963, the project was about to be complete, and the water would flow through Israel’s National Water Carrier. The Arab Summit in Cairo of 1964 gathered thirteen Arab kings and presidents to establish an inter-Arab conciliation under the command of Egyptian generals. The Arabs would join efforts to make their own water diversion scheme to counter Israel’s plan of diverting headwaters (Cooley, 1984, p. 4; Morris, 2011, p. 303).¹³ In the Arab regimes’ perception, they could not allow the completion of Israel’s National Water Carrier as it would enable Israel to increase its power by becoming self-sufficient and encourage further expansion of Israel beyond historic Palestine, both in terms of territory, power and population (Evron, 1973, p. 53; Tessler, 2009, p. 362). There is no doubt that the Arab states were alarmed on many levels. The international community, along with the US, had also failed to mediate for an agreement between the Arab regimes and Israel. In fact, the US delegation headed by Eric Johnston had proposed to use “a canal from the Nile River to irrigate the western Sinai Desert and resettling some of the 2

¹² Nasserism had initially attracted many Palestinians (Pearlman, 2012, p. 128), primarily due to the fact that Abdel Nasser seemed more committed to counter Israel. In addition, this large support for Nasser was also driven by the fact that Egypt controlled that Gaza Strip from 1959 to 1967. In fact, in 1948, only 1% of Palestinians went to Egypt for refuge (Brand, 1988; Kossaifi, 1980, p. 18). Although the number of Palestinians in Egypt grew (Brand, 1988, pp. 43-108), their political organisation was always kept in check by ‘Abdel Nasser. Palestinians elsewhere across the region had similar convictions. It should be noted that immediately after the 1948 war, according to Brand, while Egypt was administrating a great number of internally displaced people in Gaza (70,000-100,000), within Egypt, the number of Palestinian refugees were merely between 7,000 and 11,000. Even until 1960, the Palestinian refugees were estimated around 15,500 and it was not until after the Six Day War, that the numbers doubles. For more see Brand (1988: 43-181)

¹³ The UN along with the US attempted several times to address the water resources within the framework the Arab-Israeli conflict, however, the Arabs could not even afford to proceed on a water agreement with Israel because none was ready to either recognize or normalize relations with Israel.

million Palestinian Arab refugees in the one-time wasteland” (Cooley, 1984, p. 10), which would entail further allocating the Palestinian problem *deeper* into Egypt’s domestic affairs. While each Arab state responded with low-scale violence against Israel, in 1964, the Arab Summit in Cairo failed to address the water issue collectively. Nevertheless, the on-going discussions resulted in the end of the high intensity in the (first) ‘Arab cold war’ and in a consensus regarding the creation of a Palestinian political entity, Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).

3.4.1. The PLO and Arafat’s leadership

In the Arab Summit Cairo of 1964, ‘Abdel Nasser took it upon himself to lead the discussions regarding the institutionalization of a separate Palestinian entity. He used his influence and successfully convinced other Arab leaders to establish the PLO on May 22, 1964. Ahmed al-Shuqayri was appointed as head of the PLO, who was previously the representative of Palestine within the Arab League.¹⁴ Interestingly, al-Shuqayri was of Palestinian origin and had extensive diplomatic experience, first as a member of the Syrian delegation to the UN and, later, as the Saudi ambassador to the UN. The PLO was not, yet, a Palestinian expression for self-determination; instead, it was a way for Arab regimes, particularly Egypt’s, to control the various Palestinian organisations further and restrain them from dragging the Arabs into another Arab-Israeli conflict (Morrison, 1984, pp. 36-37; Tessler, 2009, p. 374). The creation of the PLO was a rather contested issue, as according to Shuqayri’s own account, the US had secretly tried to avert some moderate Arab regimes from establishing the PLO, “promising a settlement through the UN” (Selim, 1991, p. 290).

To this end, PLO was intended to be an umbrella organisation that would incorporate all the Palestinian organisations scattered in the region. It included MAN, which had shrunk significantly, but also its offshoots; the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP).¹⁵ It also included Fateh as well as various clandestine and small-scale guerrilla movements. Nevertheless, all the leaders of the Palestinian organisations, including al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni, the head of the Arab Higher

¹⁴ For more on the process of consolidation of the Palestinian people from 1948 to 1967, see Shemesh (2004)

¹⁵ The fact that Abdel Nasser did not ‘utilize’ his followers within MAN to create a Palestinian entity and instead opted to establish a new structure, did not only expose Nasser’s intention to completely control the Palestinians via the PLO but it also indicated that MAN was too marginalized by the Palestinian factions and base to be able to help Nasser in influencing and controlling the Palestinians. For more on the reason of MAN’s demise see Baumgarten (2005, pp. 30-31).

Committee (AHC), were critical of the PLO. The Palestinian factions had been exacerbated by the constant exploitation and manipulation of the Arab regimes and had grown wary of Arab politics and their intentions. Howbeit, the PLO remained the single effort of the Arabs to create a Palestinian entity; and the Palestinian factions would eventually use it as a platform to their advantage. The PLO was and still is comprised of mainly two bodies: the Palestinian National Council (PNC) and the Executive Committee (EC); under them, there are other smaller councils and departments. The PNC, which functions as a democratic parliament, is conducted bi-annually, representing all Palestinian factions and organisations.¹⁶ Almost all the Palestinian factions eventually agreed to cooperate with the PLO but with extreme caution towards al-Shuqayri, who was considered an agent of ‘Abdel Nasser (Tessler, 2009, p. 374). Ironically, within the next five years, Fateh—one of the largest and oldest Palestinian factions—managed to co-opt the PLO rather than vice versa.

Fateh’s ability to take over the PLO was due to its consistent leadership, its gradual influence in the region since the late 1950s, its inclination towards institutionalization and, finally, its military capacity, which demonstrated its effectiveness in the Battle of Karameh of 1968. Created by Yasser Arafat in 1958, who later in 1969 became Chairman of the PLO, Fateh was larger and more active than any other guerrilla group devoted to armed struggle. Educated Palestinians such as Khalil al-Wazir, Farouq al-Qaddoumi, Khaled al-Hassan, and Salah Khalaf constituted the inner circle of Fateh under Arafat’s leadership (Amos, 1980, p. 48). The people that constituted the inner circle of Fateh had particular functions; for instance, al-Wazir was in charge of military activities, and al-Qaddoumi was the diplomate dealing with foreign relations.¹⁷ Fateh’s inner circle was balanced by the Central Committee (CC) that democratically elected representatives under a ruling committee on various issues in an effort to avoid any personality cult, as it was a trend in the Arab political scene. In fact, it was after the 1967 war and after enormous pressure that Fateh revealed that Arafat was “its supreme leader” (Kiernan, 1976, pp. 60-61), who ultimately became a symbol of the Palestinian cause.

Fateh’s logic of institutionalization can be traced back to 1955, when Arafat was one of the main creators of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) (Kiernan, 1976, p. 23). Much inspired by the successes of the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) in the 1950s, Fateh’s

¹⁶ For a detailed description of the organisational structure of the PLO see Fig 1 in Cobban (1984, p. 13)

¹⁷ Qaddoumi at one point headed the PLO's UN delegation.

leadership would reach out to various countries to recruit Palestinians across the region. The ideological framework of Fateh revolved around bringing together Palestinians under an organisation independent from Arab states. Arafat was the first to realize that the Palestinians had to fend for themselves, which would form an armed struggle against Israel. This was articulated in various publications of Filastinuna (Our Palestine) – which was run by Fateh’s member Khalid Wazir in Beirut in the late 1950s, aiming to reach out to Palestinians in other countries (Pearlman, 2012, p. 129). It also had developed an armed branch, the Fedayeen, that carried out raids against Israel (Migdal & Kimmerling, 1993, p. 252). In order to remain independent from Arab politics, Fateh depended on donations; Arab states did not provide the aid but Fateh’s own members, who would offer half or more of their wages (Morrison, 1984, pp. 135-140). The notion of independence was central for Fateh, usually expressed in the commonly used word *Kiyan* (entity/existence) in Fateh’s publications in Falastiniuna (Baumgarten, 2005, p. 33).¹⁸ It connects the independent existence not only with Palestinian statehood but also with the independent identity from the Arab regimes’ influence. In fact, if Fateh desired not to fall into the footsteps of MAN, it had to maintain its *Kiyan* and remain active in the political arena. To this end, Fateh became active in its engagement with the PLO while maintaining its own activities and operations.

The aftermath of the Arab defeat in the Six-Day War of 1967 provided Fateh with an opportunity environment. The Arab regimes, particularly Egypt and Jordan, were willing to compromise Palestinian rights (Tessler, 2009, p. 423). More specifically, the Arab regimes were considering a ‘political settlement’ with Israel to return the lost territories; namely, the Golan Heights of Syria, the Sinai of Egypt and the West Bank and Gaza for the Palestinians. A political settlement would involve the recognition of Israel by the Arab regimes (Taylor, 1982, p. 75), which would compromise the Palestinians’ interests. Paradoxically, the defeated Arabs had agreed during the Arab summit conference in Khartoum at the end of August that there would be no reconciliation, no negotiation, and no recognition between the Arab states and Israel if not all territories were returned. However, ‘Abdel Nasser and King Husseyn had accepted Resolution 242, which “called for Israeli withdrawal in return for recognition of the right of all states in the region (effectively including Israel) to live in peace and security” (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 143). This

¹⁸ Fatah members had engaged in many debates regarding the notion of *Kiyan* in an attempt to define its entity and its existence not only as an independent one but also an agency ready to exhibit many aspects of a state.

may be argued to be a second structural modifier that triggered a modification in the already established dynamics.

On the one hand, the recognition of Israel was viewed as the most deprived possible outcome not only by Yasser Arafat but almost all Palestinian factions, as it would compromise the leverage the Palestinians had; the ‘card’ of the ‘Palestinian issue’ in the politics of the Arabs. On the other hand, Resolution 242 was rejected as it only addressed the refugee issue with no “reference to Palestinian national rights” (Selim, 1991, p. 291). This was a critical moment for the PLO. Al-Shuqairy was under tremendous pressure balancing the factions and the Arab regimes, leading to his resignation in the 4th PNC meeting by the end of 1967. In the 4th PNC meeting, the Fatah Central Committee appointed Yassir Arafat as its official spokesman and representative, and Arafat then took the lead in articulating the demands of Fatah and the Permanent Bureau for increased representation at the forthcoming PNC meeting (Morrison, 1984, pp. 38-39; Tessler, 2009, pp. 427-429)

At this point, it was not the integrity of the PLO that was at stake, but the integrity of the Palestinian Cause, generating an upheaval across all the active Palestinian factions. To stall the political turmoil, Yahya Hammouda became the interim replacement of al-Shuqayri. Fateh built on the momentum by attempting to advocate a ‘unified political strategy’ in January 1968, inviting almost all organisations in Cairo and allowing Fateh to exert more influence. The momentum further accelerated in favour of Fateh with its victory in the Karameh battle on March 21, 1968, which was a “successful encounter [...] Palestinian forces with Israeli troops” along with some Jordanian troops (Taylor, 1982, p. 73). In retaliation to the Israeli attack on the village of Karameh, the Palestinians inflicted substantive damage to the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). The Arab public was galvanized, allowing Fateh to gain strong support among students, leftists, and Arab nationalists. Fateh also impressed the international community that a small Palestinian faction was more effective than all the Arab armies together (Owen, 2002, p. 62). Arafat had even made the front page of Time Magazine on December 13, 1968,¹⁹ as one of the top ‘terrorists’. Soon Fateh’s increased influence was reflected in its size as an organisation but also in its number of representatives within the PLO. Gradual infiltration of Fateh within many PLO departments had already been in motion.

¹⁹ Arafat was in the front page of Time under the title: Time (1968)

It was a matter of time for Arafat to be appointed as the Chairman of the PLO's EC. By February of 1969, in the famous 5th PNC meeting, Arafat was also appointed as the chairman of PLO's military affairs; the latter indicated an upgrade of the PLO into a more militarised actor in respect to its previous mandate.²⁰ Even PLO's Charter changed along similar lines to that of Fateh. Either Fateh members or sympathizers of Fateh ran vital departments such as the Political Affairs, Occupied Homeland Affairs, Popular Organisation, Financial Affairs, and Guidance and Information; while from the 105 PNC seats, Fateh had 33 members (largest allocated to one faction)²¹ (Amos, 1980, p. 36; Cobban, 1984, pp. 13;42-43; Morrison, 1984, p. 40; Tessler, 2009, p. 429). Arafat's political manoeuvring (Khalidi, 2013b, p. 64) managed to bring the PLO under Fateh's political agenda, although all major Palestinian organisations participated in this governmental structure of the PLO, albeit intermittently due to disagreements with the policies of Fatah. It was apparent to the Arab leaders that Fateh was dominating the PLO, as Yassir Arafat claimed Fateh *was* the PLO (Brynen, 1990, p. 48). While they seemingly allowed a Palestinian entity, the Arabs were reluctant for PLO to become a Palestinian agent, especially under Arafat. In fact, the legitimacy of Arafat, who was devoted to maintaining the independence of the Palestinian issue, was disputed mainly by many Arab leaders, creating constraints for the organisation's political agenda in the years to come. According to Sayigh, "each Arab interventionist state has at some time denied the PLO's right to take unilateral decisions on the twin issues of peace and war with Israel, asserting that the PLO's representation of the Palestinians does not negate the Arab say in the Palestine question" (Sayigh, 1987, p. 46). Nevertheless, Arafat could manoeuvre these constraints and cling to the opportunities.

Under the prism of the structure/agency nexus, it may be argued that the regional structures that had constrained the Palestinian agency for decades since 1948 were changing in favour of the Palestinians in the post-1967 era. As a new independent actor, the PLO brought its own gravitation to the dynamics of the sub-system in the Middle East. Albeit Arafat's appointment as the PLO Chairman in 1969, the Arab regimes did not officially hand the baton of the Palestinian question to the Palestinians until 1974 in the Arab League Summit in Rabat, where the PLO was deemed

²⁰ For an extensive and detailed analysis on the military capacity of the PLO including Fateh and other guerrilla groups see the great work of Eleftheriadou (2021).

²¹ Hayha Hammudah was elected chairman of the PNC. The number of PNC seats was increased from 100 to 150 with 33 for Fatah, 12 each for PFLP and Saiqa, 42 for independents, and 6 for Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) – the military branch of the PLO.

the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Subsequently, the PLO had a regional legitimacy that laid the foundations to clench the opportunities of the regional and international system. PLO's leadership turned towards genuine diplomacy, placing the Palestinian cause on the international map, beyond the demonisation of Palestinians as terrorists, which was fuelled by Palestinian hijackings²² and attacks aiming to avert any inimical plan against the Palestinians. In order to better understand the trajectory of the foreign policy of the PLO within the opportunity environment, the next section will examine Arafat's perception regarding the developments in the system and his strategic culture.

3.5. Arafat's perception of the system and strategic culture

The political dynamics in the region between the 1967 and 1973 war define much of the central perception of PLO's leadership and the vital factors that shaped Arafat's strategic culture. Undoubtedly, the heavy defeat of 1967 affected the way the Arab states viewed the Palestinian question. The devastation of the war had tangible negative implications for Syria, which lost the Golan Heights, but even more so for Egypt, which lost the Sinai and Gaza, and Jordan, who lost the West Bank. The Jordanians had the administrative control of the Palestinian territories, and the loss of the West Bank was equally devastating; as one of the advisors of the Jordanian King, Adnan Abu Odeh, pointed out, "the Israeli occupation of the West Bank effectively meant the loss of half the country [Jordan]... it was like walking on one leg, that is why it was an earthquake for Jordan" (Al-Jazeera, 2009a). To a large extent, this defeat validated Arafat's perception regarding the need to initiate conscious emancipation of the Palestinians from Arab politics. What became even more urgent to the Palestinian leadership was to prohibit a possible Israeli-Arab settlement without the presence of the PLO. To this end, Arafat's goal was to "block Arab-Israeli deals which would neglect [his] irredentist demands" (Calvocoressi, 2009, p. 342) and keep all regional actors close enough to be able to have access to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In order to navigate these regional dynamics, the PLO had to interact and engage in the overall Arab competition that continued to define the region during the post-1967 defeat and after the 1973 October war. Arafat's interaction and engagement tactics, for better or worse, were

²² For more on the hijackings of the Palestinians see Chapter 5 'A Worldwide Interlocking Terrorist Network' Chamberlin (2012, pp. 133 - 161)

balancing polities, be it regionally or internationally.²³ To a large extent, it became almost an inherited trait of PLO's strategic culture for two main reasons. First, PLO's foreign policy was deeply entangled with its presence on 'borrowed' territory, first in Jordan between 1967 and 1970, then in Lebanon (1973 to 1982) and Tunisia (1985 – 1993). Thus, while it had political independence, there was a level of logistical dependence that varied in degree from one place to another. Secondly, much of Arafat's foreign policy was entrenched in attaining arms and training to maintain the ability to attack Israeli targets. By the same token, Arafat's perception and strategic culture were exposed in his dealings with the leadership of the countries sharing borders with Israel as they were crucial for Arafat: Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon.

The Egyptian – Palestinian relations intensified as 'Abdel Nasser was contemplating accepting the US peace plan for Egypt and Israel after 1967, turning the Palestinians against Nasser. However irritating for 'Abdel Nasser, whose initial plan for the PLO was hijacked by Arafat, the relevance of the PLO, mainly due to the arms at its disposal, to the regional politics rendered Arafat indispensable. 'Abdel Nasser came to realize that he needed to come to an understanding with Arafat. In exchange for supporting him and providing training, PLO was forbidden to conduct operations against Israel from Egyptian soil. At the same time, the revolutionary sentiment of the Ba'th regime in Syria espoused the Palestinian resistance, both ideologically and militarily. Before the 1973 war, the Syrians allowed Fatah to use training camps on Syrian territory, offered them commandos training and arms, distributed its newspaper, assisted in weaponry transportation, and received Algerian shipment supplies through its borders (Pearlman, 2012, p. 132). Syria's generous support went beyond the revolutionary ideology; supporting Fatah's Fedayeen were a tool to counter Egypt. Arafat's clarity of the system—the continuity of the competition among the Arab leaders' hegemony in the region—gave him a lever of instrumentalizing it to put forth his own agenda.

Arafat did not aspire to play the hegemony game in the region as he was not competing with the other regional leaders. As Cobban (1984, pp. 204-205) has observed, the relationship between the Palestinian leadership and the Arab states was that they would support the PLO in

²³ Balancing polities is not limited to states; it includes non-state actors (guerrilla organisations) and political parties. In fact, in many occasions Arafat supported (mainly via arms) opposition parties within some states to put pressure to the ruling governments to comply with Arafat's demands.

logistical and political terms. In reciprocation, the PLO agreed not to use its arms against the Arab regimes. Although, it should be noted that, later on, Arafat technically broke his promise to almost every Arab leader in that regard. However, he was restricted by these constraints as the PLO required to be active in their territories against Israel to remain relevant and evolve as an actor and develop statelike characteristics. In Jordan, after the battle of Karama in 1968, the PLO established a representation in some quasi-governmental institutions that combined various commando organisations with civilian and military infrastructure on the East Bank of the Jordan River (Brand, 1988, p. 5). Finally, in Lebanon, Arafat managed to reach a deal with the Lebanese Christian leadership, known as the Cairo agreement in 1969,²⁴ much to their disdain, which allowed the PLO to use specific areas of southern Lebanon to attack Israeli targets and gradually gain legitimacy among the large Palestinian refugee population in Lebanon (Sahliyeh, 1986, p. 4). This further aggravated the Syrian president's cautiousness, who was deeply involved in Lebanon, becoming one of the fiercest opponents of Arafat.

As the Palestinians were adapting to the new opportunities in the region, they had to confront drastic changes that called the PLO to acclimate to new realities. Several domestic political developments in each of the Arab states dictated these drastic changes in the region. More specifically, between the Six-Day war in 1967 and the October war in 1973, the regional dynamics were triggered by the death of 'Abdel Nasser, whose legacy was unable to be tainted even by the humiliating defeat of 1967. Both Cairo and Damascus, who were deeply involved in the defeat, endured quite a change in their political scene. In 1970, Anwar Sadat took over in Egypt, an Egyptian nationalist, as opposed to his predecessor Nasser, a pan-Arabist and the moderate Ba'thist, Hafez Al Assad, replaced the Ba'thist regime (Taylor, 1982, p. 75). Both leaders were highly cautious of Arafat, as they wanted a say in Palestinian affairs.

On the one hand, Sadat intended to distance himself from the PLO; on the other, Assad wanted to co-opt it. Arafat continued to project a strategic culture of balancing politics and developed the art of avoidance to fit into the drastic changes within the region. At the same time, some key countries in the region endured changes more than others. While all the dynasties of the Gulf states continued unchanged along with Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, in 1969, Libya's coup d'état brought Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi into power, and Iraq witnessed a Ba'thist coup that soon

²⁴ For the text of the agreement see Brynen (1990, pp. 201-202)

brought to power Saddam Hussain (Hourani, 2005, p. 417). To a large extent, the devastation of the Arab world following the Six-Day War was still hovering in the early 1970s, defining much of the political spirit.

It is almost impossible to assume that there is a clear perception of the system when the developments occur in such a drastic manner in a short period. Furthermore, it blurred Arafat's perception of the system, especially as he had attained his new position in the PLO and its overconfidence regarding its military capacity and position in the region. As mentioned previously, Palestinian guerilla fighters were scattered in almost all countries bordering Israel. Palestinians always invested in Jordan due to the fact that it shared the longest border with Israel. In the 1970s, the PLO used Jordan as a base to launch attacks against Israel. This had significant implications for the Jordanian Palace, as it threatened its stability, not only vis-à-vis Israel but also compromised the legitimacy of Jordan. In addition, the Palestinian armed groups had a thug-like behaviour that usually speared uncontrollable violence in the suburbs of Amman, challenging the Palace's authority. As the Fedayeen would carry out attacks from Jordan, regardless of the objection of the palace, Israel would retaliate on Jordanian soil. The Palestinians felt that the fact that the King of Jordan had lost the West Bank would compensate him by allowing the PLO to develop autonomy. In fact, the palace had closed its eyes to the lawlessness of the Palestinians. At the same time, the Palestinians had demonstrated that they intended to gain internal autonomy and state-like powers, which they managed to a large extent in Jordan, albeit far more so in Lebanon (Lia, 2006). Whether it was the PLO's inexperience or over-estimated perception of its power, the Palestinians were abusing their power within Jordan,²⁵ which led to the tensions between the Jordanian armed forces and the PLO accelerating rapidly.

Consequently, Black September broke out or, as the Jordanians call it, "Jordanian civil war" in 1970 (Anziska, 2018, p. 197), leading to the Palestinian leadership's and armed branch's expulsion from Jordanian territory. The escalation of violence in Jordan demonstrated that the PLO did not have total control over the armed Palestinian groups. The aftermath of Black September triggered a difficult period on various fronts for the PLO. From a political aspect, PLO exposed a vulnerability of internal friction within its constituency. The ousting from Jordan stated the

²⁵ It seemed that already since their days in Jordan, the Palestinian movements had started to conduct policing on the Palestinian population within the host state and beyond. For more on Palestinian self-policing in Jordan in 1968–70 see Lia (2006, pp. 33-34).

obvious; the PLO was still subordinate to its host state's authority. This difficult period would be further burdened by the October War of 1973.

The 1973 war was the Arabs' attempt to vindicate the Arab wounded pride and regain the territorial losses of the defeat in 1967; the Golan Heights, the Sinai and the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel. On Saturday morning in October 1973, Yom Kippur day, the Syrian and Egyptian armies simultaneously launched surprise attacks at the Golan Heights, crossing the Suez Canal and seizing the Bar-Lev Line of Israel, heading to the Sinai, while the PLO was attacking from the southern part of Lebanon. By the same token, the Iraqi, Jordanian and Moroccan forces dispatched “expeditionary force to assist the Syrian army”, while “Algerian and Kuwaiti units supported the Egyptian army” (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 319).²⁶ Although Israel was unable to anticipate the attack, it soon was able to repel the Arab forces. Amidst the war, the “Arab oil-producing countries decided [...] to cut production by 5 per cent until Israel relinquished the territories occupied in 1967” and even retaliated against the US, who were supporting Israel, by imposing “a 10 per cent production cut and an embargo on sales to the US” (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 319). This coordination among the Arab states did not last long. Sadat had halted the Egyptian forces halfway through Sinai, leaving the Syrian forces exposed on the Golan Heights confronting the IDF. In essence, Sadat had negotiated his terms with Israel via the mediation of Kissinger, disregarding the Arab allies (Khalidi, 2013a, p. 33). It is noteworthy that, prior to the war in 1971, Sadat had attempted to negotiate the Egyptian territories with Israel on an exclusive bilateral level, but Tel Aviv rejected the terms. Given the Arabs’ heavy military defeat, the October war 1973 was a costly ‘flight square’ for Sadat. He opted to go to war and was willing to endure a military cost only to pursue his initial intention, which was to convince the US and the Soviets to mediate for a political settlement regarding the Sinai (Hourani, 2005; Khalidi, 2013a). If anything, Sadat’s stance towards his Syrian allies ‘broke’ the pact of *no war, no peace approach*, an unequivocal understanding among Arab leaders that entailed an Arab collective approach towards Israel, setting the pace for the new regional dynamics in the post-1973 war era.

Beyond the tactics of balancing polities vis-à-vis the regional actors and, by extension, the superpowers, Arafat pursued ‘a dual political tactic’ (Abraham, 1979, p. 7) in the way he conducted

²⁶ According to Sayigh (1997b, p. 319) “the cost of the conflict for Israel was over 2,800 dead and an estimated 109 aircraft, and 840 tanks, while for Egypt and Syria (and their Arab allies) lost another 8,500 dead, 447 aircraft, and 2,554 tanks, indicating the military defeat of the Arabs”.

his diplomacy, which was evident already by the time of the olive branch speech in 1974. On an official level, Arafat had rejected UN Resolution 242, which required Israel's recognition of the pre-1967 borders. In practice, however, Arafat pursued a set of foreign policies, indicating his willingness to recognize Israel. In September 1974, Arafat endorsed a more political approach to the Palestinian cause and agreed with Egypt and Syria to connect (and limit) the Palestinian rights to regain the 1967 occupied territories (Eleftheriadou, 2021, p. 101; Sayigh, 1997b, p. 343). In exchange, the PLO would instrumentalize its regional relations to expand and enhance relations beyond the Middle East. This more moderate style would enable the PLO to penetrate the Arab and international system²⁷ via the route of diplomacy at the expense of the PLO's revolutionary character (Abraham, 1979, pp. 7-8; Sayigh, 1986, pp. 100-101).

3.5.1. The International Playground

If diplomacy is understood as “the softer end of the continuum of foreign policy instruments” (Hill, 2015, p. 158), it is required to briefly examine Fateh's and PLO's foreign policy beyond the region up until Arafat's speech at the UN in 1974. Arafat accessed the international political scene due to his efforts on a bilateral level to attain military support from actors beyond the region. It is important to mention that the Palestinian leadership was not concerned with the ideological competition of the external powers of the region. Be it with China, the Soviets or the US, Arafat was concerned more about how to attain support for the Palestinian armed struggle that would come to sustain the PLO.

Since the mid-1960s, under Algerian auspices, Arafat travelled to China to establish a vital supply of arms almost until the 1980s (Cobban, 1984, pp. 216-217). PLO's Fedayeen were inspired by the Chinese thought regarding “tactics on the utility of military force and guerrilla warfare” (Selim, 1991, pp. 293-294). Even in geopolitical terms, China's understanding of the region vis-à-vis the US-Soviet Cold War had rendered PLO a valuable ally that counter-balanced the imperialist US, who backed Israel and the revisionist Soviets. Furthermore, Arafat cultivated this relationship carefully, which turned out to be a genuine investment in his later diplomatic agenda. Although when China became part of the Security Council of the UN in the 1970s, they “did not once wield the veto this seat afforded them to block any resolutions opposed by the Palestinians”

²⁷ For a more schematic description of PLO's penetration to the international system see Amos (1980, p. 261)

(Cobban, 1984, p. 18). Instead, the Chinese supported the Palestinians by providing arms and never condemned the Palestinian liberation struggle as such. In fact, Palestinian – Chinese relationship was resilient even when PLO sought Egypt’s and Syria’s assistance to establish relations with Moscow.

After tremendous persistence on Arafat’s part, ‘Abdel Nasser introduced him to the Soviets in late 1968 as part of the Egyptian delegation; he was received with reservations. The Egyptian president had already mediated and was a guarantor for the Soviets to provide arm supplies to PLO. The Soviet’s policy considered that their role in the Arab – Israeli conflict would “outweigh the benefits” of preventing western influence in the region (Golan, 2010, p. 19), which eventually caused Moscow to lose its international leverage, as was demonstrated during Camp David. Nevertheless, the Cold War, according to Sayigh and Shlaim (1997, p. 125), was “a principal factor [...] [in] determining the outcome of the Palestinian national struggle at every stage, and that PLO politics and policies were affected by it at every level. The impact was not always direct—the Cold War often operated through the intervening role of the Arab states—but it remained pervasive”. Finally, it should not be surprising that the PLO had directed its attention to the UN, as it was the main platform for the Palestinian issue. In the eyes of the PLO, “[t]he UN can only really be effective in a period of superpower détente”,²⁸ as Hassan Abdel-Rahman, deputy head of the PLO’s observer mission at the UN between 1974 and 1982, later pointed out.

Nevertheless, the Olive Branch speech had put the Palestinian question in the Palestinian hands in front of the international community. To a large extent, the Palestinian strategy by 1974 was geared toward preserving both the armed struggle and a Palestinian international presence while attempting to negotiate for a political solution (Khalidi, 2007, p. 156). Israel firmly rejected the PLO in the UN General Assembly in September 1975 as the representative of the Palestinians. The PLO was regarded as a terrorist organisation whose “primary aim [was] the annihilation of the State of Israel and the genocide of its people” (Tessler, 2009, p. 486). Furthermore, in 1974, the Israelis considered relations with Egypt much more vital than the Palestinians to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. In fact, they were barely convinced that the UN had any “genuine interest in the Palestinian cause but was instead simply caving in to pressure from oil-rich Arab states”

²⁸ Quotes in Cobban (1984, pp. 230-231)

(Tessler, 2009, p. 486). The US endorsed the Israeli stance and imposed grave restrictions on implementing the Palestinian diplomatic agenda.

In the post-1973 war, the PLO had come to a crossroad. Once given the blessing of becoming the sole representative of the Palestinian people, the PLO had to enhance its all-encompassing authority over the Palestinian question. To this end, as Rosemary Sayigh (1986, pp. 100-101) points out, the options for the PLO were:

“either to maintain maximal goals, requiring a level of military, infrastructural, social, and economic strength it had not come close to enjoying even at its peak in the 1968-70 period, or to adopt the minimal goals that could be achieved through international diplomacy”.

PLO's foreign policy was constantly adapting to a minimal goal of its national aspirations to safeguard the organisation's very existence. A pattern that entirely defined Arafat's strategic culture vis-à-vis his international diplomacy. What makes the PLO even more extraordinary is its ability to derive power from its internal cohesion and channel it not only into foreign policy beyond bilateral agreements of military nature (e.g., arms, training and so forth) but also advance it into the realm of diplomacy (e.g., legitimacy of the entity). In other words, the PLO builds on its domestic sovereignty to achieve international sovereignty without being legally recognised internationally. Technically, the starting date of its international sovereignty is 1974, when it was officially accepted as the sole representative of the Palestinian people by the Arab League and, subsequently, by the UN. The power that PLO developed as a statelike actor was mirrored in its ability to conduct foreign policy. PLO's trajectory until the early 1970s clearly revealed its leadership's strategic culture and the system's perception. What consolidated PLO as a statelike actor was when Arafat relocated PLO's headquarters to Lebanon. Thereon, PLO developed firm statelike characteristics.

3.6. A Statelike Actor in the Making

PLO's evolution from an armed non-state actor into a statelike actor developed gradually, reaching its peak in the decade between 1973-1982. The most spectacular aspect of PLO is that it went beyond military activity, expanding its capacity with many state functions. The main aspects of these state functions regarded attaining territorial control, developing structures of a “multi-level governance system” that became even “more functional and effective than the official Lebanese

government [especially during the civil war] or [other] governments of several third world countries that had recently gained independence” (Eleftheriadou, 2014, p. 283). This was due to the fact that for the first time since the loss of Palestine in 1948, “all layers of Palestinian society coalesced to form a more or less integrated whole” (El-Khazen, 1987, p. 41). The PLO established all facets of what defines a state, led by Arafat, albeit on foreign territory. In terms of the internal organisational structure, the PLO displayed “all the trappings of a government-in-exile: an executive, a cabinet, a parliament, and an army” (Brand, 1988, p. 3). It also provided services to its constituency, such as health, education and welfare, not only in Lebanon but also in the region. Many scholars have been intrigued by this process of PLO’s state-building (Amos, 1980; Baker, 1978; Cobban, 1984; Eleftheriadou, 2014; Hamid, 1975; Jureidini & Hazen, 1976; Kiernan, 1976; Sahliyah, 1986; Sayigh, 1977; Sayigh, 1997a, 1997b) to name a few.

3.6.1. Territoriality

The notion of territoriality is a crucial factor when conceptualizing a statelike actor within the state/non-state nexus. The general scholarship acknowledges that the PLO’s state-building process dates back to the beginning of 1970 when it moved its headquarters to Lebanon. What is impressive in PLO’s case is that it carved out its own space within Lebanon. It was a space that offered the PLO different aspects of sovereignty on a particular territory (Lebanon) beyond the territory that it claims (OPT) until the PLO’s exodus in 1982. The decision of Arafat to establish PLO’s headquarters in Beirut was primarily a result of the structural dynamics of the region and, to a lesser extent, a result of Arafat's efforts to establish some access within various states bordering Israel in order to be able to launch attacks against the latter. After PLO’s expulsion from Jordan, the organisation searched for a new temporary home for an estimated 15 to 30,000 rebels and their families (Brynen, 1990, p. 64). Following Black September of 1970, which resulted in the loss of the Palestinian movement's independent base in Jordan, the destiny of the PLO’s next home was much dictated by the regional dynamics. The PLO had three options: Egypt, Syria or Lebanon. Egypt was rather openly hostile to any PLO military activity against Israel and decisive in curtailing PLO’s influence, so it was rapidly ruled out. Similarly, Syria would offer a very narrow margin for freedom of operational and political movement, even though, initially, Assad’s regime received approximately 2,500-3,000 rebels – mainly PFLP members (Sayigh, 1986). Hafiz al-Assad, who had just attained power in Syria, intended to influence the Palestinian movement by

imposing restricted security measures on the active Palestinians in Syria and limiting them from creating an independent base similar to that in Jordan. Consequently, many non-compliant Palestinian rebels gradually sought refuge in Lebanon between 1971 and 1973 (Sayigh, 1986, pp. 99-100).

As the leaders in the other bordering states, the Lebanese government considered the PLO a threat, generating a web of perplexity in Palestinian-Lebanese relations. In fact, since the Nakba, in 1948, the Palestinian population in Lebanon was one of the most maltreated by the Lebanese government in comparison to other Arab states. Although similar to other Arab countries, the Palestinian cause and armed struggle were popular in Lebanon's public opinion. Seventy-nine per cent of the Lebanese population supported the Fedayeen (Brynen, 1990, p. 49). On the contrary, the Maronite Christian establishment that ruled Lebanon had good relations with Israel (Atzili, 2010, p. 764). Moreover, Lebanese security forces always had a tight grip on its large Palestinian refugee population.

However, before the PLO's headquarters were moved to Lebanon, various Palestinian armed factions in Lebanon attempting to claim some freedom for activity against Israel were met with force by the Lebanese Army. Arafat – still in Jordan –persisted lobbying Arab regimes to pressure the Lebanese regime to change its stance toward the Palestinian soon paid off. The Lebanese army's military weakness and limited internal legitimacy made it impossible to resist the mounting pressure exerted by various Arab regimes. More specifically, this pressure led to the Cairo Agreement between the Lebanese President Helou, head of the Lebanese Army, General Bustani, and Yasser Arafat in 1969 (Sayigh, 2008, pp. 172-173).²⁹ While little changed regarding the clashes between the Palestinian guerrillas and the Lebanese Army, the Cairo Agreement gave the PLO “full control over the Palestinian [refugees] living in Lebanon” (Sahliyeh, 1986, p. 4). Thus, upon PLOs arrival in Beirut in 1973, the Palestinian leadership had a vast base and some autonomy. In addition, the agreement allowed the PLO to use specific areas of southern Lebanon to attack Israeli targets. So, although a hostile country, Lebanon had offered the PLO the ability to attack Israel and mobilise the Palestinian population through the ‘no-man's-land’ in the Lebanese south (El-Khazen, 1987, p. 41). Despite setting some limitations to the PLO, in the sense that any

²⁹ Internal and external pressure, exacerbated by the official handling of a PFLP-organised hijacking in 1968, (Cobban, 1984, p. 146)

action of the Palestinians would require some coordination with the Lebanese, the agreement technically legitimized PLO's autonomous status within Lebanon.

In Lebanon, Arafat could translate PLO's autonomous status into physical control over (Lebanese) territory with various state functions such as economic production, the establishment of Palestinian identity, monopoly of violence and development of institutions. In turn, these state functions rendered the PLO a government-in-exile. It should be mentioned that although the PLO achieved its maximum level of stateness in Lebanon between 1973-1982, there were previous, short-lived attempts. Specifically, in Jordan between 1968 and 1970 and in the Gaza Strip between 1970 and 1971, the Palestinians were predisposed to develop autonomy and statelike functions, regardless of whether it was within Palestinian or in other states' territory (Lia, 2006, p. 31). PLO's capacity to become a full statelike actor was facilitated by Lebanon's fragile dynamics, which were much dictated due to the confessional system—especially after the total disintegration of the Lebanese security structures, dragging the country into a devastating civil war, which created a vacuum that allowed the PLO to develop a proto-state (Eleftheriadou, 2021). While this corrosion of the security system implied the weakness of the Lebanese Army's efficiency in restricting the PLO, on the one hand, it also created a set of additional problems that would redirect the PLO's primary focus (attacks against Israel) as it became preoccupied with several other actors and militia groups, all competing for territorial control within Lebanon (Atzili, 2010, p. 765). On the other hand, the vacuum of power and the chaos offered the opportunity for the PLO to expand its power in various aspects of state-building efforts, to the point that Lebanon was no longer solely “a transnational sanctuary in the service of the Palestinian struggle against Israel” (Eleftheriadou, 2021, p. 119). Instead, Lebanon became an independent base that would restore the lost dignity in the Nakba.

At the same time, it also created an opportunity environment for Israel that used the chaos of the Lebanese civil war to intensify its counterinsurgency attacks against the PLO. In the beginning of the Lebanese civil war, the Israeli Labor government had allied with the Christian Maronite forces, who were fighting the PLO primarily, and offered them \$150 million for military reinforcement (Sahliyah, 1986, p. 5). As a result, PLO's armed struggle against Israel expanded to a violent and deliberate involvement in the Lebanese civil war. In addition, Arafat had to confront many new rivals within Lebanon, who also viewed the PLO as a threat. This was exploited by Al-Assad, who inspired to control the PLO and banish Arafat from its leadership, via proxies in

Lebanon. Thus, in practice, Israel ceased to be PLO's primary target as it had to channel its military efforts to counter other militias. To a certain extent, it may be argued that these military constraints compelled Arafat to shift his efforts toward state-building and diplomacy to counter Israel. In this sense, the Lebanese civil war is a vital structural alternation of the structural dynamics in which Arafat and the PLO operated internally and externally.

Without being granted the international legal recognition of a state – neither at a *de facto* level (a recognition that came in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords) nor a *de jure* (a recognition that as of this day has not been granted), the PLO had a high degree of 'stateness', in the Weberian sense. The Palestinian leadership had an institutionalised rule structure with the ability to rule authoritatively, with administrative order and even legal at times, implementing central decisions for a collectivity. By the same token, PLO exposes two parallel processes of sovereignty that overlap in various points: the internal (domestic) and external (conducting bilateral and multilateral relations) sovereignty that will be addressed under the prism of intervening variables in the following sections.

3.6.2. State-Society Relations

In technical terms, the PLO—as the sole representative of the Palestinian people—attained popular legitimacy in the sense of domestic sovereignty. At the same time, it is not acquired from the very bottom-up approach; instead, it was a semi-top-bottom perspective. To a large extent, the international legitimacy of the PLO to represent the Palestinian people reflected the domestic legitimacy provided by the PLO's internal function, which represented numerous Palestinian factions across the board. However, it gradually was able all the more to penetrate and gain support from various strata of the scattered Palestinian society, eventually attaining a bottom-up legitimacy. The question, however, is what was PLO's constituency and how it attained this legitimacy from a bottom-up perspective.

The Palestinian population is scattered; it is not only the Palestinians inhabiting the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (OPT) but also the Palestinian refugees from Egypt to Kuwait and those beyond the region, regardless of whether they had the status of stateless or held another state's document.³⁰ In order to confront the challenge of being the representative of this dispersed

³⁰ For a detailed geographical distribution of the Palestinian people see Table 9.1. in Selim (1991)

population, the PLO established departments equivalent to ministries; for instance, the Department of National Relations represented the PLO in Arab countries, especially focusing on the status of the Palestinians in these host states and the department of Occupied Homeland's Affairs dealing with the Palestinians under Israeli occupation in Palestine (Selim, 1991). When Arafat attended the Rabat Summit, which recognized the PLO as a presentative of the Palestinian people, he held a petition signed by 180 West Bank and Gaza dignitaries (Tessler, 2009, p. 490). Given the lack of an effective electoral system, it cannot substantiate the actual level of representation of the Palestinian people across the board as a whole. However, it may be argued rather fiercely that the PLO represented some of the core principles that all Palestinians shared, namely, the liberation of Palestine and the Palestinian people, as well as the return or rights of refugees. These became a common denominator unifying many Palestinians, setting aside possible disagreements regarding how to attain liberation, on what borders, what would adjust the situation of the refugees and so forth. Howbeit, and even more importantly, the unprecedented exitance of Palestinian representation from and by Palestinians rendered the PLO an 'acceptable' leader as opposed to not being represented at all. This is not to say that all Palestinians supported the PLO. The more power the PLO gained, the more the enemies within its ranks. For instance, the PLO lost many Palestinian supporters to Syria, while other factions with a more Islamic character did not deem the secular PLO legitimate. Still, the constituency of the PLO came to encapsulate a large base not so much for its political convictions but based on a general Palestinian cause.

The PLO attempted to establish a political rhetoric that would broaden its base. Arafat capitalised on this factor since the inception of Fateh; Arafat was advocating for a non-partisan movement that would bring together all the Palestinian 'brother comrades' (Azam, 2020) to liberate Palestine. On the one hand, addressing the Palestinian people as 'brother' conveyed the dual notion of a nationalist discourse of the 19th century and religious lingo, intending to appeal to both the nationalist and religious sentiment—be it Muslim or Christian. On the other hand, the term 'comrade' to appeal to the more leftist sentiment implied his intention to unify all Palestinians across the board under a non-partisan umbrella. As a chairman of the PLO, Arafat's political style and rhetoric of Arafat maintained the same tone, regardless of the practices behind the scenes.³¹

³¹ Arafat's tendency to negate some of his official positions behind the scenes e.g. his convictions regarding the US (officially denouncing the US yet behind the scenes attempting to establish dialogue) has been characterized by some experts as 'contradictory policies' (Sayigh, 1997b) or 'dual tactics' (Abraham, 1979)

Unlike the political style of the Arab regimes that had the tendency “to monopolize power and to relate to their masses in a paternalistic way”; Arafat’s social egalitarianism established the foundations for political legitimacy that brought the leadership and its people closer (Taylor, 1982, p. 76). It is important to note that it was not so much a matter of genuine egalitarianism based on a bottom-up democratic process of the Palestinian people. Instead, the Palestinian leadership’s rhetoric emphasised on popular armed resistance and revolutionary activity; a rhetoric that narrowed the gap between state and society. The resistance discourse was equally apparent and persistent in PLOs media outlets (newspapers, pamphlets and magazines). In this sense, it may be argued that the resistance discourse functioned as a populist veil of Arafat’s authoritarianism not only within Fateh and PLO but also in regards to opposition figures on the higher echelons of several Palestinian political groups. The authoritarianism was a tool that allowed the Palestinian leadership to forge a relationship with the society so as “to stand above it, to control it and to shape its nationalist agenda” (Baylis, Owens, & Smith, 2019, p. 211), not only for the sake of a free independent Palestine per se but also for the sake of the power in the hands of Arafat. Arafat was aware of the importance of his constituency. In an interview in Cairo’s Al-Ahram newspaper on November 7, 1969, he claimed:

“Commando action in Lebanon is an established fact, as evidenced by our presence in the streets, in the camps and in the border villages. However, we cannot base our action in Lebanon on the fait accompli alone. The commando movement needs to deepen itself from the human, ideological and struggle point of view. This cannot be achieved, either in Lebanon or anywhere else, except through the commando movement tying itself to the masses”.³²

Even before moving PLO's headquarters to Lebanon, Arafat had these notions in mind. When he arrived in Beirut in the early 1970s, he had to demonstrate that the PLO valued the masses. The primary and more immediate constituency of the PLO was a large number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, over 400,000 Palestinians, many of whom were heavily armed (Neumann, 1979, p. 30) and would see the PLOs benefits of being a statelike actor in action.

PLOs state structure during 1973-1982 became so concrete and successful due to its *durable bureaucratic elite* (Sayigh, 1997b, p. x) that gave it the power to become a major broker “and, [a] cuckoo-like, construct[ing] a state-in-exile” (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 675). Administratively, the PLO was already in control of the Palestinian refugee camps located in Lebanon to the PLO,

³² Quoted in Brynen (1990, p. 54).

based on the Cairo Agreement in 1969 (Atzili, 2010, p. 768; Sayigh, 1997b, p. 180). The institutionalization of political power stemmed from the various functions the PLO provided to its constituency. First and foremost, the very enlargement of the PLO implied that many more were employed by it. As Yazid Sayigh (1997b, p. x) pointed out, the PLO maintained the exclusivist functions of the core bureaucratic elite, much like the statist corporatism that characterized the Arab states in the region, where the state is “both as a major employer and as an arena for the articulation of factional conflict and power competition”.

This ‘state-centric’ approach guaranteed ‘a clientelistic loyalty and dedication to the system’ (Peretz, 1977, p. 61), further generating legitimacy among his constituency, similar to other Arab regimes in the region. However, the PLO attempted to genuinely unify the Palestinian community by becoming a social bridge between the Palestinian upper and lower classes within Lebanon (Eleftheriadou, 2014); more specifically, between the small Palestinian professional and business elite (e.g., doctors, lawyers and professors) in Beirut and the more marginalized massed of the camps. Arafat was very wary of the particularities of Lebanon and utilized the Palestinian elite such as Hasib Sabbagh, Tawiq Khoury and banker Abdul Majid Shoman to bridge between the Palestinian communities and the Lebanese government.

The civil war had put a strain on Lebanon’s general law and order. One of the challenges for the PLO was to implement law and order among its own constituency, a pressing matter for Arafat to demonstrate the Organisation’s legitimacy. Since the outbreak of the civil war, there was a proliferation of weapons, crime and the unnecessary use of arms (Lia, 2006, p. 35); all handled by the Palestinian Armed Struggle Command (PASC), PLO’s Revolutionary Court and popular committees in the camps (Eleftheriadou, 2014, p. 282). In fact, the PLO later developed a legislative framework for justice, directed by the Revolutionary Penal Code, the Revolutionary Code of Criminal Procedures, and the Revolutionary Rehabilitation Code, in 1979, which ‘to all sectors of the Palestine People’ with an independent court system (Arab Reports and Analysis, 1981, p. 150). Beyond the issues of law and order, PLO penetrated the Palestinian society—in the OPT and the diaspora— by establishing the ‘Department of Mass Organisations’. This department would include various unions, such as the General Union of Palestinian Worker and General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS), to disseminate PLO’s political agenda to what came to be its (Rubenberg, 1983, pp. 71-75).

The critical element for every functional state is an efficient economy, and the PLO created a 'Palestinian economy'. According to some estimates, the Palestinian economy produced over 15 per cent of Lebanon's GDP (Nasr, 1990), boosting PLO's function to resemble all the more a state. The PLO's employment capacity (Amos, 1980; Khalidi, 1984; Morrison, 1984) was equivalent to that of a state and its employment in the public sector, employing over 10,000 non-military and creating around 30,000 jobs for the Palestinians (Nasr, 1990, p. 5). Some reports indicate that the PLO employed over 60 per cent of the Palestinian workforce (Sayigh, 2015, p. 213). Initially, it directed its energy into providing for the families of its fighters. As the violence intensified both against Israel and with the context of the Lebanese civil war, the PLO had to provide incentive for its legitimate cause and curtail any possible frustration by providing special assistance to the fallen fighter's families. It established the department of 'Social Affairs and Welfare for the Families', although it expanded to provide financial help also to the poorer Palestinian families across the region and, particularly, to the Palestinians within the OPT whose houses were demolished by Israeli forces (Brynen, 1990, p. ch. 6; Rubenberg, 1983, pp. 75-76). An even more proactive attempt, the PLO establish a vocational training institute, SAMED, that similarly to the department of Social Affairs and Welfare, it had various services for the families of the fallen fighters but it developed its training workshops into a total of 46 factories. Impressively, with a labour force of over 5000 people producing a vast variety of products (from clothes and shoes to furniture), not only for internal consumption but also to export in the region (Brynen, 1990, p. ch. 6; Eleftheriadou, 2021, p. 108; Rubenberg, 1983, pp. 66-69; Sayigh, 1997b, p. 460). An important observation is that all these financial boosting had contributed to Lebanon's economic lifeline amid a devastating civil war.

Additional PLO initiatives that exposed its state functions vis-à-vis the society revolved around a network of social services, from electricity and water supply, garbage collection and health care. In fact, the Palestinian 'government' had given particular significance in developing the health care system. Since 1969 in Lebanon, the PLO opened clinics under the name 'Palestine Red Crescent Society', treating non-Palestinians to win and preserve the support of the Lebanese population. At the outbreak of the civil war, it used these infrastructures as a base to expand health care and other social services. By 1982, the PLO ran 10 hospitals, an additional of 30 clinics, centres for rehabilitation centres, nursing school and various pharmacies (Brynen, 1990: ch. 6; Rubenberg, 1983: 61-6; Morrison, 1984: 49-51).

This financial apparatus that broadened the financial and social base of the PLO was funded partly by Arab oil-producing states. Donations by wealthy Palestinian diaspora also assisted in flow of funds. Palestinian abroad were also paying voluntary taxes. Interestingly, given Arafat's influence, all these flows of revenues were direct to Fateh rather than to the PLO (Morrison, 1984, pp. 117-118; Tessler, 2009, p. 497). By the mid-1970s, most of the money was directed toward investing in the Palestinian economy within Lebanon, fortifying the state-society relations. However, similar to other Arab regimes, corruption started to proliferate among many of the PLO's cadres, as large amounts were "wasted or spent to support the luxurious lifestyles" (Morrison, 1984, pp. 117-118), especially at the beginning of the 1980s, altering the state-society dynamics.

Finally, the PLO intended not only to convince its constituency of its policies and gain their loyalty, but it also wanted to form a national identity; thus, education and production of knowledge were also central. To this end, the PLO funded many Palestinian students via scholarships. It also funded and opened 100 new schools in Lebanon for Palestinian refugees at the height of the Lebanese civil war (Nasr, 1990).³³ Generally, the literacy rate of the Palestinians, not only within Lebanon but also across the region, including the OPT, was the highest of any other Arab society in the Middle East at the time (Morrison, 1984, pp. 117-118). Additionally, the PLO funded and developed various projects in theatre and arts, promoting traditional costumes and creating a national anthem to frame a cultural history that would support the political challenges of the Palestinian cause. In an effort to 'broadcast' to the world the Palestinian cause, the PLO operated radio stations, film-making facilities, magazines and newspaper presses, all of which enhanced its function as a state and brought it closer to its society. Information Bureau performed both informational and public relations and presented the various policies of the PLO to the constituency. Most notable of all was the newspaper *Filastin al-Thawra* (Palestine Revolution), news agency Wafa, and publishes a bi-weekly journal in French and English entitled Palestine.

During the 1970s, the PLO created a society within Lebanon and the diaspora, which it served, as the PLO cared for a large variety of material needs and services for and by the Palestinian people. Hence, many Palestinians, as a constituency, became dependent on the PLO. The state-society relations in terms of legitimacy were perhaps the closest they have been up-to-date. The fact that the PLO provided services, a financial apparatus, and dealt with all the matters of

³³ The Lebanese civil war had affected much of UNRWA's work for the Palestinian refugees causing a halt in its educational projects. This created an additional vacuum for the PLO to fill.

livelihood to its constituency offered the PLO the power and resources to mobilize and gain popular support for the Palestinian cause, increasing the loyalty of Palestinians (Atzili, 2010, p. 768). While this section examined the state-society relations of PLO as a statelike actor, the role of the state-society in the foreign policy decision-making is not so linear.

3.6.3. The Mechanism of Decision-Making and its Institutions

One of PLO's strengths since its inception, and even when Arafat became chairman—was that it had established a relatively democratic decision-making process on the leadership level. However, as neoclassical realism claims, “democracies vary in the degree [...] it is useful to examine their institutional differences” (Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016, p. 76). This democratic process included the various factions within the PLO. In Arafat's view, the democratic structures of the PLO, regardless of their factual representation, were a point of pride and negating it would destroy the organisation. To this end, the PLO had installed various bureaucratic processes. PLO's formal process of foreign policy decision-making came with a simple majority on the level of the Palestinian National Council (PNC),³⁴ while the Executive Committee (EC) is entrusted with the task of making specific foreign policy decisions (Selim, 1991, p. 284). However, the charter of the PLO did give the ultimate power of decision-making to the EC, while Arafat could veto a decision. If the circumstances did not allow the gathering of the PNC, as it entailed hundreds of Palestinians across the world to meet, the issue would be handled by the EC, which is much smaller and consists of the more important and influential members of the PNC. Based on PLO's Charter the PNC and by extension, EC is the one that represents the Palestinian people and regulates decisions. The twelve EC members are elected by the PNC (Brynen, 1990; Selim, 1991). There was also an intermediary body, the Central Committee (CC), that would meet every three to five months to review and channel the communication between the EC and the PNC. These steps of formal procedures were invoked in either non-crisis periods or non-urgent matters.

Nevertheless, PLO's reality—more often than not—consisted of crisis situations and time constraints. This element is taken into consideration by neoclassical realism. It acknowledges that during such time, “[the] executive is usually separated from the “body” of the bureaucracy and from society and domestic institutions as a whole” and “have fewer opportunities to influence

³⁴ For a historical background of the PNC meetings see Arab Reports and Analysis (1987b)

the processes and mechanisms through which decision making occurs” (Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016, p. 61). Given the region's chaotic situation and the urgency of some decisions in an environment of war and constant change, neither the PNC nor the CC played a significant role in the urgent formulation of PLO's foreign policy (Brynen, 1990, pp. 184-185). Instead, the decisions were taken by the EC, the highest executive body of the PLO, in order to accelerate effective policy responses. By the same token, it may be argued that Fateh, as a dominating party within PLO, commands the organisation's informational, foreign policy and diplomatic machinery. Arafat's inner circle, the EC, had to bequeath legitimacy and authority upon sensitive and divisive decisions. Arafat's mandate was central in the decision-making process and in managing possible frictions between disagreeing parties within the PNC, by managing proceedings and reviewing all essential considerations and expedient alternatives (Selim, 1991, p. 285).

The EC comprised mostly Fateh members, reflecting the dominant majority of Fateh within the PNC. The EC controlled the Political Department, equivalent to a foreign ministry, under Khalid al-Hasan, Muhammad Yusif al-Najjar and Faruq al-Qaddoumi, all of whom operated under PLO's Chairman Arafat. In fact, the most efficient professionals and senior officers abroad either belonged to Fateh or supported it (Brynen, 1990; Rubenberg, 1983). In many cases, where the EC had to proceed with decisions that might have generated strong disagreement, the EC would proceed on presenting their decision in a vague but carefully written manner. While the Chairman has the power to veto decisions, Arafat could not command at will (Rubenberg, 1983, p. 61). However, even with the luxury of time, Fateh's domination within the PLO implies that it can influence and persuade via bargaining and compromise among these factions (Brynen, 1990, p. 50). Arafat had impeccable persuasion skills that would allow him to manoeuvre and manipulate others based on the clientelist system he ran.

Interestingly, given the range of Palestinian factions, according to Brynen (1990) the resolution of disagreements would “rests on compromise or even issue-avoidance”, often allowing a variety of interpretations of the policy and incremental changes to the policy (1990, pp. 47-48). While the smaller groups had the power of veto, the strength of Fateh was able to use its influence beyond the realm of the procedure to alter decisions. Again, this rather formal procedure usually took place on non-urgent issues and even principal issues, such as the PNC's 1974 decision to establish a national authority on any liberated Palestinian soil. That meant that hundreds of representatives across the world had to convene at a PNC meeting.

PLO's foreign ministry, the Political Department, in Beirut became PLO's "address for visiting foreign delegations" (Sayigh, 1986, p. 95), and it opened offices in most Arab capitals, gradually expanding globally, promoting popular Palestinian organisation (Nasr, 1990). The PLO had arranged with the Lebanese government to allow the foreign delegations for the PLO to enter without having to go through the usual immigration formalities, facilitating access to a vast international network. PLO's representation abroad (not only in countries but also in international organisations, e.g. UN) was in either formal diplomatic missions, quasi-diplomatic offices or information offices; within a decade of PLO's inception, there was a process within the Political Department, which regulated and selected the diplomatic personnel based on adequacy which was measured by seniority' within the PLO and 'experience' in conveying PLO's political agenda in the country of interest (Rubenberg, 1983, p. 78). It is worth noting that Arafat overshadowed PLO's Political department but also expanded and was enhanced by Fateh's External Relations Department (Sayigh, 1989, p. 259). In addition, the Information Bureau managed the journalists and other individuals from abroad and encouraged them to observe and study PLO in an effort to open up to the world (Rubenberg, 1983, p. 78). In fact, as Morrison (1984, p. 146) observes, examining the PLO archives, there was a high number of foreign officials visiting PLO leaders in Lebanon such as national leaders, diplomatic representatives and official envoys

Much of these internal processes of state-building of the PLO grasp the dynamics of the intervening variable of state-society relations and domestic institutions. To a great extent, they expose the process of how the PLO consolidated domestic sovereignty. In turn, domestic sovereignty bridged PLO's evolution of external sovereignty on the international political scene. This was expressed not only via the aforementioned missions across the world but also through a series of bilateral and multilateral relations that further consolidated the PLO as an actor within the realm of international politics. The very existence of all these statelike actor characteristics paved the way for the PLO to build unimaginable diplomatic machinery. The main statelike actor characteristics that reflect the intervening variables of neoclassical realism, including territoriality that remained a constant and stable factor until 1982, allow the study to view the PLO as an actor within the international system.

3.6.4. Diplomatic Machinery

What geared PLO's foreign policy was that it opted for diplomacy as an alternative weapon to counter Israel and promote the Palestinian issue. In fact, the military approach towards Israel largely declined; whether it was due to PLO's strategic contradictions(Sayigh, 1986),³⁵ or an inherited military weakness, the diplomatic outreach was meant to compensate for the ineffectiveness of the armed struggle without necessarily renouncing the latter altogether. The aim of deploying diplomatic machinery was primarily to consolidate the PLO's ultimate control of the Palestinian question and secondarily to promote Palestinian national aspirations. PLO's most outstanding achievement with its turn towards diplomacy was that it de facto achieved the role of being the 'authority' to decide the fate of the Palestinian people. With this acquisition, the notions of a state of Palestine or Palestinian national rights were and still are the ultimate objective. Though inhabited by the asymmetry of power, the more immediate aim became to attain a seat at the table of the Palestinian negotiations regarding Palestine.

Within the realm of diplomacy, Arafat was convinced that the US held all the cards in the region after 1973 and would be the only one with the power to *force* the hand of Israel. The consistent US reluctance to accept the PLO in any shape or form forced PLO to expand its relations with the rest of the world to persuade the US to attain a direct dialogue with the PLO. The PLO's diplomatic efforts in the early 1970s led to the UN speech's success in 1974, granting the observer status in the UN. Having already established and mobilized Arab solidarity,³⁶ Arafat sought a closer relationship with critical pro-Western Arab states such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt to utilize and increase PLO's bargaining power beyond the region. In addition, Arafat could use "the recycling of petrodollars to offer (or deny) oil supplies, receive financial aid and gain leverage" with various countries (Sayigh & Shlaim, 1997, p. 133).

The challenging aspect of PLO's foreign policy was that it aspired to engage with a vast range of countries that at times belonged to opposing political and ideological camps. In turn, Arafat had to balance and preserve his difficult and polemic relationship with al-Assad in Syria, to the extent that it would function as a bridge to more confrontational regimes such as those in

³⁵ For more an elaborate analysis of the military dimension of the PLO and how it was "overshadowed" by the diplomatic dimension see Eleftheriadou (2014, pp. 263-288).

³⁶ As Farouq Qadoumi had said: '[t]he PLO hopes to have good ties with all Arab states, developed ties, to support the Palestine cause'(Al-Qaddumi, 1988).

Iraq and Libya, but also with some contesting Palestinian factions within the PLO. For instance, Syria played a crucial role as it supported Arafat and gave him the right tone to proceed in presenting PLO's new moderate political program in 1974 (prior to the UN speech). On the other hand, Arafat also had problematic relations with the King of Jordan, who, especially after Black September, was much reserved towards Arafat. Nevertheless, Jordan, along with all the Arab countries' recognition of the PLO in the Arab summit, projected, at least superficially on a diplomatic level, a united Arab front regarding the PLO. This allowed the PLO to gain similar recognition by the Islamic Conference Organisation in 1969 and become a full member of the Arab League in 1976 (Quigley, 2010, p. 137).

In many aspects, the PLO considered itself part of the Third World, mainly in the geographical sense rather than ideological. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) became necessary leverage for PLO's diplomatic expansion, as many members were convinced to cease diplomatic relations with Israel (Tessler, 2009, p. 483). The alliances had no ideological connotation for PLO beyond its own liberation project. There was no intention on Arafat's behalf to position the PLO as an "equidistance towards the global powers" (Selim, 1991, p. 277). Instead, the PLO used various means of persuasion of various Third World states. To some, PLO "arranged cheap oil supplies or loans from Arab states in return for diplomatic support" (Sayigh & Shlaim, 1997, p. 133), while for uncompliant ones, the PLO armed and trained their opposition groups.

In this vein, PLO's penetration of the international system's various colliding blocks at times enhanced Arafat's statement that the PLO is in neither superpower camp. In fact, the PLO had no interest in altering its doctrines beyond the necessary point, which was to convince the Third World of the PLO's legitimacy and cause, as Arafat had to safeguard the PLO from any possible influence from any of the countries. The ultimate goal of Arafat's strategy to expand diplomatically was to increase PLO's involvement in various blocks and transnational organisations, including the Organisation of African Unity, to enhance diplomatic solidarity for the Palestinian cause further. All these diplomatic initiatives help advance Soviet-PLO relations. As it was not until 1976 that Moscow officially recognized the PLO, but the first official visit of the PLO to Moscow, for instance, took place in 1970, which was prompted by the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee. China was also important in maintaining and developing relations with many Third World countries. The Palestinians admire the Chinese thought on guerrilla warfare

and were much influenced by it.³⁷ Historically, the Chinese modestly provided financial and arming of the PLO (Selim, 1991, pp. 293-294). Nevertheless, China allowed the PLO to open an office in Beijing with de facto recognition (Selim, 1991, pp. 293-294). To compensate for the long stability of relations between the two, the PLO played a crucial role in convincing many Arab States to recognize the People's Republic of China. Similar positive relations with the Japanese had developed with the PLO. Japan was also part of the diplomatic attempts of Arafat, especially with the Japanese Communist Party. Although Japan voted in favour of the PLO's participation in the UN's General Assembly in 1974 and always treated the PLO delegations as representatives of the state in their mutual meetings, it "abstained on Resolution 3236" to avoid friction with the US; by 1976, PLO was operating its own office in Tokyo (Al-Hout, 2011, pp. 130-133).

The approach to Western states was even more essential for the PLO, who wanted the Western allies to indirectly influence the rigid stances against the Palestinians and the 'pro-Israeli' conditions set by Washington. While there is no evidence to suggest that the European state influences the US regarding the Palestinians, the PLO's efforts, however, shifted the Europeans stance from a rigid pro-Israeli to a more pro-Palestinian one. The first sign of improvement of the PLO-European relations occurred on a regional level, between the Arab League and the European Economic Community (EEC), in 1974, agreeing to the 'Dublin formula' that prompted dialogue between European delegation and Arab delegations, including the PLO (Frangi, 1983, p. 158).

Furthermore, the diplomatic machinery of Arafat demonstrated to the world the organisations' efficiency and relevance in international politics at the level of intermediations, allowing PLO to be viewed as a reliable actor. On a regional level, the PLO has averted many intra-Arab conflicts. For example, Arafat and his inner circle mediated between Iraq and Syria, whose relationship had deteriorated for some time. Impressively, the Soviets requested the PLO to negotiate with the Saudis on its behalf to advance Soviet-Saudi relations (Cobban, 1984, p. 229; Morrison, 1984, p. 155). Arafat mediated in a dispute between Muammar Qaddafi and Fidel Castro (Frangi, 1983, p. 139). In addition, the PLO sought to emphasize that it has a role in the region and that it can bridge relations between superpowers and regional powers; it was explicitly stated in one of Qaddoumi's speeches in the Summit following Fez declaration when asked about the mediation role of the PLO in the Soviet-Saudi relations, in 1982:

³⁷ For a more elaborate analysis see Eleftheriadou (2014, pp. 208-211)

“It's not a question of mediation. No one has asked us to mediate. But we play a role, because we are interested in the development of good relations between our friend, the Soviet Union, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, (the greatest economic power in the Arab world). [...] No matter how close the Soviet Union is to the oil sources, it is the friend of the Arabs and a supporter of their rights and their struggle” (Al-Qaddoumi, 1982, p. 169).

In Lebanon, the PLO concreted significantly in providing safety to many diplomates and official delegates or meditating for kidnappings and attacks against foreign diplomats (Sayigh, 1997a, pp. 365-366, 395, 504). To mention a few, the PLO sought to safeguard Kissinger's visit to Beirut in 1973 and American diplomats and nationals and many more other countries to flee Lebanon's 1976 clashes safely; the PLO's efforts received the recognition of the then US President Ford (Cobban, 1984, p. 236). According to some reports, PLO, in 1978, played an important role in averting Kurt Waldheim, UN General Secretary, assassination attempt in Lebanon (Brynen, 1990, p. 130). Furthermore, a major mediating effort of the PLO was in the Iranian American hostage crisis in 1979. A PLO delegation as part of the US mediating groups was set up to negotiate with Iranian officials, albeit its unsuccessful outcome in securing the hostages. PLO provided its mediation service for three years (1980-1983) between Mitterand's France and the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) to curtail ASALA attacks on French personnel and interest (Sayigh, 1997b).

If one is to take the definition of Hill (2015) regarding the performance of diplomacy for the contemporary international actor, the PLO's diplomacy had all four functions: it attempted various forms of negotiations, and it actively strived to achieve and participate in multilateral institutions and even promoted goods (SAMED) (2015, p. 158). This also included the machinery of justice, the police and armed forces, public administration and the institutions of political life (Hill, 2003, p. 39). Due to its strong statelike actor characteristics, the PLO was “more securely onto the international political stage as a full-fledged actor” (Morrison, 1984, p. 156). At the same time, the diplomatic support and solidarity attained by the PLO had an impressive impact on the international stance toward the PLO. It withstood major challenges within its own constituency that Arafat was able to manoeuvre, but also the structural challenges that occurred with the second Arab cold war that ‘converged with the deterioration of US-Soviet ties’ after 1978 (Sayigh & Shlaim, 1997, p. 139). Finally, albeit PLO's international reputation had been tainted by numerous Palestinian terrorist attacks (Brynen, 1989, p. 59), the diplomatic solidarity that came along with

PLO's *hyperactive* foreign policy on the international political scene into being more favourable toward the PLO and the Palestinian cause, at least on a rhetorical level.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter illustrated how the structural constraints had hindered the Palestinian agency since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 on three levels within the neoclassical realist approach. More specifically, the international dynamics, mainly through the involvement of the superpowers in the Middle East, demonstrated no interest in the Palestinian question as they were more concerned with the Arab-Israeli conflict. Within the Arab regional system, the Palestinian question was equally hindered and overshadowed by the Arab cold war. It was not until the mid-1960s that the regional actors deemed it necessary to allow a Palestinian organisation to be established, albeit under the control of Egypt. The laxity of the structural constraints triggered the first seeds of Palestinian agency, establishing a political platform for the already existing Palestinian factions to become involved.

Fateh, the most influential Palestinian faction, was able to take control of the PLO in 1968-1969 and, gradually, drive it out of the Arab regime's control, which was marked by Arafat's 'Olive Branch' speech in the UN's General Assembly in 1974. The speech also marked PLO's transformation into an independent statelike actor with the ability to conduct its own foreign policy. As its headquarters were in Lebanon, the civil war offered an additional structural modifier that allowed the PLO to grow into a statelike actor with the ability to conduct foreign policy as any other actor in the system. In spite, rather than despite, the structural constraints, the PLO was able to emerge and consolidate itself as "a political organisation demonstrated that the local actor (or agent) was not wholly subject to systemic constraints at every level" (Sayigh & Shlaim, 1997, p. 125); in this sense, the PLO was able to bare the Palestinian 'agency', as a political entity within the regional and international milieu.

The theoretical framework of neoclassical realism undoubtedly sustains that structural constraints and opportunities primarily influence actors' foreign policy. Its added value in analysing the actors' foreign policy choices is by incorporating *Innenpolitik* elements of analysing foreign policy as intervening variables, such as the domestic institutions, state-society relations, the leadership's perception of the system and its strategic culture. By the same token, the author used these intervening variables to corroborate the relevance of statelike actors' interaction with

the system's structure and external behaviour. To this end, the chapter traced and framed PLO's domestic institutions, PLO's relations with the Palestinian people, Arafat's perception of the system and his strategic culture in various instances. In addition to these variables, the study found that the notion of territoriality was equally vital in conceptualizing a statelike actor's external behaviour as it reflects its status of sovereignty.

More specifically, the notion of territoriality is not a given factor for statelike actors. Thus, the way PLO was able to consolidate control within a specific territory is indicative of its power as an actor. Moreover, even if PLO's territorial aspirations have always been the OPT, the chaos of the Lebanese civil war rendered West Beirut a base and a place where foreign delegations from across the world would go and meet with PLO's leadership, which shows its capacity to conduct foreign policy despite the structural constraints.

Equally vital for PLO's leadership was establishing a constituency to create state-society relations. While PLO was deemed as the sole representative of the Palestinian people, the demographic dispersion of the Palestinians from the OPT, the region and beyond was rather challenging. PLO's domestic institutions generated a clientelistic relation between the government-in-exile and its constituency. Not only did PLO provide a network of social services for its constituency, but it also was able to create a Palestinian economy amidst the Lebanese civil war, which provided jobs for a large base of the Palestinian population and Lebanese.

Another state function of the PLO was the establishment of the Political Department, equivalent to a foreign ministry that dictated the foreign policy of the PLO. It may be argued that the mechanism of decision-making was two geared. On the one hand, there were provisions of formal procedures that would take place via PNC and EC meetings to incorporate all Palestinian representatives within the PLO democratically. On the other hand, given the consistent crisis situation and the lack of time and space (as these meetings required hundreds of Palestinian representatives across the world to meet), there was a gradual creation of an 'inner circle' that would dictate the foreign policy of the PLO and became much dependent of Arafat's strategic culture and perception of the system.

These different aspects of state function allowed the PLO to build diplomatic machinery, which put the Palestinian question on the international political map as a political issue rather than a refugee concern, under the guidance of the Palestinian leadership, as opposed to the regional Arab regimes. Examining the various state-functions aspects of the PLO demonstrated the

relationship between, on the one hand, the intervening variables and the PLO's leadership in responding in various instances. On the other, it illustrated how the PLO, as an actor, engages and reacts to the fluctuations within the system's environment—primarily within the region and, by extension, with the superpowers, under the prism of neoclassical realism.

In order to analyze the foreign policy choices of PLO in the upcoming chapter, this chapter attempted to pave the way for how statelike actors may be incorporated within neoclassical realism. What has been observed from the analysis is that the notion of territoriality, the state-society relations, which include the domestic institutions and a mechanism of decision-making, are a prerequisite for any actor to gain the capacity to conduct foreign policy. At the same time, the way in which the PLO responded to the structural fluctuations delineates Arafat's perception of the system and his strategic culture.

More specifically, besides PLO's formal discourse to achieve liberation for Palestine and its people, three elements shaped both Arafat's perception of the system and his strategic culture. First and foremost, Arafat sought complete independence from the Palestinian question of the influence of Arab regimes. In turn, that would help him attain more leverage within the general Arab-Israeli conflict. Secondly, Arafat saw the US as the key to an Israeli-Palestinian resolution. To this end, he reached out to pro-US Arab regimes in order to open talks with Washington. The efforts to achieve this goal outlined Arafat's tendency to balance politics and dual tactics. This became even more evident as the US continually refused to open dialogue with PLO, given Israel's categorical rejection of negotiations. Moreover, the PLO repeatedly attempted to play off the superpowers and all the regional actors to convey its goal. Last but not least, the PLO's ultimate goal was to maintain power as the only Palestinian political entity to decide the fate of the Palestinian people.

Chapter 4: PLOs Foreign Policy Choices

4.1. Introduction

This chapter will examine a number of the foreign policy choices of the PLO. First, its choices during and after Camp David Accords sealed the unprecedented peace deal between Egypt and Israel between 1977 and 1979. Second, PLO's unilateral declaration of independence in an attempt to gain a seat at the negotiation table of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the late 1980s. Third, Arafat's stance vis-à-vis Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Last, the Palestinian-Israeli talks commenced with the Madrid Conference and continued in Washington between 1991-1992 and the Oslo Accords in 1993.

There is an extensive literature on PLO's external behaviour (Abraham, 1979; Barnett, 1995; Brown, 2004; Cobban, 1984; Fawcett & Sayigh, 2000; Sahliyah, 1986; Sayigh, 1989, 1997a, 1997b; Sayigh & Shlaim, 1997; Shemesh, 2012) that documents from different angles the constraints and opportunities presented to the PLO from its inception until the Oslo Accords. More often than not, PLO's external behaviour is deduced as merely a response to the structural setting and changes mainly due to the fact that PLO is treated more like an armed non-state actor than a statelike actor.

This chapter will examine the extent to which the intervening variables—such as the perception and culture of the leadership, domestic institutions, state-society relations, and the notion of territoriality—play a role and engage with the structural elements and produce foreign policy. It is important to note that all these foreign policy choices took place amidst drastic systemic changes, such as the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in 1979, the Israeli invasion in 1982, which resulted in PLO's exodus from Lebanon, the first Palestinian Intifada in 1987, the fall of Berlin Wall in 1989 and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, to name a few. In each of these instances, PLO's foreign policy was based on a different set of interactions between the systemic and intervening variables. The systemic structure was different in each instance, and the five intervening variables had different synergy effects.

To this end, the next section will examine and analyse the foreign policy of the PLO vis-à-vis Camp David Accords under the prism of neoclassical realism. Given that the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon generated a structural modifier that directly impacted all five intervening variables and, by extension, Arafat's foreign policy, this chapter will dedicate a section to

examining the changes that occurred on these variables. The ‘status’ or ‘conditions’ of these variables in the post-1982 remain more or less stable, so examining the foreign policy of Arafat and the outcome after this period explains many contradictions of the Palestinian foreign policy. For instance, why did PLO announce Palestinian independence unilaterally? Why and how Arafat went from the Stockholm Agreement to a rather opposite position towards Saddam? Or why and how were the Americans willing to extend an invitation to Madrid? The sections after will examine each foreign policy choice separately to better study the application of the neoclassical realist approach to statelike actors.

4.2. Camp David and the PLO

The Egyptian-Israeli peace negotiations that commenced in 1977 shook and reshuffled the dynamics of the structural system of the Middle East as it had grave implications for the Arab-Israeli conflict. Regardless of the disagreements and contestations among Arab states, their confrontation against Israel has always been a collective effort that united them. There were times when Sadat had demonstrated signs of his intentions to negotiate with Israel unilaterally; be it during the last stages of the 1973 War,³⁸ or even prior to it, Egypt (along with Jordan) entertained the idea. However, the impact of the actual signing of the Camp David Accords in September of 1978 was tremendous.³⁹ Sadat of Egypt and Begin of Israel, under the auspices of US President Carter, signed an unprecedented peace agreement in September 1978, where an Arab state officially recognised Israel for the first time.

The Camp David Accords comprised of two Framework Agreements: one framework regarded Israel’s total control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including East Jerusalem. In reference to the Palestinian population, the agreement stated a “self-governing authority (administrative council)” for the West Bank and Gaza. It also suggested that “a withdrawal of Israeli armed forces [of unspecified dimensions] [would] take place and there [would] be a redeployment of the remaining Israeli forces into specified security locations” within five years. In addition, in a later stage, a three-year transition period would be required before “negotiations

³⁸ For more of Sadat’s approach on the October War of 1973 see Baker (1978, pp. 132-135) and Morris (2011, pp. 387-443), while for Sadat’s separate agreement with Kissinger regarding the Sinai amidst the war see Quandt (2010, pp. 99-129)

³⁹ It should be noted that the Israeli – Egyptian peace treaty signed on September 17th, 1978, was not registered by Israel until June 14th, 1979. As a result, in most of the relevant literature Camp David Accords refer to the latter date.

[...] take place to determine the final status of the West Bank and Gaza and its relationship with Israel”.⁴⁰ However, in essence, the reference to the provisions regarding Palestine was rather vague, sidelining actual representatives of the Palestinians from the negotiations. The other framework dealt with the “normalization of the relations” between Egypt and Israel by returning the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in exchange for “the opening of the Suez Canal to Israeli ships” (Anziska, 2018, p. 124). All three parties—Israel, Egypt and the US— had agreed on a Palestinian autonomous authority without specifying how, where or by whom the provisions would be implemented. There was, however, “no structural linkage” between dealing with the West Bank and Gaza and dealing with Egypt-Israel peace—partially due to the fact that the Egyptians insisted on incorporating a vague provision in an effort to discredit “Arab charges” against Cairo for its “separate peace with Israel” (Cobban, 1984, pp. 99-100). Nevertheless, these vague provisions did not deter Arab anger.

The conclusions of the Camp David Accords bestirred rage among all the Arab leaders, including the PLO. The Arab League signalled their new isolation policy toward Egypt by moving its headquarters from Cairo to Tunis and ousting Egypt from the League. The PLO, who convened an emergency session, mobilized a strike of ‘all Palestinians, inside and outside the areas under Israeli rule’ to express their discontent with the Accords (Cobban, 1984: 99-100). The Accords implied a disintegration of Arab unity vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict. At the same time, it demonstrated the increased US involvement as the Soviets were in retreat from the region (Snow, 2012, p. 71). For the PLO, this development weakened the Palestinian’s bargaining position within the Arab-Israeli conflict, which had tried so hard to link the Palestinian cause and the Israeli occupation of Palestine with the Arab-Israeli conflict. Under this prism, one of the greatest implications of the Camp David Accords was that it set the pace for bilateral negotiation processes with Israel—as suggested by Kissinger—as opposed to the Arab-Israeli comprehensive negotiation process with multiple tracks on Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Palestine that would concentrate all the regional Arab support.

The peace agreement of 1978 was a result of many years of negotiations between Egypt and Israel. During the negotiations, Sadat visited Begin in Jerusalem in 1977, which alarmed Arafat. In order to avoid being left out of an agreement that would involve the Palestinians, Arafat

⁴⁰ For the complete text of the Framework of Peace agreement in Camp David in 17/09/1978 see (Israel-Egypt, 17/09/1978)

had attempted repeatedly to approach the US and even declared his intention to initiate dialogue with the US for a new framework for peace (Rubenberg, 1989). The US was viewed as a vital actor in achieving Arafat's political aims, but they constantly rejected the PLO. Within the realm of Arafat's perception, the US was key to the Israeli occupation, as he believed that the US had the power to impose some limitations on Israel. To some degree, Arafat managed to open a channel for communication. For the first time since 1948, the Americans had already acknowledged the necessity to resolve "the aspect of the Palestinian-Israeli issue within the Arab-Israeli conflict" (Khalidi, 2013a, p. 10). On Carter's part, despite his reservations, he sought to convince Arafat to join the agreement, which was followed by intense secret channels of communication between the two.⁴¹ However, the US persistence on PLO's unilateral recognition of Israel as a precondition for a dialogue discouraged Arafat and *pushed* him to refuse any participation in the agreement. When the Accords were signed and the window of opportunity for Arafat was closed.

As Arafat was attempting to reach out to the US prior to the conclusion and signing of the agreement, he also attempted a second, parallel policy that ascribes PLO's leadership of dual tactic and balancing politics. More specifically, PLO was to expand its diplomatic machinery in the logic of "peace offensive" (Sayigh, 1997b) that had a two-fold purpose. First, Arafat would seek to attain more political and popular support for the Palestinian cause by deepening his ties with the Soviets and the socialist countries, many of which ultimately granted official recognition to the PLO, including the Soviets. Secondly, he intended to establish a new block against the Accords and Egypt and the US subsequently. As a result, the PLO, along with Jordan, Syria, Libya, Algeria, and South Yemen, issued a statement calling the US an enemy. In fact, already in 1977, Arafat reached out to Libya's Qaddafi and his 'Rejectionist Front' to create the Steadfastness Front, which incorporated the "three no's principles" no to direct negotiations with Israel, no to recognition of Israel, and no to peace with Israel (Sayigh & Shlaim, 1997, pp. 136-138). This was one of the limited yet deeply symbolic efforts aiming to reaffirm PLO's relevance to the regional system, which reignited tensions that led to another Arab cold war; this time between Egypt and monarchies (except Jordan) and the 'steadfastness' states Syria, Iraq Libya and the PLO.

⁴¹ According to a former CIA political analyst, Kathleen Christison, Carter was an idealist and 'he regarded the Palestinians as another disenfranchised people like the Blacks [in the US]' (1998b, p. 27). Carter had established the logic within the White House that there are two sides of the Palestinian-Israeli story, a fact that caused some alarm among Israeli supporters.

Consequently, PLO's foreign policy reaction to the negotiations between Israel and Egypt encapsulated dual tactics; one tactic of reaching out to the US to avoid any agreement regarding the Palestinians without PLO and another tactic of creating the Steadfast Front, which he hoped to counter-balance the agreement.

PLO's dual tactics could not be sustained without Arafat's tendencies toward balancing politics. Thus, from the beginning of the Israeli-Egyptian negotiations in 1977 until the signing of the agreement in 1978, Arafat had attempted several approaches to balancing politics that both hindered and advanced PLO's political goals. This is evident in the Soviet-PLO relations. More specifically, with the US mediating between Israel and Egypt, the Soviets were expected to convince Syria to also join negotiations with Israel during the end of the 1970s. The fact that the Soviets failed to do so, they were marginalized from the Egyptian-Israeli peace negotiations, which harmed their prestige in the region. So, when Arafat reached out to Moscow, the Soviets responded by turning their attention – for the first time – to Arafat rather than the general Arab-Israeli conflict and beyond simply supplying the PLO with weapons. However, this did not change the long-lasting reservations of the Soviets towards Arafat, primarily because of his tendency of balancing politics and dual tactics. Arafat's repeated efforts to establish a dialogue with the US and his close relationship with China always made the Soviets wary of Arafat. Balancing politics had almost jolted the Sino-PLO relations, leading to China opposing Steadfast Front. After tiresome efforts on PLO's part that had delegations travel to Beijing to reassert the Chinese-Palestinian good relations, China was reluctant to oppose Egypt but criticized Israel and reasserted its strong relations with the PLO (Selim, 1991, p. 294). Despite the contradictory approaches of the PLO, by the end of 1978, which witnessed the very first Arab-Israeli peace agreement, Arafat's efforts crystalized a sturdy opposition to Camp David agreements in the region.

The Camp David Accords revived the relationship between Arafat and the King of Jordan. In the face of this development, the PLO and Jordanian cooperation reignited. Not only did they have a joint National Consultative Council and Joint Coordinating Committee for the Support of Steadfastness, but they also proceeded to establish a joint mechanism to support the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza (Selim, 1991). By the same token, for a brief period, the anti-Sadat milieu accelerated the thaw of enmity between al-Assad and Arafat, at least on an official level and within the framework of the Steadfast Front. However, this did not imply that Arafat would accept any Syrian domination regarding the Palestinian affairs; he projected an 'outward solidarity

with Syria, but [still maintained his] private determination to pursue an autonomous diplomatic course, free of Syrian influence' (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 323). Nevertheless, Arafat's foreign policy choice between 1977 and 1980, beyond the opportunity provided by the system, was clearly geared and influenced by his strategic culture, which was dictated by dual tactics and balancing politics. While there was no doubt that PLO's foreign policy choice intended to secure it with a contingency plan, it may be argued that PLO's leadership deemed it secondary within the realm of foreign policy making.

Undoubtedly, the dual tactics and balancing of politics had repercussions on the internal dynamics of the PLO and more leftist groups, which became palpable after the signing of Camp David. Arafat was personally accused of "kowtowing to Egyptian-Saudi-US plans" on normalizing relations with Israel and of trying to "obtain a seat on the American train" as opposed to the Soviet one (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 136). Subsequently, these accusations highlighted intra-Palestinian dynamics, crystallising a Palestinian camp against PLO's leadership. Many Palestinians, either pro-Soviet or pro-Syrian allies, "joined the rejectionist groups for the first time" (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 136). Evidently, the reaction of the more leftist Palestinian members of the PLO indicates that the decision-making process of this specific foreign policy choice did not undergo the formal procedure of the PNC or the CC as it was curtailed by EC and the inner circle of Arafat. Thus, while the role of state-society relations and domestic institutions had a secondary role—if any at all—in influencing PLO's foreign policy choices, the shortfalls in these two variables had a limited impact on Arafat's legitimacy both within the Palestinian constituency (albeit shrunk) and the international community. First, Arafat compensated for his prestige due to PLO's functioning 'state' in Lebanon, including the development of domestic institutions, services and welfare to its constituency. All these functions were directly related to the notion of territoriality, which PLO was developed steadily since the early 1970s as an statelike actor on Lebanese soil. Thus, the sustainment of territoriality is of equal importance.⁴² Secondly, PLO's 'peace offensive' in response to Camp David became a launching pad for the PLO to expand its diplomatic machinery not only in 1974 but even more between 1977 and 1982. While the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in

⁴² The importance of territoriality here is related to PLO legitimacy. This differs from the role of the notion of territoriality on the foreign policy choice. The later will be observed and more closely examined in the subsequent foreign policy choices of Arafat, where the PLO loses its territoriality in 1982. See sections 4.3.1. and 4.3.2.

June 1982 caused severe damage to the PLO on various levels, up until then, Arafat's *peace offensive* created unprecedented diplomatic solidarity that became a structural modifier.

4.2.1. The Diplomatic Solidarity: a structural modifier

PLO offices had over 100 countries from Eastern Europe, Western Europe, North America, Central and South America, and Asia, all acknowledging the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and their cause. The very existence of this diplomacy stems from the opportunity environment provided on a regional and international level but also the achievements of the PLO in relation to issues such as the bilateral relations of the PLO, domestic institutions, the 'foreign relations address' in Lebanon—where the official delegations from around the world were able to visit and meet with PLO leaders. Perhaps most importantly, the Palestinian people were now perceived as a society and a constituency of the PLO. Beyond these fascinating achievements, PLO's diplomatic machinery reflected some elements of contradiction in its foreign policy in general, particularly due to Arafat's perceptions of the system and strategic culture. In fact, they set the blueprint to examine his diplomacy's problematic issues. This section will present the trajectory of PLO's diplomacy between 1973 and the early 1980s to identify the interaction between the systemic dynamics, the structural modifiers and even the intervening variables' role in the foreign policy responses. Howbeit, the diplomatic machinery had a limited impact on PLO's diplomacy within the UN, mainly due to US' rigid stance and repeated vetoes against the PLO (Cobban, 1984, p. 229). Therefore, Arafat could not consolidate PLO's success besides superficial symbolic achievements, such as attaining the observer status in UNESCO and the UN declaration of an International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People (Quigley, 2010, p. 137).

One of the main results of the peace offensive, as a clear foreign policy choice of Arafat in response to Camp David, was that the PLO attained information offices in many European countries as part of the Arab League delegations, such as the UK and Paris (Cobban, 1984, p. 232). In some, however, it received *de facto* representation. In fact, a major breakthrough for the PLO in Europe happened in 1979, with the 'Vienna Meeting' in July 1979 and later with Socialist International in 1980. Following these events, the first countries to fully recognize PLO in Europe were Greece, Portugal, Spain and Austria and, soon later, Italy, where Arafat met with Pope John Paul II in 1982, officials from Belgium, Netherlands and Finland (Frangi, 1983, pp. 160-162) (Morrison, 1984, p. 152). Interestingly, many countries would promote dialogue and contact with

the PLO even if they did not officially recognize it, many of which were NATO members (Morrison, 1984, pp. 149-150). Evidence of European solidarity on a diplomatic level was all the more evident. PLO's leadership perception of the European-Palestinian dynamic was best expressed by Farouq Qadumi (PLO's foreign minister), referring to the success of PLO's campaign in Europe, "We see that the European Catholics and Orthodox take a supportive stand, whereas the Protestants hesitate and vacillate. Arafat's interview with the Pope had a great effect and removed the idea that the PLO is a terrorist organisation from the minds of many in Europe and Latin America" (Al-Qaddumi, 1988, p. 9).

Much of the ultimate goals of diplomacy were presented by Arafat's speech at the 15th PNC session in April 1981. He stated that,

"in 1947 we were swallowed up in the political and geographical domains. Palestine was simply swallowed up. It no longer existed, neither on the geographical nor on the political maps. The most important work we have done and the most important achievement scored by this Palestinian rifle and this incessant flow of Palestinian blood is the fact that Palestine has again been placed on the political map. Palestine has returned to the political map. Brothers, we once again speak in this view: what one returns to the political map will unavoidably be returned to the geographical map. The question is one of a time" (Morrison, 1984, p. 120).

The diplomatic machinery of the PLO undoubtedly had placed the Palestinian issue on the political map. The Camp David Accords triggered Arafat to respond with a peace offensive, which was relatively successful, albeit the Accords deterrent to the Palestinian issue.

4.2.2. The Intervening Variables

While there is no doubt that the diplomatic expansion was unprecedented, there were many challenges to PLO's diplomacy. The challenges were not limited to the structural constraints, e.g., the rejection of the US and Israel to recognize the PLO. One of the principal axes of the diplomatic machinery entailed that Fateh would have to convince the other Palestinian factions within the PLO regarding Arafat's approach. In fact, PLO revealed to have friction among its factions when dealing with diplomacy, especially regarding opening official or non-official with the US and/or Israel. The challenges exposed by the lack of unity within the movement compelled the PLO to persist in maximalist positions on an official level, which in turn it contributed to Arafat's 'dual tactics' of foreign policy. Arafat's tendency toward contradictory policies was rather common knowledge. Arafat's informal attempts would negate a contradiction that naturally occurred as

PLO's official position (Abraham, 1979, p. 7), as it occurred in 1977 when PLO was establishing the Steadfast Front while Arafat was attempting to open a backchannel with the US.

At the same time, it may also be argued that the tendency toward contradiction reflected the gradual change of Arafat towards moderation, while on a rhetorical level, the PLO maintained a rigid jargon of a revolutionary. Another example of these contradictions is that on the one hand, Arafat received anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles from the Soviets (Morrison, 1984, p. 157). On the other hand, Arafat persisted in establishing contact with Kissinger by sending numerous "secret messages to the US administration expressing willingness to coexist with Israel" after the 1973 joint US-Soviet statement, when for the first time, the legitimacy of the Palestinians was recognised by the US (Sayigh & Shlaim, 1997, p. 130). However, in an interview, in 1974, Arafat mentioned:

"As Commander-in-Chief of the Pales-tine revolution and as head of the PLO Executive Committee, I express the view- point of the Palestinian people. Hence, I say: We have not been deceived for a single moment by the American intentions as regards the Palestinians. All the American indications, activities, contacts and pressures were and still are, in the final analysis, aimed at annihilating the future of this people" (Al-Hawadess, 1974, pp. 195-198).

Nevertheless, Arafat has consistently tried to approach the US. Although Kissinger, as the US Secretary of State, was convinced to some extent of the necessity to pursue a direct dialogue with Arafat, the Israeli suggested agreeing to Kissinger's proposal on the second disengagement agreement in Sinai so long as the US did not proceed in talk with the PLO (Tessler, 2009, p. 483).⁴³

In many instances, Arafat's contradictory political style curtailed PLO's achievements and impacted various aspects of its diplomacy. Arafat's approach to UNRWA is—one of the many—case(s) in point. To approach the UNRWA within the realm of diplomacy, Arafat had addressed many letters to Olof Rydbeck, Commissioner General of UNRWA. According to Anne Ifran, in one of Arafat's letters, he acknowledged "the importance of UNRWA's work and thanked [Commissioner General] for his efforts on behalf of Palestinian refugees", with a "warm and solicitous" tone referring to him as a 'dear brother' (2020, p. 26). However, within the same year,

⁴³ Israel and Egypt sign the Second Disengagement Agreement (Sinai II) in Geneva, Switzerland on September 4, 1975.

the PLO “openly accused UNRWA of capitulating to imperialist and Zionist pressures” (Irfan, 2020, p. 26).

It may be argued that Arafat’s strategic culture was influenced by the Eastern Bloc rather than the Western one. Realistically, PLO lacked experience with Western society and politics (Sayigh & Shlaim, 1997, p. 130), and many of its cadres, including Arafat, were accustomed to the mode of interaction of Third World leaders. His lack of experience in Western diplomatic dynamics hindered him from correctly conceptualizing the US foreign policy dynamic, affecting his perception. An example of such confusion in the UN 1974 speech, he stated that for the “American people [...] their friendship with our Arab nation is more important, lasting, and beneficial [than the alliance with Israel]”, assuming “that appeals could sway both the American public and government to US economic interests in the Middle East” (Sayigh and Shlaim 1997: 130). A similar misconception also occurred in the case of the Soviets. Arafat's speedy successes had him convinced that his relationship with the Soviets was more than just of a tactical nature or secondary to the Soviet-Arab or Soviet-US ties, disregarding the fact that the Soviets had never demonstrated a special backing to the PLO outside the general support of socialist-Arab regimes or jeopardise the Soviet-US detente (Sayigh & Shlaim, 1997, p. 133).

Overall, these dynamics had shaped much of Arafat’s perception of the system. He was convinced that the US held the key to Israel; the regional implications of the post-1973 era, the Arab oil embargo and the all-increasing diplomatic solidarity would shift US’ stance towards the PLO, especially with the convergence in US and Soviet policies in the region. In Arafat’s eyes, all of these would work in his favour and would suffice to attain an agreement for the Palestinian issue within the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Arafat, with two main goals in mind—“to involve the PLO as a direct party to negotiations, and to place Palestinian statehood on the negotiating agenda”—proceeded in what is much part of his strategic culture to pursue balancing of politics to seek ways “to manipulate US-Soviet relations actively” (Sayigh & Shlaim, 1997, p. 125). On the one hand, the path to diplomacy was indicative of PLO’s pledge for peace, which was striving to attain a bilateral US-PLO dialogue, and on the other hand, Arafat desired to enhance his bargaining position with the Soviets. The Soviets upgraded PLO’s representative office to full diplomatic status in Moscow in 1981 (Sella, 1983, p.

37).⁴⁴ However, it created a precedent, paving the way for PLO's recognition by the hesitant Socialist bloc. Arafat utilized it to create diplomatic solidarity in order not only to impress the US but also to *force the Americans' hand* on Israel. From a structural perspective, PLO not only intended to utilize the antagonism between the superpowers when they were at the peak of their rivalry but also under conditions of detente. The actors within the sub-system of the Middle East generally feel more constrained by the superpowers' détente, opting to balance politics between the two superpowers. According to Sayigh and Shlaim (1997, pp. 133-134), the PLO was more effective during superpower détente than vice versa, as it assumed the acceptance for dialogue dependent, first, on US willingness and, second, on the Soviet diplomatic influence in a détente situation.

While Arafat's foreign policy option to pursue a global peace offensive as a response to the Camp David Accords in 1977 and on was relatively successful further to entrench the PLO in the international political scene, much of Arafat's strategic culture presented the PLO with challenges on the diplomatic front. Based on the neoclassical realist approach, the PLO's foreign policy choice was much more dependent on Arafat's perception of the system, and his strategic culture, which was reflected in the domestic institutions (mainly the capacity provided by the Political Department). In addition, the notion of territoriality is constant. Since 1973, the PLO had enhanced its 'borrowed' territorial sovereignty within Lebanon; thus, from 1977 into the early 1980s; the territoriality may be seen as a positive element in his diplomatic outreach as it provided him with a base for foreign delegations to visit facilitating bilateral relations. Finally, state-society relations seem to be essential for the legitimacy of the PLO in its global standing. This intervening variable seemed to play a much more secondary role in his decision-making than the other variables. Nevertheless, much of these variables' status and conditions altered upon Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

4.3. The Beginning of the End that Never Came: The Israeli Response

The Camp David Accords did affect not only the Arab regimes but also had implications on the Israeli political scene. For most hardliners in Israel, the retreat from the Sinai and the reference to

⁴⁴ Even though PLO had unofficial offices in Moscow since 1976.

Palestinian autonomy had caused frustration, leading to an internal political crisis. In consequence, some of the Israeli political parties formed the 'Stop the Withdrawal from Sinai Movement' to hinder the last phase of completion of the withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula and the removal of numerous newly established Jewish settlements in northern Sinai. Despite the Egyptian doubts regarding Israeli's intentions to respect the agreement, Begin, Israeli Prime Minister, had managed to complete the withdrawal in time (Tessler 2009: 561). To counter the domestic upheavals caused by the Accords and the retreat from the Sinai, Begin, along with the new Defence Minister, Ariel Sharon, committed to territorial maximalism, which would expand on Syria and the OPT and, by extension, on the PLO's base in Lebanon.

Israel annexed the Golan Heights by building settlements for 6,000 Jews, while it forced the indigenous Druze community of the Golan Heights via "coercion and collective punishment [...] to accept Israeli identification cards" (Lust, 2019, p. 268). Regarding the Palestinians, Begin had tried to reassure his constituency by stating that "the [Palestinian] autonomy agreed upon at Camp David means neither sovereignty nor self-determination" for the Palestinians, guaranteeing that "under no conditions will a Palestinian state emerge in the territory of western Eretz Yisrael" (Tessler, 2009). At the same time, as part of Israel's territorial maximalist policies by de facto annexing territories of the West Bank, it also provided financial incentives for many new coming Jews to move into the settlements in the West Bank (Tessler, 2009, pp. 546-547). In addition, the commotion caused by Israeli occupation policies and the disappointments of Camp David Accords' signing intensified demonstrations of Palestinians in the West Bank. The Israeli Defence Forces' (IDF) violence reached an unprecedented dimension since 1967. Besides IDF's collective punishment tactic on Palestinians in the OPT, IDF targeted all the PLO branches in the West Bank and Gaza and even removed elected pro-PLO mayors and municipal council members (Tessler, 2009, p. 562), indicating that PLO had become a real threat for Israel. In Israel's view, if it discouraged Palestinians from supporting the PLO, Palestinians of the OPT would accept Israel's proposal unconditionally (Tessler, 2009, p. 569).⁴⁵ The retaliation of Israel against the PLO's all-increasing influence was not limited to the OPT; it also decided to wage a direct and open war with PLO in Lebanon to ensure its total destruction.

⁴⁵ The overall diplomatic accomplishments of the PLO had raised concerns to the Israeli's. Beyond the insistence rejections to commence dialogue with the PLO, the latter was confronted militarily. In the West Bank and Gaza various attempts for dialogue within the inhabitants but failed due to lack of credibility of Israel and its absurd conditions.

Israel magnified PLO's military capacity, despite its factual demise, by stating in spring of 1982 that PLO "was using its Lebanese bases to launch direct attacks upon the Jewish state" (Tessler, 2009, p. 569). Evidently, there were sporadic clashes between the two but the asymmetry of military power was vast.⁴⁶ Despite the countless attempts of US intervention to de-escalate the fight between them, Israel was determined to destroy PLO for good (Tessler, 2009, p. 571).⁴⁷ PLO was incredibly restrained to avoid further escalation not only because it was in a situation where it had reached the crescendo of its diplomatic expansion but also because the Palestinian military efficiency was at its lowest. Highly aware of these circumstances, in May 1982, Arafat beseeched Begin by sending him a letter via the UN stating, "You of all people must understand that it is not necessary to face me on the battlefield. [...] Do not send a military force against me" (Schiff & Ya Ari, 1985, p. 92). All in vain; Israel used the pretext of a Palestinian extremist attack (not affiliated with the PLO)⁴⁸ against the Israeli Ambassador in the UK, launching 'Operation Peace for Galilee', which led to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in the summer of 1982.

Within three days, Israel's attack against PLO had devastating consequences for the Palestinians. The Palestinians' defeat, albeit severely heavy, was not as extreme as Operation Peace for Galilee was intended, primarily due to the fact that the IDF did not manage "to kill or capture any senior PLO civilian or military leader" (Tessler, 2009, p. 576). Notwithstanding, the human and military cost was high for the Palestinians. IDF's invasion left thousands of Palestinians and Lebanese killed or wounded and hundreds of thousands rendered homeless (Al-Hout, 2004).⁴⁹ PLO's retreat did not suffice; Israel demanded PLO's evacuation from Lebanon mediated via the US and the Lebanese government.⁵⁰ Despite the fact that the Palestinian leadership complied with the agreement and departed along with all its fighters, the IDF in cooperation with the Maronite

⁴⁶ For an excellent account on the military aspect of the PLO – Israeli confrontation in Lebanon in 1982 see Eleftheriadou (2014, pp. 263-281).

⁴⁷ There were many instances that Israel had manipulated situations in order to justify an open war with the PLO, despite the repeated attempts of the PLO to avoid it. For a more detailed account see Schiff and Ya'ari (1985: 55, 91-155)

⁴⁸ Abu Nidal and his organisation were responsible for the terrorist attack against the Israeli Ambassador. Abu Nidal was expelled from the PLO in 1974 and ever since was one of Arafat's fiercest enemies (Davis, 1995, pp. 2-3)

⁴⁹ Bayan Al-Hout conducted extensive interviews with the Sabra and Shatila survivors and compares the numbers of missing and dead Palestinians as a result of the invasion with all the available records.

⁵⁰ For an extensive and detailed analysis of the negotiations and the process of decision-making of the PLO to leave Beirut see (Khalidi, 2013b)

Lebanese Forces, organized a massacre in Sabra and Shatila camps (Khalidi, 2013b, p. 172).⁵¹ The Maronites Lebanese Forces slaughtered thousands of civilian Palestinians as Israelis surrounded the camps. The consequences for the PLO on almost all fronts were grave.

The course of events that led to the invasion revealed major stumbling blocks on PLO's diplomatic strategy. Although almost the entire international community condemned Israel for its actions on a level of discourse, it did not translate it in practice. The massacre of the civilians in Sabra and Shatila had enhanced the righteousness of the Palestinian Cause in the eyes of the world. Qaddoumi sought to push "the European Parliament to call for an international peace conference attended by the PLO and for establishing a free, independent Palestinian state" in the face of the devastation in Lebanon (Al-Qaddumi, 1988, p. 7). It was now evident that the US was not able to effectively influence Israel, as it was not able to keep its promises to PLO regarding the protection of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon after the PLO's evacuation from Beirut. Arafat even publicly accused the US of "tak[ing] part with Israel in the Lebanese war [, by providing Israel with] military, political, financial, and diplomatic support" (Selim, 1991, pp. 291-292).

In practice, PLO was left with a severely damaged infrastructure and an even weaker military. After the evacuation in 1982, the PLO members were dispersed across the region: most of the Palestinian fighters went to Syria (around 7000), another 600 in Algeria, 1,000 in Tunisia, 500 in Sudan, 850 in North Yemen, 1100 in South Yemen, fewer than 300 in Jordan and some 200 in Iraq (Brynen, 1990; Sayigh, 1986, p. 95). During the Israeli invasion, Arafat had no adequate support from the Arab allies. With no territory and the burden of representing a disheartened people, Arafat went to Greece right after Lebanon, showing his discontent with the Arab reality of having turned their back on him.

The impact of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon is revealed in almost all aspects of PLO's statelike actor characteristics as it rearranged PLO's dynamic regarding its territory, state-society relation and its domestic institutions but also altered Arafat's perspective on the system. Nevertheless, while the manner of foreign policy formulation (e.g. decision-making process) did not change significantly, the alternation of the status of the intervening variables seems to have

⁵¹ According to Yazid Sayigh, the IDF's contribution to the Sabra and Shatila was of logistical nature. Technically, they transported the numerous men from the Lebanese Forces to the camps, "provided wireless communications, ammunition, food rations, and night-time illumination" for two days, while the Maronite Lebanese militia "conducted a systematic slaughter of every living thing, human or animal, they met [...] in plain view of Israeli posts" (1997b, p. 539).

impacted the foreign policy choices that followed after 1982. Before delving into the specific foreign policy choices, it is required to frame the altered statuses and conditions of the intervening variables in question.

4.3.1. Territoriality and Institutions

The notion of territoriality was the first immediate variable affected by PLO's evacuation from Lebanon in 1982. The PLO lost its "quasi-autonomous political power base" and "the integrated military complex [...] [which it] enjoyed [...] combat presence [...] administrative/logistical infrastructure [and] geographical continuity" (Sayigh, 1986, p. 96). Arafat had to reconfigure the institutions' location and ensure their functions' continuity. The PLO institutions became dispersed, from Nicosia, where the news offices were located, to Aman, which hosted the SAMED factory, and Cairo's suburbs, which hosted the Palestine Red Crescent Society. Arafat, along with PLO diplomatic offices, the core of the leadership and approximately 1,100 fighters, moved to Tunis, albeit the fact that the Chairman's offices were nominally located in Damascus, mainly due to the perplexity of the PLO-Tunis dynamics.

Tunis was no home turf nor did it provide any prospects of becoming an independent base. Unlike Algeria, Tunisia has always kept a distance from the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, Tunisia's President Bourghiba, whose main political orientation was pragmatism, was the first Arab leader to suggest that the Arab world should admit that Israel is *here* to stay.⁵² Still, though, Bourghiba allowed PLO to stay in Tunis temporarily. Interestingly, it is believed that his wife, Wassila Bourghiba,⁵³ allegedly convinced him, as she had strong pro-Palestinian sentiments (Joffe, 1987). Inviting PLO to Tunis also expressed the sentiments of the Tunisian street, which boosted the regime's popularity. Tunisia had close links to the US and wanted to avoid any implications that would disturb the relationship; Washington was assisting Tunis to counter Libya's Qaddafi military politics in the country. To this end, Bourghiba kept a close eye on PLO

⁵² In fact, Bourghiba had put forward many proposals of Arab-Israeli peace in which the Arabs had to recognize Israel, while put blame on the Arab leaders on the way they handled the Palestinian matter. For more on Israeli – Tunisian relations see Laskier (2004) and Ghiles-Meilhac (2014).

⁵³ Wassila Bourghiba was the second wife of the former Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba and the First Lady of Tunisia from 1962 until 1986. Upon the arrival of the PLO with the Greek ship on Tunisia's shores, the entire presidential family including the President himself, happily greeted the Palestinians. Regardless of the Presidents dislike of Arafat and the PLO, the Tunisian constituency, like most Arab street across the region, was found of the Palestinians.

without, however, intending to exert any influence neither on PLO's leadership nor the Palestinian Cause as were the cases of al-Assad in Syria or King Hussein in Jordan. PLO adjusted to being simply a *guest* on Tunisian territory and managed to continue running its dispersed institutions.

However, in 1985, the allegations regarding PLO's involvement in targeting Israelis in the Achille Lauro and Larnaca affairs agitated Bourghiba;⁵⁴ as a result, he imposed further restriction policies vis-à-vis the PLO (Joffe, 1987, pp. 181-182). More specifically, al-Al-Qabas (1987), a Kuwait newspaper, reported that PLO officials and members were subjected to harassment, some of whom were refused entry to the country or even refused the renewal of their stay by Tunisian authorities. In addition, according to the same report, many Palestinian sources revealed both frustrations vis-à-vis the Tunisian authorities and anxiety over PLO's presence in Tunis. In reality, in the mid-1980s, PLO had no other place to go. With the exception of South Yemen (Joffe, 1987, p. 182), every other Arab country in the region had openly revealed their desire to co-opt and curtail PLO's independence.

Even under Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who came to power in 1987, the Tunisian authorities increased their hostility towards the PLO. According to the Tunisian political analyst Ali al-Lafi, the Tunisian authorities "provided the logistical support to facilitate" the Israeli attack and "the assassination of Wazir al-Khalil" (Abu Jihad).⁵⁵ Abu Jihad was Arafat's most trusted peer within Fateh and the PLO, who linked the latter to the OPT (Khalidi, 1988, p. 22). Despite the serious allegations against the Tunisian authority, the PLO was not in a position to respond and with nowhere else to go, the PLO offices remained in Tunis until the Oslo Accords in 1993. It may be argued here that the volatility of PLO's territoriality and the negative implication of not being able to control any territory significantly impacted its bargaining power. The territorial variable remained in this dire condition all the way into the beginning of the 1990s when PLO moved within OPT as a result of the Oslo Accords. Thus, it is important to take into account that territoriality, or lack thereof, became one of the central variables that geared Arafat's foreign policy choices. Any

⁵⁴ Larnaca and Achille Lauro affairs were two hijacking that took place in September and October 1985 in Cyprus and off the coast of Egypt, respectively. In the case of the Larnaca, the Palestinian attacks resulted to the death of some of the hostages.

⁵⁵ As Ali al-Lafi stated in the documentary film of Al-Jazeera (2020) the Tunisian authorities had never up-to-date admitted to having been complicit in the assassination. Khalil al-Wazir was PLO's second in command and founding member of Fatah. There is no doubt that Abu Jihad was in favour and supported the armed struggle agenda, in the words of Mohamad Al-Loul, Fateh Central Committee member, 'if Abu Jihad wanted to stop a proposed political project, he would carry out an attack to foil it'. However, others such as Rashid Khalidi suggest that he was supportive of Arafat's political initiatives with Israel and the US (1988: 22).

choice, despite the cost, would enable PLO to return to *any part of the* Palestinian territory (Cobban, 1983, p. 644). The regional dynamics had made it clear that there would be no more a temporary home, making it all the more evident that there is no place like home, meaning Palestine.

4.3.2. Arafat's Perception of the System and Strategic Culture

Arafat's perception of the US' role in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict altered after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Despite his disappointment with the US, he was aware that Washington would not counter Israel, mainly due to the powerful lobbying of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). AIPAC remains one of the US's most important and influential pro-Israeli groups. Although it did not always get its way, AIPAC's loyalty to the US as opposed to Israel had become a contested issue among the conservatives (neo-conservatives and paleoconservatives) during the 1980s.⁵⁶ What is of great importance within the framework of US foreign policy is that during the Reagan administration, the new Secretary of State, Shultz, was initially opposed by many pro-Israel circles accusing him of having business with the Arab world. In fact, the Reagan Plan in 1982 recognized the Palestinians' legitimate rights and highlighted the need for a solution to the Palestinian problem but due to intense AIPAC objections, it was never materialised (Christison, 1998a, p. 30). After 1982, there was a US surge in AIPAC's budget (Christison, 1998a, p. 29).

This prompted the Palestinian leadership to shift the centre of gravity towards dialogue with Israel rather than with the US, within a framework of peace that would be enabled by the regional and international actors. This was expressed in the Cairo Declaration in 1985, which incorporated a number of previous efforts, such as those of the Arab summit in Fez in 1982 and the Geneva Declaration, regarding the international conference on Palestine (Lukacs, 1992, pp. 478, 370). For the first time, the PLO leaders met openly with peace groups in Israel, launching track-II diplomacy and unofficial pre-negotiations talks, which intensified in the late 1980s (Mansour, 2011, p. 39). This validated PLO's genuine intention of coexistence so long as there was a guarantee of mutual recognition as opposed to a unilateral recognition on PLO's behalf as the US had proposed (even in Regan's Plan in 1982).⁵⁷

⁵⁶ For more on the role of AIPAC in the US foreign policy see Mearsheimer and Walt (2008).

⁵⁷ Reagan's plan for the Middle East was a proposal that could not even attain Israeli's support; however, it is worth mentioning that its foundations was based on Carter's logic of Camp David, giving primacy to Jordanian control on the Palestinian people and on the OPT. For more see Aruri and Moughrabi (1983) and Anziska (2018, pp. 162-237)

Arafat had to also adjust to the drastic changes that occurred on the level of the US-Soviet détente that failed to provide any fruits for PLO. The US-PLO relations have fallen in a pattern of conflictual interaction, especially between 1982 and 1988. The persistence of the unchanging US position on the unilateral recognition of Israel and the acceptance of UN Resolutions 242 and 338 as preconditions for dealing with the PLO had prevented the two from overcoming the impasse in their negotiations. In 1987, the US hostility towards the PLO led Regan to shut the PLO's Information Office in Washington and even suggested the "expulsion of the PLO's Permanent Mission to the UN in New York" (Selim, 1991, pp. 291-292). PLO-Soviet relations were equally in dire terms. The Soviet condemnation of Israel's and US' actions in 1982 was accompanied by some weaponry to PLO, "which were seized by Syria" as he mentioned in an interview with Saad Ibrahim; while in another interview with Al-Mussawer in 1985 he said, "[t]he Soviet Union preferred to side with the Syrian ally rather than the Palestinian friend".⁵⁸ Arafat's disappointment translated into boycotting the Soviets from the 17th PNC session. The situation worsened in 1985, with Gorbachev in power. The Soviets were not too concerned with the Arab-Israeli conflict and even less with the Palestinians, as they were more preoccupied with their own demise in the international order (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 546). However, the Chinese filled the vacuum as they sent weapons in 1982 and provided consistent political support.

On a regional level, Arafat's relations with the Arab regimes were delicate. The relationship between Assad and Arafat was severely dented. Syria attempted to instigate and fuel the intra-Palestinian fighting in Lebanon (the Battle of the Camps in 1983-1987) to curtail PLO's power further. Arafat openly accused Assad of wanting "the Palestinian card in his own pocket" and having "secret links with Israel" (Selim, 1991, p. 299). Arafat's disappointment was not limited to Syria. PLO became totally disillusioned by the Arab regimes, not only due to their idle stance in the events of 1982 but also due to the Jordanian efforts to cooperate with the Israelis so that the former could regain influence in the West Bank.

Despite Arafat's disillusionment and in accordance with his general strategic cultural tendency, he sought to attain minimal solidarity among some Arab counterparts. The regional rapprochements were much tainted by Arafat's dual tactics. Even with the new President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, who took power after the assassination of Sadat in 1981, Arafat tried to maintain

⁵⁸ Quoted in Selim (1991, p. 293)

some sort of relationship—at least on a nominal level. What came as a surprise to everyone in the region was that Arafat met Mubarak in Cairo in 1983; the first Arab leader to officially visit Cairo after the Camp David Accords of 1979. Under the same prism, Arafat had to attempt a rapprochement with the Jordanian Palace in 1984. In an attempt to establish a backup plan for its role in Palestinian affairs, PLO proposed a confederal connection between the PLO and Jordan. This confederal connection came to be known as the Amman Accord or Amman Agreement, where Arafat would be part of the Jordanian delegations in the negotiations with either Israel or the US regarding the Palestinian state (Selim, 1991, p. 297). The Jordanian King agreed so long as Arafat would publicly announce the confederal connection to guarantee the indenture of the Amman Accord.

Nevertheless, Arafat could not publicly substantiate his decision of the secret agreement, as it would have aggravated some of the more conservative members of his political constituency amidst intra-Palestinian fighting. Officially announcing a confederal connection with Amman implied an official handover of the Palestinian affairs to the Jordanian Palace. Arafat's refusal led to the deterioration of the agreement by 1987.⁵⁹ Interestingly, according to Mamdouh Nofak, a senior DFLP official, Arafat knew all along that he would not commit to this deal; “he [Arafat] used it [Amman Accord] to gain some breathing space; he established relations with Jordan, signed the agreement and then abrogated it” (Al-Jazeera, 2009b).

4.3.3. State-Society Relations

An equally devastating repercussion of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was the demoralization of the Palestinian people and the popular support of the PLO, which generated divisions within PLO's ranks (Cobban, 1984, p. 130). In fact, it was an “opportunity for Syrian-backed factions to lead a major split within Fateh and then to expel forces loyal to the PLO chairman from Lebanon by the end of 1983” (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 545), which led to intra-Palestinian violence, which escalated to what came to be known as the Battle of Camps that lasted until 1987. The very state-society relations were deteriorating. The Palestinian refugees (PLO's constituency) in Lebanon felt they were left unprotected by their leadership. In turn, this led to an internal upheaval within the PLO. In spite of the reaffirmation of the PNC, in the 16th session in Algiers in

⁵⁹ For more on the Jordanian perspective on the agreement see (FBSI, 1987)

1983, with almost 400 delegates reiteration of Arafat's leadership legitimacy and the continuation of PLO's organisational integrity (Cobban, 1983, p. 635), the 17th session in Amman in 1984, all major factions boycotted the session except for Fateh and various smaller factions. Syria was the first to seize the opportunity to trigger a divide, particularly within Fateh (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 545). Many Palestinians with Syria's backing created the 'Rejection Front', calling for a change in PLO's 'moderate' leadership, which was sparked by the secret US-PLO negotiations during 1977. However, the split in 1984 was more severe because it stemmed from the atrium of the PLO, Fateh. In addition to the criticism of the loss of Beirut in 1982, the commotion of the loss of the territory had driven Arafat to appoint officers to military posts that were loyal to him; all these events had made many Palestinian academics assume that Arafat's reign would soon come to an end (Morrison, 1984, pp. 18; 60-62). Indeed, Arafat had to create an opportunity where he could recuperate whatever left of PLO's sources of power, starting from the cohesion of the PLO.

In April 1987, PLO's 18th PNC meeting, which came to be known as the Unity Talks (Majlis il Tawheede), led to the reconciliation of various Palestinian forces, bringing the Battle of the Camps to an end.⁶⁰ On the one hand, many of the Palestinian factions, including those that had boycotted the meetings (e.g., PFLP and DFLP) or were never present (e.g., the Communist Palestinian Party), attended the 18th PNC session. On the other, the repercussion of the intra-Palestinian fights compelled Arafat to tighten further PLO's core to counter the role and status of the Palestinian factions within the Organisation in the years that followed; consequently, it reaffirmed and strengthened Arafat as the "ultimate decision-maker" (Sayigh, 1989, pp. 248-249). This was not the only element that indicated the widening gap between the leadership and its constituency. In the winter of 1987, the Palestinians within the OPT started to protest, leading to the outbreak of the First Intifada. The unexpected bottom-up uprising in the OPT implied that the Palestinians were taking matters into their own hands as they viewed the PLO's leadership as incapable of delivering a solution to the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

The Israeli invasion of 1982 had almost destroyed PLO. Left with no sovereignty, on no specific land, where the cracks in the delicate society and state relationship began to emerge, it may be argued that on many levels, the PLO was playing on borrowed time between 1982 and 1988. To a large extent, from Arafat's perspective, the PLO had to *play ball* in the European arena

⁶⁰ For an extensive analysis on the Unity talk meeting see Arab Reports and Analysis (1987a)

and the UN. To this end, and with an already well-cultivated ground on the diplomatic front, Arafat would unilaterally announce the State of Palestine in 1988. Although the foreign policy choices that followed are much defined by the aforementioned new systemic constraints and internal change. Arafat seized various small windows of opportunity to ensure the survival of the PLO at all costs. Subsequently, the tendency of Arafat's foreign policy choices was much more constrained than his response to the Camp David Accords.

4.4. Unilateral Declaration of Independence

PLO's foreign policy choice to unilaterally declare Palestinian independence in 1988 occurred in a different structural environment. In the late 1980s, the regional and international systemic dynamics were marked by three main tendencies. First, the outbreak of the Intifada in 1987 brought the OPT to the front stage and, indirectly, provided the PLO with a political lifeline. Second is the renewed interest of European powers in the region. Driven by their willingness to boost their prestige, many Europeans were eager to replace the US in the negotiations regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Finally, the potential negative implications of the Intifada persuaded the US to change its approach toward the PLO. All of these elements had created a new structural dynamic for the PLO. Nevertheless, the new structural dynamics did not negate the previous balance of power. Israel insisted that discussions regarding any aspect of the Palestinians required US mediation (Anziska, 2018, p. 261).

Once again, Arafat endeavoured to utilise his diplomatic relations and the renewed interest of Europe to reach out to the US. Particularly, the Swedish Foreign Minister, Sten Andersson, suggested an initiative to bridge the US-PLO gap. He arranged for PLO delegations to meet with American Jews "to formulate a statement demonstrating the Palestinian commitment to a peace deal with Israel" (Anziska, 2018, pp. 261-263).⁶¹ Andersson, a socialist himself, had developed contacts with both sides and was deeply affected by the Palestinian cause and the outbreak of the Intifada in 1987. His efforts were encouraged by the Austrian government as well. In addition, as the Israeli-PLO dialogue was impossible without the US, in 1988, Andersson brought together William Quandt of the Brookings Institution and the Palestinian Mohammed Rabie of the Center

⁶¹ These leaders included Rita Hauser, the New York lawyer who had served as ambassador to the UN Human Rights Council, Stanley K. Sheinbaum, an economist and human rights activist, and Drora Kass, the director of the International Center for Peace in the Middle East. For more details see Anziska (2018, pp. 261-625), Quandt (2004) and Rabie (1992)

for Educational Development in Washington, D.C. as part of establishing the future framework of the indirect US-PLO dialogue. They were able to open a secret channel for pre-negotiation talks between the US and PLO, which lasted between 1988-1990. This resulted to a brief formal dialogue between the two for the first time in history as opposed to secrete negotiations in different instances in the past.

Nonetheless, there is no evidence to suggest that the US' initiative was a genuine interest toward the Palestinians cause or even an effort for peace, as Reagan's administration was "most deeply and emotionally opposed to negotiating with the PLO" (Christison, 1998a, p. 32). Instead, the US wanted to find ways to contain the regional upheaval caused by the First Intifada that would disturb the US interests in the region, the financial relations and stability of the pro-US regimes in the region and, most important, Israel's security (Rubenberg, 1989, p. 38). To this end, the US gave the green light to launch the necessary mechanism to pave the way for formal dialogue.

At this point, the PLO was required to prove that it had matured in order to justify the dialogue with the US. In the summer of 1988, a close advisor of Arafat, Bassam Abu Sharif, circulated a document entitled 'PLO View: Prospects of a Palestinian-Israeli Settlement' (Lukacs, 1992, p. 392). Much of the document's content was designed to meet the US' expectations. Arafat validated PLO's intention for peace in its 19th PNC session on November 15, 1988, in Algiers with the Declaration of Independence. The historical declaration—characterized as the greatest compromise—was a text written by one of the most prominent Palestinian figures, Mahmoud Darwish and blessed halfheartedly by Arafat.⁶² This unilateral announcement of independence, however, highlighted two points: first, PLO's commitment to a two-state solution on Gaza and the West Bank with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the UN Resolutions 242 and 338; second, Arafat was expected to renounce terrorism. This compromise was projected as a victory by the PLO. In Arafat's view, the declaration was necessary if the PLO intended to survive, given the problems in Tunis and the lack of territory, the assassination of Abu Jihad and the urgency to deliver anything to its constituency to remain relevant to the Palestinian political scene.

PLO boosted its image in the international arena as over 100 UN member states acknowledged the declaration of the State of Palestine. It also called for an international peace

⁶² By which Arafat became President and the Palestinian Independence Day is celebrated in that date. To this day, the Head of Palestine has dual titles, one as the Executive Chairman of the PLO and the other as President of the State of Palestine.

conference, reaffirming that the key to peace is the Israeli withdrawal from the pre-1967 borders and East Jerusalem, the dismantlement of the Israeli settlements and the resolution of the Palestine refugees issue (Thrall, 2017, pp. 37, 248). Many US officials acknowledged that PLO had matured (Quandt, 2004, p. 482). What seemed to be key to the different US approach toward the PLO, in William Quandt's words, was that "most American policymakers accepted the fact that the PLO was the most widely supported spokesman for the Palestinians.[...] So, in one way or another, most administrations had tried to develop some contacts with the PLO" (2010, p. 277). The US ambassador to Tunisia, Robert Pelletreau, was designated by Shultz to open an official dialogue with the PLO a month after the Palestinian Declaration of Independence, where superficial matters were discussed. At the same time, substantive issues would be postponed for a later date in the light of a new US administration in 1989 (Anziska, 2018, p. 265). Nevertheless, the unprecedented formal US-PLO dialogue was based on the understanding of the so-called Stockholm agreement, headed by Anderson, which was meant to be a Palestinian Camp David.

The second phase of the Stockholm agreement entailed PLO officials renouncing terrorism. The UN speech in Geneva in December 1988 was the platform where Arafat was expected to *drop the guns of revolution* and stand solely with the *Olive Branch*. This was a much more complex task. In an interview with members of the Swedish delegations, the author was informed regarding the Swedish-Palestinian difference interpretation of the terms 'renouncing terrorism'. More specifically, the Swedish delegation pressed upon the key element of renouncing terrorism, while Arafat had explained that armed struggle and terrorism were not synonymous. The wordings were crucial, however, as it would have given no further excuses to the US to cease negotiations with the PLO, given that the former has requested it as a precondition. According to interviews with former members of the Swedish delegation, Arafat had implicitly accepted the concept of renouncing terrorism.

The Swedes accused Arafat of not delivering on his promise in November of 1988; according to the same accounts, he did not overtly renounce the notion of terrorism as expected.⁶³ Howbeit, when Arafat addressed the international community at the UN General Assembly in

⁶³ The author conducted an interview with one of the members of the Swedish delegation that participated in the secret negotiations between Israel and Palestine, right before the Oslo Agreements. The interviewee wished to remain anonymous.

Geneva, he explicitly expressed his thoughts on terrorism and understanding of the Stockholm agreement.

“[A]s chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, I hereby declare once more: I condemn terrorism in all its forms, and at the same time salute those sitting before me in this Hall who, in the days when they fought to free their countries from the yoke of colonialism, were accused of terrorism by their oppressors and who today are the faithful leaders of their peoples, stalwart champions of the values of justice and freedom”. (Arafat, 1988)

Arafat condemned terrorism clearly and explicitly. Quite logically, renouncing terrorism would have implied that the PLO was not espousing any form of armed struggle for a national liberation movement but was simply an armed group, a terrorist. The diminishing effect that it would have on PLO's stance not only as a negotiator but also in regards to everything the armed struggle represented in the history of the PLO. This *bra de fer* of words reflects how the PLO viewed itself as an actor in the international scene, but, at the same time, it had a lot to say about the limited relevance PLO had for the US at this stage. In Arafat's eyes, he had given the US their preconditions and believed that PLO had succumbed to an extreme compromise. The UN speech in 1988 was a chance to explain that, as Shafiq al- Hout, a close advisor of Arafat, pointed out, “[a]s far as he [Arafat] was concerned, it left no excuse for the United States to keep the PLO on its list of terrorist organisations”.⁶⁴ On the contrary, the Swedish delegation was dissatisfied only because the US did not deem it sufficient. In the interview, the Swedish delegation were perfectly aware of the dynamics of *bra de fer*, but they still expected Arafat, a movement leader, to fully concede to the US demands. Nevertheless, Palestinian remained bitterly disappointed as it was a “violation of both the letter and the spirit of the Stockholm agreement”, as described by the Palestinian interlocutor and academic Mohamed Rabie, referring to the US rejection (Anziska, 2018, p. 265). This was also fueled by the US veto against Palestinian membership in international organisations, such as the UN's World Health Organisation, Food and Agriculture Organisation, and Education, Science, and Culture Organisation (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 638).

While Reagan's administration had recognized PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people, Bush was not genuinely convinced of Arafat's moderation, and according to the Secretary of State, James Baker (1995, pp. 115-118), “the only chance for peace lay in splitting

⁶⁴ Quoted in Anziska (2018, p. 263)

off West Bank-Gaza Palestinians from the PLO". It is noteworthy to mention that prior to the US presidential election, Reagan's team of advisors drafted a report issued by Martin Indyk's pro-Israeli Washington Institute (Group, 1988) that recommended that the US "should shun efforts to achieve a rapid breakthrough" (Christison, 1998b, pp. 55-56). The Israeli discontent was grave enough to persuade the US to forbid Arafat from attending the UN speech in New York. Israel had always been able "to stage dramatic (and typically negative) repercussions for Washington" and "deflect its attention on issues Israel desires to avoid" (Rubenberg, 1989, pp. 35-36).

The brief window of opportunity for the PLO-US dialogue vanished again. Although Bush and Baker were relatively critical of Israel, they were genuinely interested in a Palestinian-Israeli dialogue to de-escalate the OPT violence, but that did not necessarily entail the PLO (Christison, 1998b, p. 55).⁶⁵ Israel was attempting to find an alternative leadership within the OPT (Tessler, 2009, p. 730)⁶⁶ with US support.⁶⁷ The Soviets were in the processes of upgrading their relations with Israel, which was expressed by encouraging Jewish communities within the USSR to migrate to Israel.

The structural system allowed Arafat to enhance PLO's relevance in Palestinian affairs. However, PLO continued to be challenged on all the fronts that rendered it an statelike actor. Still, PLO's leadership was merely a *guest* in Tunisia and its other offices were scattered in the region. Although Arafat had managed to tighten his grip within the PLO, it had to confront the growing gap in state-society relations. Having said that, it may be argued that the foreign policy choice of declaring the Independence of Palestine was a foreign policy choice that was affected by the negative value of the intervening variables.

⁶⁵ By the same account, the Bush administration was more critical of Israel on a rhetorical level, as opposed to previous administrations (with the exception of Carter's), as it was less fettered by the restraints of the US relationship with Israel.

⁶⁶ In light of the ongoing Intifada that started in 1987, the Israeli government to tackle the violence in the West Bank and Gaza proposed holding elections in 1989 "in the occupied territories to select a Palestinian delegation with which Israel would negotiate in order to establish a self-governing authority in the West Bank and Gaza", which would be "free from an atmosphere of PLO violence, terror and intimidation" (Tessler, 2009, p. 730).

⁶⁷ The PLO was viewed as 'incapable of compromise and had to be bypassed; that West Bank and Gaza Palestinians were inherently more moderate than the PLO and could constitute an "alternative Palestinian leadership"' for more see Christison (1998b)

4.5. Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990

The First Gulf War in the summer of 1990 did not directly involve the PLO or the Palestinians. However, Arafat's foreign policy response vis-à-vis Saddam's invasion of Kuwait is noteworthy as it is considered one of the worst setbacks in the Palestinian foreign policy. There is a debate regarding Arafat's stance on the Gulf War. On the one hand, in the aftermath of the invasion of Kuwait, when Arafat was asked in an interview whether he regretted supporting Saddam in the Gulf War, he claimed that "I [Arafat] didn't support Saddam Hussein in the Iraqi war against Kuwait".⁶⁸ In practice, PLO's foreign policy was much clearer at the outbreak of the Gulf War than Arafat ever intended on admitting. In the wake of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the PLO refused to condemn any policy that would indicate Arafat's disapproval of Saddam's actions. According to Philp Mattar (1994), the PLO position on paper was abstaining from the Arab League resolution condemning the invasion and calling for withdrawal; Arafat also refrained from the OIC resolution condemning the invasion; he voted against an Arab League resolution calling for condemnation, withdrawal, and foreign intervention; Voice of Palestine radio broadcast refrained from commenting on neither support nor condemnation of Iraq (1994, p. 34). Consequently, it is safe to argue that PLO refused to support or condemn Saddam openly; if anything, Arafat's official statements categorically rejected any non-Arab intervention and called for an Arab solution, along with a few more Arab and Islamic countries, including Jordan. Arafat's position was construed as evidence that PLO backed Saddam and stood against the international consensus. Arafat's positive stance on the side of Saddam in the summer of 1990 had shocked—to say the least—many in the international community, including the Arab regimes (Khalidi, 2007; Mattar, 1994; Sayigh, 1997b).

From a structural perspective, one would assume that Arafat would attempt to side with the international consensus (that included the majority of the Arab states) on the side of Kuwait, given his weakened position in the system after the impasse of the US-PLO dialogue and Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Even on a discourse level, PLO invoked being a proponent of human rights and of self-determination of his people. Saddam, on the other hand, was viewed as an invader and expansionist. This very contradiction rendered Arafat's stance incomprehensibly; as one of the

⁶⁸ Arafat was interviewed by Clayton Boyce President of the National Press Club, for more see the full video (C-SPAN, 1993).

Swedish delegations stated, Arafat's response was beyond understanding, adding that "we [the Swedes], who had defended Palestinians rights on the basis of self-determination; the very same Palestinians came to support occupation".⁶⁹ However, neoclassical realism may offer some insight regarding Arafat's stance, especially if variables such as his perception of the system, his strategic culture and the state-society relations are taken into account.

4.5.1. Arafat's Perception and strategic culture

On the part of the Palestinian leadership, the situation was rather conflictual, to say the least, precisely due to the apparent clarity of the structural system. On the one hand, Palestinians were demonstrating in support of Iraq in the OPT and Jordan, partly in generalised disapproval of the regional political status quo (Tessler, 2009, p. 738). Furthermore, the diplomatic impasse of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had created the belief "that only the presence of a credible Arab military challenge would force the [Israeli] government to the negotiating table" (Tessler, 2009, p. 738). On the other hand, oil-rich countries that traditionally supported the PLO financially had joined the US-led coalition against Iraq, which, at this phase, their relation with PLO since 1988 has endured some tension. It is no exaggeration to argue that Arafat was facing an unparallel political, financial and strategic dilemma.

For Arafat, Saddam embodied a familiar notion of the previous status quo of the regional dynamics as a militant Arab leader who would collude against the colonial and imperialist powers that sought to dominate the Middle East. A notion that resonates with him, given that Saddam was one of the few remaining militant heads of state in the region. If Saddam won the Gulf War and with Kuwaiti oil reserves at his disposal, he "would become a one-man OPEC, able to manipulate supply to achieve whatever price he wanted" (Quandt, 2010, p. 302). In an effort to gain public support against the US, Saddam linked the Kuwaiti invasion with the liberation of Palestine by saying "[t]oday Kuwait, tomorrow Jerusalem" and propagated that he was the primary opponent of pro-Western Arab regimes (Tessler, 2009, p. 738).⁷⁰ This implied that in the case of Saddam's victory, the PLO would be at the centre stage again.

In the perception of PLO's leadership, Iraq had the military capability to counter western forces. Saddam had reached out to Arafat and promised him a 54 army division for the Palestinian

⁶⁹ Quoted from the interview conducted by the author to the Swedish delegation.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Baruch and Migdal (2003, p. 328)

struggle and an Iraqi ballistic missile as “a gift to the Intifada” (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 641). Thus, a possible scenario of Saddam’s victory would have been an incredible opportunity, which would increase PLO’s leverage. Indicative of such logic is the fact that some reports suggest that some Palestinians fought side by side with Iraqi forces against the coalition forces (Mattar, 1994, p. 41).⁷¹ Arafat intended to further build on the newly emerged situation provided by the Iraqi – Kuwaiti crisis by linking Iraq’s retreat from Kuwait with Israel’s retreat from the Palestinian territories.

An interesting structural element at this point in history is the lack of clarity in the structural system. The global order in the summer of 1990 was enduring a process of change due to the Soviet demise, signalled by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. This left many reactionary Arab regimes exposed to the US unipolar dominance in the region. However, the implications of the end of the Cold War had not immediately been palpable in the dynamics on the sub-system of the Middle East. The nuance of this new reality was neither clear nor had it been fully grasped by the regional actors. The thaw of the Cold War was much of a disarray to PLO’s perception of the regional system. Indicative of this is that PLO rapidly sought to establish formal ties with various former Soviet republics in hopes “to utilize Soviet influence in order to obtain acceptable terms for peace from the US, and through it from Israel” (Sayigh & Shlaim, 1997, p. 153). It seems more likely that Arafat’s perception of the regional system in the summer of 1990 was based on the calculations of the status quo before the fall of the Berlin Wall. In addition, after the UN speech in 1988, Arafat realised that the most powerful of the superpowers could not impose itself on Israel. Perhaps, even Saddam’s invasion was a miscalculated decision whose equation failed to include the possible implications of the end of the Cold War. Albeit it was clear that world politics were in the process of reconfiguration, the changes and dynamics in themselves were vague. By the same token, Arafat’s view of the system in the wake of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was compromised by the dismay of the changing international dynamics. The fact that PLO could not take a clear stance on the invasion of Kuwait was perhaps due to Arafat’s awareness of the lack of clarity on the consequences of the end of the Cold War.

⁷¹ Interestingly, the Palestinians that fought with the Iraqi forces in Kuwait belonged to Baathist influenced groups and Abu Abbas’ PLF who was pro-PLO. At the same time, the PLO had requested from the Palestinian community in Kuwait to not participate in the activities of the Iraqi army when it invaded Kuwait (Lesch, 1991, p. 44).

PLO's stance may also be attributed to Arafat's strategic culture and his expertise in the art of avoidance or balancing between a yes and a no (Mattar, 1994, p. 37; Rabie, 1995, p. 55). PLO never condemned Saddam, and, at the same time, it never explicitly supported the invasion *per se*. On a discourse level, the PLO remained silent; in the sense that "not a single one of its statements and editorials contained an unequivocal condemnation of the Iraqi invasion or unconditional affirmation of Kuwaiti rights" (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 641). Arafat's vagueness reflected much of his balancing politics that had defined much of his foreign policy throughout the years. This was a political style that was evident among his peers. Mamdouh Nofak, a senior DFLP official, explained:

"[h]e [Arafat] did not openly and clearly condemn the occupation of Kuwait. At the same time, he did not openly and clearly support the occupation of Kuwait. He tried in his own way to simultaneously play both sides and his position was interpreted as supporting the Iraqis; his calculations were wrong and we paid a tremendous price for them" (Al-Jazeera, 2009c).⁷²

Arafat was also well-versed in taking advantage of opportunities to reassure PLO's relevance in the region. Before Iraq's actual invasion of Kuwait, Arafat flew to Kuwait City in an attempt to mediate between the parties, which was rejected by the Kuwaiti Emir, who asked Arafat not to interfere (Sharif 2009: 213). PLO persisted in attaining the role of the mediator by reaching out to European Union to mediate with him (Sharif, 2009, p. 216), but all in vain. Despite the invasion, PLO intended to find its place in the crisis. During the Arab Summit in Cairo in August and later again in September 1990, Arafat, with the backing of the Jordanian King, suggested linking the Iraqi-Kuwaiti crisis with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and calling for an all-encompassing Arab solution to the Middle East crisis; he recommended himself as a "neutral mediator to the Gulf crisis" (Sayigh, 1997b, pp. 641-642). While PLO was still attempting to avoid taking a clear stance on Saddam's invasion, Arafat was also attempting to ensure a role for the PLO in the regional crisis.

⁷² What was further indicative of Arafat's support or at least Arafat's fear to lose Saddam as an ally, was that PLO's second in command, Abu Eyad, was assassinated by the Palestinian – arched enemy of Arafat – Abu Nidal, assigned by the Iraqi forces. Abu Eyad was clearly opposing a Kuwait invasion. And although Arafat had various opportunities to retaliate against Abu Nidal, Arafat refused because Abu Nidal was under the Iraqi wing. At the same time, Arafat had viewed Kuwait with great suspicion.

4.5.2. State-Society Relations

The state-society relations between the PLO and the Palestinians, both in the OPT and the diaspora, were at a juncture; yet, it had inversely influenced the PLO's stance regarding the invasion of Kuwait. The PLO continued to lose its popularity within the realm of Palestinian domestic politics, which was much affected by the negative implications of the US-PLO negotiations between 1988-1990 (Hassan, 2011, p. 66). Regardless of how Arafat managed to capitalize on the First Intifada—in practice—it had signalled a shift of “the national movement's centre of gravity”, from the diaspora to the OPT (Thrall, 2017, p. 58). The main slogans of the Palestinians within the OPT revolved around the notion of resistance as opposed to the PLO's slogan of liberation (Baumgarten, 2005, p. 37), many of whom were not affiliated with the PLO. The most concerning element in the rupture of the state-society relations for the PLO was the emergence of new groups that promoted a militarised response to the Israeli occupation, such as Islamic Jihad and Hamas. They started to gain influence among young Palestinians within the OPT, presenting them an alternative path under the national yet Islamic umbrella as opposed to Arafat's diplomacy.⁷³ The Islamic groups, particularly Hamas, were becoming a domestic threat for the PLO, especially since PLO's unilateral declaration of independence in 1988 had not translated into concrete results neither for the Palestinians in general nor for the situation of the occupation in the OPT. What added to Arafat's concern was that Israel was seeking to negotiate with Palestinians from within the territory but categorically not the PLO. This implied that, beyond the Islamic groups, there might soon be a new consolidated Palestinian leadership. Arafat's legitimacy was certainly on shaky grounds with his broader constituency.

In 1990, there was an overwhelming Palestinian support for Iraq both in the OPT, in Jordan and abroad. This was an opportunity for Arafat to amend PLO's relationship with the Palestinians, but he also had to take into consideration some 300,000 Palestinians in Iraq and another 400,000 in Kuwait (Baruch & Migdal, 2003, p. 329; Sayigh, 1997b, p. 641), whose fate would have grave consequences whether Arafat condemned or supported Saddam. Given these factors and, in combination with the growing domestic threats, there seems to be evidence that Arafat's stance

⁷³ It is important to bear in mind that Hamas, heavily influenced by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, was established in the 1940s. Nevertheless, when some of its members started to promote an armed struggle, the Hamas leadership rejected it. This rift led to the creation of the Islamic Jihad, a small organisation, with a militarised agenda. It was not until 1987 that Hamas also incorporated the armed struggle into its own agenda (Baumgarten, 2005, pp. 39-40).

was also an omnibalancing between internal and external threats. In this sense, PLO did not only seek to remain relevant in the regional political scene, but it also wanted to find a way to restore its own legitimacy within the domestic realm. According to Steven R. David (1991, p. 238), the omnibalancing theory considers Third World leaders' weak legitimacy compelled them to opt for foreign policies that would increase their probability of remaining in power or align with an outside power that would balance and protect them from domestic and foreign threats. Not only was Arafat compelled to respond to the strong Palestinian support of Iraq, but he also had developed some grudges with Kuwaitis, whom he assumed were financing Hamas (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 641) and with the US, who had stopped the negotiations and assisted Israel in addressing the Palestinian issue with an alternative leadership in the OPT.

Interestingly, this was the case for the Jordanian King Hussein, who also took a similar stance to Arafat.⁷⁴ Jordan had over 1.5 million Jordanians of Palestinian origin supporting Saddam and who would have lost credibility and leverage over potential domestic threats such as the Islamic fundamentalists and leftists (Reed, 1990, pp. 21, 24, 34). For Jordan, supporting Saddam secured him the respect of these groups, but it also de-escalated the antagonism with the PLO within the Palestinians of Jordan (Jreisat & Freij, 1991, p. 114). For the PLO, omnibalancing was an even more urgent matter, and while it had saved Arafat some face within its constituency, PLO paid a tremendous price. The oil countries' retaliation entailed cutting off funds to the PLO and expelling all Palestinians from Kuwait, leading PLO to an even deeper financial and political crisis.

Alternatively, the PLO could have supported Kuwait openly and gained the US and Saudi support. However, this would not comply with the general tendencies of the intervening variable. The extremely weakened position of the PLO's leadership in relation to its society, which overall supported Iraq as opposed to the US-friendly Kuwait, Arafat's tendency to make an opportunity out of a crisis by proofing his relevance via mediation and finally, his strategic culture of avoidance, all indicated that it would be more likely that Arafat would follow the path that he did rather than any other option. In addition, despite his wrong calculation, Arafat considered himself well-versed in the art of manipulating his way 'back' to the Arab pro-coalition regimes, such as Egyptian and Saudi ones (Selim, 1991). Nevertheless, the prestige of the PLO was tainted once again. Arafat repeatedly denied any allegations of supporting Saddam during Iraq's invasion of

⁷⁴ It is important to note that Amman had become very dependent on Baghdad and a destructed Iraq would have severe financial and military repercussions on Jordan (Jreisat & Freij, 1991, pp. 106-108).

Kuwait. PLO's first official statement after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, asserted that PLO adopted an "attitude which calls for a peaceful negotiated solution to the crisis within the Arab context" (Mattar, 1994, p. 32).

It may be argued that Arafat's perception, on the one hand, lacked clarity in relation to the impact of the new world order on the region. On the other hand, given his general tendency in terms of strategic culture, Arafat was expected to attempt to steer a middle course on the same route of balancing politics. Finally, Arafat's assumptions and actions indicated an overestimation of the Iraqi military capability and the PLO's relevance in the region. The isolation that followed the aftermath of the Gulf war had weakened the Palestinian leadership significantly. To add to the strain, the ongoing raging Intifada seem to have no end; the continuous Israeli settlement expansions on the West Bank and Gaza had increased in the wake of the 1990s.

4.6. From Madrid to Oslo

The post-first Gulf War era offered the opportunity to build on the anti-Iraq coalition in the region and push forward for an Arab-Israeli peace talk (Morris, 2011, p. 613). This new regional momentum did not favour Arafat. Spain hosted in its capital a major conference for Arab-Israeli peace talks, in 1991, under the auspices of Washington and Moscow, at the request of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia (Eisenberg & Caplan, 2010, p. 95). The structural restrictions hindered any options for PLO to conduct a direct foreign policy, as it was not allowed to participate in the Arab-Israeli talks on behalf of the Palestinians during the Madrid Conference and the subsequent Washington talks (1991-1992). It was clear more than ever that the PLO could not rely on the US, Europe or any of the key regional regimes such as Egypt, Syria and the Gulf, who had alienated the PLO in the aftermath of the Gulf War.

The US had attained an increased prestige in the region, paving the way for President Bush to bargain with the Israelis to seek a political settlement with the Palestinians. The Bush administration pushed forward an agenda for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian issue in particular.⁷⁵ In order to counter Israel's reluctance to negotiate, the US publicly withheld a \$10 million housing loan guarantee promised to Israel (Christison, 1998b, p. 55; Quandt, 2010, p. 307). In response, Israel accepted to enter negotiations for a political settlement but asserted its

⁷⁵ Bush was one of the few US presidents that considered East Jerusalem part of OPT.

power by requesting the Palestinian counterparts would be from either the West Bank or Gaza, neither from the diaspora (meaning the PLO) nor Jerusalem.⁷⁶ Thus, Arafat desperately desired to have a protagonist role in the negotiation and had to choose between opposing the talks altogether or participating by proxy and from behind the scenes. Arafat opted for the former. At the same time, these very notions demonstrate the delicate situation of PLO as the relationship between Arafat and the Palestinian delegation from the OPT had some dissentious dynamics stemming mainly from Arafat's perception of the system.

Arafat maintained some sort of involvement at the first stages of the peace talks, allowing him to manoeuvre his way into the Oslo negotiations without the US involvement or any limitations from the Palestinian delegations in the Washington talks. In this sense, the utility of Arafat's strategic culture of dual tactics once again came in handy with the first structural opportunity that emerged. Similar to the peace talks in Washington, which merely framed "the idea of reaching an interim agreement between Israel and the Palestinians" (Anziska, 2018, p. 272), the Oslo Accords were largely void of a genuine agreement that would resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The fact that Arafat consented to an interim agreement so deviating from PLO's national aspirations does not derive entirely and exclusively from the structural limitations but also from the intervening variables that equally limited Arafat to opt for the choice that would give him any part of the Palestinian territory.

4.6.1. Madrid Conference and the Washington talks

The US and Israel had banned PLO's participation in the conference in Madrid and the subsequent Washington talks (Thrall, 2017, p. 63). Israel insisted on Palestinian delegates that came directly from the OPT. Nevertheless, in James Baker's US Secretary of State, 'Letter of Assurance to the Palestinians, prior to the Conference, he reaffirmed the US' intension to address the "legitimate political rights of the Palestinian people" and even explicitly mentioned—for the first time—the "end to the Israeli occupation" (Baker, 1991). At the Conference, Israeli, Lebanese, Syrian and

⁷⁶ To a large extent, Israel gave the impression that the 'Palestinian problem' stemmed from the PLO, rather than having 'a PLO problem' due to the Palestinians (Davis, 1995, p. 68).

Jordanian-Palestinian joint delegations would meet to discuss practical concerns,⁷⁷ with the understanding of there being no intention to reach any final agreement (Anziska, 2018, p. 273; Tessler, 2009, p. 752).

The Palestinian delegation, from within the OPT, was headed by Haidar Abdel Shafi. They were all in close contact and cooperation with Arafat himself; the delegation included prominent figures such as Hanan Ashrawi, and Saeb Erakat. The conference was to be followed by numerous bilateral negotiations rounds between Israel and Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinians in Washington, as well as multilateral negotiations in Moscow.⁷⁸ Requesting an OPT delegation under the Jordanian umbrella, while the Americans endorsing the Palestinian political rights was the beginning of a diplomatic charade so as to ease the Israeli participation, which—whether intentionally or not—diminished the PLO and Arafat. On paper, the Palestinians were presented as two Palestinian leaderships, the ‘outside’ (PLO government-in-exile, Tunis) and the ‘inside’ (OPT leaders) (Eisenberg & Caplan, 2010, p. 104), although both the Israelis and the Americans were aware of the close ties between the two *leaderships*.⁷⁹

The Washington talks that followed the Madrid Conference accentuated the direct Palestinian participation as agents of their own cause as opposed to being represented by other regimes in the region within a broader framework of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Thus, Arafat, who desperately desired to have a protagonist role in the negotiation, had to choose between opposing the talks or participating by proxy and from behind the scene. Given that, from a structural perspective, the fragile situation of the PLO had no leverage in the new regional system, Arafat humbly accepted the latter rather than not having a place at all. What made it worse is that Arafat believed that the US wanted him to indirectly “approve” of the “inside leadership” (Christison, 1998b, p. 58) and then make him “disappear, *like a male bee that fertilises once and then dies*”

⁷⁷ It is noteworthy to mention that in addition to these delegations, Gulf countries delegated, including the secretary-general of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Saudi ambassador to the US nominally participated in the conference although not at the negotiating table.

⁷⁸ For a breakdown of the rounds see Camille Mansour (1993)

⁷⁹ According to one of the advisors of the Palestinian delegation (inside leadership) to Madrid Conference, Camille Mansour, the request of negotiating with delegates that came directly from the OPT, not Jerusalem or the Diaspora, was not ‘a binding condition’ but a ‘a de facto arrangement’, which the Palestinian leadership chose to accept so as to facilitate the launching of negotiations, he also noted that it could break whenever national interest so required. See (Mansour, 1993, p. 9) In addition, To no one’s surprise, the veil was taken away in mid-1992, when the members of ‘inside’ Palestinian leadership attended PLO’s CC meeting in Tunis, publicly thanking them as *PLO’s* negotiation team (‘Abbas, 1995, p. chapter 6; Ashrawi, 1996, pp. 209-210; Mansour, 1993, p. 18).

(Sayigh, 1997b, p. 654).⁸⁰ Even though it took Arafat a lot to conform to the US-Israeli power games, he opted for the negotiations for two main reasons that stem from the state-society relations and territoriality.

First, Arafat feared a coup from an alternative leadership from within the OPT, thus, resenting the fact that the inside delegation had access to the US administration (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 655). In turn, it made Arafat insist all the more “on keeping all the cards in his hand and remaining the sole decision maker” (Al-Hout, 2011, p. 267). Secondly, despite this intra-Palestinian antagonism, both leaderships were threatened by the strong emergence of Islamic militant activists, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad within OPT. Not only was it challenging to PLO’s rank and file in OPT but the Islamic groups also found recruits among other traditionally secular Palestinian political activists. The Islamist militants threatened to hijack the Palestinian question and drive it away from the secular national aspirations. In order to avoid such an outcome, Arafat aligned with the secular politicians, which came to be the ‘inside leadership’. In turn, the latter, for the same reasons, became very keen to cooperate with the PLO, who for decades had cultivated supporters within the OPT. In this sense, it may be argued that an additional reason for Arafat’s foreign policy choice to participate in the talks by proxy stemmed from the logic of omnibalancing.

The Washington talks did not bridge the power asymmetry between the Israelis and the Palestinian negotiators. While the Palestinians' main concerns were seeking to attain a deal that would address their national aspirations and address the de facto annexation of Palestinian land and resources, the Israelis were not willing to proceed to anything but an interim agreement. In fact, the Israeli Shamir Likud-led government was reluctant to any territorial compromise, not in the least the withdrawal from territory occupied in 1967. The Americans were unable to convince the Israeli side for a freeze of settlement building in the OPT and were also unwilling to push for a genuine deal that would stop the Israeli occupation. Daniel Kurtzer, one of the US mediators and diplomat, told Ashrawi, “[i]f it is perceived in Congress that the Secretary has played into a Palestinian strategy to stop settlements and to get a settlement freeze, he’s finished” (Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations, 1992). One of the advisors to the Palestinian delegation, Sari Nusseibeh, stated that the Palestinians “are being led into [a] lion’s den to agree, in view of the asymmetry of power. We feel it is dangerous. We are willing to enter direct negotiations, and work things out

⁸⁰ Sayigh referenced Mamduh Nawfal’s testimony (then ANM cadre)

with Israel, but the US position has to be translated into something concrete”.⁸¹ From the American perspective, antagonizing Israel or encouraging the Palestinians to believe that they could rely on the US to pressure Israel rather than make concessions themselves would harm its interests (Christison, 1998b, p. 57). In order to keep the balance, US attempted to persuade the Palestinians that interim measures would pave the way and eventually lay the foundations for further dialogue on territorial issues, putting an end to the Israeli occupation. In the words of the US diplomat Dan Kurtzer to Hanan Ashrawi and Saeb Erakat “you may still be able to negotiate your way out of occupation. The grist for the mill may be laid in the foundation” (Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations, 1992). To a large extent, the US Secretary of State had put his hopes on the forthcoming Israeli elections (Anziska, 2018, p. 281; Christison, 1998b, p. 58), which would potentially replace Likud’s hard-liners who had brought the negotiations to an impasse.

Beside the constrains produced by the Israeli-Palestinian asymmetry of power, the negotiations were also affected by the subtle antagonism between the inside and the outside leadership. In theory, the two Palestinian leaderships would each compensate for the other’s vulnerability. PLO leadership’s knowledge of diplomacy, negotiations and foreign policy compensated for Shafi’s delegation inexperience, while the latter’s understanding of the occupational policies compensated for Arafat’s inexperience of what an Israeli occupation entailed and the practical needs of the people within the OPT. However, in practice, they seemed to have different priorities in their negotiation tactics. On the one hand, the Palestinian delegation insisted on dealing with the issue of Israeli settlement expansion on the negotiations table.

On the other hand, Arafat wanted to focus on the status of East Jerusalem. In fact, Arafat pressured Shafi’s delegations to “demand that all Palestinian legislation apply to Jerusalem” (Thrall, 2017, p. 268), which would be indubitably rejected by Israel. Such persistence has led to the assumption that Arafat used his influence on the delegations to delay and obstruct the negotiations in order to compel either the US and/or Israel to engage with him directly (Thrall, 2017, p. 56). This is further substantiated by the fact that, while Arafat was prompting the delegations to surpass the redlines set by the Israeli delegation in Washington, PLO had already commenced secret negotiations with Israel in Norway’s capital, Oslo. Arafat found an opportunity to bypass the Palestinian delegation of Shafi and take hold of the Palestinian cause. The paradox in

⁸¹ Quoted in Anziska (2018, p. 275)

1993 is that the Oslo Accords, which were a result of the direct negotiations between Arafat and the new, more reasonable Israeli President Rabin, resulted in accepting everything the delegation from the OPT was attempting to avoid and the terms,⁸² which the PLO categorically rejected in 1979.

4.6.2. The Oslo Accords

Much of the dynamics in the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks changed with the election of Begin in 1992. The perception of the new Labour-led government came to realize that in the new world order its ties with the US were not unchallenged. From a structural perspective, while the Gulf War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union had left the Arab radical regimes weakened, the rise of Islamic militant groups across the region, including Palestine, and a possible ‘new’ strong Russia ‘might arise from the ashes as a pro-Arab world power; and Iran and Iraq might acquire nuclear weapons and project their strength and rejectionism across the Middle East’ (Morris, 2011, p. 616). Thus, Rabin was willing to move forward with the Arab-Israeli peace process and build upon the new dynamics with many Arab countries, such as Egypt, Jordan and the Arab Gulf monarchies, which seemed to have accepted Israel’s existence either explicitly or implicitly.

Two of the main mandates of the new government were: first, to repair the US-Israeli relations and to reach an autonomy agreement with the Palestinians within nine months. Although Rabin was not ready to offer a genuine peace deal with the Palestinians, Israel was willing to freeze the settlement building in the OPT and reach an interim agreement within some territorial compromises (Rabinovich, 2009, pp. 46-47). While the Labour party also rejected the PLO, the emergence of Islamic radical groups within the OPT, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, had provided the Rabin government with a new ‘terrorist’ threat. This led Israel to reach out to the more secular part of the Palestinian leadership, particularly the PLO, which became possible after the Knesset introduced a pro-PLO bill in December 1992 that removed “the ban on unauthorized meetings with members of the PLO” (Tessler, 2009, p. 60) and froze the settlement building for a brief period during the Oslo negotiations. Even prior to Oslo, the Rabin administration had given

⁸² In fact, the terms of Oslo Accords differed little from the relevant provisions on the Palestinians of the Camp David in 1979; namely, without a legal connection to the provisions for the Israel-Egypt peace, which stipulated the creation of a self-ruled entity in the occupied territories for a transitional period of not more than five years. During this period the bulk of the Israeli armed forces would withdraw and the remaining ones would redeploy to specific security zones. Then, within a timeline of three years, negotiations on the final status of the West Bank and Gaza would take place (Cobban, 1984: 99).

the impression to the US and Palestinian delegation in Washington that Israel was gradually moving away “from a strictly functional approach toward the territorial model developed by the Palestinians” (Anziska, 2018, p. 281).⁸³

The Intifada functioned partly as a structural modifier impacting the Palestinian-Israeli conflict not only because it led to the bilateral Washington talks (Shafir, 2017, pp. 244-352) but also due to the effect it had on both the Israeli and Palestinian societies and leaderships. The ‘iron fist policies’ of Rabin had led to another round of violence within the OPT, detaining 1,600 activists that were allegedly fundamentalists and deporting 415 of them (Benvenisti, 1995, p. 176; Tessler, 2009, p. 752). The Israeli society also felt this enervation. The establishment of the Peace Now movement was a testament to the Israeli society’s realization that the “policy of ‘status quo’ was not sustainable”, thus, leading the government to seek a more realistic approach (Hassan, 2011, p. 65).⁸⁴ In fact, in the second half of 1992, both societies seemed ready to agree. Indicative of such were different opinion polls that showed 66.4 per cent of Palestinians within the OPT and 60 per cent of Israelis supported an Israeli-Palestinian agreement.⁸⁵ Rabin and Arafat commenced talks, first informally and then via official representatives.

Arafat had to seize the structural opportunity for the same reasons as Rabin. The growing gap between state-society relations that was being shadowed by the emergence of Islamic groups and even by the alternative (secular) leadership had even further encouraged Arafat to seek direct talks with Rabin. Arafat’s top priority was to maintain PLO’s relevance as the Palestinian representative and discussions on autonomy. In order for PLO to have full charge of the autonomous authority, ‘Arafat believed that [...] [it] could only be found by secret negotiation [directly with Israel], and so responded favourably when ‘Abbas and Qrayc disclosed that a back channel in 1992 had been opened with Norwegian mediation in December’ (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 655). Initially, PLO-Israeli talks in Oslo worked on conceptualizing a framework for an Israeli-PLO accord. Although the progress of the talks was not steady—even came to an impasse in many

⁸³ These were issues discussed already see draft minutes of the Palestinian negotiators with U.S. State Department officials in 1992 and 1993.

⁸⁴ For more on the Peace Now movement of Israel see Bar-On (1996); For a more analytical account regarding the practices and policies of Rabin that led to the peace process see Barnett (1999)

⁸⁵ This survey was conducted by CNN and French Television for the Palestinian and for the Israeli public opinion, it was conducted by an Israeli poll, for more see Mark Tessler (2009, p. 758)

instances—regarding a genuine agreement that would solve vital aspects of the conflict,⁸⁶ the two sides announced the Declaration of Principles (DoP) on September 13, 1993 (Tessler, 2009, p. 758). For symbolic reasons, the ceremony took place in Washington, which was hosted by the new US President Clinton (Christison, 1998b, p. 60).

The DOP was an arrangement of an Interim Self-Government, which suggested but not explicitly stated a possible withdrawal of Israel to the pre-1967 borders but at least allowed the Palestinians to have some sort of autonomy that resembled what Eyal Weizman (2012) called prosthetic sovereignty. What Arafat agreed in 1993, he had fiercely rejected in 1991 in Washington talks and prior to that, in 1977 negotiations in the wake of Camp David. In fact, the DOP conditions echoed many aspects of Begin's proposal and logic (Anziska, 2018, pp. 283-284; Quandt, 2010, p. 329). Its implementation would sustain an Israeli dominance in key areas within the POT, which offered the PLO "enclaves of Palestinian self-rule in a sea of Israeli control while respecting the autonomy of individual enclaves" (Gordon, 2008, pp. 169-196). According to Uri Savir, the chief Israeli negotiator, later wrote that Oslo's central achievement was much simpler; the agreement was an admission from both sides "that the land would ultimately have to be shared by two" (Savir, 2013). A Palestinian police force would be established to maintain internal security, but Israel maintained responsibility for external control. Most glaringly was the fact that the PLO, in the second Oslo Agreement, agreed to allow for an Israeli clause that would enable ongoing settlement expansion before permanent status negotiations. Again, similar to the Camp David provisions, the contested issues such as of borders, the Palestinian refugees, final settlements status and the issue of eastern Jerusalem would be discussed later in a five-year transitional period.

From the Palestinian perspective, the only opportunity that emerged after the election of Rabin was Israel's will to actually accept the PLO while modestly proposing a freeze in settlement building and leaving the notion of actual withdrawal from the 1967 territory along with the other contested issues as pending matters. Since the last phase of the Washington talks and into the Oslo talks, PLO's fragility was becoming more pronounced by the severe financial crisis within the PLO, which led to cutting wages of civilians and the military. This challenged Arafat's legitimacy both within the state-society relations and institutions. Thus priority for Arafat, who was still in

⁸⁶ For Oslo negotiations see Uri Savir (2010); Savir (2014) Antoon (2002); Anziska (2018); Hassan (2011); Shaath (1993); Waage (2002, 2008)

Tunis, was to gain back his legitimacy and, most importantly, attain some sort of sovereignty in any place within historical Palestine.

Under this prism, the contested issues between Israel and Palestine, such as the status of Jerusalem, refugees and so forth were secondary to Arafat. In fact, as part of the diaspora, the Palestinian languishing government-in-exile had become totally disconnected from the reality of life under Israeli occupation and its implications on the ground and did not have a complete picture of how to overcome practical limitations posed by the Oslo Accords (Khalidi, 2013a, pp. 59-60; Sharif, 2009, pp. 127-128). The return to the territory at any expense “was seen [by the government-in-exile] as a development that might place the PLO back at the heart of the national struggle” (Anziska, 2018, p. 286). In this sense, at first sight, Arafat had more to gain than lose with the Oslo Accords. As William Quandt (2010) puts it, the “theoretical advantage” of postponing critical issues of the conflict would offer the PLO time and space to tackle “practical administrative and security arrangements that would have to be mastered before a lasting peace could be forged” (2010, p. 329). Arafat’s achievement was that PLO was finally acknowledged officially by Israel as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, which would counter any efforts of the Palestinian elite ‘within’ to co-opt him. In Arafat’s eyes, the little space given to him by the Israelis in Gaza and the town of Jericho, would soon expand and allow the PLO to rise from the ashes like a phoenix. In this sense, the territory (that he was deprived of in Tunis) and the legitimacy of the recognition by Israel (legitimacy was unstable both in terms of state-society and domestic institutions) would generate the same dynamics that allowed the PLO to expand its internal and external sovereignty as it did in the days of Lebanon.

While many of the dynamics did restore many aspects of PLO’s statelike actor characteristics, the final discussion of what the Oslo agreements never foresaw really took place. What could also not be foreseen was the assassination of Rabin as a result of the Oslo Accords, which technically sealed the brief window of opportunity for Arafat to develop his initial strategy. At the same time, the immediate impact of the Oslo Accords had caused an upheaval among the Palestinian leadership, especially the Palestinian delegations in Madrid and Washington. The conditions accepted by Arafat in Oslo were the very same ones that Arafat had previously instructed the delegations between 1991-1992 to reject; on some points, the compromises Arafat agreed to were even on far narrower terms than they had initially sought out (Khalidi, 2013a, pp. 58-59, 145-155). By the same token, a number of PLO’s prominent figures that were close to

Arafat became furious; namely, the PLO executive committee member Mahmud Darwish resigned, Shafiq al-Hut suspended his participation in protest, and even some called for the establishment of a “Palestinian government of national salvation that would arrest the all-out collapse of the Palestinian institutional network” (Sayigh, 1997b, p. 659).⁸⁷ Edward Said (1993) wrote about ‘the morning after’ the agreement and accused the PLO of stripping away the Palestinians of their national right. The signing of the agreements that established a Palestinian Authority (PA) and permitted its presence within the OPT had materialised Arafat’s political and diplomatic aspirations in the short-term but not the long-term.

4.7. Conclusion

The examination of PLO’s foreign policy between the Camp David Accords of 1979 and the Oslo Accords of 1993 exposes the ability of this statelike actor to exert foreign policy that is not exclusively dependent on the structural dynamics but also on intervening variables. At the same time, the intervening variables define its very composition, highlighting the stateness of the PLO as opposed to a non-state actor. When Arafat took over PLO’s leadership, it signalled the beginning of a new phase for the Palestinian people. The Palestinian question was no more a *card* at the hands of the Arab regimes. Under his leadership, PLO’s overall foreign policy placed the Palestinian issue on the political map. This chapter addressed the most defining PLO’s foreign policies and their interaction with the structural system in an effort to apply neoclassical realism to statelike actor’s.

Within the framework of neoclassical realism, this study found that both the independent and the intervening variables play a crucial role in implementing foreign policy. The study observed that structural modifiers such as the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the first Intifada in 1987, and the end of the Cold War are also crucial in how the independent and intervening variables interact as they showed to have an impact on the structural system but also on elements such as state-society, territoriality, Arafat’s perception and strategic culture and even domestic institutions. In terms of the intervening variables, for instance, PLO’s foreign policy to promote its diplomatic machinery in response to the Camp David Accords seems to be affected by all intervening variables. While the foreign policy choices after the structural modifiers,

⁸⁷ For a poetic allegory on the critique on Oslo see Antoon (2002)

PLO's external behaviour seems to be dictated by Arafat's perception, strategic culture, state-society relations and the notion of territoriality, be that in his decision to unilateral announce the Palestinian Declaration of Independence, his approach towards Saddam's invasion of Kuwait or his approach to the Washington talks and later Oslo.

Yazid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim have already observed that PLO, like any other local actor, "is not wholly subject to systemic constraints at every level" as the PLO had the "ability to embody and institutionalize Palestinian nationalism and to survive as a political organisation" (Sayigh & Shlaim, 1997, p. 125). This chapter attempted to spot the very elements that generate this ability. Neoclassical realism proposes the intervening variables—state-society relations and domestic institutions Arafat's perception of the system and his strategic culture, as well as PLO's notion of territoriality—as elements that enable PLO's agency and foreign policy choice. More specifically, Yazid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim emphasize "the crucial errors of judgement" of Arafat, especially amidst the Cold War, rather than incorporating and understanding how these 'judgments' were shaped by Arafat's perception of the system and his strategic culture and also by the clarity of the system to the leadership as well as the actors it engaged with (Sayigh & Shlaim, 1997, p. 154). This chapter's scope was precisely to frame the additional elements that shape external behaviours in statelike actors.

The study found that the importance of variables of the leadership's perception, strategic culture and the need for a territorial base outweigh the variables of domestic institutions in shaping foreign policy. In some instances, state-society relations remain marginal unless they are on the threshold of total collapse. This does not negate the fact that the very existence of state-society relations is of great importance as it provides internal legitimacy and the ability to have an external legitimacy, especially when there is no international legal recognition. By the same token, the PLO created a constituency and was deemed the sole representative of the Palestinian people, offering it both internal and external legitimacy, despite the fact that the role of the state-society relations was minimal in choosing a foreign policy approach (except to when it generated threats to the legitimacy and survival of the PLO within the logic of omnibalancing). Similarly, it was important to establish domestic institutions in order to create a launching pad where the PLO could sustain the state-society relations and interact with other actors in the system. However, especially in regards to how the decision mechanism was established, much of the formal procedures were bypassed by Arafat and his inner circle. Having said that, the structural

environment offered PLO's foreign policy numerous opportunity slots, however, small may they have been. Within the framework of neoclassical realism, PLO's foreign policy choices can be understood and theorised not as an exceptionalist reaction but as a logical extension of the mechanism of foreign policy choices of a statelike actor.

Part II - Hizbullah

Chapter 5: Hizbullah as a statelike actor

5.1. Introduction

Hizbullah's trajectory in almost three decades has created an enormous amount of literature in an effort to better understand its mechanism, scope and function. The scholarship is broadly divided into three categories that revolve around the "multiple faces or identities of Hizbullah", namely, a Shia Islamic movement under Iran's influence, a resistance movement that aims to destroy Israel and a Lebanese political actor (Saad-Ghorayeb, 2002, pp. 69-87; Saad-Ghorayeb & Ottaway, 2007). The first category—the most dominant in the IR literature—views Hizbullah as a 'terrorist organisation' and a proxy/client of Iran and Syria within Lebanon, focusing on its capacity as a military power vis-à-vis Israel, its role in Syria and other countries in the region (Azani, 2011, 2013; Hirst, 2011; Kramer, 2017; Levitt, 2015; Takeyh, 2006; Zisser, 2000). The second category delves into understanding the Islamic movement's evolution (Hamzeh, 1993; Hamzeh, 2004) from a militia in the 1980s to a political party in the 1990s, a process that has been characterized as Lebanonisation (Norton, 2007) or civilisation (Saouli, 2011). Others view it under the prism of identity politics (Hage Ali, 2018) and frame it as a national Islamist movement (Ayoob & Lussier, 2020). While the first category is mainly preoccupied with external behaviour, the second focuses on internal dynamics. In an effort to tackle this binary, a third category emerged, which engages the internal/external nexus (Husseini, 2010; Knio, 2013). Building upon this last category, some have explored the "interconnectedness" between being an armed non-state actor and a political party (Berti, 2011; Calculli, 2020) and others have immersed in examining the socialization aspect of Hizbullah and its mobilization power (Daher, 2019b; Saouli, 2017). At the same time, the autonomy of Hizbullah has also shed light on its statelike characteristics, which is widely acknowledged as a state within a state (Early, 2006b; Kindt, 2009) or view it as an autonomous non-state actor (Dingel, 2013; El-Hokayem, 2007; Samii, 2008; Tinas, 2018).

The way in which the organisation was able to navigate between Lebanonisation and Iranisation has allowed it to develop its own statelike characteristics and evolve from a militia movement into a statelike actor. Like any other statelike actor, Hizbullah has its own calculus and foreign policy decisions. Particular patterns inform us on its strategic culture and perception of the system that influence and shape at least partially its foreign policy decisions be it the war with Israel or its involvement in Syria or Yemen.

However, before examining Hizbullah's foreign policy, it is necessary to capture and frame its statelike characteristics, shaped by the structural opportunities and constraints on a regional level and within the context of the Shia trajectory in Lebanon. Consequently, this chapter will first trace the Shia trajectory from marginalisation to radicalisation from a structural perspective that fostered the birth of Hizbullah – The Party of God – amidst the chaos of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990). At the same time, it will provide the main elements that define its leadership's perception of the system and its strategic culture. While the organisation was established in the mid-1980s, its internal and external mechanisms—as we know them today—were not solidified until the 1990s. As a Shia Islamic movement, it cultivated a strong relationship with a particular part of the population, which became its constituency, hence attaining the power of mobilization; second, it developed political and institutional structures parallel and in sync with those of the Lebanese state and, finally, it managed to legitimize and monopolize the use of violence, at least in particular parts of Lebanese territory. Within the state/non-state spectrum, these characteristics push Hizbullah closer to the 'state' end of the spectrum, allowing the study to view Hizbullah as a statelike actor.

5.2. The Shia Trajectory: From Marginalisation to Radicalisation

In Lebanon, until the 1960s, the Shia community was marginalised from the state, as opposed to the Christian and Sunni communities that dominated both the financial and political sectors. Demographically, at the time of Lebanon's independence, the Shia was estimated to be approximately 19.6 per cent of the total population, based on the last official population consensus in 1932 (Drysdale & Blake, 1985) and was mainly concentrated on the periphery; namely, the South of Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley. The lack of fertile land in these areas limited their economic development, impeding any access to the clientele networks of the Lebanese state (Owen, 2002, pp. 170-171). The traditional Shia leadership was disconnected from its community and had no interest in improving its socio-economic status. The Shia socio-economic standards were characterized by having the lowest incomes and being less educated compared to other communities (Norton & Binder, 1987, p. 18), generating a general perception of the Shia community as being inferior to others. Even religiously, they lacked any independent representation within the Lebanese Supreme Islamic Council and were “implicit[ly] [under the]

tutelage of the Sunni community” (Daher, 2019b, p. 21). What is more, the geographical distance between the South of Lebanon and the Beqaa Valley kept the Shia separated (Siklawi, 2012, p. 5).

The developments that followed in the late 1960s at the regional, national, and Shia communal levels gradually paved the path for their emancipation. The main competitors of Beirut’s port, Haifa and the Suez Canal, were closed after the Arab-Israeli war in 1948 and the Suez Canal crisis in 1956, allowing Beirut to attract attention from the oil-producing Arab countries. By the end of the 1960s, Beirut had become the financial hub of the region and the “center of the triangular trade network linking the industrial world with the oil-production areas of the Middle East”, allowing the country to experience a phenomenal service-centred economic boom (Halawi, 1992, pp. 49-50). In essence, this was the period that transformed Lebanon from a feudalistic, agrarian republic into a modern state (Hourani, 1981, pp. 142-148). Within the same period, the Shia population expanded from 154,208 persons to a little less than one million and a half—over 40 per cent of the total population—from 1932 to 1988 (Faour, 2007, p. 912; Halawi, 1992, p. 50). Today, it is estimated that it may be the largest sectarian group, almost half of the Lebanese population (Van Efferink, 2010, p. 4). The demographic change was accompanied by structural changes in the region that had indirect and direct implications on Lebanon.

The boom that was taking place in Beirut and the dire socio-economic conditions in the Shia rural areas generated a “forced migration” of part of the community towards Beirut’s southern suburbs (Siklawi, 2012, p. 5) which connected the Shia communities in the peripheries. Concurrently, Beirut exposed the Shia community to the growing social and political movements such as pan-Arabism, Nasserism and Baathism, as well as all hues of radical nationalist movements. More importantly, though, many Shias were exposed to the experience of the Palestinian militant groups in Lebanon and the Lebanese leftist movement that was emerging dynamically at the time (Daher, 2019b, pp. 50-51; Siklawi, 2012, p. 8). A portion of the Shia sought to resist the deprived status of their community and collided with the “traditional” Shia families that had “agreed” to the Lebanese National Act of 1943, which limited the community from attaining a significant position within the state (Halawi, 1992, pp. 96-97).

However, the ultimate political awakening that emancipated the Shia as a separate political entity was accomplished by the Shia cleric, Musa al-Sadr. In 1967, he established an independent and officially recognized Supreme Islamic Shia Council (SISC), which was able to connect and bring together all the geographically distanced Shia. By 1974, al-Sadr established the first political

Shia movement to be recognized by the state, Haraka al-Muhrumin (the Movement of the Dispossessed). Although Musa al-Sadr was of Lebanese origin, he was born in Qom, Iran and also lived in Najaf, Iraq. Al-Sadr was educated by both the Marja's (source of emulation) of Qom and Najaf, although by tradition, Lebanese Shia clerics emulate the latter. Sadr developed a lingo that charmed the majority of the community by connecting their religious beliefs and values with modernization that echoed the immediate needs of the Shia community (Halawi, 1992, p. 129). The revolutionary underpinnings of his ideology differed not only from the traditional Shia leadership, who preferred to stay on the sidelines of Lebanese political developments, but also from the Muslim leftists. They sought a change in the status quo and an end to the sectarian dynamics of Lebanon. Musa al-Sadr and his followers believed that the only way to improve the socio-economic standards of the Shia was by developing legitimate cooperation with the Lebanese authorities (Halawi, 1992, pp. 133-134, 143), enhancing the existing institutions that would incorporate religious coexistence in its essence – thus including the Shia community (Daher, 2019b, pp. 23-24). The notion of religious coexistence was vital in Sadr's ideology to gain popularity within its own community and beyond. He aimed to alter the Shia "psychological outlook" (Ajami, 1985, p. 783) not only in terms of how the Shia were viewed by other communities but also to change the way the community viewed itself within the Lebanese state.

The second phase of the Shia political awakening arose during the precarious Lebanese political scene in the face of the looming civil war (1975-1990). The proliferation of militia groups across sectarian lines so as to protect themselves inclined the Shia to embark on a process of radicalisation. Mousa al-Sadr created Amal, an acronym for (Brigades of Lebanese Resistance Detachments), to protect the Shia population, who had endured numerous casualties from Israeli attacks on the South. Much of the training of Amal fighters was conducted by Palestinian militia groups and, later, the Fedayeen, after PLO's headquarters was moved to Lebanon in 1973 in the aftermath of the Black September events in Jordan (Daher, 2019b, p. 58; Siklawi, 2012, p. 7). By the time of the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in April 1975, the Shia, for the first time, had their own militia, which implicated them in the local and regional dynamics changing the course of their political trajectory.

The Lebanese civil war erupted between various factions with divergent views over the all-increasing autonomy and military activity of PLO in Lebanon and the political role of the Maronites in the country. The demarcation line separated Beirut into two overarching camps: the

East side was controlled by the 'Lebanese Front' (LF), which was mainly comprised of Christian factions such as the Phalangist, Liberal parties, Guardians of the Cedars and the Maronite Order; while West Beirut harboured the 'National Movement' (LNM), which included the Druze Progressive Socialist party, the Communist party, the Communist Action Organisation, Sunni factions such as the Nasserist Mourabitoun and the Nationalist Syrian Social party (Majed, 2010). Overall, the Christian and Sunni communities had increased involvement in Lebanon's political and financial developments, allowing them to become armed and create their own militia for protection against each other. At the same time, these factions had their own alliances and external relations with regional and international players. Within these dynamics, Christian militias perceived Amal as a threat due to its close cooperation with the PLO in the South. The Maronite establishment requested assistance from Syria – a PLO rival – in 1976 to assist the Christian militias in curbing PLO's expansion in Lebanon. The Syrian invasion came two months after the massacre of 'Black Saturday', carried out by the Christian militia – known as Kataeb – leaving behind many Shia victims among Palestinian, Druze and others under the LNM (Tamimova, 2018). However, while the Palestinian Fedayeen had trained Amal militia fighters and its leader, Musa al-Sadr, was committed to and supported the Palestinian cause (Siklawi, 2012, pp. 8-9), soon the relationship between al-Sadr and Arafat started to deteriorate. The rift stemmed from the growing hostile activities of Palestinian armed forces against the Shia in the South, especially the Israeli invasion of 1978 known as Operation Litani.⁸⁸ In fact, Sadr decided to side with the Christian militias, which caused a minor commotion among some pro-Palestinian Shias. Notwithstanding, Sadr and, by extension, Amal remained the de facto and the 'sole referent' for the Shia community in terms of political representation and security within the context of the civil war.⁸⁹

A few months after the Israeli invasion, Musa al-Sadr disappeared after an official visit to Libya in the summer of 1978.⁹⁰ The Shia community was shaken. The new leader of Amal, Nabih Barri, could not fill the religious and political vacuum left behind by Sadr, despite his popularity

⁸⁸ The conflict between Israeli forces and PLO forces had led to the destruction of the poor areas in the South; the Shia inhabitants had to often endure the thug-like behaviour of many Palestinian fighters. The behaviour of the Palestinians had drastically changed the dynamics between Sadr and Arafat. For more on Amal and PLO see Brynen (1990, pp. 142-146)

⁸⁹ It should be noted that the alternative for the Shia community would have been LNM. However, after the assassination of its leader, Kamal Jumblatt in 1977, the multi-sectarian posture of LNM faded away (Daher, 2019b, p. 25).

⁹⁰ Musa al-Sadr travel to Libya as part of his tour of Arab capitals to discuss the dire situation in Lebanon. The disappearance of al-Sadr has triggered many rumours of his whereabouts (Halawi, 1992, p. 201) but the blame mainly shifted between the Libyan and the PLO.

and power (Nir, 2011; Siklawi, 2012, p. 10). The circumstances of his disappearance indicated that PLO might have been involved along with the Libyan authorities, bringing the Palestinian–Shia relations to the edge. The disappearance of Musa al-Sadr brought an end to the second phase of the Shia political trajectory.

5.2.1. The Islamic Revolution of Iran and the Lebanese Shia Community

The structural changes that occurred due to the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1978-1979 and the second Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 created the environment for the Shia to broaden its community's options for politicisation beyond Amal (Saouli, 2017, pp. 58-59; Siklawi, 2012, p. 10). In conjunction with the ongoing civil war, the Lebanese Shia entered the third phase of political awakening, which ultimately emancipated and radicalised the community.

The trajectory of the Shia community from marginalisation to radicalisation was not exclusive to Lebanon. Similar efforts were made by the community in Iraq and Iran within their own religious-political contexts. In Iran, the achievements of the Shia to entrench religion and politics to what became the Islamic Revolution of Iran was the crescendo of the political awakening of the Shia community across the region. Despite the differences between the various Shia communities in the region, religious education has bred an interconnectedness among them, especially between Iran, Iraq and Lebanon.⁹¹ During the Islamic Revolution of Iran, many Lebanese Shia set up committees to support their Shia brothers in Iran and even voluntarily went to fight to support the struggle against the “Zionist and corrupted Shah” (Siklawi, 2012, pp. 12-13). In other words, the Iranian revolution had politicized the Shia community beyond Amal. On Iran’s part, Ayatollah Khomeini had close ties with Musa al-Sadr. The former not only had made extensive efforts to search for Musa al-Sadr, but he went as far as claiming that he “nearly raised [al-]Sadr” (Ajami, 1987, p. 196). These were the first concrete trappings of Iranian involvement in Lebanon.

Amal’s political and religious leaders had a genuine dilemma over the support of the Islamic Revolution of Iran. On the one hand, some of its members viewed Ayatollah Khomeini as their spiritual leader, who was able to overthrow the corrupted and pro-Israeli Shah of Iran. Others

⁹¹ The link between the Shia community and Iran has created a problematic for the Shia community across the Arab world since the 1500s. Particularly in the late 20th century, the Shia communities had not found a way to link their religious believes with the Arab nationalism. For more see Kelidar (1983).

viewed the Shia community as part of the mosaic of the Lebanese confessional system and sought a more political-oriented movement rather than a religious one; nor did they wish to import the Islamic Revolution in Lebanon (Norton & Binder, 1987; Smit, 2000). Nabih Berri sought to transform Amal into a movement that was less religious than it was under Musa al-Sadr, which automatically opened the space for a more religious wave within Amal that eventually split. This new wave did not become palpable until the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

The religious wave within Amal had allowed figures to emerge, who were overshadowed by Musa al-Sadr. Many Lebanese Shia clergies had sustained their relationship with the Iranian religious institution, participated in the Islamic Revolution in Iran and eventually grew out of Amal. This generated an intense debate among the Shia community on whether they wanted a secular or religious-political system in Lebanon. In the wake of the Iranian revolution, many Shia religious groups were testing out various concepts and notions for a new movement. They managed to build various institutions and Shia committees unrelated to Amal. For instance, there were some religious organisations, such as al-Ittihad and al-Shabab al-Mu'min, that did not favour a religious regime in Lebanon, while others like Harakat al-Tawhid al-Islamiyya (Movement for Islamic Unity) sought to imitate the Islamic Revolution of Iran in Lebanon.

Subhi al-Tufayli was one of the key figures that set up and led the pro-Iranian Lebanese networks from which Hizbullah members would soon emerge. Tufayli, who mainly resided in Iran, returned to Lebanon in the late 1970s and became a link among different Lebanese Shia currents that were supportive of an Iranian model for Lebanon. He created Tajammu al-Ulama al-Muslimin fil-Biqa (Association of Muslim Ulema of the Bekaa), a group of Shia scholars and clerics with roots in the Baalbek–al-Hermel region. He also formed Islamic committees based in Beirut, which coordinated with the much suppressed Shia political party of Iraq, Da'wa, which had a branch in Lebanon (Daher, 2019b, pp. 34-35). Within the same religious circles, Abbas al-Moussawi, another main figure, established a number of hawzas – Shia religious seminars – in Beqaa Valley. The hawzas became a hub for all the Lebanese Shia that had to return from Iraq and for the more religious Shia within Lebanon (Norton, 2014, p. 31). Moussawi had a large base of students, whom he required to go through military training as he preached “Islam of resistance” and built around the notion of “soldiers on all fronts”, generating a new current within the third political phase of the Lebanese Shia, the cleric–fighter (al-alim al-mujahid) (Daher, 2019b, pp. 37-38). Initially, many of the Shia Lebanese returnees from Iraq were organised in the Lebanese Da'wa party; yet,

it was soon to be dismantled, and its members were “instructed to infiltrate in Amal and reform it from within” (Norton, 2014, p. 31). The works of Tufayli and Moussawi had a large impact on many Lebanese Shia. Between 1978 and 1982, these efforts were part of a trial-and-error process in search of an identity beyond Amal. Many figures would emerge from this process, such as Hassan Nasrallah, a student and protégé of Moussawi, Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah and Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din. They all preached for a political movement and an armed resistance against foreign invaders. This process revived Sadr’s trend of militant Islam that became the cornerstone of al-Muqawama al-Islamiya fi Lubnan (the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon- IRL), what was later known as the military wing of Hizbullah. It is important to note that Hizbullah was consolidated some years after IRL as the latter’s political branch.

The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon caused a structural change in the South. Initially, many in the country considered the invasion a rescue mission against the PLO, including a considerable portion of the Shia, except those who had joined the IRL. Nevertheless, the longer the Israeli troops stayed, the more they exploited the South; grievances between the Shia and the Israeli forces started to grow stronger, bringing together the efforts of Tufayli and Moussawi. Barri’s decision to participate, along with other major Lebanese confessions, in negotiations with Israel caused the official split within Amal (Daher, 2019b, p. 43). Many Shias, who were already trained and/or had strong religious education and, thus, were influential agents within the community, denounced Amal. At the same time, Iranian battalions and dispatches of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) were sent to Lebanon to support the Shia community that wanted to resist the occupiers. The Iranian involvement via Subhi al-Tufayli and Abbas al-Moussawi was blessed by the Syrians. Based on the narrative of Tufayli, “more than a thousand young people were trained this way [by IRGC] in the summer of 1982, then formed into clandestine groups and sent south to carry out the first operations” against Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).⁹²

The first spark of fire between Israeli soldiers and the Shia population occurred on October 16, 1983, on Ashura day. An IDF convoy had its way through the Shia town of Nabatiyya, killing and wounding several mourners and flagellants. Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din, Musa al-Sadr’s designated clerical deputy and vice-chairman of the Higher Shia Council, officially announced

⁹² Quoted in Daher (2019b, p. 48).

civil disobedience and resistance against Israeli forces in southern Lebanon. It is worth noting, however, that while the Shia Council blessed resistance against Israeli forces, there was already a prominent radicalised Islamic militant trend among the Shia community, which was dispersed between the fighting in the South, the Chouf mountains and even around Beirut. Indicative of such were the numerous attacks against Israeli, American and Western targets (Ajami, 1987, p. 202;206). It should be noted that, at the time, neither Hizbullah nor IRL was established as we know it today. Instead, the radical militant, political or religious elements of the Shia community that did not feel represented by Amal anymore were the first trappings of what was later known as IRL and Hizbullah.

5.2.2. Hizbullah: The Third Phase of Shia Political Awakening

Hizbullah was established in May of 1984, when Shia Islamic representatives from Beirut and Beqaa Valley met in Baalbek, forming a nine-member committee which outlined the main principles of the new political organisation. Subhi al-Tufaily, who was already leading IRL's political and ideological orientation, became the very first General Secretary of Hizbullah (the Party of God). He was soon replaced by Moussawi, who officially launched Hizbullah into the world as a political organisation with IRL as its military wing, announcing a programmatic document on 16 February 1985. The Open Letter,⁹³ as it was called, outlined the political and ideological underpinnings that justified how the Party of God intended to import the Islamic Revolution of Iran into Lebanon. Among the main principles of the organisation, as posed by the nine-member committee in 1984, were: first, “the unicity of the movement, in which the constituent organisations must dissolve and whose leadership would operate on a collegial basis, without anyone at the top; [...] [second], the Islamic nature of the movement, with Islam its first and foremost inspiration; [...] [third], allegiance to the principle of Wilayat al-Faqih and, as a corollary, respect for Khomeini’s recommendations, these having the force of obligations. But above all, they decided [...] [forth], that the principal mission of the movement would remain ‘a fighting mission’ (muhimma jihadiyya)” (Daher, 2019b, pp. 50-51). The new organisation framed itself as a resistance movement against the Israeli occupation of Lebanon and did not identify with the Lebanese political structure. Instead, it related itself with the Iranian religious leadership that

⁹³ For a translation and analysis on the Open Letter see Alagha (2011a, p. 39)

advocates a religious governance based on the guardianship (Wilayat) of a high-ranking religious scholar and jurist (faqih) as the ultimate authority.⁹⁴

In practice, much of IRL's energy was geared towards protecting the South and the Shia from IDF, allowing the newly established Hizbullah to maintain a certain level of popularity among the community. Initially, Amal did not oppose Hizbullah in this venture. However, Hizbullah actively challenged Amal's policies, which made the latter realise that the former posed a threat as Hizbullah had intended to carve its own agency within the Shia political realm, leading to an intra-Shia rift in the late 1980s that dragged on until the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1990 (Majed, 2010, p. 4). More specifically, in an effort to dislodge the few PLO loyalists on Lebanese territory, who were mostly expelled by 1983, Amal, backed by Damascus, waged war on the Palestinians, which became known as the 'Battle of the Camps'.⁹⁵ The Shia's emotional connection with the Palestinian cause and the Shia religious clerics' efforts to contain the Shia-Palestinian tensions manifested in various fatwas (Islamic rulings), which prohibited fights between the Shia and the Palestinians. Amal did not espouse the fatwas, prompting Hizbullah to intervene militarily to end the conflict, which came to be known as the Battle of Maghdouche (Siklawi, 2012, pp. 16-17). It was during this time that many rank-and-file members of Amal defected to join Hizbullah. At the same time, Hizbullah attempted to sideline Amal in various ways. For instance, in 1985, an IRL's skyjacking, TWA flight 847, was allegedly organised by Hizbullah member Imad Mughniyah in exchange for releasing over 700 Lebanese prisoners from Israeli prisons. Despite Amal's attempts to mediate the crisis, Hizbullah rebutted Barri's efforts, challenging further Amal's political authority. In the end, the prisoners were released after the mediation of the Syrians and Iranians (Daher, 2019b, pp. 70-71; Norton, 2014, pp. 42-43). The relationship between Amal and Hizbullah deteriorated in 1988 when the former kidnapped US marine Colonel William R. Higgins, who was serving with UN forces in the South, threatening Amal's power to control the South and its cooperative working relationship with the UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) (Chehabi & Abisaab, 2006, p. 227; Norton, 2014, pp. 42-43).

⁹⁴ For more on the Shia political thought and the notion of governance see Mavani (2011)

⁹⁵ This rift reflected the disrupted relations between Assad's regime and PLO's leadership. The latter, like Amal, sought to destroy any possibility of the re-emergence of a Palestinian militia that would lead to another cycle of violence with Israel.

The rivalry between Amal and Hizbullah over the Shia Lebanese dominion reflected the dynamics of Iran and Syria in Lebanon and, particularly, the relationship between Syria and Hizbullah. After the Islamic Revolution, Iran's involvement in Lebanon was mostly channelled towards sponsoring IRL. Ali Khamenei (1981-1989) served as Hizbullah's political and religious guide, defining its *modus operandi*. The Syrian regime, on the other hand, was wary of the growing Iranian influence in Lebanon (Hunter, 2010); on the other, Hizbullah was a welcoming force against the Israeli forces (Harris, 1997, p. 284; Scheller, 2014, p. 121). Damascus had not contested IRL nor Hizbullah, and, on many occasions, it publicly expressed its "appreciation of Hizbullah and its jihad struggle, and declared its support for the choice of resistance without reservation" (Qassem, 2012, p. 308). Nevertheless, in many cases, Damascus had directly or indirectly clashed with Hizbullah (Samii, 2008, p. 39). One notable incident between the two was in 1987. A trivial dispute between Hizbullah members and some Syrian soldiers escalated, leading to the execution of twenty-three Hizbullah members in retaliation for killing a Syrian soldier (Daher, 2019b, p. 75; Norton, 2007, p. 477). Hizbullah's increased popularity and power implied an equally augmented Iranian role in Lebanon, while Syria had grown closer to Amal during the 1980s. Even though Damascus supported Tehran during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), Hafez al-Assad was unable to counter Iranian influence within Lebanon via Hizbullah. This lack of manoeuvring space for Assad disabled Damascus to co-opt Hizbullah. At least though, Hizbullah and the Syrian regime could establish their own understanding and communication channels. To this end, during the clashes between Amal and Hizbullah, Damascus initiated a parallel course of talks with Hizbullah. The latter's leadership attended several meetings with high-ranked Syrian delegations in order to resolve the issues with Amal and even discussed the Israeli occupation of Lebanon. By the end of the clashes, the Assad regime and Hizbullah had cultivated an understanding that there is prospect of cooperation between them "if each was able to respect the redlines of the other" (Scheller, 2014, p. 141). These efforts established the basis of the relationship of convenience between Syria, Hizbullah and Iran, whose alliance was based on countering Western influence and the Israeli occupation of Lebanon (Norton, 2014, pp. 34-35). The rift between Hizbullah and Amal ended in 1989 with the mediation of Iran and Syria in an accord of allocation of responsibilities, which proposed that the latter would represent the Shia in the parliament while the former would have the 'monopoly on resistance' to protect the South (Kindt, 2009, p. 130; Majed, 2010, p. 4).

This accommodation was soon followed by the end of the civil war in Lebanon, which was materialised with the Document of National Understanding (wathiqat al- wifaq al- watani), known as the Taif Agreement,⁹⁶ signed in Saudi Arabia in October of 1989. The Syrian-backed government of Omar Karami government (1990-1992) was composed of a thirty-member cabinet, which included all the main leaders of the wartime militias and political parties and organisations except for the Aounists and Hizbullah (Salem, 1994, p. 49).⁹⁷ In essence, the National Understanding was a document that bore the fruits of a compromise between the local and regional players in Lebanon. All local Lebanese actors, be they Christian or Muslim, had to primarily negotiate their future with Syria. Interestingly, the Taif Accords was initially the Saudi-led regional initiative for reconciliation in Lebanon, aimed to avert the Lebanese civil conflict from taking regional dimensions (Krayem, 1997). Nevertheless, Syria's alignment with the international coalition against Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 secured Washington's support for Syrian hegemony in Lebanon (Aboultaif, 2016, p. 170; Gani, 2014; Nasrallah, 1994, p. 135).

In an attempt to rectify the causes that triggered the civil war, the Taif Accords addressed the issue of national identity, socio-economic divides, sectarianism, the restructuring of the political system and reasserting the sovereignty of the new Lebanese state. More specifically, regarding the latter point, the Accords were clear on two points: first, the liberation of South Lebanon from Israeli occupation based on UN Resolution 425 and, second, the establishment of a privileged relationship with Syria (Frangieh, 2004, p. 98; Rais, 2005, p. 63; Scheller, 2014, p. 125). While the Agreement failed to provide any provisions that would abolish the sectarian character of the Lebanese political system, it did provide a framework where the Christians and Muslims have equal representation in all levels of governance. At the same time, all local actors would renounce any external tutelage, be it French or Syrian, as Lebanon would be an independent and sovereign state as part of the "Arab fold" (Salloukh, 2008, p. 285). For Hizbullah, born in the turmoil of the Lebanese civil war, the post-Taif era pushed the organisation to dive into an intense internal debate regarding what its role will be in the new political reality both on a national and regional level. Although Israeli forces were still in the South of Lebanon and IRL's mandate to

⁹⁶ For the full text of the Taid Agreement see Joshi, Quinn, and Regan (2015).

⁹⁷ The Aounists were supporters of Michel Aoun, who is Christian and the current leader of the Patriotic Movement in Lebanon. In 1989, he declared war on Syria. Consequently, he was ousted from Lebanon and his party was banned until 2005, when Syria retreated its troops from Lebanon.

resist the occupiers was still legitimate, Hizbullah's vision to bring an Islamic Revolution to Lebanon seemed inapplicable.

5.2.2.1. Structural Constraints: Unfolding Hizbullah's perception of the system

The impact of the end of the Cold War on the regional dynamics altered many of the structural opportunities and restraints on Hizbullah. In turn, it affected much of the strategic culture and perception of the organisation, shifting it away from what was established by its founding father. The most important change was that Hizbullah ceased to seek an Islamic Revolution for Lebanon; instead, it turned towards a more 'Lebanised' version of Islamic Shia resistance. Indicative of such was Hizbullah's logo on its flag in 1985 was 'The Islamic Revolution in Lebanon' (al-Thawra al-islamiyya fi Lubnan), but by the 1990s, it changed to 'The Islamic Resistance in Lebanon' (al-Muqwama al-islamiyya fi Lubnan). However, there are key principles that remained consistent throughout time; namely, the notion of resistance, the Islamic Shia nature of the movement and even the internal organisation and operating mode of Hizbullah that are still based on the teachings of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard in the early 1980s, while other notions, such as that of Wilayat al-Faqih were interrupted but not entirely altered.⁹⁸ The Party of God presented to the Shia community an alternative political identity to Amal.

The structural constraints stemmed from both the domestic and regional changes. Within Lebanon, the post-Taif era was not an environment where Hizbullah's cleric fighters would be able to continue their Islamic revolution. In principle, Hizbullah opposed the Taif Agreement, primarily due to the fact that it stipulated the dismantling of all militias, be they Lebanese or non-Lebanese. Hizbullah refused to dissolve IRL and lay down its weapons (Khatib, 2011, p. 72). Nevertheless, the Lebanese Council of Ministers decided to exempt Hizbullah from this provision in 1991 – a decision prodded by Syria so as to exert pressure on Israel in the South (Picard, 2005, p. 4). Hizbullah had to readjust the mandate and scope of its most vital principle—al-Muqawama (the Resistance)—and redirected its discourse by gradually cultivating the idea that IRL was a resistance force for the sake of all the Lebanese people, not a militia nor a vessel for an Islamic revolution and justifying its existence in the fact that the Israeli troops continued to occupy South Lebanon (Alagha, 2006, pp. 149-150; Khatib, 2011, p. 72). This was accompanied by a turning

⁹⁸ For more on how Hizbullah reinterpreted the concept of Wilayat al-Faqih see Saad-Ghorayeb (2002, pp. 59-68)

point in the political trajectory of the organisation. In order to obtain political relevance, it sought to carve its own space. In 1992, Hizbullah's decision to run for the municipality elections was a way to cultivate a political composure for IRL in the post-civil war era.

These new realities in the Lebanese political scene reflected the changing dynamics of how Syria and Iran viewed Lebanon and the Party of God (Alagha, 2006; Hamzeh, 2004; Leenders, 2006). It was evident that the organisation had to maintain a steady relationship with Syria in the post-Taif era, given the latter's involvement in the national security apparatus of Lebanon. Contrary to common perception, the alliance between Hizbullah and Syria has no religious nor doctrinal basis; instead, it is based on a common stance on Israel (May, 2019, p. 129). Syria's commitment against Israel was not doubted by Hizbullah, even when Damascus agreed to participate in the US-led Arab-Israeli peace process (Fadlallah, 2014, p. 34). Even though Hizbullah protested in Beirut against the Syrian participation, Damascus had set UN Resolution 425, which called for a full Israeli withdrawal from all Lebanese territory, as a precondition for Syrian – Israeli negotiations (Rabinovich, 2009; Salloukh, 2008, pp. 306-308). When the peace talks between Israel and Syria fell apart, Damascus had to reassure that Lebanon would not follow in the footsteps of the PLO and Jordan, who were unilaterally negotiating a peace deal with Israel at the time.⁹⁹ Under this prism, Damascus reinforced its tutelage over Lebanon with the Syrian-Lebanese treaty of 'Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination' in 1991, which put Lebanon's security, financial and foreign policy affairs in Syria's hands. If Hizbullah desired to continue to be part of the Lebanese political scene, it had to maintain good relations with Damascus. At times, the organisation defied Assad's will on lesser issues, while Damascus was more assertive on other issues. For instance, Syria hoped that Hizbullah and Amal would run joint slates within the municipality elections. While the Party of God was unable to counter immediately Assad's attempts to dictate the Hizbullah's politics in 1992, by 1998, Hizbullah ran its own state (Daher, 2019b, pp. 77-78).

At the same time, the death of Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989 had also stirred some anxiety among Hizbullah's leadership. In light of the financial devastation of the Iraq-Iran war and subsequent international isolation, the new Iranian leadership under Ayatollah Khamenei and President Rafsanjani had to readjust the priorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran and direct it

⁹⁹ If Lebanon proceeded to unilateral negotiations with Israel, Syria would have been the only Arab state that had disputed territory with Israel. In fact, Assad lost a great deal of leverage in his negotiations with Israeli counterparts over the Golan Heights.

towards economic development. Within the domestic political scene, Khamenei and Rafsanjani were the more conservative options, who had profiles with stronger characteristics of political and pragmatic leadership as opposed to a religious one (Chehabi, 1997, p. 31). Thus, exporting a Shia revolution in the region had ceased to be a priority. Consequently, financial and military assistance to Hizbullah was severely curtailed under both terms of Rafsandjani (1989-1997) and in regard to Lebanon, Tehran would cultivate relations on a bilateral level with Beirut (Daher, 2019a, p. 129; Daher, 2019b, p. 74). In 1989 and on, while Iran had started to climb down the revolutionary ladder and seek more pragmatic approaches, Hizbullah was left bereft. Rafsandjani was pulling out most of its IRGC personnel from Lebanon that was assisting Hizbullah, recommending the organisation to become “a party like the others” (Chehabi & Abisaab, 2006, p. 228). The Islamic Republic did not entirely cut off ties with Hizbullah but their relationship gravely depended on the political dynamics within Iran. In fact, a gradual revival of their relationship occurred under Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), as Iran progressively increased its financial support and even more so under Mahmoud Ahmedinajad (2005-2013). In retrospect, the political and financial disengagement between Iran and Hizbullah was for a brief moment in the history of their relationship, which never took a total toll given the organisations religious connection with the Iranian religious leadership. As Hizbullah’s second-in-command, Naim Qassem, puts it, the relationship with Iran on numerous overlapping values such as the theological framework of the two, the “political concord” regarding the “rejection of the superpower hegemony, [...] and support of all liberation movements [...]”, which have been consistent throughout all Iranian presidencies (Qassem, 2012, pp. 301-302). Hence, in regards to the brief regression of the relations in the first part of the 1990s, Qassem claims that

“the notion that the relationship would be affected by differences amongst the two main powers inside Iran did not correspond to reality. Divergence between Iran's conservatives and reformists includes different views on state administration, state construction and economic, social, cultural and legal policies. It does not embrace perspectives on resistance, the support of which the two parties agree to” (Qassem, 2012, pp. 302-303).

Regardless of how the relationship re-established itself after 1997, Iran’s different approach under Rafsandjani (1989-1997) promoted the Party to delve into an intense internal debate regarding the organisation’s rapport with the Lebanese state that was officially under Syria’s tutelage until 2005.

The fermentation and the outcome of the internal debate led Hizbullah to develop a distinct identity from Amal. Hizbullah would represent the religious members of the Shia community while Amal was perceived as a more secular party. The relationship between the two as well as their connections with Syria and Iran remained delicate. Even if the Iranian politics showed no sign that it was going to re-engage in Lebanon after the Taif Accords, Damascus remained wary of Hizbullah's growing influence. To ensure that the Party would not turn against Syrian influence, Assad established direct relations with Hizbullah's leadership. At the same time, Syria ensured Amal's survival as a political actor so as to counterbalance Hizbullah's influence among the growing Lebanese Shia community.

5.2.2.2. Framing the Strategic Culture

The main concern in the immediate aftermath of the Taif Accords in 1989 was whether Hizbullah would engage with the sectarian Lebanese state and, if so, how. The more conservative trend echoed the firm positions of the former Secretary-General Subhi al-Tufaily, who maintained a more revolutionary stance against the sectarian Lebanese state. The more moderate trend under the leadership of the second Secretary-General, Abbas al-Moussawi, advocated engaging with the Lebanese state and a process of Lebanonisation or *Iftitah* (opening up), which would entail becoming a Lebanese political party and accepting the Lebanese constitution, including the Taif Agreement. It should be noted that many Lebanese Shia clerics were in favour of Lebanonisation, namely figures such as Mohammed Hassan Fadlallah and the Sheikh Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din, president of the Supreme Islamic Shia Council from 1978 to 2001.¹⁰⁰ Although Israelis assassinated Musawi in an effort to prevent this trend from dominating among the organisation's members, Hassan Nasrallah, who succeeded him, launched the process of Hizbullah's Lebanonisation.

Out of this process, Hizbullah proved to have strategic flexibility that allowed it to emerge as a viable competitor of Amal vis-à-vis the Lebanese Shia community but also to some extent as an important actor within the Lebanese political system. In fact, between the late 1980s until the mid-2000s, Hizbullah invested in developing a multifaceted identity. First, the resistance identity

¹⁰⁰ It is important to note that Fadlallah, whose Marja' is Najaf, the city of he was born in, is said to have inspired Hizbullah's ideology since its inception and continues to do so. Nevertheless, he has categorically denied to be an official member (Samii, 2008, p. 34)

that is established in the framework of the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon (IRL), as a Shia militant force; second, the religious identity, stemming from its inherited religious connection with the Iranian Shia leadership and the religious Lebanese Shia community; and, finally, the national identity, which developed in the post-Lebanese civil war era.

Key to better understanding the strategic culture of balancing between these three identities that developed via Hizbullah's Lebanonisation is the ideological principles of the *Source of Emulation* (Marja') and the *Rule of Jurisdiction* (Wilayat al-faqih), which both provide the ultimate authority on Islamic Law.¹⁰¹ These theological notions have constantly been used to justify, one way or another, the rationale behind Hizbullah's action. Traditionally, in Shiism, the source of emulation is more of an individual choice, and it concerns religious affairs. For instance, within Hizbullah, some rank-and-file members and supporters of Hizbullah emulate the Lebanese Ayatollah Mohammad Hassan Fadlallah, while others emulate Iraq's Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani. Hassan Nasrallah, however, as the leader of an organisation, emulated Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini. However, the Iranian perception of Marja' was reinterpreted under Ayatollah Khomeini. He argued that the Marja' should align with the Wilayat al-Faqih and the distinguished Shia cleric who would be a source of emulation and would not only resolve "religious and legal matters but also would be the nation's ultimate political authority" (Norton, 2014, p. 100). Even when Iran's Ayatollah blessed Hizbullah's Lebanonisation process, the notion of Wilayat al-Faqih bound Hizbullah's and Iran's leaderships. Within the Shia Islamist political ideology, the political and the religious are interconnected, which implies that to some extent, the political decision-making of Hizbullah is contingent on the approval of the Iranian religious leadership. Nasrallah's Lebanonisation process dissociated the Party from the Iranian government; however, the latter's religious leadership is the 'Guide' of the Rule of Jurisdiction. By extension, the Islamic leadership of Iran is the ultimate authority of Hizbullah. In practice, Nasrallah and his inner circle would proceed in their own decision-making on the political activities of Hizbullah in the post-civil war Lebanon and the Guide would approve; thus far, there is no evidence to suggest otherwise, nor have Hizbullah's decisions been counterintuitive to Iran's fundamental political interests (Daher, 2019a, p. 128; Daher, 2019b, pp. 76-77; Ranstorp, 1994). Nasrallah was aware of the need to break away from the organisation's previous image as an 'Iranian tool' or an Iranian vessel to export the

¹⁰¹ For more on the notion of Marja' see Chehabi and Abisaab (2006, pp. 298-301)

Islamic Revolution and establish an Islamic state. Although Hizbullah never officially renounced its pursuit of Islamic governance in Lebanon, Hassan Nasrallah stated that Hizbullah would never impose an Islamic rule against the will of the Lebanese (Calculli, 2020, pp. 362-363). More specifically, in one of his speeches, the General Secretary claimed that:

“I do not deny that Hezbollah wants to see an Islamic Republic establish itself [in Lebanon] someday. ... However, the establishment of an Islamic Republic cannot be done by force or imposition. This requires a national referendum. And a positive 51 per cent referendum vote would not be an acceptable outcome. It would require a positive 90 per cent referendum. From that standpoint, and given the current context, the establishment of an Islamic Republic in Lebanon is not possible at the present time” (Daher, 2019b, p. 75).

This adaptation paved the way for a new element in Hizbullah’s strategic culture: strategic flexibility. Despite the dogmatic rigidity, the Party adjusted to the needs of the new structural reality of post-civil war Lebanon to not lose legitimacy and remain relevant to the political scene. When the parliamentary elections were announced in 1992, Hizbullah announced its participation “very early on and had prepared vigorously them” (Salem, 1994, p. 58). It should be noted that Nasrallah had still maintained his disagreements with the Taif Accords and, although he had accepted them ‘temporarily’, he refused to become part of the government – a principle that changed in 2005 (Daher, 2019b; Fadlallah, 2014). Albeit the fact that Hizbullah obtained 12 out of 128 seats in the parliament, it was not ready to be associated with the much older wartime leaders and politicians of the Lebanese states, who generated the corruption before Hizbullah’s nascence, as it would tint the new image it was trying to depict. Hizbullah invested in gaining credibility as it still held a ‘clean record’ in terms of corruption (Saouli, 2011, pp. 934-935). It is not clear whether this was a conscious choice or an impossibility, especially considering that Syria did not welcome Hizbullah’s participation in the parliamentary election and limited the “number of MPs that Hizbullah could place in the Lebanese parliament” (Calculli, 2020; Norton, 2007), let alone the organisation’s participation in a government. In fact, Syria supported Amal rather than Hizbullah, whom Assad feared would become a catalyst of Iranian influence in Lebanon. Nevertheless, the results of the elections in 1992 highlighted that Amal had a ‘clear edge’ over Hizbullah, even though it should be noted that, at the time, there was a reluctance among

Hizbullah's followers "to openly expose" their support and affiliations (Harik & Khashan, 1993, pp. 55-56).¹⁰²

The main themes and principles in Hizbullah's discourse and strategic culture are its nature of resistance against the occupiers and its Islamic nature. The organisation emphasised IRL's importance and its resistance to Israel. In an effort to reinforce the legitimacy and the necessity of preserving its arsenal, almost a year after the parliamentary elections, IRL fired sixty rockets into northern Galilee settlements in Israel in retaliation to Mousawi's assassination in 1991. The Israelis retaliated with Operation Accountability of 1993, which increased Israeli presence in the South of Lebanon. Hizbullah's war-making with Israel remained central to its strategic culture. Although Hizbullah had to limit itself to not attack from areas controlled by the Lebanese army or UNIFIL in the southern part, it continued attacks on Israeli forces, and at times it targeted northern Israel, leading to escalations of Israeli punitive operations such as Grapes of Wrath in 1996. In both operations, France, Iran, Syria and the US mediated to defuse and contain the incidents (Chehabi & Abisaab, 2006, pp. 297-298), which to some extent validate the importance of Hizbullah, at least in military affairs.

Another characteristic of Hizbullah's strategic culture is highlighted by its relationship with the Lebanese state. As mentioned before, the Party's participation in the political scene was limited to the parliament. Hizbullah was one of the newcomers in the political arena and had no influence on the governments. In fact, from 1990 and until 2005—when it decided to participate in the government—Hizbullah was in constant negotiation with the state and cultivated a dynamic which would balance between establishing some level of influence on the Lebanese government and not agitating the dynamics with Syria. The implicit deal between Hizbullah and the Lebanese state, and by extension, Syria, was that IRL "would defend the national territory on the ground militarily while the government was to support the Resistance domestically and abroad, both politically and through diplomacy" (Daher, 2019b, p. 82). Indicative of the understanding between Hizbullah and the Lebanese state was the events that took place after September 1993. After the announcement of the Oslo Accords peace deal between the Israelis and the Palestinians, Hizbullah along with various Lebanese parties and groups, took the street to demonstrate against it. The Lebanese army

¹⁰² One may assume that Assad tolerated Hizbullah's choice to participate in the parliament precisely because he knew that Amal was still a significant power among the Shia community in the early 1990s. As will be illustrated in the next section, Hizbullah's extensive socio-economic activities in the southern areas that were neglected by the Lebanese state contributed to its popularity that superposed that of Amal.

killed nine people and caused numerous casualties; Hizbullah fearing an escalation that could endanger its newly acquired position, called its members not to retaliate. IRL was one of the main cards of Hizbullah to remain relevant in the Lebanese scene. With Iran distancing itself from its previous arrangement with the organisation, the Party had to seek a way to survive within the post-Taif era of sectarian power-sharing system, in which Hizbullah had no influence and was at the mercy of Damascus. In other words, Hizbullah needed to break through the state of Lebanon. The agents that captured the Lebanese state were comprised of wartime and traditional leaders from before Hizbullah's time. Although Hizbullah did not seek directly to capture the state altogether, it did seek to become one of the many agents of state capture. The notion of state capture, as understood by Edwards (2017, p. 9), has multiple actors be it, groups, parties or individuals within the "state structure can and do capture the state, change rules and draft policies to protect their own interest or further their own agenda". Within the Lebanese context, the sectarian power-sharing system of Lebanon, Hizbullah wanted to become a "power broker", like other political parties that were "competing for the distribution of power and resources within [...] [the Lebanese] system and mediating services between the state and their *clientele*" (Fakhoury & Al-Fakih, 2020, p. 181).

By the same token, Hizbullah, as a new agent within the Lebanese political scene, had to gain legitimacy in order to safeguard its political and military relevance. The new world order after 1990 allowed the organisation, under Hassan Nasrallah's leadership, to re-invent itself with a new strategic outlook and develop a strategic culture that would render it resilient for over three decades. Even though the Lebanese political realm limited Hizbullah to merely protecting the South, the organisation sought to entrench its relevance by becoming an agent equivalent and parallel to the Lebanese state or, as it is most commonly referred to, a state-within-a-state (Kindt, 2009). In this sense, it may be argued that the statelike characteristics that Hizbullah developed in the post-Taif era compensated for the lack of access it had to the state.

5.3. Hizbullah Becoming a statelike actor

As of 1992, the organisation embarked on the journey of Lebanisation or *Ifitah* as political party that sought to participate in the parliament but not the government. Nevertheless, by the time of the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon in 2000, Hizbullah had developed many state-like aspects, which are largely acknowledged within the scholarship. Hizbullah developed into a separate political entity parallel to the Lebanese state. The role of Hizbullah as a political party,

social movement and service provider was geared towards fortifying its legitimacy and, in itself, an aspect of Hizbullah's domestic policy. At the same time, its composure as the protector of Lebanon against Israeli aggression and its bilateral relations with state and non-state actors falls under its foreign policy.

Via its parliamentary position since 1992, the Party could pressure the Lebanese government for regional development budgets for the sidelined Shia in various areas in the country, such as "displaced from the Mountain and those from regions such as Dekwaneh, Tall al-Za'tar, and Nab'a" (Daher, 2019b, p. 81). Already by the elections of 1996, Hizbullah had channelled much effort to present adequate political candidates that would assist the organisation to gain a broader constituency beyond its natural base of religious Shia, appealing to a more moderate support base. Hizbullah promoted non-cleric figures with more pronounced business and educated characteristics as opposed to military and religious candidates (Herrick, 2010, p. 184; Shanahan, 2005, p. 122). Resisting Israel was central to its discourse in the campaigns, whose posters read "they [IRL fighters] resist with their blood, resist with your vote" (Norton, 2007, p. 481). Even after the Israeli withdrawal, in the elections of 2000, Hizbullah was able to capitalize of its social political developments and even forged an alliance with Amal, who together "won twenty-three seats in southern Lebanon and more than a quarter of all seats in parliament" (Herrick, 2010, p. 185).

In fact, Hizbullah had continued to promote its dedication to Lebanisation. That was done either by issuing various documents, which reminded its possible constituents of its moderate and open ideas regarding the realities of the Lebanese society such as the document of 'Views and Concepts' of June 20, 1997 and the document of 'Statement of purpose' of March 20, 1998 or by various practices that demonstrated its openness to other confessions in Lebanon. During the 1990s, Hizbullah promoted a Muslim-Christian dialogue, which resulted in the establishment of a committee that would include all Lebanese denominations both within the political and civil society realms. It proved Hizbullah's acceptance of the Lebanese multi-confessional character and national coexistence. At the same time, these practices opened the space for Hizbullah to foster the idea of being the protector of Lebanon against Israel; on many occasions, religious figures such as the Maronite Patriarch had supported IRL and its actions against the Israeli occupation and IDF aggression on Lebanon's territory (Alagha, 2006, p. 157). This approach allowed Hizbullah to criticize the corrupt Maronite and Sunni elites, separately from their communities, without being

accused of sectarianism and hate speech. Hizbullah's domestic policy via its political participation in the system, not the government, was to state that it sought to modify the culture of corruption and nepotism; Hizbullah had refused the government the vote of confidence on many occasions and supported workers' strikes (Shanahan, 2005, p. 124). Nevertheless, regardless of its participation and role in the Lebanese parliament, the Party of God was challenging Lebanon's sovereignty as it was building its own mechanism of state, not least due to its full control over the South that was contingent with a homogenous Shia population, but to the social network that provided state-like services, replacing Lebanon's role.

In order to highlight the core aspects of Hizbullah's statelike actor characteristics by utilizing the intervening variables proposed by neoclassical realism, this section will examine, first, its ability to control a specific territory (territoriality) on which it monopolizes violence; second, it has political and institutional structures parallel and in sync with the state of Lebanon (political mechanism and institutions); and third, it has cultivated a strong relationship with a particular part of the population by becoming the prime service provider to its constituency; thus it has the ability to mobilize (state-society relations). These characteristics allow Hizbullah to draw its own power to a certain extent as an agent of the regional system, not confined to its role as a Lebanese political party.

5.3.1. The Party of God: A Contiguous Territory and Homogenous Population

One of the basic characteristics of an statelike actor is its ability to control a specific territory in which it has a monopoly on violence. The Lebanese state and Syria blessed Hizbullah's military presence in the South as the only militia allowed to operate outside the official state lines so as it could oppose the Israeli occupation forces on Lebanese territory. Thus, Hizbullah was given the authority to control the South and the Bekaa, which had a high concentration of Shia inhabitants. It allowed a territorialisation of 'confessional control' similar to Beirut's Green Line that the existed prior to the Taif Agreement.¹⁰³ Prior to the civil war, Lebanon harboured statelike entities based on confessional lines; indicative of such was LF's control of Christian areas such as Mount Lebanon, Kisrawan, and the strip from Beirut to Jubayl. Nevertheless, LF and others were unable to develop a state-like entity over time either due to the lack of maintaining control over contiguous

¹⁰³ The Green Line divided East and West Beirut. Christians controlled the former, while the Sunni Muslims the latter.

territory and a homogeneous population or lack of ability to develop social institutions (Kingston & Zahar, 2004, pp. 86-87). After the Taif Accords, many of these state-like entities incorporated and channelled their political and socio-economic power to the state of Lebanon. In contrast, Hizbullah was left outside of the official state practices and was allowed to have a monopoly on violence in the South against Israeli forces and Israel's local allies, such as the Christian militia known as the South Lebanon Army, which Israel financed, trained and were positioned in the so-called security zone. The security belt in the South, which Israel occupied since 1982, functioned as a buffer zone and protected northern Israel from attacks from Lebanese territory.¹⁰⁴

Israel's "iron fist policy" against the inhabitants of South Lebanon had contributed heavily to Hizbullah's legitimization (Blanford, 2011). The attacks during the 1990s were relatively of low intensity, with the exception of 1993 and, particularly, the 1996 operation known 'Grapes of Wrath', in which Israeli artilleries left hundreds of civilians and UN peacekeepers dead at Qana (Blanford, 2011; Fisk, 2001). Hizbullah's rhetoric on the necessity to resist and its leader's contribution to the resistance, especially since Israeli forces assassinated Hassan Nasrallah's eldest son in 1997 (Qassem, 2012, p. 71), made the Party of God a potent actor with much popular support.

Part of Hizbullah's first media policy was establishing a 'Combat Media Unit', which was tasked to film IRL operations as part of the psychological warfare against Israel but also to promote its cause and impress its constituency and the Lebanese population (Daher, 2019b, p. 121). Ever since, media propaganda and image promotion have been central to Hizbullah's domestic and foreign policy (Khatib, Matar, & Alshaer, 2014). IRL's unexpected attrition, psychological and rocket warfare against IDF had exhausted Israel, particularly after Qana, leading to Israel's unilateral withdrawal in May 2000 (Gabrielsen, 2014; Gordon, 1998; Harb, 2011; Kaye, 2002). As the Israeli forces, along with the South Lebanon Army members, were crossing into Israel in May 2000, "Hizbullah launched an overwhelming 323 operations" so as to give the "impression that the Israelis were withdrawing under fire" (Gabrielsen, 2014, p. 262) and were chased out of the Lebanese territory, except the area known as the Shebaa farms.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ It should be noted that since 1978, Israel had rejected United Nations Security Council Resolution 425, which called for an Israeli withdrawal to the recognised international border. Nevertheless, the UN had established ever since a mission "United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)", which would monitor and monitor the withdrawal and even secure the border area. Nevertheless, Israel had no trust that UNIFIL was "capable of securing the border" (Kaye, 2002, p. 564).

¹⁰⁵ Hezbollah village of Shebaa, a disputed territory in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

After the withdrawal, IRL was deployed in the area granting in the post-2000 era absolute power and unchallenged sovereignty over that specific territory. Indicative of such authority over the South was Hizbullah's stance on the members of the South Lebanon Army. Hizbullah followed the orders of Nasrallah, who forbade vendetta attacks on a member of the South Lebanon Army and their families that did not manage to flee to Israel after May 2000. Hizbullah was considered a liberator not only among the majority of the Shia but also from a vast majority of the Lebanese population (Majed, 2010, pp. 9-10). In fact, as Nasrallah stated in his speech of Liberation on 26 May 2000,

“To all Lebanese, I say: You need to realize that this victory belongs to all Lebanese, for it is not merely the victory of a party, movement, or current. It's not about the victory of a sect and the defeat of another. Faulty and ignorant is he who believes or says so. This is Lebanon's victory; this Resistance has been a force for the nation, and so it will remain”.¹⁰⁶

Hizbullah's autonomy in the military realm was a launching pad that pushed the organisation closer to the state in the state/non-state spectrum. Having a specific territory allowed it to display its authority, which is equally well-organised and structured to mimic a state.

After the Israeli withdrawal, Hizbullah's right to persevere its arms in the name of resistance had become void for many within Lebanon. However, Hizbullah claimed that IRL urgency rested in its capacity to deter any Israeli efforts to violate Lebanese sovereignty, given the weakness of the Lebanese Army Forces (LAF). In addition, the withdrawal of Israel was partial, in the eyes of the Party, as Israel still occupied the Shebaa Farms. The 14 farms are a 25-square-kilometre strip of territory adjacent to Syria and are considered part of the Syrian Golan Heights, which Israel occupied during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. It is a disputed territory between Israel and Syria in theory and on paper. Damascus has accepted on a verbal level that the Shebaa Farms were given to Lebanon in 1951 (Harik, 2005, p. 157; Kindt, 2009, p. 136; Scheller, 2014, pp. 144-145). Although Assad has claimed that “the final demarcation should only be made after an Israeli withdrawal” from all the Golan Heights area (Scheller, 2014, p. 143), the vague status of the Shebaa Farms has been used by Hizbullah to justify IRL's arsenal.

¹⁰⁶ For the full speech see Nasrallah (2000)

5.3.2. Political Organisation and Decision-Making

Hizbullah's organisational structure follows a top-down model, where the concentration of power lays in its highest level of leadership or the inner circle; thus, it is vertically rigid, hierarchical and with internal discipline. The consolidation of the political organisation, as we know it today, came in 1997. Although much of the structure was already established between 1985 and 1992,¹⁰⁷ in May of 1995, Hizbullah attained even further autonomy from Ayatollah Khamenei, who appointed Nasrallah, head of the religio-judicial council, as one of his religious deputies in Lebanon. In essence, this allowed Hizbullah financial independence in its financial resources as his new position allowed the Party to attain directly the revenues from tax, zakat and other religious duties collected by the Shia in Lebanon rather than being channelled via Iran as was the case prior to 1995 (Alagha, 2011b, p. 53). Structurally, the organisation has accounted for all the aspects of state functions, be it in regards to the public or to foreign relations. The backbone of Hizbullah is its Central Council (Majlis al Markazi), which comprises 200 senior members. In turn, the Central Council elects the nine-member Consultative Council (Majlis Shura al-Qarar), which is the highest body of decision-making of Hizbullah, headed by the Secretary-General. The inner circle of Hizbullah is comprised of the elected member of the Consultative Council; figures like Naem Qasim, Nayef Krayyem, Hajj Muhammad Raed, Hajj Husein Shami, Nawwaf al-Musawi and Hashim Safi al-Din. It supervises all the affairs of the organisation, and they are organised under nine assemblies; the leadership of each of the assemblies is assigned to one Council member.

First and foremost, the Executive Assembly (Majlis Tanfithi) is headed by the second in command, Hashim Safi al-Din. This council's units comprise of the Social Unit, the Health Unit, the Education Unit, the Information Unit (media), the Syndicate Unit, the Finance Unit, the Internal Security and Coordination Unit (Wahdat al-irtibat w al-tansiq) and the Foreign Relations Unit. The latter oversees relations on a regional and international level and serves as the diplomatic body of Hizbullah. It advises the Consultative Council on foreign relations matters, and its head is the equivalent of the foreign minister as he meets with delegations with foreign delegates (Daher, 2019a, p. 132). Second, the Political Assembly primarily provides the Consultative Council with political analysis on Hizbullah's political portfolios both within Lebanon and beyond. The assembly manage the dynamics with political powers within Lebanon. While the foreign dossiers

¹⁰⁷ See figure I in Hamzeh (1993, p. 326)

are divided between relations with Arab countries, Palestinian factions, Islamic groups, Europe and so forth. Third, the Parliamentary Assembly was created to support the Hizbullah's MPs and reassure them that their actions align with the organisation's principles and objectives. The fourth, the Judicial Assembly, oversees a Hizbullah system of courts to deal with intra-Shia conflicts and has some legislative authority, which has been implemented in some Hizbullah-controlled areas – regardless of the fact that some provisions conflict with the national legislation (Saab, 2008, p. 97; Van Efferink, 2010, p. 11). Finally, the Jihad Assembly drafts recommendations on all the resistance-related issues both internal and external threats. It is the non-operational body of the IRL, which consults the Consultative Council that tasks the Military and Security Apparatus of the IRL (Kindt, 2009, p. 133; Qassem, 2012, p. 75; Saouli, 2017, p. 68).

The departments or units of the various assemblies were established in the early 1990s and expanded throughout the decade. Like all important and strategic decisions, the foreign policy is formulated by the General Secretary in conjunction with the Consultative Council. While at first sight, some departments or units overlap, the fact that the concentration of power lies in the hands of the Consultative Council and its leadership guarantees no—or minimal— complications in regards to the modus operandi of Hizbullah's foreign policy (Daher, 2019a, p. 133). Hizbullah has made an effort to develop relationships with foreign actors beyond the country's official institutions. For instance, it has cultivated relations with many European countries, especially since 1996. Unlike the US, which since 1997 has designated Hizbullah as a terrorist organisation, the EU has established relations with Hizbullah. According to Qassem (2012), there have been steady bilateral relations that “were not limited to exchanges of opinion but translated into practical albeit limited cooperation with a number of embassies on some general issues”, which included meetings of the French and British ambassadors with the Party's Secretary General. It was not until 2013 that the EU member states blacklisted Hizbullah's ‘military wing’ but continued to have relations with its political leadership. On a regional level, besides Syria and Iran, Hizbullah developed relations with non-state actors such as Hamas in Palestine rather than with Arab states, mostly due to the Iranian-Saudi rivalry and the perception of Shia expansionism in the region or the fear of disturbing their relations with the US. Hizbullah's main foreign policy objective has been to protect IRL and avert any efforts from foreign actors to disarm it. While the diplomatic realm seems narrow for it to display its foreign policy, in practice, the organisation has expanded its diplomatic

manoeuvring by using the Lebanese state as a foreign policy platform and “lobbying the Lebanese state authorities” (Daher, 2019a, pp. 133-134).

In terms of decision-making, Hizbullah remained, to a large extent, autonomous from Iranian and Syrian influence but not independent. More specifically, despite the limitations on Hizbullah by Hafez al-Assad during the 1990s, the balance between Damascus and Hizbullah changed in 2000. The Israeli withdrawal occurred in a rather ambiguous period of Syrian politics (Daher, 2019a, p. 130), weeks before Hafiz al-Assad’s death and months before Bashar, his youngest son, succeeded him. Contrary to his father’s cautious approach to Hizbullah, Bashar al-Assad gradually developed a different approach. Given the fact that he lacked legitimacy and credibility both on a national and regional level, Bashar al-Assad started to capitalise on Hizbullah’s victory against Israel. He gradually developed a close relationship with Nasrallah, emphasising on axioms of anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism. Associating himself with Hizbullah would provide him “with the credentials that he needed to gain credibility, initiating a process of legitimization” and “counter perceptions that he was either a weak leader manipulated by hidden interests or an aggressive one prone to strategic miscalculations” (El-Hokayem, 2007, p. 42). An illustration of the new age in the Hizbullah-Syrian relations was the mushrooming of posters in Southern Lebanon of Bashar al-Assad and Hassan Nasrallah. Thus, in the post-2000 era, Syria had stopped to hinder Hizbullah’s political expansion, at least not to the extent as before. The power relations shifted in Hizbullah’s favour, allowing it to cultivate a relationship as an equal ally rather than simply tip-toing around Syria’s needs and boundaries. In this sense, the organisation was more autonomous vis-à-vis Syria.

Hizbullah seeks to replicate the Islamic Republic’s political and social mechanisms so as to create a consolidated political entity. Thus, many Hizbullah practices have been interpreted as imported from Iran. This misperception of Hizbullah-Iran relations is further driven by their theological connection between the two; the notion of Wilayat al-Faqih. Within the religious Shia hierarchy, Hizbullah is subordinate to Iran’s religious leadership, which has never disapproved – up-to-date- any of the organisation’s political practices. Regardless of the depth of the relationship between Hizbullah and the religious leadership of Iran, the notion of Wilayat al-Faqih does not interfere nor collide with Hizbullah’s autonomy as an organisation that dictates its own political agenda. The point of convergence of the political alliance between Iran and Hizbullah is not limited to Shiism; instead, it finds common denominators in more concrete political concerns such as

common perception of the American and Israeli threats. Having said that, the fact that Iranian and Syrian support and alliance contribute tremendously to the welfare of Hizbullah does not necessarily mean that Iran and Syria compromise Hizbullah's internal political mechanism or its decision-making autonomy. Instead, the decision-making depends on the opportunities and constraints the alliance offers within the Lebanese and regional political structure.

5.3.3. State-Society Relations: Constituency and Beyond

Whether the Shia community in the South and Bekaa identified with Amal or not, Hizbullah was able to fill a void left by the Lebanese state in terms of services. During this decade, similar to the practices of the PLO in the 1970s, Hizbullah developed an economy, cultivated an identity rhetoric, and a strong network of social welfare services from schools and hospitals to consumer, housing, and construction cooperatives as well as sports, cultural clubs for women and youth and scouting groups. These ventures on various development projects are very well structured and organised under committees such as the Relief Committee or Reconstruction Campaign or Jihad al-Bina, the Islamic Health Committee Association (IHC), the Martyrs Foundation, or al-Shahid, to name a few; Hizbullah's capacity revealed, quite quickly, a high degree of institutional development, which exceeded that of the Lebanese state and displayed a dedication to the people of its constituency (Flanigan & Abdel-Samad, 2009; Hamzeh, 2004; Herrick, 2010; Saab, 2008).

The scope of the network initially was to assist and provide for the fighters and their families. Hospitals such as the Hospital of the South and the Martyr Salah in Nabatiyeh, Ghandur Hospital in Bint Jbeil, al-Batul Hospital in al-Hermel or al-Rasul al-Adham in Beirut's southern suburbs were built in the late 1980s for the wounded. Ever since they have been expanded and fortified with high-tech medical equipment, the latter has been classified as a top hospital in Lebanon by the Lebanese Ministry of Health (Daher, 2019b, pp. 97, 101). It is active in the medical field by launching vaccination campaigns and educational workshops about pregnancy, immunization, oral hygiene, chronic diseases, immune system, anti-smoking, AIDS, and other conditions. IHC also cooperates with the Ministry of Health, UNICEF, or WHO. In addition, Hizbullah has established a Civil Defense (Al-Difa al-Madan) with multiple functions to serve the civilians, from fire-fighting to first aid and ambulance transport, blood transfusions to evacuations and even waste collection and rodent control, to name a few. Similarly, schools and teaching centres were established for the children of martyrs and prisoners, and today these facilities operate

within the network of the fourteen al-Mahdi schools found in Lebanon with almost 20,000 students (Daher, 2019b, p. 110; Hamzeh, 2004, p. 57). Overall, Hizbullah's services and networks were replacing those of the Lebanese government, including the electricity shortages, which were tackled by installing generators in numerous areas and running water, pumping stations and even digging wells.

Another important investment of Hizbullah was infrastructural development projects mostly in South Lebanon such as houses, buildings, shopping malls and roads – amongst other facilities – to compensate for the damages caused by the Israeli forces during the occupation; for instance, by 2002 Hizbullah constructed almost 80 buildings and restored over 10,500 facilities ranging from homes and hospitals to shops and agricultural cooperatives), most of them in South Lebanon (Daher, 2016, p. 99). Undoubtedly, this generated an amicable atmosphere and a positive attitude vis-a-vis IRL, whose members participated at these projects. In addition, more often than not, these housing services were not only available for the Shia to people of all denominations. Many of these projects' logic was to develop the South in the post-civil war era. It also intended to build an economy as these projects would employ doctors, nurses, teachers, workers, administration staff and so forth. At the same time, some of these projects would establish vocational schools and offer “micro-loans aimed at increasing agricultural development” in the South (Harik, 2005, pp. 83-87). The projects of agriculture were central given the geo-economic milieu of the South; thus, these committees provided agricultural equipment from mowers, and tractors to fertilizers and treatments “on credit with repayment deferred until harvest time” (Daher, 2019b, pp. 102-104).

This modus operandi is not exclusive to Hizbullah. It is well known that the Lebanese state lacks the capacity to delve into projects that would support the relatively disadvantaged areas, whose perpetuating economic crisis stems from the financial mismanagement and chronic corruption of the political and financial elite that also receive assistance from other states based on their personal and familiar influence. What differentiates Hizbullah's social welfare from the state's institutions is that it is much more efficient, caters for a larger number of people, it has lasted through time and it is an unprecedented phenomenon for the Shia community (Flanigan & Abdel-Samad, 2009; Hamzeh, 2004; Herrick, 2010; Saab, 2008).

Hizbullah has an independent financing system that operates parallel of that of the Lebanese state. The Party's revenues come from four main sources. First and foremost, Iran that

has maintained a certain level of financial assistance to Hizbullah, particularly, channelled to the charity committees and IRL such as the Martyr's Foundation, the Foundation for the War Wounded and Committee for Islamic Resistance Support (Daher, 2019b, pp. 106-108, 121). Although there is a lack of reliable information regarding the Hizbullah's annual budget and the amount of Iranian financing, some estimates indicate an average of \$US 1 billion annually; while the Martyrs Foundation alone operates on an annual budget of US \$3 million (Scheller, 2014, p. 142). It is almost impossible to find credible sources regarding Hizbullah's revenues and even more ambiguous is the percentage of Iranian financial assistance. Interestingly, the Iranian funds to Hizbullah are not within the calculations of the Iranian Ministry of Finance because the funds come from charitable foundations, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards and Iran's intelligence services that fall exclusively "under the direct control of the Wilayat al-Faqih" meaning Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah, and not the Iranian government (Hamzeh, 2004, pp. 63-64). A second source of financing its activities is via tax collection among believers— it is known as *khums*, meaning that it is mandatory that one pays one-fifth of his annual income); third, revenues from numerous businesses such as petrol stations, food stores, construction companies and so forth and finally there is assistance in the form of donations from Lebanese Shia in Lebanon and the diaspora (Hamzeh, 2004, pp. 63-64). In addition, Hizbullah has been accused of illicit cigarette and drug trafficking (Harik, 2005; Levitt, 2015).

The social services provide a pool for recruits for Hizbullah members. Even before Hizbullah, IRL's rationale for recruitment was based on "personal experience to convince people closest to them to join the Resistance"; by the same token, Hizbullah did not limit itself to "sermons delivered in the mosques" (Daher, 2019b, p. 69). Instead, it expanded in all other areas. At the same time, the network of services resembled a clientelistic one that had its own dynamic separate from the official Lebanese state, which provided it with a constituency. Hizbullah's relation to its constituency imitated the patron-client relations of every other religious political group in Lebanon as it replaced state-society relations. At the same time, Hizbullah promoted religious practices and built mosques, although it was not necessarily its main pool for recruits. Given that many religious practices and concepts were imported from Iran as they did not really exist prior to the 1980s, (Hage Ali, 2018; Majed, 2010; Norton, 1990; Norton, 2007), it seems that Hizbullah sought to develop a distinct Shia identity for its constituency. This identity also comprises non-religious practice of the organisation, for instance, it organised or established annual dates to commemorate

and celebrate events that reflect and substantiate the principles of the organisation such as the Day of the Lebanese Prisoner (23 May), Day of the Fight against Torture (14 February), Freedom Day (29 January), Mother's Day for all prisoners (21 March), and the Day of Palestinian and Arab Prisoners (17 April). In addition, it has invested in the private education sector (Education Institute), which includes higher education levels, in an effort to recompose the Shia identity that incorporates Hizbullah principles and values.

The Party's communication and media campaign has also been successful in creating a space for a relationship between the organisation and its constituency. It has various media outlets, most notably satellite broadcast television networks such as al-Manar Channel, which is its flagship and reaches approximately 10 million views per day, (Kindt, 2009, p. 132) but also others such as al-Mayadeen, a number of newspapers and radio stations. The media and communication have been an auxiliary to substantiate not only the image that Hizbullah seeks to promote, whether it was to prove its *iftitah* towards Lebanonisation in the 1990s or even later to promote its policies, but also how it perceives itself and its principles. Its repertoire has mainly revolved around the notion of resistance in both religious and political terms, but at the same time, its media programs incorporate a vast range of themes such as sports, social and children's programs.¹⁰⁸ As Khatib, Matar and Alshaer have noted, Hizbullah's 'epiphenomenal' usage of the media spaces via text, image and symbols reached out to diverse groups within the Lebanese public and beyond (2014, pp. 68-69). It was clear that by the late 1990s Hizbullah was more popular than Amal among the Shia community as well as the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Even though Amal remained a relevant actor within the Lebanese political scene, it was outplaced by the Party of God in the Shia concentrated areas in the south as well as the areas of Iqlim al Tuffah, Baal beck and Hirmil regions. Eventually, Hizbullah "superseded Amal as the main representative of the community" (Haddad, 2013, p. 73; Hamzeh, 2004, p. 113). In addition, the organisation did not aim to impress solely the Shia community as it sought legitimisation from the Lebanese society as a whole and cultivated a relationship with all parts of the confessions in Lebanon.

¹⁰⁸ For a more detailed account on Hizbullah and its media unit see Harb (2011) and Khatib, Matar, and Alshaer (2014).

5.4. Conclusion

By the end of the civil war, the Shia community went from being marginalised to being the strongest military power and, perhaps, the largest religious group in Lebanon. It was Hizbullah that benchmarked the third phase of Shia political awakening, placing the Shia community at the Lebanese centre stage of the ambiguous proxy politics. The structural catalysts that contributed to the rise of Hizbullah were: first, the systemic disregard of the Shia community from the Lebanese political and economic system dominated by the Maronite and Sunni elites, a situation which persisted in the post-Taif era; second, the successful Islamic Revolution of Iran and, finally, the second Israeli invasion of 1982. While Hizbullah was dependent on Iranian financial assistance and religious authority on the one hand and Syria's benevolence regarding the issue of persevering Hizbullah's arms, on the other, the organisation carved its own path within Lebanon.

The structural opportunities and constraints in the 1990s offered Hizbullah a certain level of autonomy, which soon translated the organisation's experience into a proto-state. Despite its efforts to integrate into the Lebanese political scene, Hizbullah's control over contiguous territory and its population, in combination with the social, political and economic development, allowed it to create a vast clientelist network from which it derives its strength similar and, at times, better than that of the Lebanese state. The continuous shortfalls of the Lebanese state vis-à-vis the Shia community, even after the Taif Accords, fueled Hizbullah's *raison d'être* in the eyes of its constituency. Even more pressing was the Israeli forces in the South, which despite their withdrawal in 2000, the Israeli threat continued to feed into Hizbullah's repertoire. The end of the Israeli occupation had boosted Hizbullah's image both within Lebanon and across the Arab world, after which a new concern emerged in terms of state-society relations. The organisation's leadership claimed that the resistance mission remained unfinished, justifying the preservation of IRL's arsenal as Hizbullah's military branch, which had caused a new wave of concern. On the one hand, its constituency, Syria and the pro-Syrian Lebanese actors accepted Hizbullah's 'right' to have arms. On the other hand, other Sunni and Christian forces rejected the claims (Stephan, 2009, p. 240); this remained a concern in the relationship between Hizbullah and the Lebanese society for the next two decades.

By examining Hizbullah under the intervening variables of neoclassical realism as proposed in this study, namely, territoriality, state-society relations and domestic institutions, it has depicted an entity that veers towards the state in the state/non-state spectrum. In this sense,

Hizbullah may be considered a sovereign political entity, even though it does not seek nor pursue international legal recognition for its sovereignty in Lebanon, and it situates itself as a political party within the Lebanese political system. It is clear from the level of autonomy and control that Hizbullah has an effective capacity to display authority. In Krasner's terms (1999), Hizbullah excludes external actors from the territory it controls (Westphalian sovereignty), it has the legitimacy of its constituency and the Lebanese state to exercise its authority (domestic sovereignty), and it also regulates movements across the border—at least in regards to technology and weapons (interdependence sovereignty) (Van Efferink, 2010).

The strategic culture as well as the organisation's perception of the system—especially as they were moulded during the critical years of the 1990s—imply that Hizbullah will adapt to any circumstance, be it internally or externally, so long as it preserves its arms and relevance as a political entity. The Israeli threat is central to its discourse to fulfil and justify the fact that it is the only confession within Lebanon that maintains a militia status. It may be argued that the internal/external nexus is directly connected to Hizbullah's fundamental scope: survival as a political and military power. To this end, Hizbullah promotes its foreign policy by aligning itself with Iran, compromising in an alliance of convenience with Syria or approaching other state and non-state actors beyond the formal Lebanese institutions; and even utilising the Lebanese state via lobbying the Lebanese authorities. The organisational structure has carefully accommodated the mechanism of international relations and foreign policy, making it distinct and parallel to the Lebanese state.

Chapter 6: Hizbullah's Foreign Policy

6.1. Introduction

There is a dominant perception within the scholarship that Hizbullah's foreign policies are a result of Iranian and Syrian pressure (Baroudi & Salamey, 2011; Blanford, 2011, 2017; DeVore, 2012; Gold & Diker, 2007), whose scope is to fortify the Shia Crescent in the region to counter Western influence and Israel. This approach implies that the Shia identity is homogenous, based on the principle of Wilayat al-Faqih. Nevertheless, many Shia, particularly in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, reject the concept (May, 2019, p. 129). It is not enough of a strong principle to maintain Hizbullah's long and exhaustive wars. Lebanon's sectarian political dynamics that are characterised by the hovering of multiple external patrons over the Lebanese political parties (Wilkins, 2011, p. 114), renders the examination of Hizbullah's foreign policy more challenging than other armed non-state actors.

Having established in the previous chapter that Hizbullah is a political entity and functions as a statelike actor, this study is deployed on the basis that the Party has an autonomous mechanism of foreign policy formulation. Hizbullah's transitional relations are viewed as alliances (e.g., Iran and Syria) and are considered part of the regional dynamics. The extent that Hizbullah's foreign policy is influenced by Iran is directly dependent of the regional structures opportunities and constraints and processed via its own cost/benefit analysis. Thus, viewing Hizbullah's foreign policy merely as a proxy agent of Iran conceals the prospect of better understanding the organisation. This study examines the Party's foreign policy as an independent result of its own agency. Hizbullah's main lever for its foreign policy is Resistance; as Nasrallah puts it, the organisation, be it on domestic on foreign affairs, "stands on two legs: resistance and public support for the resistance", without which would endanger the Shia community within the Lebanese system (Noe: 2007).

The implications of 9/11 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had a tremendous impact on the structural system of the region that, in turn, impacted Hizbullah's foreign policy, especially since the US invasion of Iraq precipitated the end of Syria's tutelage over Lebanon in 2005. In addition, when examining the structural dynamics, Lebanon is viewed as an extension of the regional structural system for two reasons: first, given Lebanon's susceptibility to regional pressures, much of the regional rivalry started to mirror itself within the domestic political scene;

and second, Hizbullah's bid to position itself within the political system exposed the organisation to the structural opportunities and constrained of Lebanon. However, examining the structural changes in conjunction with the domestic realities in Lebanon will allow a better understanding of what affects the Party's foreign policy choices. The domestic realities in each period of foreign policy formulation have to a certain extent, impacted and shaped the foreign policy, rendering obsolete the argument that the Party is merely an Iranian proxy. This chapter will trace the structural dynamics at the national, regional and international levels that contributed to two separate foreign policies of the Party. First, its policy vis-à-vis Israel, particularly in 2006 and second, its policy in Syria between 2011 and 2019.

6.2. A Miscalculation: July War of 2006

Already since 2002, US President George W. Bush's rhetoric against Iran, Iraq and North Korea as the Axis of Evil had set the tone for international politics in the 21st century (Heradstveit & Bonham, 2007). The aftermath of 9/11 and the new US policy in the Middle East changed much of the regional structures. Particularly, in the Spring of 2003, the region was torn between those who opposed the US-led invasion of Iraq and those who welcomed it. What defined the strategic balance of the Middle East was the Axis of Terror, being Iran, Syria, Lebanon via Hizbullah and the Palestinian Occupied Territories, Hamas, as coined by the Israeli Ambassador to the UN, Danny Gillerman.¹⁰⁹ While the fall of Saddam was a relief to both Syria and Iran, the US expansionism in the region caused much concern to both countries. This common concern brought together Tehran and Damascus like never before, particularly during 2003-2004 (Goodarzi, 2009, p. 293), which reignited the political antagonism between them and the Arab Gulf states and other pro-Western governments in the region.

The US efforts to weaken the Axis of Terror were evident as Washington pushed the UN Security Council to adopt Resolution 1559 in the fall of 2004,¹¹⁰ demanding the full withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon and the disarmament of Hezbollah (Achcar & Warschawski, 2015, p. 7). From the organisation's perceptive, the US, as the new hegemon in the post-Cold War era, "was forced to fabricate a new public enemy", that being Iran (AlahedNews, 2006a). Hizbullah's understanding of Middle East politics is an "intrinsic" (Saad-Ghorayeb & Ottaway, 2007, p. 88)

¹⁰⁹ For a detailed report on Gillerman's speech in the UN that first used the term Axis of Terror see (JPost, 2006)

¹¹⁰ Resolution 1559 (2004) was voted nine in favour, to none against with six abstentions

“cultural conflict” between the West and Islam (Qassem, 2012). Along these lines, Israel, the ‘small Satan’, is viewed as an extension of the ‘Big Satan’, the US, both whom are viewed as the “root of vice and the source of all malice on account of its ultimate responsibility for all Muslim” (Daher, 2016, pp. 169-170). In turn, the Arab regimes that were friendly towards the US were viewed as an extension of the ‘malice’. The Iranian-Saudi conflict was never jumbled with a confrontation of Shiism and Sunnism; instead, it was interpreted as a confrontation between the ‘Axis of Resistance’ and the pro-Western forces in the region.

The regional pressures coincided with the growing tensions within Lebanon’s political scene. Rafic Hariri, former Sunni Prime Minister—a close business partner of Saudi Arabia and a close friend of Jacques Chirac, the French President at the time—was also known as a tycoon for his financial contribution for Lebanon’s reconstruction in the post-civil war era. He had a close relationship with Syria especially in the 1990s. However, Saudi’s partnership with the US in its War against Terror, which included Syria, significantly affected Assad’s relations with Hariri who sided with his Saudi partners (Blanford, 2006). Hariri participated in drafting the US-led UNSCR 1559, which stipulated the US and Saudi efforts to destabilize Syria and its Lebanese allies; namely, Hizbullah (Majed, 2010). As a result, Rafic Hariri was assassinated on February 14 of 2005.¹¹¹ Given the implications of UNSCR on Syria and by extension Hizbullah and the timing of the assassination, there was credible suspection that the Party was involved. However, if Hizbullah’s connection to the assassination was proven it would have direct implication on its arsenal. Nasrallah had made it clear in his speech on May of 2005, “[w]e will fight to the death anyone who thinks about disarming the resistance by force” (AlahedNews, 2005). Therefore, when the international and Lebanese forces commenced the discussion on the establishment of an international tribunal for Hariri’s assassination, which was expressed by UNSC 1664 in March 2006, Hizbullah entered a new phase of defense in which it would attempt to reassert IRL’s necessity to exist.

¹¹¹ Hariri was killed in a bomb explosion on “his convoy en route from parliament to his home”; all the pro-Syrian forces were blamed for the assassination (Stephan, 2009, p. 238). As noted by Talal Nizameddin (2006) the struggle between Assad and Hariri “remained largely behind closed doors until late 2004, took centre stage in the international arena after February 2005” and pro-Syrian politicians in Lebanon were under the impression that Hariri and his inner circle were behind Resolution 1559, passed September 2, 2004 in the weeks building up to the assassination. Nonetheless, Syria blamed Israel and Iran blamed “on al-Qa’ida acting on behalf of the US, with the objective of starting a civil war that could be blamed on Syria” and by extension weaken Hizbollah (Samii, 2008, p. 47).

Hariri's assassination triggered the Cedar Revolution or the Uprising of Independence (intifadat al-istiqlal) a week later, which divided the country in two main camps: The March 14 Movement, an alliance of anti-Syrian forces – including, the Druze, the Christian Lebanese Forces, under the leadership of Samir Geagea, and Sunni group, under Saad Hariri (son of the assassinated Rafic Hariri)—that sought the end of Syrian tutelage. And the March 8 coalition, which comprised of Hizbullah, Amal and the Maronite Christian Free Patriotic Movement of Michel Aoun (Shields, 2008, p. 477).¹¹² The international, regional and national pressures eventually led to the departure of Syrian troops from Lebanese territory in the spring of 2005 and effectively ended the 29-year Syrian occupation of Lebanon. While the two alliances had a top-bottom approach, a large part of Lebanese society, across religious and sectarian lines, opposed Syria's involvement in Lebanon; the Cedar Revolution, for a brief moment, reflected the popular discontent on issues such as corruption that was associated with Syria's presence in the country and, to some extent, Hizbullah's weapons (Kurtulus, 2009, pp. 199-200).¹¹³

The changing international, regional and national environments were challenging the legitimacy of Hizbullah. The US, Israel and Saudi Arabia viewed Hizbullah's arsenal as a central security threat to Lebanon's stability. Thus, the vacuum of power left behind by Syria's departure, implied that there would be no one to persuade the upcoming Lebanese governments to the Party's benefit. Despite Hizbullah's efforts to convince the Lebanese society of IRL's importance by consistent deterrence efforts against Israeli forces on the Shaba farm, the organisation was not able to maintain its 'Liberator appeal' achieved in the 2000s. Finally, in Hizbullah's eyes, the US alliance with Sunni Arab states and particularly Saudi Arabia was cultivating an anti-Shia rhetoric that aimed to marginalise the Shia across the region. Undoubtedly, the new reality was threatening Hizbullah's existence as it extended in almost all fronts of its statelike characteristics. First, while the majority of the Shia supported Hizbullah and its right to preserve weaponry, the anti-Hizbullah rhetoric of the remainder of the society was a spoiler to its society-state relations; second, the territorial integrity, which would be challenged if it were to relinquish its arsenal. Both would

¹¹² March 8 was the date that Hizbullah organised the pro-Syrian demonstration; that day Nasrallah delivered a speech calling for national unity and coexistence to a crowd of half a million. Almost a week later, on March 14 of 2005 (the Cedar Revolution), one million Lebanese took the streets, demanding the end of the Syrian occupation and protested against Hariri's assassination.

¹¹³ As it will be demonstrated in the next part of the chapter, the Cedar Revolution was the beginning of a long political crisis in Lebanon. The popular discontent was cut short by devastating July War. Another round of sit-ins started on December 2006 and lasted for 18 months straight until the Doha Agreement in 2008.

eventually lead to its total disempowerment as a statelike actor and render it merely—at best—a political party like all others.

In response, Hizbullah took a number of actions to regain some control on the domestic front. The only way for the organisation to have a say in the Lebanese government was to become part of it by running for the general elections in May-June of 2005. This would ensure the Party's share in the capture of the Lebanese state. As Nasrallah put it the 2005 elections were more important and more dangerous than 1992 (Noe, 2007). Hizbullah intended to have a “leading political and developmental role [...] in Lebanese political, economic, and administrative life, as well as the participation in all the Lebanese government's institutions, including the cabinet” (Alagha, 2011b, p. 120). This was a drastic shift for Hizbullah's leadership, who were categorically against their participation in the Lebanese government. In order to justify it, they portrayed their new attitude as an obligation and responsibility, in the name of protecting Lebanon and its people from Western influence (Alagha, 2006, p. 173). In addition, to safe face within its constituency, a Shia Lebanese fatwa, not an Iranian one, precipitated the Party's participation in the general elections (Noe, 2007). Indeed, Hizbullah was represented in the highest executive body of Lebanon, the Council of Ministers with two ministers. Although the number could not directly have a positive influence on Lebanese policy formation regarding the organisation's right to preserve its arms, its MPs were able to disrupt the process by retreating from the Parliament, as was the case in numerous instances. In addition, its participation in the government offered the organisation more space to manoeuvre and influence non-Syrian friendly forces. The anti-Syrian bloc did not directly suggest the disarmament of Hizbullah. For instance, the Druze leader, Walid Jumbat, viewed the Party as a liberation movement, although in other instances he had accused Nasrallah for implementing Syrian and Iranian agendas in Lebanon. The art of alliance shifting in Lebanon was a common practice that Hizbullah had become accustomed to in its experience in the parliament, allowing it to develop alliances with others; notably, Amal and the Christian Free Patriotic Movement. In any case, this art of alliance implied that it would be able to persuade support among the Lebanese political elite.

Another issue that was taunting Hizbullah was the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL),¹¹⁴ which was proposed in March 2006. It had become a central concern in the Lebanese political

¹¹⁴ It was not officially established until 2007 and did not officially open its doors until 2009.

scene as the number of assassinations were increasing after Hariri such as that of Gebran Tuéni, Samir Kassir and others (Leenders, 2006, p. 42).¹¹⁵ The assassinations were linked to Damascus and possibly local allies, further agitated the public opinion against Hizbullah. Moreover, a further indication on the ambivalent balance of state-society was an incident in the early summer of 2006. In the general hue of free speech in Lebanon in the post-Syria era, Nasrallah was mocked on national television in a political satire show *Basmat Watan*. This caused an unprecedented riot where the Shia constituency of Hizbullah took the streets and particularly the Sunni and Christian areas. The Shia protesters were not easy to control. Notwithstanding the efforts of Hizbullah's rank and file to contain the riots, it was not until Nasrallah's public appearance which technically 'ordered' them to return. This incident, which took place a month and a half prior to the July War of 2006, was indicative of two factors: first, the Lebanese populations overall associated Hizbullah with Syria more often than not and it was accused of prohibiting freedom of speech (Alagha, 2011b, p. 122; Norton, 2014, p. 133) and second, the Party had an effective and strong mobilization power within its constituency. Notwithstanding the Party's efforts to recuperate control by entering the government, it still had lost its legitimacy remained limited to within the boundaries of its constituency.

While on a domestic front Hizbollah was facing immense pressures, the regional environment was more favourable. Already since Bashar al-Assad took the reins of Damascus in 2000, the relationship with Hizbollah had become more positive. The Syrian withdrawal rendered the relationship more equal in terms of power relations. In this sense, despite organisations' agony vis-à-vis the Syrian withdrawal in terms of the domestic political scene, it was becoming more autonomous (Scheller, 2014, p. 146). At the same time, Hizbollah would defend its ally but not in the expense of its reputation among its domestic allies (El-Hokayem, 2007, p. 43). Syria's departure from Lebanon had facilitated the relationship between Tehran and Hizbullah. Iran's new government under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who took office in mid-2005, sought to strengthen relations with Hizbullah. With Syria out of Lebanon, Iran was now more flexible to assist the Party without endangering its relationship with Syria, the only Arab ally—at the time—in the region. Ahmadinejad's foreign policy agenda was similar to "the early years of the [Iranian] revolution" in many aspects (Hunter, 2010, p. 229). The Iranian government viewed suspiciously the US

¹¹⁵ The victims were opposed to the Syrian influence in the Lebanese political scene.

policies in Afghanistan and Iraq. Within the context of the antagonistic regional dynamics, Iran opted to solidify an alliance with Syria and Hezbollah and to an anti-Israeli rhetoric to counter the US alliance with Saudi Arabia (Tinas, 2018, p. 132), marking a drastic turn in US-Iranian relations. Although Iran was quick to demonstrate the warming of relations with Hizbullah in 2005 so as to prove the length of its hand in the region, the relationship was “relatively supple” (Daher, 2019a, p. 129). Hizbullah welcomed the new Iranian leadership amidst a genuine Lebanese crisis as it believed that it would attain further support (Samii, 2008, p. 49). The regional alliances were perhaps the most fundamental positive development for Hizbullah since the years of the Israeli occupation of Lebanon.

Another significant regional development that occurred in 2005 was a change in Israel’s attitude towards Hizbullah. Generally, there was “occasional skirmish between Hizbullah and the Israeli army” since the withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 (Kaufman, 2006), which, over the years, the two sides have developed a *set of rules* that would prevent the tensions from escalating. However, Israel was extremely preoccupied with the developments on the Palestinian Occupied Territories, as Hamas took over Gaza after its victory in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections. Hamas had also increased its attacks against Israel and they were seen to be linked with Hizbullah. In fact, when Hizbullah abducted the two soldiers on July 12, 2006, Israel perceived them to have a connection with Hamas’ abduction of another Israeli soldier and the killing of two others in a cross-border raid a few weeks before (Özlem, 2007, p. 118). This rendered the Israeli-Palestinian conflict a prime reason that triggered the Hizbullah-Israeli war on 2006 in the eyes of many analysts (Avon, Khatchadourian, & Todd, 2012, p. 82; Prados, 2007, p. 13). From an Israeli perspective, Hizbullah’s operations at the time were viewed under the prism of the “Axis of Terror and hate created by Iran, Syria, Hizbullah and Hamas”, as Tzipi Livni, the Israeli vice prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, put it (Blecher, 2006). IDF intelligence was also monitoring communications between the two that exacerbated Israel’s attitude. More specifically, the reports suggested that Hizbullah “was developing a first-strike capacity to unleash massive, pre-emptive rocket attacks on Israel” (Norton, 2014, p. 134). In turn, IDF was preparing for a grand scale attack on Hizbullah (Hersh, 2006). These development were occurring in an precarious regional environment in which Iran enriched its “uranium to a level of 3.5 per cent” (Hirst, 2011,

p. 348), expanding its nuclear program.¹¹⁶ As Ahmadinejad put it, Iran became part of “the nuclear club of nations”, which would “change all the power equations in the region and beyond, turning Iran into the biggest power in the Middle East” (Naji, 2008, p. 134). IRL’s increased hostilities towards Israeli forces between 2005 and 2006 were interpreted as an extension of Iran’s projection of power. Specifically, the war of 2006 was seen as Iran’s “way out of its [diplomatic] dilemma” with the US (Ajami, 2014). The threat of Iran’s nuclear program on both Israel and the US had rendered the former quite tense vis-à-vis Hizbullah.

In terms of foreign policy goals, Hizbullah’s attacks against Israel were framed around the right to regain the Shebaa farms, the deterrence against Israeli forces in Lebanon and the release of Lebanese prisoners in Israel. The first two had rather waned their impact both on a popular level but also among the Lebanese elite. The latter, however, had become a central issue that was revived every now and then. The release of Lebanese prisoners became known as the ‘Faithful/True Promise’, *Waad al-sadiq*. According to Hizbullah, the issue of Lebanese detainees in Israel “could only be solved through an exchange of war prisoners with Israel. The Resistance therefore focused on operations of capture, planning for a number of these and often concentrating its efforts” (Qassem, 2012, p. 179). On April 24, 2006, in a ceremony marking Hizbullah’s cadre, Samir Kuntar’s twenty-eight year of detention in Israeli prison,¹¹⁷ Nasrallah stated that 2006 would mark the fulfilment of the *faithful/true promise*, “pledging publicly to act for the liberation of the detainee”, referring to Kuntar (Achcar & Warschawski, 2015, pp. 31-32). One of the latest successful prisoner exchanges occurred, prior to Syria’s departure, in 2004 via German mediation, which resulted in the return of one Israeli officer and the bodies of three soldiers in exchange for the release of four hundred Palestinian and twenty-three Lebanese prisoners (Norton, 2014, p. 117). Not long after Syria’s departure, Hezbollah attempted to capture, on November 2005, IDF soldiers on the Lebanese border with the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights; to no avail. Israel’s impatience was unveiled in some months prior to July 12, 2006. As noted by Norton, in late May 2006, Hizbullah wounded an Israeli soldier on the border post; instead of Israel responding by “shelling a few Hezbollah positions and command and control centers”, it chose to bomb “twenty

¹¹⁶ For a detailed analysis on Ahmadinejad’s administration on the nuclear program see Kasra Naji (2008, p. Chapter 4) and Shireen T. Hunter (2010, pp. 64-68)

¹¹⁷ Kuntar was responsible for the murder of many Israelis in the 1980s. Once captured Israel refused to release him despite the numerous prisoners’ exchanges that occurred since 1985. Finally, he was part of the prisoner exchange deal of 2008. He later played a role in Hizbullah’s operations in the Syrian civil war and was killed by a rocket attack claimed by the Free Syrian Army.

Hezbollah positions along the border and destroying many of them” (2014, pp. 134-135). Unlike the previous unsuccessful attacks, on July 12, 2006, Hizbullah demonstrated its military prowess by crossing the Israeli border, where IRL militants kidnapped two soldiers and killing eight others and destroying a state-of-the-art Merkava tank (Norton, 2014, p. 135). Israel’s retaliation demonstrated that it was in a state of preparedness in anticipation of an attack. Nasrallah was clear in his speech the next day that he was open to negotiations for prisoner exchange but also stated that Hizbullah and the IRL were equally in a state of preparedness.

As far as Hizbullah was concerned, the prisoner exchanged would have provided the organisation leverage to maintain its weapons. While both parties were prepared for an escalation, Hizbullah would have preferred that the fighting would remain within the parameters of its territory in the South. Israel’s attacks, however, reached the heart of Beirut, which brought the organisation in confrontation with both the Lebanese state and the entire country’s population. From the first days of the July War, it was not a war between Israel and Hizbollah, but an Israeli war against Lebanon. It was clear that Israel was attempting to inflict enough rage among the Lebanese population that would delegitimize Hizbullah in order for it to be seen as the *real* culprit for Israeli attacks on Lebanese territory. The destruction of Lebanon was so devastating that Nasrallah said in an interview on New TV amidst the war, if Hizbullah would have known the extent of Lebanon’s devastation, it would have not kidnapped the two soldiers (Alagha, 2011b, p. 127). Within the thirty-three days (July 12 until August 14) of war between IRL and IDF, Lebanon was sieged by air, land and sea. In the eight weeks, Lebanon endured traumatic bombardment, which destroyed various infrastructures, some estimations indicate approximately 1500 buildings, over half of the bridged over the Litani river, over 500 sections of roads, over 900 factories were hit or destroyed and almost the same number of cultivated fields, with material losses amounting to \$4-5 billion (Alagha, 2008, p. 124). According to BBC reports, almost a million Lebanese (a quarter of its population), were displaced or evacuated and over 1000 civilians killed (BBC, 2006). The military casualties included approximately 200 Hizbullah fighters and 28 Lebanese soldiers, as opposed to 118 IDF soldiers (Hafez, 2008, pp. 200-203; Norton, 2014, p. 143).

6.2.1. The Lebanese During the War

The Lebanese government’s rhetoric during the war reflected the rift between the March 14 and March 8 coalitions. While the President Emild Lahoud supported Hizbullah’s resistance against

Israeli aggression, the Lebanese government, led by Fouad Siniora, with a cabinet dominated by the March 14 bloc, chose to distance itself from the Hizbullah's actions and claim neutrality; more specifically, it stated that "the government was not informed of the operation and it does not approve of it", relinquishing any responsibility of the escalation of war on Lebanon (Tinas, 2018, pp. 134-135).¹¹⁸ This stance expressed the opinion of Hariri and Jumblatt, who alongside the government, condemned the Israeli attacks but never called for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to join IRL in defending Lebanon. Many within March 14 bloc were hoping that IDF's superior military capacity would weaken—if not destroy—IRL, as Wikileaks documents confirmed (US Embassy in Beirut, 2006a, 2006b). In their view, the July War was an opportunity to counterbalance the Party's power on the domestic arena. As the war proceeded and the Lebanese infrastructure was being systematically destroyed by IDF, the Lebanese government had attempted to generate a favourable international climate that would impose a ceasefire. In fact, Siniora's speech at the international conference in Rome in July 15, 2006, proposed a Seven-point plan,¹¹⁹ which included the disarmament of Hizbullah, further fuelling the polarization within the country amidst a full-war.

The first weeks of the war demonstrated the differentiation on foreign policy issues among different groups within the government. In essence, it brought to the surface Hizbullah's capacity to manage its own foreign policy agenda. It gave its own speeches addressing not only its constituency but the Lebanese people as a whole. In many levels, Nasrallah's speeches resembled those of a leader of a nation, encouraging fighters and showing compassion to civilians. Hizbullah's media was able to launch an information warfare not only against Israel but also against domestic threats. Nasrallah publicly claimed that the Party "has been planning for this operation for almost five months now" and did not "inform the Cabinet of the plans to capture these soldiers" (AlahedNews, 2006c). Hizbullah framed the forces that seek to disarm IRL as a direct threat to the Shia community, claiming that "to eliminate the weapons of the resistance is to eliminate the Shia, and to eliminate the Shia is to eliminate Lebanon" (ICG, 2007, p. 6). While in some instances the General Secretary attempted to connect the pro-government forces to the US

¹¹⁸ On 25 July, Prime Minister Siniora participated in an international conference aimed at bringing an end to the war in Lebanon, and presented his Seven-point Plan. The plan, in brief, sought the release of the Lebanese and Israeli prisoners and detainees, withdrawal of the Israeli army behind the Blue Line, the official border between Lebanon and Israel declared by the UN in 2000, (Tinas, 2018, p. 139)

¹¹⁹ See full speech and proposal of the Plan of Siniora's official website (Siniora 2006)

and Israel, in others he invoked an anti-sectarian rhetoric to appeal to Sunnis in the Arab world (Khatib, 2011, p. 72). Appealing to the hearts and minds of the Arab public was a much easier affair than achieving support from the Arab regimes; it attempted widen its audience in the Arab world via its networks it televised the war on pan-Arab satellite (El Hourri & Saber, 2010; Khatib, Matar, & Alshaer, 2014, p. 83).

On July 15 of 2006, Saudi Arabia called for a Ministerial Council of the Arab League meet in Cairo. The July War had generated three conflicting trends towards the extent of Hizbullah's responsibility of causing the war. The first group viewed Hizbullah as 'irresponsible' and 'untimely', it included Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, the Palestinian Authority, UAE and Bahrain; the second group, which included Syria and Yemen, believed that Hezbollah's actions against Israel were legitimate, and, the third group, which included Morocco, Sudan and Libya, did not blame Hizbullah but suggested that it should have informed the Lebanese government (Ahmad, 2008, pp. 242-243). Interestingly, Lebanon's foreign minister Fawzi Salloukh, was Shia, endorsed by both Hizbullah and Amal, supported Hizbullah actions stating that IRL's "only aim was to liberate Lebanese territory still under occupation, release Lebanese prisoners held in Israeli prisons for over 26 years and liberate the Shebaa Farms" and claimed that IRL "had saved the Arabs from their current state of affairs, liberated Lebanon and restored Arab pride and the spirit of Arabism" (Ahmad, 2008, pp. 242-243). Having said that, a decision nor a resolution ever came out of the meeting. The statement that was published merely reflected the perception of the first group and claimed that no opportunity should be given to Israel to cause damage to any Arab state. In essence, the Arab League agreed to stand behind Lebanon and Siniora's government. In any case, the popular solidarity towards Lebanon and the resistance countered the passive Arab leaders' stance.

Hizbullah's resilience on the battlefield and the increasing humanitarian situation appeased the Lebanese government polemic stance towards the Party. The Israeli airstrike on Qana, in the end of July, that killed over 50 people, mostly civilians and children, greatly impacted the Lebanese government, whose rhetoric started to converge with Hizbullah's (Hirst, 2011, p. 389). This stance was crystalized in a common statement stating that "they refused to enter into any diplomatic negotiations until a ceasefire was assured", in which Siniora demonstrated his support of IRL forces and thanked Hizbollah for its sacrifices for Lebanon (Wilkins, 2011, p. 165). While Hizbullah was not winning, it did remain mostly intact; all the while the country was descending

into a humanitarian crisis. This situation became evident only a couple of weeks into the war. The Lebanese government came to realize that Israel was unable to destroy Hizbullah. Nasrallah gave the green light to the government to proceed on a common stance. Amal's Nabih Barri was mediating between Nasrallah and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (Tinas, 2018, p. 141). With the entire government on Hizbullah's side, Nasrallah had more leverage to negotiate. This was evident in the process of drafting the UN Resolution 1701, which was finally accepted by the Security Council on 11 August 2006. The proposal was initially rejected by Lebanon as it did not render the Israeli withdrawal as a precondition for the ceasefire. It was not accepted after amending this clause. Based on the UN Resolution 1701, 15,000 troops of the LAF would be deployed in South Lebanon, as the Israeli army withdraws behind the Blue Line' in assistance with UNIFIL as needed, "to facilitate the entry of the Lebanese armed forces into the region [South Lebanon]" (UN Security Council, 2006). At the same time, the UN Resolution crystalized a compromise between the March 14 bloc and Hizbollah, at least on paper. LAF's and UNIFIL's deployment would theoretically hinder Hizbullah's sovereignty on Southern Lebanon and assert full control of the Lebanese state on the entire Lebanese territory. Thus, Siniora's government limited Hizbullah to some extent. In regards to the UN Resolution, Nasrallah publicly approved it "with many reservations, pending verification in practical implementation", lamenting over "unfairness of the resolution, which refrained in its preambles from any condemnation of Israel's aggression and war crimes", but acknowledged that "it could have been much worse and expressed his appreciation for the diplomatic efforts that prevented that from happening" (Achcar & Warschawski, 2015, p. 48). Hizbullah was content, so long as the issue of disarmament of IRL—a central institution in the composition of the organisation—was not part of the international agreement.

Albeit the brief unity within Lebanon towards the end of the war, the July War concealed momentarily the issues within Lebanon and burdened the country with massive destructions. The dire consequences of the war demonstrated that July 12, 2006 was a miscalculated choice on both sides. Despite the nature of the asymmetric warfare, the war ended in a tie; but it was interpreted differently from both. In the eyes of the Israelis, as Harel and Issacharoff (2008), "a tie is same as defeat". Undoubtedly, Hizbullah's foreign policy choice to kidnap Israeli soldiers so as to negotiate the release of Lebanese prisoners and boost its prestige in the post-Syrian era of Lebanon did not anticipate the large-scale conflict that followed. It may be argued that it was strategic mistake that wrecked all the accomplishments of Lebanon in the post-civil war era. However, Hizbullah after

a sober statement of Nasrallah in the immediate aftermath of July War, calling for national unity and solidarity, a couple of weeks later it started to capitalize and project a sense of victory. More specifically, in the beginning of Ramadan, in late September of 2006, Nasrallah claimed “Let us renew our covenant and declare our joy at the divine victory to the whole world”(AlahedNews, 2006b). On a popular level for most of the people in the region, Hizbullah’s resilience was viewed as the first Arab victory in a round of Six Arab-Israeli wars. Hizbullah’s evolution of strategy and military performance was not expected by the IDF (DeVore, Stähli, & Franke, 2019; Gabrielsen, 2014). The fact that the IDF was unable to destroy the organisation both politically and militarily, allowed Hizbollah to rise stronger from the ashes of war in terms of its military capacity as well as to fortify its resistance discourse.

6.2.2. Assessing the Intervening Variables

While there is no evidence to suggest that Hizbullah’s foreign policy aimed at waging a large-scale war against Israel, the choice to abduct the Israeli soldiers was, on the one hand, possible due to the outcome of structural opportunities that emerged from the new balance of power in the region. The Syrian and Iranian alliance with Hizbullah had fortified its military capacity and in combination with its new – yet brief alliance with Hamas, who had abducted another soldier in mid-June – Hizbullah would be able to increase its leverage in the negotiations with Israel regarding the prisoners’ exchange. The aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq polarised the region and set the foundations for a Saudi-Iranian rivalry with a sectarian hue. The Shia Crescent was interpreted by its opponents as an Evil force in the region. On the other hand, the Shia’s in the region saw this as an echo from the past where their people were being ostracized. Despite the efforts of Hizbullah to appeal to the general Arab public beyond a sectarian discourse as a liberation movement rather than a Shia force, the organisation failed, as proven by the Arab League stance during the July War. If the July War would be treated as an extension of the Arab-Israeli wars, Hizbullah would have probably come out of it even stronger. To a large extent, the lack of clarity in regard to the shortfall of the Arab leaders as well as in the anticipation of Israel’s intention to escalate into a full wage-war, albeit the indications, were both a result of Hizbullah’s perception of the system.

One may argue that this lack of clarity in the perception of Hizbullah occurred as a result of the pressures regarding IRL’s arms within Lebanese structural system. Syria’s withdrawal would bring to the surface the thorny issue of Hizbullah’s arsenals, which according to the Taif Accords

of 1990 should have been dismantled. The absence of Damascus from the political affairs of Lebanon left Hizbullah with the challenge to prove the necessity of its weaponry in the domestic realm. While this legitimacy was secured within its Lebanese Shia constituency, the confessional political system required the organisation to acquire some level of legitimacy from the Lebanese political forces. The organisation's participation in the government in 2005 rung the bells of the first round of *bras de fer* with March 8 alliance, which revolved mainly around the issue of IRL. In turn, it was a catalyst that destabilized the relationship between Hizbullah's leadership and the Lebanese society. Hizbullah attempted to invoke IRL's ability to protect the Lebanese in the post-Syrian era. In this sense, it may be argued that Hizbullah opted to the abductions as a necessity to preserve IRL. In addition, the absolute support of its constituency and the leadership's capacity to mobilize, recruit and count on its constituency reveals the latter's dedication to the Party. This renders the state-society variable much entrenched in the strategic culture of the Party. Thus, the abduction tactics served a foreign policy strategy, which has been influenced by the Hizbullah's perception of the system,

Hizbullah's strategic culture was evident in how the Party sought to display its resistance identity to serve its ultimate goal which is the preservation of its arsenal. The subsequent involvement of Hizbullah in the Lebanese government further proves its strategic flexibility. The threat to its territoriality was also vital in its decision-making. In practice, after the July war the organisation was able to preserve its authority in Southern Lebanon, regardless of the deployment of the LAF and UNIFIL in those areas, which are overwhelmingly Shia and Hizbullah supporters. Thus, IRL continued to enjoy free movement and use those areas to launch attacks on northern Israel.

IRL's projection of power by attacking Israeli forces seems to increase as the resistance's legitimacy is threatened. It became more palpable during the intense political crisis between 2006 and 2009 in Lebanon. During this time, IRL's responses towards Israel became more provocative and Nasrallah did not miss any opportunity to reiterate IRL's capacity to that "all of Israel is within Hizbullah's missiles reach" and that it would not hesitate to retaliate (Alagha, 2011b, pp. 128-129). In November 2007, as Israel was conducting a military drill in the security zone between Lebanon and Israel by deploying 50,000 military personnel, Hizbullah "immediately responded with a three-day military drill, which involved the mobilization of 120,000 of its elite fighting force, dressed in civilian clothes" (Alagha, 2011b, p. 128). This incident established a set of new

rules between Hizbullah and Israel; ever since, both sides have been at the edge of a war. The latter's foreign policy continued to carry the connotations of the negative correlations well into the next decade and even expanded its operations from Syrian territory after 2013-2014. At every turn that IRL was either directly or indirectly put under scrutiny within the domestic political scene, the Party projected IRL's all-evolving military capacity towards Israel.

6.2.3. The Battlefield in Lebanon's Political Structure

The political situation in Lebanon became quite precarious in the aftermath of the July War as the confrontation intensified between Hizbullah-led March 8 and the coalition of March 14. The Lebanese political scene became a theatre in which Hizbullah was able to project its mobilisation power that consistently destabilised the political establishment, leading eventually to an eighteen-month political crisis. Much of the regional polarisation was mirrored within Lebanon. March 14 coalition was supported by US and Saudi. They further pushed for the materialisation of the UN Resolution that called for Hizbullah's disarmament and the establishment of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, putting the Party on the spotlight for Hariri's assassination. In Hizbullah's perception, its disarmament and IRL's integration within the LAF was not negotiable. The organisation sought a greater role in the political structure of Lebanon by attaining a veto power that would safeguard Hizbullah's core concerns such as cabinet decision-making, foreign policy issues and the future of IRL (Salloukh et al., 2015, p. 162).

As of December 2006, the organisation used several non-violent civil and political means to push back on these pressures, such as sit-ins and demonstrations that paralysed Lebanon. Politically, in cooperation with Amal and the Free Patriotic Party, Hizbullah withdrew government ministers and achieved to block the elections of a new president forcing the government of Siniora to resign. In Hizbullah's eyes, the March 8 bloc was resisting against the pro-American forces within Lebanon. The balance between violent and non-violent resistance tipped towards the former, when the cabinet announced to investigate Hizbullah's communications network and installing surveillance cameras at the Beirut airport under the pretext that the Party was violating state laws. The fact that the network was part of the IRL and was used for security purposes, Nasrallah considered, as he put it, "[t]he [government's] decisions are tantamount to a declaration of war and the start of a war on behalf of the US and Israel" (Stephan, 2009, p. 240). In response, he stated that Hizbullah "would cut off the hands" of anyone who dared to touch IRL (Salem,

2008). Although Nasrallah never publicly called for riots or official attacks, many pro-Hizbullah fighters took the streets in May 4 of 2008. Battles unravelled in the heart of Beirut, violently attacking government building and the Sunni neighbourhoods which turned into a three-day battle that later spread to Tripoli between Sunnis and Druze, leaving over sixty-five dead and over 200 injured (Stephan, 2009).¹²⁰ The battle stopped after the decision was revoked by the government. The Arab League mediated for a national reconciliation in the end of May in Doha; all Lebanese parties agreed for general elections to take place in 2009 and allowed Hizbullah to attain veto power for the time being.

Hizbullah's use of force against civilians – who were mostly of Sunni background – implicated it into vicious cycle of confessional politics (Stephan, 2009, p. 135), with irreversible implications on the state-society relations between Hizbullah's leadership and most of the Lebanese people as well as on IRL's legitimacy. This was evident in the election results of 2009. Despite Hizbullah's efforts to demonstrate a more moderate face with prominent educated professionals such as Nawwaf Mousawi, Hussein Mousawi, and Ali Fayyad, March 14 bloc won the elections with 71 seats. Nevertheless, these upheavals had not disrupted the bond between Hizbullah's leadership and its constituency; Hizbullah-led bloc attained 54 percent of the popular votes and 88 percent of the Shia votes (Zahar, 2012, p. 80). The new government relinquished Hizbullah's veto power which was previously agreed upon in the Doha Agreement (Herrick, 2010, pp. 185-186). Yet, in the day after, Nasrallah publicly accepted the results. In the two speeches that followed the elections AlahedNews (2009a, 2009b), Nasrallah reiterated the basic principles announced in Hizbullah's new 'Manifesto' of 2009 (Alagha, 2011a). Nasrallah went on criticising the sectarian dynamics within the political scene; without negating the organisation's Islamic nature, the rhetoric hue became more nationalistic to convince the public of its patriotic conviction as opposed to having an Iranian agenda; Nasrallah asserted that the organisation will continue to seek the right to veto and suggested that the discussions on national unity should continue aside from the issue of its weapons (Berti, 2011, pp. 956-957). Indeed, the tug of war continued in a more subtle tenor. IRL was not put on the table per se but other issues indirectly relating to it (such as the Special Tribunal for Lebanon) started to take centre stage in the March 14 and March 8 confrontation after 2009. The speeches as well as the Manifesto unfolded much of Nasrallah's

¹²⁰ It should be noted that LAF claimed neutrality. Some argue that Hizbullah 'struck a deal with military leaders' (Salem, 2008)

perspective of the system. He sought to justify that he does not represent Syrian and Iranian interests and if it were so, then it would not have accepted the results of the elections. However, Hizbullah acknowledged the pro-US and pro-Saudi forces' dominance within Lebanon and countered them by fortifying and accrediting its relationship with Syria and Iran as strategic alliances.

All in all, the main results of July's War were that IRL as an institution and the notion of resistance as a strategic culture will continue to occupy a central role for Hizbullah against all odds. Although its popular support was limited within the Shia constituency, it still required so level of legitimacy from the Lebanese society overall. To this end, the organisation intended to penetrate and integrate into the political scene at all costs. It had to reverse the damage caused by the clashes in 2008, which crystalized the regional effects of the Sunni-Shia rift discourse that was plaguing the region. Thus, Hizbullah was attentive towards being associated with Iran and Syria, by shifting the gravity into the domestic political scene, its choice to participate in the Lebanese political system, especially since 2005, has rendered the organisation dependent on the Lebanese political structure. The dependency, however, does not deny Hizbullah its autonomy as a state-like actor just as much as its dependency on Syria and Iran does not negate its own agency. What becomes even more evident in the post-2005 era, is that the Lebanese political structure is in itself susceptible to the regional structure as the power-sharing conflicts on a domestic level mirror the regional rifts. Hizbullah's rhetoric and actions prove that in its leadership's view the two structures as a continuum of the very same system in which it attempts to survive and maintains its strategic goals and interests.

6.3. Hizbullah's Foreign Policy and The Syrian Crisis

The Arab popular uprising waves that galvanized the region were transformed into violent unrests, by mid-January 2011 that intensified polarization and sectarianized the geopolitics of the Middle East. Syria's popular unrest was unable to bear the fruits of the euphoria projected by the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. The relentless crackdown of Assad's regime, the splitting ranks within the Syrian army as well as the Saudi and Qatari financial and military assistance to rebel forces avalanched Syria into a bloody civil war. The fall of Assad would change the balance of power in the escalating confrontation between Iran and Saudi Arabia in an effort to fill the vacuum left by the gradual US retreat from the region. A pro-Saudi regime in Syria would be a strategic victory

that would contain Iranian influence in the Middle East. From the Saudi perspective, a regime change in Syria became central as it had already lost a 'Sunni-ruled Iraq' to Iran, despite Riyadh's efforts (Salloukh, 2013, p. 41). The Syrian crisis became a critical front for the Saudi-Iranian *bras de fer* and, even more so, for Hizbullah.

From a structural perspective, Hizbullah's support of Assad's regime was more than warranted, especially, considering the implications that a pro-Saudi regime in Syria would have on Hizbullah. Syria had become a place where IRL was allowed to train and store weapons. Hence, the Party opted for a cautious and passive foreign policy, favouring reform and calling for a political solution between the regime and the opposition at the onset of the Syrian uprising. The reluctance of the party to become further involved in Syria stemmed from the consequences such a decision would have on its political composure within Lebanese political system and on the delicate Sunni-Shia balance within Lebanon as many Sunnis within the country (27%) supported the Sunni rebels in Syria (Hokayem, 2017, pp. 137-138; Phillips, 2016, p. 157). Nevertheless, as the Syrian crisis escalated, IRL became more involved by sending a limited advisory mission to assist the Syrian military forces. Hassan Nasrallah faced a genuine dilemma regarding the extent of support it would provide to Bashar al-Assad as the Syrian opposition forces were gaining ground in the Syrian battlefield. A possible overthrow of Assad's regime would have negative repercussions on IRL and, by extension, its power relations within Lebanese political scene.

The critical point was in May of 2013. Nasrallah announced that the IRL's members were officially fighting in Syria on the side of Assad's regime. Hizbullah's gradual shift from a passive to proactive foreign policy suggests that the leadership had initially decided to maintain a safe distance from the Syrian crisis. The current academic and policy analysis debate revolves around the extent that Hizbullah's choice was serving its own interest versus the interest of its allies. Justifiably, most of the scholarship leans towards the second as Hizbullah's choice of linking the Party's fate with that of Bashar al-Assad, an approach that was rather contradictory from its previous practices *vis-à-vis* the Syrian regime as well as disregarding the consequences it would have on Lebanon, was a great risk. These factors seem to validate suspicions that perhaps Hizbullah had little choice and was obligated by Iran. However, under the prism of neoclassical realism, Hizbullah seemed to have a choice and opted to a greater degree of involvement in Syria not as a result of Iranian pressure but due to structural constraints and opportunities that arose both within regional and Lebanese structures.

6.3.1. Hizbullah and the Arab Uprisings

Nasrallah had welcomed the uprisings in the region in 2011. The perspective of the downfall of pro-US regimes would change the balance of powers in the region. Hizbullah's leadership expressed repeatedly its solidarity "with [the] Arab peoples, their revolutions, uprisings, and sacrifices, mainly with the people of Tunisia [...] then Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, and Yemen".¹²¹ He condemned the regimes repressive reaction towards the protestors and advised them to adopt reforms that would met the protestors' demand (Daher, 2016, p. 172). When speculations circulated regarding the authenticity of the uprising and the possibility that they may be driven by external forces, the Party's leadership reiterated the popular character of the movements, stating:

"any accusation that claims that America is behind these revolutions, has incited and stirred them, and is leading them represents a false, unjust accusation of these peoples [...] These are regimes that follow America and harmonize with it that have offered and still offer services for the American plot, and that do not constitute any threat to the American policy—which is "Israel" in the Middle East [...] These are true, popular revolutions" (AlahedNews, 2011).

At the same time, Hizbullah sought to re-establish its 'movement' characteristics by identifying with the demands of the protestors across the region. Nasrallah in his speeches redirected the euphoria of the uprisings towards a rhetoric of a regional resistance—in line with the Party's values regarding the oppressed and the oppressor. In addition, this rhetoric was geared to position itself in favour of the popular uprising that was taking place in the heart of Beirut. Although the Lebanese 'Uprising of Dignity' in early January of 2011 was intended to protest against the corruption of the political and financial Lebanese elite, it was short-lived, as it was soon overshadowed by re-emergence of the perpetuating political crisis triggered by the tug of war between the March 14 and March 8 coalitions.

The wave of the Arab Spring had met Lebanon in a slow-brewing political crisis that brought down Hariri's government in January of 2011 over the contested politics revolving around STL.¹²² In light of the regional developments, the Druze leader, Walid Jumblatt, shifted his alliance

¹²¹ This statement was in an interview of Nasrallah in Al-Manar-TV on March, 2011. For the written version on the speech see AlahedNews (2011); For all the other speeches throughout 2011 in which he expressed his solidarity with the uprisings see AlhaedNews.

¹²² The precarious situation had promoted Saudi-Syrian mediation effort to settle the tug of war between March 14 and March 8. The regional powers had suggested that Lebanon's official institutions should end all direct involvement in the process of the tribunal by ceasing to finance it and withdrawing Lebanese judges. Hariri's refusal caused the resignation of the Cabinet's opposition member, leading to the fall of Hariri's government (Dingel, 2013, pp. 70-71).

and joined March 8 bloc, which offered the opposition the required majority, for the first time since Syria's withdrawal, to form a government. The formation of the new government took some time to establish itself as both blocs disagreed on particular ministerial positions. In fact, Syria's precarious situation had convinced many within the March 8 bloc to settle the issue as fast as possible. Assad even encouraged the funding of STL (Naharnet, 2011), bypassing Hizbullah's main requests on the matter. Assad's regime, now facing a Syrian uprising that ignited in March 25 of 2011, required a certain stability in Lebanon and a government, which could abstain from the Arab League sanctions on Syria (Scheller, 2014, p. 140). Even under the government of Najib Mikati, who was endorsed by Hizbullah, the latter failed to counter the March 14 bloc's pressure for the materialisation of STL. As PM Mikati had clearly stated, if the cabinet failed to vote for STL funding, he would resign (Dingel, 2013, p. 76). Even if Hizbullah managed to become part of the government, it could neither dictate nor have a direct influence on Lebanon's policy. This implied that the Party had not established its position within the Lebanese political scene – at least not in the degree that it would achieve the implosion of the STL project. Leaks to media indicated that Hizbullah members were directly linked to Hariri's assassination, rendering the Party's position extremely fragile. It seemed that the organisation was very much consumed into corroding “public support for STL or delegitimize domestic opponents by linking their agenda to Israel” (Ranstorp, 2016, p. 32) to spare resources for the Syrian unrest.

In the first phase of the Syrian crisis, Nasrallah's speeches were carefully put to balance the organisation's position between the Lebanese and regional political structures. In Nasrallah's first speech addressing the Syrian crisis (Al-Manar, 2011), he clearly highlighted the organisations support of Bashar al-Assad and prompted him to carry out reforms and enter into dialogue with the opposition. He further stated that Hizbullah recommends a political settlement for Syria as a regime change would be in Israel's and US' interests. Nasrallah's speeches would gradually build up on Hizbullah's support of Syria. Already three months later, Nasrallah – during an irrelevant speech regarding the Palestinian cause on Jerusalem Day (August 28) – spoke of the ongoing situation in Syria, stating that “some [US and Israel] are seeking the disintegration of Syria as part of a new Middle East agenda”, reminding its audience of Syria's leadership's contribution to the Palestinian cause as a common value of Hizbullah and Assad's regime (Al-Moqawama, 2011). Up until summer of 2012, Hizbullah maintained its position of not sending fighters into Syria, but

thenceforth, the party's official statements were continuously altered along with the structural dynamics.

6.3.2. Structural Constraints (2012-2013)

There are two factors that had direct impact on the structural constraints and opportunities that prompted Hezbollah to alter its foreign policy. First, Assad's regime consistent battlefield losses and, second, the spill over effect of the Syrian sectarian violence into Lebanon. In July 2012, the death of the Syrian minister of Defence and brother-in-law of Assad, Assef Shawkat, was a turning point in the Syrian crisis (Dagher, 2014; Solomon, 2012). For many, his death signalled the beginning of the end of Assad's regime. The prospects of Assad's survival seemed grim at the time, provoking his allies to support the Syrian military. Iran's had steadily increased its support by dispatching numerous IRGC advisers, including top Al-Quds commander, Qassem Suleimani, (Phillips, 2016, p. 150), who helped to form the Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas Brigade and trained various poorly disciplined Syrian army or para-military units such as National Defense Force (NDF), the Jaysh al-Shaabi and the shabiha (Ranstorp, 2016, p. 38). The Iranian involvement had enhanced the regional implications of the Syrian civil war as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and UAE emerged as the primary backers of the Syrian opposition. By the same token, Hezbollah viewed the Syrian civil war within context of the regional dynamics.

Nasrallah, in various speeches during 2012, exposed the change of Hezbollah's perception. For instance, he said that the Party supported the regime based of its readiness to engage in reforms and dialogue. However, in 2012, he emphasised on the continuous rejections of the Syrian opposition to enter negotiations with Assad. In addition, Nasrallah pointed out that the opposition has ceased to be a genuine popular movement after the weapons flooded into the country, claiming that pro-US forces in the region and al-Qaida were cooperating together to overthrow the Syrian regime, and, by extension, Hezbollah's resistance, seeking to realise the project of the New Middle East. The change of Hezbollah's discourse on the Syrian situation was accompanied with numerous speculations regarding the party's involvement in Syria. Some media reports suggested that Hezbollah fighters have been in Syria since 2011. While these reports seemed almost entirely circumstantial, more reliable sources seem to place members of Hezbollah's Unit 910 and selected cadres cooperating with the Iranian Quds Forces around Homs in July 2012 (ICG, 2014; Ranstorp, 2016, p. 37; Sullivan, 2014). It was around that time that there were multiple funerals of Hezbollah

cadres, such as that of Ali Nassif, that gave away the Party's involvement in the Syrian civil war. By mid-2012, the involvement pertained to an advisory mission to assist with technical and logistical support as well as training Assad's forces (Hokayem, 2017, p. 138; ICG, 2014, p. 1).¹²³ Hezbollah military advisory mission aimed to avert the possibility of Assad's fall and maintain Syria as the land bridge between Iran and Lebanon. In addition, a pro-US and pro-Saudi regime in Syria would be a drastic advantage for Israel and a leverage to the organisation's rivals in Lebanon to further push for IRL's disarmament and limit its political influence within the country (Saouli, 2013, p. 41). The exposure of IRL's involvement prompted Hezbollah to a new rhetoric of 'self-defense' against the Sunni jihadi groups within Lebanon and beyond. Indeed, there were many attacks of several Lebanese Shia individuals inside Syria in the summer of 2012, leading Lebanese Shia to retaliatory kidnappings of Syrians (Hokayem, 2017, p. 136). These were incidents that had built up in the Lebanese-Syrian border between 2011 and 2012, leading to a full spillover of the Syrian tremors into Lebanon.¹²⁴

6.3.2.1. Spillover into Lebanon

Lebanon's historical and geographical links with Syria made it vulnerable to the sectarianised civil war. On an official level, Lebanon's cabinet had stated Lebanon's disassociation from the Syrian crisis, which found a considerable portion of the Lebanese society in agreement (Hokayem, 2017, p. 133); with exception of part of the Sunni community. Part of Lebanese Sunni's from the political establishment were "sheltering Syrian defectors, running logistical networks, fundraising and recruiting Lebanese fighters" for the Syrian opposition (Hokayem, 2017, p. 136). It should be noted that although many Sunnis were supportive of the fall of Assad and in favour of the Syrian uprising, it was only a segment from within the Sunni community, especially in the northern and north-eastern part of Lebanon that identified with the Salafi-Jihadi groups that emerged in Syria's chaos.

¹²³ It should be noted that at the time there were accusation from Hezbollah's detractors that there were IRL fighters combating on Syrian territory fighting alongside Assad's forces (Naharnet, 2012).

¹²⁴ Further indication on Assad's will to export the violence into Lebanon and force Hezbollah's hand to further assist his regime, was the arrest of a pro-Assad former minister, Michel Samaha, who was planning an attack in North Lebanon in order to cause sectarian strife (Rabil, 2014, pp. 218-219), demonstrated Assad's intent to persuade Hezbollah to enter the war by exporting the sectarian tensions (Hokayem, 2017, p. 137). The arrest led to the assassination of Major General Wissam al-Hassan in October 2012, who gave the order of Samaha's arrest.

This trend emerged due to the sectarian toll of the Syrian civil war and the shortfalls of the mainstream Sunni Syrian opposition be it the Free Syrian Army or the National Syrian Council. The proliferation of Syrian Salafi-jihadi militants was not necessarily a result of Salafist ideology per se but became popular because it underscored their Sunni identity as opposed to the Alawite regime and attracted private funds from Gulf states (Luca, 2016, p. 58; Lund, 2013, p. 10). At the same time, many Sunni rebels were influenced by foreign fighters and, particularly, from neighbouring Iraq. Almost from the beginning of the uprising, there is evidence that Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was establishing jihadi cells in Syria (Abouzeid, 2014). This trend gave birth to various extremist groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (IS) and Ahrar al-Sham, to name a few, which had established themselves in various parts of Syria and had alliances with Salafi-Jihadi groups in Lebanon.

In addition, given the intensification of the pre-existing tensions, especially after the vacuum left behind Hariri's resignation, the interaction with Sunni rebels as well as Assad's attacks on them on Lebanese territory triggered the re-emergence of Lebanese Salafi-Jihadi groups (Salloukh, 2017, pp. 32-33; Saouli, 2014, p. 129). Although, there were many Salafi elements in Lebanon since 2007 that targeted "Shia's regardless of political affiliations", the Syrian crisis had reinvigorated a Salafi movement (Saab & Ranstorp, 2007). The Syrian sectarian rift had amplified the cause of groups such as Fatah al-Islam, Jund al-Sham, and the older Asbat al-Ansar, but most importantly the Salafi-Jihadi movement led by Ahmad Assir in the northern Lebanon, particularly, in Tripoli, Akkar and Sidon. The Salafi cleric, Assir, intended to spearhead a 'Salafi uprising' geared against Hizbullah (Fleming-Farrell, 2013). He propagated a new narrative in which it replicated the Sunni-Shia Syrian conflict within Lebanon. Assir espoused a Sunni rebellion against the Shia 'siege' of Lebanon (Knudsen, 2019, p. 10), similar to Syria. Furthermore, these groups' solidarity with the Syrian Sunni rebellion was based on the deep resentment towards Assad's regime 29-year occupation of Lebanon. By the fall of 2012, there was evidence that many Lebanese jihadists went to fight alongside the rebels in Syria (Luca, 2016, pp. 63, 75; Rabil, 2014, p. 219).

Beyond the political interconnectedness between Lebanon and Syria, the latter's high concentration of Sunni dominated cities and villages along the 375-kilometer shared border further inundated it by Syria's violence. The northern and northeast part of the country became a sanctuary for Syrian Sunni's (rebels, jihadists and refugees) who fled from the nearby Syrian villages that

were being attacked by regime forces. The Syrian opposition used Lebanese territory to target Assad's forces on the other side. The same area was also a hub for weapons, fighters and humanitarian assistance into Syria. The familial and territorial linkages between the two countries gradually transformed the Lebanese-Syria border into an additional theatre of operation of the Syrian civil war along sectarian lines. The growing Salafi threat in Lebanon had implicated and intensified the communal tensions. The spillover effect of the Syrian civil war had made its way to heart of Hizbullah stronghold as many Shias were facing cumulative attacks in the Beqaa Valley and Dahiyeh in the southern suburbs (Rabil, 2014; Ranstorp, 2016; Zelin, 2016).

At the same time, the developments on the Syrian front were also worrying Hizbullah's leadership, as the Syrian and Iranian forces were being hit hard by the Syrian opposition and the Salafi-Jihadi groups. IS, under al-Baghdadi's leadership, had captured almost all eastern Syria. The Syrian rebels had captured Al- Quasyr city in 2012 and, by 2013, they were gaining ground around Aleppo and the north, jeopardising the route that connects Damascus with the Mediterranean coast and Lebanon (Blanford, 2013; Sullivan, 2014). The advances of the rebels, despite the re-organisation of the Syrian forces with the assistance of the Iranian forces, had made Assad's position extremely vulnerable. It was during this time, when Hizbullah's role in Syria became more active. In April, 2013, Hizbullah officially announced IRL's full involvement in the Syrian civil war alongside the Syrian forces against the opposition as well as the Salafi-Jihadi groups. The developments in Syria and Lebanon had made it impossible for Hizbullah to maintain its passive role vis-à-vis the Syrian crisis. While there is no doubt that both Iran and Syria appealed to Hizbullah for more concrete assistance (Phillips, 2016, p. 157; Sullivan, 2014, p. 12); the degree that their appeal had on Hizbullah's decision is merely a logical extension of the common threat perception. A defeat of the Axis of Resistance in Syria would endanger the Shia across the Levant. It was already manifesting itself in Lebanon.

6.3.3. The Point of No Return: Spring of 2013

These structural constrains, as perceived by Hizbullah, had endangered its legitimacy within Lebanon. Thus, the justification to enter the Syrian civil war in overt combat was carefully calculated to deter implicating Lebanon and the Shia into a sectarian war. Hizbullah's role in Syria aimed to avert the overthrow Assad's regime, which would endanger its survival. The presence of the Salafi threat in the regional and domestic areas became an opportunity for Hizbullah to

substantiate its role and resistance in Syria against the Salafi-Jihadi within the broader context of its obligations vis-à-vis the Lebanese. More specifically, in 2013, Hassan Nasrallah stated that:

“Syria has been the spine of the resistance, so the resistance can’t stand still while that spine is being ruined [...] The US has brought in “al-Qaida” and the other Takfiris [salafi-jihadi] organisations from all over the world, paid them money, and offered them all the assistance they needed [...] Obviously, the Takfiris [salafi-jihadi] current is dominant among the Syrian opposition, and it is being funded and armed by a number of Arab and regional states [...] If Syria falls in the hands of the USA, Israel, Takfiris, and US instruments in the region, then the resistance will be besieged, and “Israel” will invade Lebanon to impose its conditions and revive its project again. If Syria falls, then Palestine, the Palestinian resistance, Gaza, the West Bank, and the Holy al-Qods (Jerusalem) will be lost and the people of our region will face a dark and cruel era!” (AlahedNews, 2013).

Hizbullah’s perception of the system justified its involvement and was in line with the strategic culture of the organisation. Undoubtedly, the regional and domestic developments had endangered Hizbullah’s survival in Lebanon, not only as a political organisation but also its military arsenal. The first and decisive manifestation of its new role in Syria was in the Battle of Qusayr in May 2013. Approximately 1500 IRL fighters were able to siege Qusayr and retake the city from the rebels in 17 days, almost single-handedly, as Syrian forces was “limited to logistical, artillery, and aerial support” (Sullivan, 2014, p. 23). Qusayr (Homs, Syria) was a city of strategic importance both for the Syrian regime and Hizbullah. Since 2012, the city was used by the rebels as a base to attack Shia areas in Hermel (Beqaa Valley, Lebanon) and facilitate the transportation of weapons and supplies from Lebanon. Recapturing Qusayr protected Hizbullah’s supply lines (Ezzi, 2020, p. 8) and cleared the corridor of Sunni rebels and jihadi groups (Blanford, 2013, p. 22; Hokayem, 2017, pp. 133-135). Hizbullah’s victories in large areas of Qalamoun mountains, including Yabrud, Nabk, and Rankous marked a turning point of the Syrian conflict. More importantly, however, it demonstrated Hizbullah’s commitment to contribute the success of Assad’s regime in Syria (Sullivan, 2014, p. 16).

Despite the secrecy on Hizbullah’s operations in Syria, it has been established that after Qusayr, IRL took a less protagonist role in the operations and functioned in an auxiliary role for Syrian and Iranian forces by providing man power and military tactical supervision (Nassief, 2014, pp. 21-23; Phillips, 2016, p. 131; Sullivan, 2014, p. 16). IRL’s operational choices indicated that it would take dominant military roles in battles whose locations interlinked Lebanon with rebel and jihadi forces and were strategically vital for Hizbullah’s security (Ezzi, 2020; White, 2013). When Russia’s military intervened in Syria in late 2015, IRL’s presence in the Golan Heights was

notable (Blanford & Orion, 2020, pp. 8-9). In the years that followed and until the de facto victory of Assad's regime in 2019, Hezbollah had increased IRL's military capacity as well as its regional role as a transnational militia.

6.3.3.1. Challenges in State-Society and Domestic Institutions

Hezbollah's official and extensive involvement in Syria had provided a pretext for the targeting of Lebanese Shia and increased its detractors within the Lebanese political scene. Despite the official disassociation of Lebanon, LAF was deployed in the border areas, on July 2012, to counter both the Syrian regime forces and rebel attacks into Lebanon and, most importantly, the Salafi-Jihadi movement that was proliferating in the north-eastern area (Nerguizian, 2018). Within the first months of Nasrallah's official announcement of IRL's role in Syria, a car bomb killed eighteen Lebanese in the Shia suburbs and another forty-seven Lebanese Sunnis in Tripoli. These escalations eventually led to the resignation of Mikati's government on March 2013. For many among the Lebanese public, Hezbollah was viewed as the primary culprit for the rise of Salafi-Jihadi elements. Nasrallah had to contain the domestic fallout from its growing involvement in Syria and secure a certain level of stability within Lebanon (Phillips, 2016, p. 159). The Lebanese Salafi-Jihadi movement had also become a great concern for the Sunni political establishment in Lebanon. Many within March 8 bloc, including Hezbollah, agreed to a government that would ease the sectarian tensions by allowing March 14 leaders to take key positions such as that of the Ministers of Interior and Justice and Defense (Zelin, 2016, p. 61). In addition, LAF operations would be in a tacit and cooperation with Hezbollah against radical Sunnis (Phillips, 2016, p. 159; Ranstorp, 2016, p. 45). Hezbollah's public policy was geared towards a "counter-terrorism strategy" that would "defuse the perception of Shia dominance in the army and government" (Zelin, 2016, p. 61) and give space to the Sunni political leaders to clampdown the Sunni extremists in Lebanon. To this end, by 2014, Nasrallah allowed LAF to take over the security of key Hezbollah areas, such as Dahiya (Al-Monitor, 2013), in order to avert any sectarian violence in Shia areas.

Hezbollah's leadership's relation with the Lebanese society was at the verge of deterioration. In addition, according to Pew Research Center polls conducted in 2011 and 2013, the organisation faced a decrease in its popularity across the region and, even, a drop of almost 5 percent within its own constituency. Notwithstanding the fact that some Lebanese Shia expressed doubts regarding the organisation's necessity to fight a war on Syrian territory (Hajj, 2013), an

overwhelming Shia majority remained “ideologically and emotionally connected with Hizbullah” (Lob, 2014, p. 6). The leadership sought to clarify that its involvement was for the sake of Lebanon and the Shia rather than fighting a foreign war. More specifically, Nasrallah had stated in 2013, “Syrians are fighting in Syria; we are not fighting on their behalf. We have no fighters in Deraa, Sweida, Raqqa or Hasaka. We are only present in Damascus, Homs, and areas near the border”, which would primarily protect Lebanon and secondarily improve Assad’s position in the battlefield (ICG, 2014, p. 8). The global condemnation of Salafi-jihadi groups and particularly the international coalition against the IS’ atrocities, influenced Nasrallah’s discourse as it mainly focused on IRL’s battles against. In practice, however, IRL’s main efforts were channelled to fight the Opposition Forces.

According to Kizilkaya (2017, p. 95), Hizbullah intended to highlight its role in Syria as the protector of the Shia by deploying IRL fighters around religious sites to avert their destruction, such as the Saidina Zainab shrine in southern Damascus. These justifications allowed the anti-Hizbullah coalition to accuse the Party fuelling the sectarian tensions in the first stages of its involvement between 2013 until 2014 (ICG, 2014). Notwithstanding, as the sectarian tensions declined in the post-2014 period, “many Lebanese including Christians”, acknowledged Hizbullah contribution in protecting Lebanon from IS (Sayigh, 2017), which up until August 2017, IS militants were occupying a 46 square miles area in the Arsal and Qalamoun.

This perception was cultivated after LAF’s and Hizbullah’s coordinated military campaign against IS and other jihadist forces in July-August of 2017 (Nerguizian, 2018). In the campaign, the coordination between IRL and LAF was not to be revealed as that would inflict the retreat of international financial assistance. In order to avoid this, Hizbullah led the first attack in South Arsal, repelling the large number jihadist groups from Lebanon. During the second phase of the campaign, LAF led the Fajr el Jurd offensive, which cleared the remaining extremists in Ras Baalbeck and el-Qaa outskirts (CSKC, 2014). In a secrete cooperation with the Hizbullah and the Syrian army, they squeezed the IS jihadists on both side of the border (Meier, 2018, p. 15). The General Secretary’s, Hassan Nasrallah, scope was to demonstrate the positive and necessary relation between IRL and LAF, claiming that Hizbullah fighters are ‘at the service of the LAF’ (Al-Manar, 2017), allowing the latter to take full credit for the anti-IS campaign even though, it was an ‘open secret’ that Hizbullah was central to the offensive.

Having said that, Hizbullah's political composure remained ambiguous within the Lebanese domestic scene. Its role in Syria had aggravated the sectarian relations within Lebanon. Even without IRL's involvement, Lebanon would have felt the tremors of the civil war next door. Only to consider that the estimates of Syrian refugees (mostly Sunni) in Lebanon are approximately 1.5 million, with only 1 million being registered with UNHCR (Atrache, 2020; Dobbs, 2014). Due to the overall financial interconnectedness between Lebanon and Syria after 2011, the Syrian unrest put strains on Lebanese economy gradually pushing it into a financial crisis. Yet, the Party's involvement undoubtedly exacerbated political and sectarian tensions and reasserted the problematics of IRL. The domestic considerations continually challenged Hizbullah's foreign policy towards the Syrian crisis.

The perception of threat was overwhelming for the organisation on two fronts: first, on a regional level, the possibility of a pro-US regime would have severe implications on Syria's role as a bridge the bridge that links Lebanon and Iran. In addition, given the Syrian-Lebanese political and economic interconnectedness, a Syrian Sunni regime would be an advantage for the March 14 bloc to impose the disarmament of the Party. Second, the Salafi-jihadist threat, which emerged as a direct consequence of the Syrian civil war, was not a concern that regarded Hizbullah exclusively, but it was a threat to Lebanon's stability. These structural threats, as perceived by Hizbullah's leadership, were central to the Party's decision to enter Syria and they could not be countered by other domestic considerations such as the implications on the Lebanese society. Resistance, as a pillar of its strategic culture, was at the forefront of the decision and was now enhanced, beyond the 'Zionist' threat. The Salafi-jihadist threat had now upgraded Hizbullah's regional stance that had a common agenda with the international coalition against IS. Finally, Hizbullah's disarmament and the implications it has on its legitimacy vis-a-vis the Lebanese society remain contested on the same extent as prior to the Syrian crisis. It is important to note that the dedication of its constituency and its capacity to mobilize remained equally stable and strong. In foreign policy terms, the central axis of Hizbullah's decision to dispatch IRL fighters into Syria was directly dependent on the structural implications of an anti-Hizbullah regime in Syria. Lebanon's implication into the war, be it for its geographical proximity that pertained the interminglement of Lebanese and Syrian on the bordering area, the large influx of Syrian rebels and refugees into Lebanon or Assad's persistence to export the violence would have simply prolonged the advisory mission with technical, logistical and supervisory assistance.

6.4. A New Regional Foreign Policy

Despite the financial and human cost, the Syrian civil war has advanced IRL's military and operational capacity (Blanford, 2017; Blanford & Orion, 2020). It has enriched its warfare tactics and experience with different type of weapons, especially rockets and missiles. Hizbullah's has established combat units on the Golan Heights along the Israel-Syrian-Lebanese border —beyond the area of the Shebaa Farms—expanding its front against Israel (Cambanis et al., 2019, p. 44). Since Hizbullah's gradual withdrawal from Syria, Nasrallah has returned on his rhetoric against Israel, given that after 2017 the Salafi-Jihadist threat has been contained. In the past few years, Israel and Hizbullah have 'upgraded' the rules of their game. Particularly, there seems an increased crossfire between Hizbullah and Israeli targets within Syria since 2017 indicating that the two sides are concerned about an encroachment (Jones & Markusen, 2018, p. 5). Nasrallah speeches seem to portray IRL's resistance against the Salafi-jihadist 'as a natural continuation of the first generation of resistance against Israel' by commemorating the liberation of eastern Lebanon, in 2018, in a similar way that Hizballah celebrated the liberation from Israeli occupation (Nilsson, 2020, p. 12).

In addition, unlike the first stages of the Syrian civil war, Nasrallah has been relatively vocal about IRL's advisory missions in Iraq and Yemen. Approximately 250 IRL specialist cadres have been sent to Iraq to assist the Iranian-Iraqi militia al-Hashd al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization Unit – PMU) as of the summer of 2014. Even after the defeat of IS, the advisory mission has simply decreased in size (Blanford & Orion, 2020, p. 9). Similarly, in Yemen, IRL supports the Zaidi Shia Houthis with technical and logistical support (Daher, 2016, p. 176). Houthi officials have been spotted in Hizbullah's headquarters in Beirut's southern suburbs; while Houthi fighters have been treated in the organisations hospitals in Lebanon's capital (Blanford & Orion, 2020, p. 9).

While the context of Hizbullah's alliances in the region are generally viewed under an oversimplified sectarian prism, the differences between the Houthis, Alawites and Hizbullah either theologically and ideologically may render the explanation null (Fraihat, 2016, p. 54). Instead, within the context of the Iranian-Saudi cold war, Hizbullah has become an indispensable ally to Iran. Rouhani's government, similar to his predecessor, have embraced a more open relationship with the Party. The extensive operations on the side of Iran and in an effort to broaden its military appeal on a regional level has come to a price regarding its European foreign policy dossier.

Particularly, since IRL's intervention in Syria, the EU has placed IRL in the terrorist list in the summer of 2013 (BBC, 2013), and ever since there has been an extensive discussion regarding the extent to which IRL should be treated differently and separately from Hizbullah as a Lebanese political party (Ezzi, 2020; O'Sullivan, 2013). Hizbullah has proven repeatedly that the IRL is an indispensable institution to the Party and it gears its foreign policy to counter imperialist forces in the region, be it the US, Israel or Saudi Arabia.

6.5. Conclusion

Hizbullah's pledge to resist and protect the Lebanese Shia have been the lever of the Party's rise. By the same token, its foreign policy is defined by a strategic culture that is deeply rooted in these principles and is based on institutions—such as IRL—that have been the backbone to its pledges. Under Hassan Nasrallah's leadership, the organisation attempted to develop two complementary platforms of foreign policy throughout the years; one via the Lebanese state as a component and competitor of the Lebanese political system and another via IRL as an actor within the regional political system. Its limited diplomatic endeavours within the EU and the Arab world have been hindered by its position within regional dynamics of the 21st century.

The liberation of South Lebanon from Israel was the main strategic goal since its inception and it became central to its threat perception. Under this prism, it is only natural that Hizbullah, like any other actor, to continue to cultivate its military power for deterrence purposes, even after the withdrawal of IDF in 2000. The Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005 was the first display of the new regional antagonism in the post-2003 Iraq, which fortified the organisations threat perception within the context of its alliance with Syria and Iran to counter the US and 'Zionist' hegemony in the Middle East. The antagonism was mirrored within the Lebanese political structure. The anti-Hizbullah forces within the country invoked the US-led UN Resolution 1559 which required IRL's disarmament of Hizbullah. In response, Hizbullah deployed a two-fold policy. On the domestic platform, the leadership opted to gain more control in the Lebanese political structure by its participation in the highest executive body in the country and counter from within the political arena the domestic efforts to destabilize the Party. At the same time, on its foreign policy platform it would engage in military activities to substantiate IRL's necessity. Within this context, the abduction of the Israeli soldiers in 2006 may be evaluated as a foreign policy choice that occurred primarily from the structural opportunity on the regional and domestic

level, which was much in line with the perception and strategic culture of the leadership. Additionally, the July War, albeit a miscalculation from both sides, verified that Hizbullah's preparedness to wage a full wage war puts the IRL, as an institution, on the top of its priorities. Finally, the two-fold policy demonstrated that the organisation's leadership view the regional and the Lebanese structures as a continuum of the very same system.

Hizbullah's bid to engage with the Lebanese political system has created an additional dependency with the Lebanese structure. On the one hand, it never genuinely subdued to the Lebanese political structure, even after the 2009 elections. On the other, it has not managed to penetrate it enough to be able to influence it towards Hizbullah's own interests. In turn, Lebanon's susceptibility to the structural dynamics further burdens Hizbullah's foreign policy platforms. This was manifested specifically between 2011-2013 during the Syrian crisis. While the Syrian conflict in itself became a theatre of operation for the regional antagonism of Iran with Saudi Arabia, the latter with UAE and Russia with the US (to a lesser extent), Lebanon was unable to remain immune on neither a political nor a social level, regardless of Hizbullah. In addition, the Party's initial stance of supporting a Syrian dialogue between the opposition and the regime indicated its prioritization of the Israeli and US threat. It was not until Assad's overthrow became a real possibility that IRL dispatched an advisory mission and it was not until a possible Saudi-friendly regime in Syria became a probability that Hizbullah opted for a combat mission. At the same time, the new Salafi threat similarly to the Israeli threat were steered towards two complementary platforms (domestic and foreign policy) to fortify IRL. The organisation has proved resilient to structural changes and persistent on its arsenal as means to protect the community and Lebanon. Hizbullah's strategic goal is to remain an autonomous political entity with all its parallel institutions including the IRL; thus, much of its foreign policy is based on achieving and securing this status.

Part III - KRG

Chapter 7: KRG as a Statelike Actor

7.1. Introduction

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has been the de facto ruler of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) since 1991.¹²⁵ Albeit not having attained international legal recognition, the Kurdish minority in Iraq has achieved almost tangible statelike characteristics as it has its own leadership with the monopoly of violence over a specific territory, institutions and constituency. As a result, Iraqi Kurdistan has been identified as an example par excellence for the phenomenon of de facto states (Gunter, 1993, 1995; Palani et al., 2020; Voller, 2012) quasi-states (Costantini & O’Driscoll, 2020; Jackson, 1990; Kolstø, 2006; Natali, 2010, 2015), semi-states (Chorev, 2007), pseudo-state (Dahlman, 2002), states within states (Bengio, 2012; Romano, 2004), secessional and unrecognized states (Caspersen, 2013; Caspersen & Stansfield, 2011) just to name a few. Much of the scholarship has analysed KRGs internal composition and its state-building process, such as the economy and the political organisation (Gunter, 1995; Leezenberg, 2002; Natali, 2010; Stansfield, 2003, 2017a) as well as its external behaviour vis-à-vis its relations with states (Bengio, 2014; Charountaki, 2012; Entessar, 2018; Gibson, 2016; King, 2013; Little, 2010; Mustafa & Aziz, 2016; Romano, Hussein, & Rowe, 2017) and even certain aspects of its foreign policy making and foreign relations (Charountaki, 2019; Gunter, 1997a; Sadoon, 2017; Sargis, 2005). Iraqi Kurdistan achieved the status of de facto state in two stages; namely, the first stage between 1991 and 2003, during which the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein withdrew the military and administrative forces from Iraqi Kurdistan after the US-led No Fly Zone (NFZ) over the Kurdish territory and the second stage in the post-Saddam era after 2003 in which the Kurds participated in the drafting of the Iraqi constitution to secure and upgrade their autonomous status within Iraq (Voller, 2012). The Iraqi Kurdish bid for an internationally recognized statehood has been a quest for over 100 years, as the latest 2017 referendum attempt to secede officially from Iraq attested. However, the official status of KRI today is still a federal region within the Republic of Iraq; thus, still attached to its ‘mother state’.

¹²⁵ In the following two chapters, the author will refer to the Kurdistan Regional Government as KRG, KRI or the Region interchangeably. While its primitive formation under the name IKF – Iraqi Kurdish Front, during the 1990s, is to replace the Kurdistan National Front.

Nevertheless, the level and effectiveness of its autonomy have rendered it a state in all but name. The structural system that allowed KRG to come into existence in 1991 commenced upon the Ottoman Empire's collapse in the 1920s and the British mandate in Iraq. The trajectory of the Iraqi Kurds from a rebellious community to a statelike actor unfolded over several decades, allowing it to gradually carve its own agency within Iraq and the Kurdish movement promulgated between Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. Henceforth, the Iraqi Kurdish leaderships oscillated between the constraints and opportunities provided by the international, regional and local dynamics in an attempt to materialize the Kurdish nationalist sentiment to attain the exclusive rule and autonomy of – what was at the time referred to as – Southern Kurdistan also known as Bashur. Today, KRG officials, both abroad and at home, refer to their territory as Kurdistan—largely disregarding the notion of Greater Kurdistan and their brethren in neighbouring states. Even though Iraqi Kurds have been conducting foreign policy since the 1920s, it was not until the post-Saddam era that they attained a high standing in international politics.

Prior to examining the main drivers of KRGs foreign policy, it is essential to examine its evolution as a statelike actor. While there is nothing novel in examining KRGs statelike characteristics per se, what is of interest in this chapter is to trace and deduce the key trends of KRGs strategic culture, its perception of the system, its relation to its constituency and even how institutions had been established in relation to its foreign policy. All of which were engendered and cultivated in the period prior to 1991 and appear to be primarily rooted in the unique phenomenon of the dual centre of power within KRG established by the prevailing Kurdish political parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). In order to better understand KRG's synthesis, the next section will examine the Iraqi Kurds in international and regional politics from the 1920s into the Cold War. By the same token, the implications of the Iran-Iraq war entrenched the power politics of two Kurdish leaders, KDP's Masoud Barzani and PUK's Jalal Talabani, that control the decision-making process of KRG. At the same time, the multiple Kurdish-Iraqi wars, as well as the inter-Kurdish conflicts between the 1960s and the 1990s, display a pattern of the two leaders' strategic culture, their perception of the system, and their relations with their constituencies. Finally, this chapter will delve into the significant structural opportunity that occurred both in the aftermath of the First Gulf War and upon Saddam's fall to highlight the dynamics that allowed the Iraqi Kurds to establish a de facto

rule of their territory and consolidate the institutional as well as KRGs political power, which, in turn, expanded and advanced the Iraqi Kurds' foreign policy.

7.2. Tracing Iraqi Kurds in International Politics

The international dimension of the Kurdish question was much dictated by the geopolitical and geostrategic aspirations of the British and French in the broader region in the first half of the twentieth century. The notion of a Kurdish state was mentioned in the Treaty of Sevres in 1920, according to which the Kurdish population of 'Greater Kurdistan'— which ranged from south-eastern Turkey (Northern Kurdistan), northern Syria (Western Kurdistan), northern Iraq (Southern Kurdistan), to north-western Iran (Eastern Kurdistan)—would conduct a referendum to decide their fate as peoples in the surging nation-states that arose from the collapse of the Ottoman empire.¹²⁶ The Great Powers entertained the idea of either a Kurdish state or many Kurdish states, which would function as a buffer between Turks and Arabs, keeping in check the surrounding states, namely Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran (Eskander, 2001, p. 153; Olson, 1992, p. 480). However, the diverging British foreign policies regarding the status of Mesopotamia,¹²⁷ on the one hand, and the emerging vigorous Turkish and Iranian nationalisms on the other, the Kurdish question was dissected, and the Kurdish populations in each of the four states embarked on different struggles for survival. By 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne, which divided the Ottoman territories and disintegrated the Kurdish-populated areas into four states (Ali, 1997), made it clear that the Great Powers did not intend for an independent state. The Kurds in Iran and Turkey were subjected to repressive policies during the interwar period, while Syria and Iraq, under French and British mandates, respectively, allowed the Kurds to have some leverage to negotiate certain aspects of their self-determination.

The population across Greater Kurdistan was susceptible to the political and social dynamics of the states that engulfed them. Its social fabric was characterized by strong tribal affiliation (McDowall, 2004; Romano, 2004, p. 154; Tripp, 2002), which translated into polycentric leaderships of the Kurdish movement that emerged in all corners of Greater Kurdistan

¹²⁶ For an analysis on the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) regarding the provisions for independence in the Council of the League of Nations and the Kurdish population see McDowall (2004, pp. 459-460)

¹²⁷ For the intra-British rivalry regarding British policies see Fontana (2010); Olson (1992)

in the post-World War I era.¹²⁸ In the aftermath of the Ottoman empire's dissolution, the Kurds oscillated between local rebellions and negotiations with the Great powers and/or the Arab, Turkish and Iranian authorities. The Kurdish population after World War I was estimated between 23 and 28 million, constituting approximately 20 per cent of the Turkish population, 15 per cent of the Iranian, 27 per cent of the Iraqi and 10 per cent of the Syrian (Romano, 2004, p. 154). The diverse socio-political trajectory that each Kurdish population experienced adds to the fissure within their movement, which is largely heterogenous, be it in linguistic, religious or cultural terms and, most importantly, gravely confined by tribal dynamics (Harris, 1977; McDowall, 2004, pp. 1-16). In turn, the territorial fragmentation that occurred in the intra-war period mirrored the disintegration within the movement as the polycentric leaderships differed in ideologies, convictions and styles of governance.

Notwithstanding the diverse trends within the movement, the symbolic unity under the banner of the Kurdish cause generated a political platform among all Kurdish political forces in which they would conduct alliances, seek inspiration and even antagonize each other. Having said that, each Kurdish population, be it in Turkey, Syria, Iraq or Iran, has a distinct trajectory within a broader Kurdish movement. The efforts of Middle Eastern states with Kurdish minorities cooperated to prevent them from any transnational joint action and attempts to establish a Kurdish state that could lead to challenging their territorial integrity (Gunter, 1993, pp. 311-312). Thus, the Kurdish question became a domestic/internal issue instead of a transnational or regional one (Olson, 1992, p. 485). By the same token, and despite the transnational attempts, the Iraqi Kurds' struggle for autonomy and independence from Iraq was mainly confined within the Iraqi borders.

7.2.1. The Iraqi Kurds under Mandatory Iraq

Like their brethren, the Iraqi Kurds aspired to achieve self-determination in the post-World War I era. Under Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji's leadership, the Kurds revolted against the British in Mandatory Iraq to no avail. While the 1919 and 1922 revolts failed per se and Barzanji was exiled to India, Southern Kurdistan was designated a "Kurdish district" within the northern part of the Iraqi state under King Faysal (Fontana, 2010, p. 7). Due to the fact that Mosul province was contested

¹²⁸ At this phase of nascent Kurdish nationalism, the Kurds were nominally united under a common flag and national anthem. For more on the first stages of Kurdish nationalism and Kurdish national identity see McDowall (2004), Owtram (2018b) Marr and Al-Marashi (2018) and Entessar (1992).

territory between Turkey and Iraq up until the mid-1920s, the British had allowed the Kurds to administer a large part of northern Iraq as Mosul's environs had a high concentration of Kurds (Bengio, 2005, p. 173; Edmonds, 1957; Olson, 1992, pp. 476-477). At the same time, in order to placate their self-determination ambitions, the British promised that once the Iraqi state was established, the Kurds would have national rights within Iraq and administer parts of northern Iraq; in fact, a Local Languages Law was passed that acknowledged 'Kurdish' as an official language in the Kurdish areas of Iraq (Hassanpour, Skutnabb-Kangas, & Chyet, 1996, pp. 369-370). However, the failure of the Iraqi state and the British to fully deliver on these promises after its independence in 1932 further fueled the Iraqi Kurdish movement, leading to continuous clashes between the Kurds and the Arabs. Unlike the French that retreated from Syria upon its independence in 1945-1946, Great Britain indirectly retained Iraq's control until 1958, sixteen years after its independence. During this period, the British followed contradictory policies. On the one hand, they instrumentalized the Kurdish cause to threaten and intimidate Iraq, Turkey and Iran into "not challenging" Great Britain's policies in the region (Olson, 1992, p. 476). On the other hand, any Kurdish efforts for self-determination were met with force and crushed by the British (McDowall, 2004, pp. 282-300). Given the repeated defeats that followed upon the Iraqi independence, the Kurdish leaderships sought a more pragmatic approach and "enlist the power of Great Britain to their own advantage" (Tripp, 2002, p. 35) and confined their efforts to promote self-determination.¹²⁹

The younger generation of Kurds engendered a new drift within the movement in Iraq that differed from the traditional tribal leadership. Many Kurds that migrated to Baghdad mingled and interacted with the new leftist Arab groups. Among whom, they found Arab allies, such as Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) and Al Ahali Group, who advocated for Kurdish rights (McDowall, 2004, p. 305). This new direction of the Kurdish struggle—after Faysal's death in 1933—created a new trend of nationalism among the Iraqi Kurds (Marr & Al-Marashi, 2018; Romano, 2006, pp. 188-190), which led to the formation of Kurdish groups such as that of Darkar in Sulaymaniyah, which soon spread to other Kurdish towns, Mosul, Baghdad and even developed relationships with activists in Iran. In 1939, Darkar established a new party Hiwa (Hope), in an effort to bring together the new Kurdish sentiment, which—contrary to the previous years—had shifted away from the "mountain and tribal context" of the Kurdish struggle (McDowall, 2004, p. 306).

¹²⁹ For the historical context of the Kurdish revolts during this period see O'Ballance (1973), Entessar (1992), Vanly (1993) and Jawad (1981).

While their political agility was restricted within Iraq, many sought refuge in Iran, which eventually became a hub for Iraqi Kurds fleeing the Iraqi government's repressive politics. Amongst them was Mustafa Barzani, who was a distant cousin of Mullah Barzanji, thus, from an influential conservative tribe. Although he was not a nationalist, his interaction with Hiwa members in Iran and his position within the tribal politics allowed him to balance the tribal and leftist forces among the Kurdish population. Like many other Iraqi Kurds, Barzani and many Hiwa members were intrigued by the Iranian Kurdish struggle. Qazi Muhammad established Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDP-I) in 1945, and a year later, it declared the Kurdish Republic in Mahabad of Iran in January of 1946. Even though this venture was unsustainable after the Soviets withdrew their support to Iran, KDP-I inspired many Iraqi Kurds. In 1945, due to his background and involvement in KDP-I, Barzani was able to mediate between the tribal notables and the leftist activists in Iraq to join KDP Iraq, which was meant to incorporate all the politicized groups in Iraqi Kurdistan (McDowall, 2004, p. 296). Despite the agitation of many Iraqi Kurd political activists, KDP held its first congress in Baghdad on August 16, 1945.

Mustafa Barzani was elected President, although he was still in exile –first in Iran and then in the Soviet Union after the collapse of the Mahabad Republic. In order to balance between the tribal notables and leftists, he appointed Sheikh Latif Barzanji—son of Mahmud Barzinji, who had led the great *Rapareen* against Great Britain in the 1920s—and Ziyad Aghaz as vice presidents on the one hand.¹³⁰ On the other, Barzani offered the leftist leaders Ibrahim Ahmed, who at first headed the Iraqi branch of the Iranian KDP, and his son-in-law Jalal Talabani to head the central committee (Gunter, 1996, p. 226). It should be noted that in this first attempt to establish a political entity, KDP was unable to deliver a comprehensive programme beyond some nationalist elements, mostly due to possible negative reactions from the tribal leaders and landlords (McDowall, 2004, p. 296). Not much was ensued by KDP. The withdrawal of Soviet support to Iranian Kurds and the cooperation of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey to deprive the Kurds of any transnational joint action (Gunter, 1993, pp. 311-312) incapacitated the Iraqi Kurdish struggle, which, once again, became idle for the next decade.

¹³⁰ *Rapareen* is the Kurdish term for uprising and is identified with the Kurdish rebellions for self-determination.

7.2.2. Regional Opportunities

At the outset of the Cold War, the Iraqi Kurdish struggle seemed condemned by the Baghdad Pact of 1955. The agreement brought together Turkey, Iraq, Great Britain, Pakistan and Iran on the basis of political, military and economic cooperation to counter possible Soviet influence in the region, which positioned Iraq – briefly – on the side of the US. However, the Free Officers Revolution on July 14, 1958, overthrew the Hashemite monarchy, causing the de facto withdrawal of the British from Iraq. Under the leadership of Abd al-Karim Qasim, the Iraqi Republic had to disassociate itself from any sort of subjection to either regional or Western interests. To that end, Qasim established an ‘Iraq first policy’ on all fronts and withdrew from the Baghdad Pact. Despite Qasim’s opposition to the communist ideology and Soviet support for Gamal Abdel Nasser, he sought diplomatic and military assistance from the USSR (Gunter, 1993, pp. 311-312; Tripp, 2002, pp. 157-170). At the same time, after some initial resistance, Eisenhower’s administration placated the new Iraqi government out of fear of a regional war (Gibson, 2016, p. 29). This balance allowed Qasim’s regime to maintain a ‘safe’ distance from the Cold War.

In his attempt to consolidate his power within Iraq, Qasim invited Barzani to return to Iraq (McDowall, 2004, p. 300). The new President of the Iraqi Republic espoused Iraqi national patriotism and, like others before him, instrumentalized the Kurdish support to counter his pan-Arab nationalist rivals within the Free Officers, who adhered to Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser (Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 2001, p. 57). Qasim promoted a partnership between Kurds and Arabs. He passed a law (Article 3 of the provisional constitution of 1958), which offered the Kurds national rights and later, in 1960, allowed the legitimized KDP as a party in Iraq (McDowall, 2004, pp. 354-357; Seyder, 2017, pp. 28-29; Voller, 2014, pp. 47-48). However, Baghdad’s regional power after the revolution was weakened. The Iraqi claim to Kuwaiti territory in 1961 isolated Baghdad from the Arab world. As a result, discord among the two leaders arose as KDPs aspirations became a threat to Qasim. In response, Baghdad fuelled intra-Kurdish friction by arming and financing Barzani’s tribal rivals and commenced an Arabization policy against the Kurds. This led to one of the greatest Kurdish revolutions in Iraq on September 11, 1961, igniting another Arab-Kurdish war in Iraq.

Amidst the war, the fall of Qasim’s government in 1964 rendered Iraq a Cold War battleground. The Ba’athists took power under the leadership of Abdul Rahman Arif. The US did not mind the overthrow of Qasim, who nationalized the Iraqi Petroleum Company, owned by

numerous Western firms. However, the Iraqi-US relations deteriorated after the former joined the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 – albeit its limited participation (Kinninmont, Stansfield, & Sirri, 2013, p. 7). It was not until the second Soviet-backed Ba'ath regime under Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, who rose to power after the 17 July Revolution of 1968, that the Iraqi Kurds grasped the superpowers attention. Notwithstanding KDPs pleas for US assistance since the early 1960s, the first US - KDP direct contact occurred in 1969. The relations cumulated into US\$ 14 million, aiming to support the Kurdish contribution to the overthrow of the Soviet-backed Ba'ath government and encourage good relations with the Iranian monarchy (Charountaki, 2010, p. 135; Gunter, 1997a, pp. 3-4). In response, the Soviets also started to focus on the Kurds and their problem so as to reassure them that they would not become a liability to the Baathists in Baghdad (Sadoon, 2017, pp. 165-166).

To some extent, the Soviets could pressure Baghdad to address the Kurdish problem. All the leaders of the Ba'ath party, similarly to Qasim, utilized a divide-and-rule strategy via bureaucracy, legislation, arming and financing of rival Kurdish groups, as well as intensified the Arabization policies of the Iraqi population while pushing the Kurds out of key areas such as Kirkuk (McDowall, 2004, pp. 358-361; Voller, 2017, p. 384). However, there were some short-lived peace agreements between KDP and Baghdad under the Soviet auspice, namely, the declaration of Abd al-Rahman al-Bazzaz's government of 1966 and the March 1970 Peace Accords. Despite the fact that the Iraqi-Kurdish conflict reignited soon, the agreements reflected KDPs emerging position within international politics. KDP was able to utilise American, Iranian and Israeli assistance to destabilize the Ba'ath regime and force Baghdad's hand into conceding to Kurdish aspirations (Costantini & O'Driscoll, 2020, p. 219; Gürbey, Hofmann, & Seyder, 2017, p. 29; Olson, 1992, p. 484). On a national level, the agreements, and particularly that of March 1970, built on the notion of autonomy as Qasim had suggested back in the late 1950s. The 'Kurdish Autonomous Zone' would include some parts of Kirkuk oil fields and the official use of the Kurdish language, while within five years, the boundaries would be determined, and elections would be conducted (Fawaz, 2017; Natali, 2005, pp. 57-58).

What sealed the end of these agreements, beyond Iraq's unwillingness to yield territory and power to the Kurds, was the new dynamics that emerged on a regional level. The Iraqi Republic's economy grew, and its standing within the Arab world increased under the de facto leader Saddam Hussein, chief of Ba'ath's intelligence services. At the same time, Iraq started to grow closer to the Soviets, particularly following the 1972 Friendship and Cooperation Treaty,

which enhanced Iraq with a large number of Soviet weapons.¹³¹ Baghdad flaunted its increased power in the 1973 October War. Contrary to the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Iraq participated more actively. In fact, Iraq's privatisation of western oil companies in 1971 following the OPEC accords transformed its political economy. The petrolisation of the Iraqi state fortified its position in the region, especially after the oil embargo of 1973 (Gürbey, Hofmann, & Seyder, 2017, p. 30; Natali, 2005, p. 58). This change had an implication on Iraq's political structure, changing the attitude of the state vis-à-vis its society. For the Kurds, this was translated into the beginning of an Arabization policy and other forms of state oppression, technically annulling the 1970 agreement. Furthermore, Baghdad invested in building an "Arab Circle" of houses "around the Kurdish quarters in Kirkuk, deported Kurds from their homes, granted land deeds only to Arabs, and gave Kurdish localities Arabic names"(Natali, 2005, p. 58).

This triggered the fifth Arab-Kurdish war in 1974 (Vanly, 1993, pp. 180-183). The Kurds had established communication with the CIA and Mossad via the Shah already since 1972,¹³² who were providing them with military equipment and \$16 million in aid (Marr & Al-Marashi, 2018, p. 121). However, the abrupt disengagement of Iraqi Kurdish allies curtailed Barzani's insurgency. The Algiers Accords of 1975 between Saddam Hussein and the Shah of Iran cut the weapon supplies to the Iraqi Kurds (Voller, 2017, p. 390). The US – Kurdish communication channel between Henry Kissinger and Mustafa Barzani abruptly ended, prompting the withdrawal of US and Israeli support (Korn, 1994; Romano, 2004, p. 155). It should be noted that even though the US was aware that the Shah was contemplating an agreement with Iraq, Kissinger and Ford deliberately chose to hide this information from Barzani (Little, 2010, p. 81). The 1975 Accords ended the most contested territorial dispute between Iran and Iraq since the 1930s. In exchange for cutting support to the Kurds, Iran would gain access to the Shatt al-Arab river, a vital channel for oil export for both states. The collapse of the Kurdish insurgency was followed by Baghdad's extensive violence against civilian Kurds. Approximately 800 Iraqi Kurdish villages were destroyed along the borders with Iran and Turkey in order to create a "security belt" and proceeded to an Arabization policy which displaced circa 250,000 Kurds from the Kurdish area of northern

¹³¹ Within the Cold War dynamics, Nixon's Two Pillar Doctrine pushed Iraq's government closer to the Soviets so as to counter Iran (Kinninmont, Stansfield, & Sirri, 2013, p. 7).

¹³² According to Charountaki (2018), the Shah had arranged a meeting between the son of Barzani, Idris and Mahmoud Othman with CIA director Richard Helms and Colonel Richard Kennedy, Deputy Assistant to the National Security Council Planning.

Iraq to the Arab populated areas in southern and central Iraq, “[...] where they were distributed among Arab villages in groups of up to five families” (Olson, 1992, p. 476).

7.3. The Formation of Two Power Centres

The negative implications of the prolonged Iraqi-Kurdish wars on the Kurdish population exposed intra-Kurdish tensions within the fragile KDP leadership. As a result of the Kurdish defeat in 1975, KDP leaders dispersed: Barzani sought refuge in Iran and Talabani in Damascus. The leftist members, under the leadership of Jalal Talabani, created their own party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), in Damascus on 1 June 1975. Much of the dynamic between KDP and PUK reveals the trajectory of state-society power relations as well as the strategic culture of the leaderships, which cultivated two power centres that dominated the Kurdish political landscape encapsulating ideological friction, geographical division and tribal dynamics.

The conservative tribes and leftist trends within the Iraqi Kurdish movement had been a challenging venture already since the 1940s. To some extent, this tension was reflected in the antagonism between Mustafa Barzani and Jalal Talabani, whose families were rivals of the Sufi orders, Naqshbandi and Qadiri. In addition, each family represented different components of the Iraqi Kurds. Barzani was associated with the mountain north (the Kurmanji speaking areas), while Talabani was associated with “the more cultured Sorani-speaking areas of the south” (Gunter, 1996, pp. 227-228). Thus, the diverse political and ideological trajectories that occurred in the 1930s and 1940s had already predisposed the two men to different visions for the Kurdish struggle. This duality also spilled over within the military force of KDP. In the Arab-Kurdish war of 1961, they established armed units known as Peshmerga (literally meaning ‘those who face death’). The forces operated into three divisions along cohesive geographic areas: Mustafa Barzani commanded the central division, Jalal Talabani the southern division and a smaller division was headed by Assad Hoshewi (Hama, 2021, pp. 4-5). Talabani, an experienced commander in the Iraqi army, was also the main point of reference to the KDPs foreign relations deputy, who had several diplomatic meetings in Europe and the Middle East, including Egypt’s Nasser in 1963 (Gunter, 1996, pp. 227-228). Thus, overall by the 1960s, the KDPs organisational division was concentrated in the hands of the two men; interestingly, Talabani was the one who controlled key areas such as Sulaymaniyah, Kirkuk and Erbil, while Barzani controlled areas such as Bahdinan, Choman, Rowanduz and Shaqlawa (Stansfield, 2003, pp. 60-75). However, Barzani’s dealings with

Baghdad amidst the war and his attempts to reach out to the US did not sit well with the party's leftist members, especially because Barzani failed to consult or inform the politburo. This was in line with Barzani's style of leadership, who also had no tolerance for criticism. So, in 1964, amidst the conflict with the Arabs, during the sixth KDP Congress 1964, he expelled Jalal Talabani and Ibrahim Ahmed to Iran along with many members of its central committee and 4000 followers and 1,000 of Peshmerga troops (McDowell, 1996; Stansfield, 2003; Gunter 1996). Even though Talabani re-joined KDP in 1965, Barzani managed to hold a better grip and dominate the party. This pace of disputes eventually accumulated a bitterness between the two men and ultimately led to the establishment of PUK in 1975. Talabani's party was able to attract many of Barzani critiques as well as influential parties, such as the Maoist Komala and populist Bezutnawa.¹³³

A year later, PUK, followed by KDP, returned to Iraqi Kurdistan. Both parties endured organisational and administrative reshuffling. They both aimed at maintaining their grip to power, all the while negotiating with Baghdad to deliver better terms for Kurdish self-determination. It should be noted that the Barzani family had established its dominance within KDP. Even the death of Mustafa Barzani in 1979 caused no commotion within the party's political organisation when his son, Masoud Barzani, took over KDP reins. However, Mustafa Barzani's decision to trust the Shah and Kissinger in 1974 cost the party its credibility within the Kurdish society to deliver upon their cause.¹³⁴ Yet, by the end of the 1970s, PUKs influence among the Kurds could not match that of the KDP. This proportion changed during the 1980s as PUKs influence grew and became a substantial political force to compete with KDP. Over the shadow of the Iraqi-Iranian war, Talabani and Barzani, each with its own constituency, organisational structures and military forces, divided their influence along geographical lines. They both established their own set of alliances and unofficial foreign relations as two different political entities.

¹³³ For more on these organisations see Stansfield (2003, pp. 83-85).

¹³⁴ Mustafa Barzani lived to see the fall of the Shah of Iran a little before he died in his house in the US For a detailed account of his last years in the US see former foreign service officer's, David Korn (1994). In addition, for more on political cost of Barzani see Ghareeb (1981).

7.4. The Transformative Years: The Iranian Revolution and the Iraq-Iran War

The Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979 had enormous implications on Iran-Iraq relations and, by extension, the Iraqi Kurds, who gradually became the fifth column between the two antagonists, leading to further intra-Kurdish rift. Not only was the new Iranian leadership unable to constrain Kurdish cross-border activities, Ayatollah Khamenei publicly addressed the Iraqi Shia to pursue an Islamic revolution in Iraq and overthrow the Ba'ath regime. Even though Saddam had almost a positive stance toward the new Iranian Republic, the latter had liability for Iraq's domestic cohesion. Already by the end of the summer of 1979, KDP had re-established a base in Iran, which allowed it to carry on the attack against Baghdad; while, at the same time, the Islamic leadership was funding Da'wa, an underground Shia movement, in Iraq that sought to overthrow the Ba'ath regime (Gunter, 1996, p. 230; Karsh, 1990, pp. 264-265). Inevitably, the border fighting soon escalated into a full wage war between Iran and Iraq in September 1980. Even though Iraq was able to exploit the Islamic republic's refusal to become a bulwark for neither the US nor the Soviets by attaining support from both superpowers throughout the Iraq-Iran war, Saddam was confronted with severe fragmentation of the social cohesion of the Iraqi society.

The fact that most of the Iraqi Arab population is Shia initially drew all of Saddam's attention. Nevertheless, when Saddam was confronted with a large number of deserters in 1983, many of whom were Kurds deployed to fortify the Iraqi army's fight against Iran, the Kurdish question had become an equally challenging concern (McDowall, 2004, p. 348). Already aware of KDPs support for Iran, Baghdad eventually attempted to appeal to PUKs secularism instead of KDPs traditional and conservative leadership by highlighting the fundamentalist threat posed by Iran and KDP. Indeed, this venture was not an easy task for PUK as within its ranks, many were pro-Iranian. It was not only PUKs leftist orientation that hindered a possible alignment with the Islamic Republic but also PUKs support of KDP-I, which resulted in offensives that pushed the PUKs headquarters away from the Iraqi-Iranian border (Stansfield, 2003, p. 90). In 1983, PUK and Baghdad signed a Comprehensive Political and Security Agreement, which was mediated by Baghdad's Iranian Kurdish ally, the Iranian KDP. In return, Saddam would grant Kurds more rights within the Kurdish Autonomy Zone, pardon deserters and grant them amnesty (Gunter, 1996, p. 230; McDowall, 2004, p. 350). Although this cooperation was short-lived, it allowed PUK to

expand not only militarily but also heralded “a new line of forceful and politically minded cadres”, such as Mustafa Chaw Rash, and Kosrat Rasoul, amongst others, that appealed to and influenced the Kurdish middle class, which enable to entrench PUKs power within Kurdistan (Stansfield, 2003, p. 90).¹³⁵

The antagonism between KDP and PUK had dragged the Iraqi Kurds into extensive violence, which eventually attracted not only the Turkish Kurds, PKK, who by the 1980s became active in northern Iraq and aligned with PUK against KDP (1987-1989), but Syria and Turkey as well. The Iran-Iraq war triggered an inter-regional politics of the Kurdish question. Syria allowed its Kurds to assist Iraqi Kurds in their fight against Baghdad. At the same time, PKK’s increased presence in northern Iraq in the 1980s dragged Turkey into Iraq.¹³⁶ Although numerous Turkish raids were reported as par tacit agreement between Ankara and Baghdad to target KDP and PKK in northern Iraq, the Turkish intrusion on Iraqi territory in 1983 was unprecedented and signalled for the first time since 1923 a new tendency of the Turkish foreign policy. Turkish incursions into northern Iraq continued until 1988; the two most notable ones were in 1986 and 1987, as they were accompanied by extensive air power. Preoccupied with the fight against Iran, Baghdad found it convenient to allow Turkey to carry on its military attack against the Kurds. A possible Turkish presence in northern Iraq would provide an unprecedented geostrategic advantage in Caucasus and Central Asia and hinder Iran’s interests in those regions as well (Olson, 1992, p. 490). Even more so, when the Turkish raid in northern Iraq drastically increased in 1986 and 1987, it also compelled PUK to direct its policy against Baghdad.

Barzani and Talabani met in Tehran in November 1986 and agreed to refrain from unilateral deals with Baghdad. This reconciliation paved the way for the formation of the Kurdistan National Front (KNF - also known as Iraqi Kurdish Front – IKF), which comprised the two dominant Kurdish parties, KDP and PUK, as well as other smaller parties such as KSP, KPDP and Kurdish Socialist Party (PASOK) , with the exception of the Kurdish Islamic groups such as the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (IMK) (Gunter, 1996, p. 231). In 1987, KDP and PUK issued a joint declaration that they would merge their Peshmerga forces while Masoud Barzani and Jalal

¹³⁵ For the internal frictions of PUK during this period see McDowall (2004); Stansfield (2017b) and Charountaki (2010, pp. 148-150)

¹³⁶ The Iraq-Iran war triggered the resurgence of Kurdish nationalist activities in Turkey, most important of which was the Kurdistan Workers' Party, known as PKK, headed by Abdullah Ocalan from his headquarterd in Damascus. PKK became active in the Turkish-Iraqi borders and received aid by Iraqi Kurdish forces and eventually established camps.

Talabani were nominated co-presidents (McDowall, 2004, pp. 351-352; Sadoon, 2017, p. 171). In essence, KNF/IKF was officially established in 1988. Although its creation was founded on defeating Baghdad's forces, it became a political platform with committees that facilitated communication and coordination between Kurdish political forces (Stansfield, 2017c, pp. 91-94). It became the foundation of the Kurdish political system in which PUK and KDP were the two centres of power.

In response to this KDP – PUK rapprochement under Iranian aegis, Iraq unleashed a punitive campaign against the Kurds coded as Anfal in 1986. By early 1988, estimates show that between 1000 and 4000 Kurdish villages were destroyed and up to one-third of the population had either died or fled Iraqi Kurdistan (Olson, 1992, p. 477). However, a major disaster was to fall upon the Iraqi Kurds during the closing phase of the Iraq-Iran war. The Iraqi government attacked with chemical gas the inhabitants of Halabja, a small Iraqi Kurdish town next to the Iranian border, in March 1988; the casualties reached approximately 5000 civilians (Kingston & Spears, 2004, p. 156).¹³⁷ The persecution continued even after the end of the Iraq-Iran as punishment for supporting Iran during the war, leading to further mass killings of the Kurdish population and violent displacement from northern Iraq. During the Anfal campaigns between 1986 and 1988, around 180,000 Kurdish civilians were massacred by the Iraqi forces and approximately 250,000 Iraqi Kurds sought refuge in Turkey and Iran.

Thus, the Peshmerga was unable to protect or effectively counter Baghdad's attacks against the Kurds. Iran, followed by Iraq a day later, officially endorsed UNSC Resolution 598 that called for the end of Iranian and Iraqi hostilities, abandoning its Iraqi Kurdish allies in July of 1988 as the Iran-Iraq border would be sealed to prevent military activity. IKF was aware that the Peshmerga, which thereafter received its supplies from Syria, could not match the Iraqi army. No doubt that the psychological defeat in 1988 was much greater than that of 1975; if Saddam sought an agreement with the Kurds, IKF might have agreed. Nevertheless, it was clear that Baghdad had no intention of offering anything to the Kurds. Masoud Barzani's appeals to the international community resulted in UNSC Resolution 620, which called for an investigation of the use of chemical weapons (McDowall, 2004, p. 362). Jalal Talabani had previously established contacts with US members of the foreign relations committee (Sadoon, 2017, p. 173), along with the

¹³⁷ For more on the Kurdish genocide of 1988 and the Anfal Campaign see Black (1993), Hiltermann (1994), Yildiz (2007, pp. 25-33) and McDowall (2004, pp. 357-364)

Kurdish representative in Washington, in an attempt to persuade the US and the international community to take action against Saddam's atrocities (Galbraith, 2007, p. 30). This resulted in the proposed bill of Senator Claiborne Pell, of the then Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, under the title "the Prevention of Genocide Act of 1988", according to which the US would punish Iraq for the use of chemical weapons against the Kurds by imposing a military and financial embargo on Baghdad. Notwithstanding, the bill was defeated with a threat of veto from President Reagan. Similarly, Turkey blocked the UN investigation process by prohibiting the UN team from having access to its territory that hosted Iraqi Kurd refugees (Entessar, 1992, p. 40) in order to safeguard its relationship with Iraq. If evidence of chemical weapon use had been found, Ankara would have to join the sanctions and jeopardize the oil and trade agreements with Iraq (Romano, 2004, p. ft. 164). Proof that the international community's eagerness to contain the Islamic Republic of Iran had turned a blind eye to the IKFs pleads was the fact that the US and the U.K that condemned Baghdad's use of chemical weapons continued to sell weapons to Iraq, short after the Halabja genocide. In contrast, others participated in the first Baghdad International Exhibition for Military Production—amongst them, Greece, Turkey, France, Italy, and Portugal, along with many from the Eastern Bloc states (McDowall, 2004, p. 363). It seemed that, once again, the Iraqi Kurdish struggle would be incapacitated by restrictions of the regional and international structure. However, it was not long after Bush and Gorbachev declared the end of the Cold War that structural opportunities re-emerged, marking a decisive turn in the Iraqi Kurds' trajectory.

7.5. The Road to Sovereignty: Becoming a Statelike Actor

KRG is known to have been formed in the aftermath of the Gulf War in 1991, as it achieved territorial autonomy. However, KRGs process of becoming a statelike actor took 15 years. Initially, it established a resemblance of institutions – some prior to the civil war and others after 1998 – but the political organisation of KRG was not complete until 2005. The main crux of this delayed process lies in the strategic cultures of Talabani and Barzani. Nonetheless, the structural opportunities that arose on an international and regional level allowed KRG to emerge as a statelike actor.

7.5.1. Iraqi Kurdish Territoriality: 1990-1991

Saddam's invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990 grabbed the international community's attention; if ensued victorious, Baghdad would control a significant proportion of the world's oil supply. Iraq's refusal to comply with the UNSC Resolution 678 opened the way for a US-led international coalition of thirty-five states in January 1991 for ground operations against Iraqi forces.¹³⁸ Within a month, Saddam's forces were ousted out of Kuwait. In the meantime, after the devastated 1988 defeat, the Iraqi Kurds were hesitant to take an official position on the unfolding events. Even though PUK and KDP delegations visited Washington and France, IKF did not want to be associated with the West and give Saddam another pretext to target their community (McDowall, 2004, p. 369). Yet, when George Bush publicly called for the Iraqi Shia and Kurds to rise against Saddam's dictatorship (Romano, 2004, pp. 156-157), popular uprising spread throughout the country. IKF did not constrain the people; according to Barzani, "the uprising came from the people themselves. We didn't expect it" (McDowall, 2004, p. 371). While there is no evidence to suggest that the US had promised to directly support the Iraqi Kurdish efforts, Baghdad's vulnerability and Bush's public announcement compelled the Iraqi Kurds to assume that if they rebelled against Saddam, they could depend on international backing.

Howbeit, it soon became evident that the US administration had no intention to support IKF nor meddle in Iraqi domestic issues and "refused contact [...] on the grounds of non-interference" (McDowall, 2004, p. 373). The Americans had hoped that a popular uprising would lead to a military coup; they had not accounted for active support to either opposition groups within Iraq. Not to mention that the US had little appreciation for the Iraqi Kurds, as within Bush's administration - at the time - they were referred to as "just bandits" (Entessar, 1992, p. 15). With no international backing, the Peshmerga forces were once again defeated. Eventually, Baghdad's relentless attacks, first on the Shia in the south and then on the Iraqi Kurds in the north, led to another massive refugee war of over 2 million Iraqi Kurds heading towards neighbouring borders.

Contrary to Iran, Turkey was unwilling to open its borders as it attempted to contain the Turkish Kurds' rebellion. Ozal, however, was under immense pressure. The humanitarian crisis of Iraqi Kurds that were stranded, starved, exhausted and occasionally bombarded by Saddam's forces on the Turkish border was internationally televised (Gowing, 1994, pp. 187-188; Robinson,

¹³⁸ For a detailed account on US' decision-making process of announcing the war against Iraq in 1990 see Brands (2004)

1999, p. 302; Wheeler, 2000, p. 141). Consequently, Ankara was compelled to temporarily accept roughly 400,000 refugees (Olson 1992: 485) and sought to convince the Allies forces of an alternative solution. Indeed, Ankara's suggestion to create a 'safe haven' for the Iraqi Kurds in Iraq intrigued the Coalition members. In April of 1991, the Security Council passed UN Resolution 688, which demanded that Iraq allowed access to international humanitarian organisations in the northern part of the country and imposed a No-Fly Zone (NFZ) north of the 36th parallel against Saddam's air force on northern Iraq (Kingston & Spears, 2004, pp. 156-157). The role of Turkey was vital in implementing and facilitating the NFZ and the Operation Provide Comfort (renamed later as Poised Hammer), as Ankara allowed forces to station the south-eastern military base, Incirlik (Fawaz, 2017; Gunter, 1993, p. 313). In exchange of becoming the guardian of the Kurdish 'safe haven' in northern Iraq, Turkey would now be able to operate on Iraqi Kurdish territory against PKK (Charountaki, 2012, p. 186). Iran, which had accommodated roughly 1 million Iraqi Kurds, did not welcome the idea of a safe haven in northern Iraq, yet it had little leverage in that regard (Olson, 1992, p. 486).

In mid-April, Saddam succumbed to the mounting regional and international pressures; he finally signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the UN and allowed the humanitarian operations to take place (Costantini & O'Driscoll, 2020, p. 220; Jongerden, 2019, p. 63; McDowall, 2004, pp. 374-376). After some sporadic fighting between Saddam's forces and the Peshmerga, Baghdad's exhausted forces retreated, along with its government personnel, from the Kurdish safe haven in late October 1991, with the exception of Kirkuk (Romano, 2004, p. 157) and imposed an economic blockade against the Kurds. Baghdad's withdrawal from northern Iraq automatically handed the IKF their own territory with a population between 3 and 4.5 million under its jurisdiction (McDowall, 2004; Olson, 1992, pp. 476-477).¹³⁹ The Kurds, who constituted 25 per cent of the entire Iraqi population, also participated in the Iraqi's opposition interim government committee in Vienna (Gunter, 1993, pp. 315, ft. 313). Nonetheless, the IKF lacked experience, financial resources and direction in governing anything beyond a political party and any central solid Kurdish authority (Stansfield, 2003, p. 123). As Jalal Talabani pointed out, "we came from the mountains, we were trained as fighters, and now we had to run cities" (Gunter,

¹³⁹ It is almost impossible to find an exact estimate of the population at the time, given the Anfal campaigns and the Arabization policies. The numbers provided by Kurdish governors also differed as some sought to either belittle the importance of the Kurdish community, out of fear, while nationalists sought to exaggerate the numbers to promote the agenda of self-determination. Indicative of the large range of estimates of the Kurdish population in northern Iraq see table 3.2 in Stansfield (2003, p. 33).

1992, p. 88). In fact, Saddam was hoping for IKFs total collapse and inability to implement Kurdish autonomy; in case of any success, IKF would also become a problem for Turkey, Iran, Syria and the West (McDowall, 2004, p. 375; Voller, 2017, p. 400). Eventually, the Kurds consolidated a central authority under the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). KRGs establishment came in two different stages and was built in a span of over a decade, validating to some extent both Talabani's fears and Saddam's anticipations.

7.5.2. The Power Struggle for Control 1992-2005

IKF, for most of the 1990s, attempted to provide the institutional basis for political leadership. In 1992, elections took place, intending to establish the foundations of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) as a legitimate, constitutional, and legal entity that would embody a representative council of Kurdish people. The Iraqi Kurds established the elected legislature of a 105-member Kurdish National Assembly (KNA) along with the executive functions under KRGs command and the Kurdistan National Council (KNC- parliament) (McDowall, 2004, p. 97; Romano, 2004, p. 158). In the summer of 1992, KRG had a council of ministers, which functioned as the executive body of KRG. The ministries included industry and electricity, culture and information, humanitarian aid and cooperation, finance and economy, agriculture and irrigation, tourism, health and social affairs, reconstruction and development, religious endowments, education, justice and Peshmerga minister. At the ministerial level, ministers were elected exclusively from KDP and PUK (only one was Christian) (Gunter, 1993, pp. 301-302). The Peshmerga forces would operate as an army – a 40 per cent ratio would go to KDP and PUK, while the remaining 20 per cent would be open to other parties (Gunter, 1993, p. 309).

In practice, the governorate structure became vital in managing the Iraqi Kurdish areas. Committee members of different parties, primarily KDP and PUK but also others such as PASOK and the KSP, governed the urban areas; yet, to some extent, each region was controlled by a specific party (Stansfield, 2003, p. 123). In an effort to counter the KDP and PUK dominance, the smaller parties attempted to merge and/or cooperate; an example is a leftist coalition, the Unity Party of Kurdistan, which brought together SPKI, KPDP, and PASOK. However, soon many of the smaller parties lost their relevance in the political scene. While all parties would be able to participate, seats in KNC would be attained by those who won at least 7 per cent of the vote. Thus, allowing the major parties to dominate the council. In turn, this process was overshadowed by

KDPs and PUKs struggle for control over the Kurdish population and territory. In practice, PUK and KDP were both dominant political entities in Iraqi Kurdistan; KDP won 51, and the PUK won 49 out of the 100 seats (Costantini & O’Driscoll, 2020, p. 220).

Despite the need for cooperation, both Barzani and Talabani could not overcome their antagonism. Consequently, their struggle for territorial control and the “the informal reality of factional power dominated by the clientelist networks of the two major parties” rendered the first institutional efforts of Iraqi Kurdistan an “institutional façade” (Romano, 2004, p. 158). Intrinsically, while both leaders engaged with the institutions, they clashed on the decision-making process as well as the aims and goals as leaders. On the one hand, Barzani sought a more conservative option to autonomy, which would entail cooperation with Baghdad so as to avoid any regional reactions. Talabani, on the other hand, envisioned a more radical course, that of an independent state based on Kurdish self-determination. Thus, both leaderships aspired to some form of autonomy – either state or government (Gunter, 1993, p. 297; Jongerden, 2019, p. 62). It is worth noting that at this stage, the Iraqi Kurdish parliament had not claimed independence from Iraq but a state with an Iraqi Federation. According to Gunter (1993, p. 306), the Iraqi Kurdish parliament put forth a dual declaration; one that declared the federation for Iraqi Kurdistan, which would grant rights to all the people within its region– including Assyrians, Turkomans and others—and another that claimed that “the entire state of Iraq was a federal state”, implying that Iraqi Kurdistan would be a constituent part of an Iraqi federation. By 1994, the political antagonism between the two escalated into an armed conflict. The Iraqi Kurdish civil war reached its peak when KDP sought Baghdad’s cooperation to fight against PUK, pushing Talabani’s forces out of Erbil towards the Iranian border (Lundgren, 2007, p. 79).

Even though the civil war dissipated KRG’s integrity as a unifying governmental authority, this period carved the power dynamics of its *modus operandi*. The civil war ended with the signing of the Washington Agreement in September 1998, which officially divided the institutional authority of the two parties within the Kurdish Autonomous Zone. KDP would exclusively administrate the governorate of Erbil and Dohuk while PUK in Sulaymaniyah and Garmian; in fact, until 2005, KRG had two Presidents, Mustafa Barzani and Jalal Talabani. This meant different prime ministers, municipal elections, budget management, judiciary systems, military apparatus and a parallel administrative structure with separate constituencies that would enhance cooperation between the two within KRG (Romano, 2004, p. 159). Even Asayish, the security apparatus for

domestic threats, which IKF established in 1993, was split between KDP and PUK and operated concurrently with the intelligence agencies of the parties, Parastin and Zanyari, respectively (Hama, 2021).¹⁴⁰ No other political force was able to challenge this status quo – with the exception of some Islamist groups such as the Kurdish Islamic League (Yekgirtuy islami) (Leezenberg, 2005, p. 640).

The Iraqi Kurdish society as a whole was unable to withstand the deep rift between the major political Kurdish parties. Even though its very composition has diverse, religious, ideological, geographical and tribal hues, the harsh volatile milieu of Iraqi Kurdistan's political stability urged the civil society for many decades to channel its needs and political participation via the Kurdish political arena that was primarily divided between PUK and KDP. Thus, the society followed the division in every major armed conflict between the two. Similarly, the civil society that emerged during the 1990s was torn between the two camps of the civil war. Although, it should be mentioned that the first years of the NFZ provided sufficient conditions and a positive environment for the Iraqi Kurds to develop many aspects of civil society. In fact, the Kurds established unions and syndicates across different professions, and numerous Kurdish newspapers and radio stations emerged as well as television stations, reaching over 15 Kurdish satellite channels; by the same token, many local NGOs mushroomed, whose mandates revolved around issues of the rule of law, democracy, women's and children's rights, freedom of the press, human rights, solidarity, development, training and awareness (Hakeem, 2017, pp. 152-154). This was fostered by the presence of numerous international NGOs in Iraqi Kurdistan. Nonetheless, these efforts could not amend the differences and friction between the two major Kurdish parties escalated. Thus, upon the outbreak of the civil war in 1996, the civil society split between Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. Perhaps, the only ones not involved were the already marginalised communities, such as the Yazidis.

Ultimately, the financial enhancement that occurred from the UN's 1995 Oil-For-Food Agreement (OFFA), which was implemented in 1997, fostered the cooperation between the two Kurdish leaders. Large amounts of Iraqi oil would be sold in exchange for humanitarian aid. Between 1997 and 2001, KRI received US \$260 million biannually (Natali, 2010, p. 59). After

¹⁴⁰ According to Hawer Hasan Hama (2021), it was not until the creation of Kurdistan Security Council (KSC) in 2011 that Parastin, Zanyari and Asayish merged. In fact, after 2011, KSC oversaw and coordinated a vast range of security related issues from counter-terrorism to protecting food and public health, and coordination with federal government of Baghdad

many years of double economic embargo, one imposed by Baghdad and the second imposed by the UN on Iraq and thus indirectly on Iraqi Kurdistan), the financial relief provided the incentive for cooperation for the two parties but also for the improvement of Iraqi Kurdish life. According to the UNSC Resolution 986, 13 per cent of OFFA revenues were allocated to Iraqi Kurdistan (Leezenberg, 2005, p. 639; Stansfield, 2003, p. 1). Albeit the corruption of OFFA,¹⁴¹ the aid allowed KRI to experience an economic boom (Marr & Al-Marashi, 2018, pp. 194-196). Both parties within the territories under their jurisdiction developed and invested in several sectors; namely, social services such as new schools (from elementary to universities), health centres, water and sewerage projects, as well as reconstruction of roads, oil wells and villages (Natali, 2010, pp. 52-74). The revenues from the humanitarian aid were directed toward safeguarding the client-based network of the Kurdish political parties (Natali, 2010, p. 106). Additional sources of income that boosted the economy and trade came from neighbouring trade. Interestingly, PUK would smuggle trade from Iran, while KDP had established trade routes with Turkey (Romano, 2004, p. 160). Although part of it was considered illegal due to the sanctions imposed on Iraq, the UN had permitted 'Kurdoil' to export 20,000 to 25,000 barrels of oil per day to Turkey (Gunter, 1993, p. 301).

Howbeit, this cooperation did not crystallise a unifying institutional inclusive structure. In fact, it merely consolidated the power of the two leaderships on separate territories with parallel political, administrative and military structures within KRG. The experiment of Iraqi Kurdistan during the 1990s highlighted a common strategic culture of both leaderships. More specifically, the dual character of the geographic and tribal affiliations and, more importantly, in the faces of Barzani and Talabani, the persistent element of personal ambition. By extension, the antagonism between the two leaders has fostered antagonising alliances: KDP is associated more with Turkey, while PUK is with Iran. The discord and harmony between KDP and PUK condition the strategic culture of KRG. In fact, after the fall of Saddam, the harmony of the two centres of power defined the pace of Iraqi Kurdish politics. Combined with the economic boom, this duality within KRG or the two one-party statelets paradoxically provided relative political and economic stability.

Thus, one may argue that the harmony and disharmony between KDP and PUK dictates the overall behaviour – both for domestic and foreign affairs – of KRG. However, neither harmony

¹⁴¹ For more on the corruption and manipulation of OFF program see Goldstone, Volcker Paul, and Pieth (2005).

or disharmony is a constant element between the two. The antagonism between KDP and PUK is perhaps that most defining element in the Iraqi Kurdish political scene, and by extension, this dynamic became an essential feature of IKFs and later, KRGs, strategic culture. The two parties struggle for control in 1994, which erupted into a civil war, is not an isolated event. As illustrated through the chapter, the two parties – more often than not – resorted to violent conflict to impose their hegemony. In 1994, however, the armed conflict between the two was framed as a civil war due to the fact that Iraqi Kurdistan had established a political organisation and territorial autonomy. The new political reality did not deter the antagonism of the two parties, which goes beyond the ideological difference between Barzani’s traditionalism and Talabani’s progressiveness. The two leaders represented different geographical principalities and populations;¹⁴² Barzani was influential in territories that range from Dohuk governorate to Erbil (these areas are known as Bahdinan principalities) and the latter, in Suran principalities that range from Sulaymaniyah to Diyala (McDowall, 2004, p. 385). Despite the autonomy, both parties allowed the involvement of regional allies and foes in the name of this antagonism. In the 1970s and 1980s, each party chose opposing foreign actors who had their own antagonism; during the civil war in the mid-1990s KDP received indirect assistance from Turkey, while KDP found support from Syria and Iran (Gunter, 1996, p. 238), exposing the overall Iraqi leadership to contradictory policies. Conversely, during periods of harmony such as that between 1997 and 2001, IKF/KRG policies are more contained and consistent. This pattern exposes a trend that the leadership’s strategic culture is contingent to the harmony and disharmony between KDP and KRG.

7.5.3. KRGs Organisational Structure and Unification Agreement of 2006

In the aftermath of 9/11, the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 provided a structural opportunity for KRG leadership to consolidate its autonomy further. The Kurds had strongly supported the US invasion of Iraq, and “the subsequent regime occupation administration relied heavily on Kurdish advice” (Al-Sahlawi & Noreng, 2014, p. 27). The American efforts to institute Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), a forceful US administration in Baghdad, had triggered

¹⁴² The Kurdish principalities in the region arose during the 16th century. Technically, they were semi-independent chiefdoms during the Ottoman empire. Even though the chiefdoms ended in the early 19th century, those geographical areas are still inhabited by the same tribes. For more on the principalities see McDowall (2021: 41-50)

unprecedented violence and rage among the non-Kurdish population of Iraq, leading the George W. Bush administration to replace the CPA with an Iraqi administration in the summer of 2004 (Marr & Al-Marashi, 2018, pp. 203-204). The transitional period and the sectarian war that followed lured the US to invest not only in the Kurds in the north but also other in the Shia in the South under the Iraqi Governing Council, which would set up the Transitional Law for the Administration of Iraq (TAL) and draft a new Iraqi constitution in 2005 that would be the foundation of Iraq's political system thereafter (Chorev, 2007; Natali, 2010). The Kurds "became the second-largest parliamentary group and functioned as kingmakers," especially in the drafting of the Iraqi Constitution in 2005 (Van Wilgenburg, 2012, p. 50). The Kurdish leadership had an opportunity to reassert its gains (Kelly, 2009), and to carve its own political, legal and institutional autonomy.

Within this new system, the Iraqi Kurds were formally guaranteed institutional autonomy under KRG within a federal system, recognizing many statelike functions such as parliament, security forces, judicial system and even their own constitution, which operated parallelly with that of the central government. Under these new conditions, KDP and PUK formed a unity government; however, its composition did not stray away from the dual dynamics of KRG of a 50/50 arrangement between Barzani and Talabani. The ministries were composed of both parties and continued to maintain parallel administrations, with KDP dominating Erbil and Duhok and PUK controlling Sulaymaniyah and Halabja (Jabary & Hira, 2013, pp. 101-102). Barzani was appointed president of KRI, while Talabani settled for a more symbolic position as President of Iraq. The dual system remained intact not so much as per the result of the parties' leaderships but of their constituencies, who were reluctant to rescind their party-tribe affiliation. This trend is also displayed within the security forces. Despite the institutionalization of the forces within the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs and the de-politicization efforts, KRGs armed forces remains divided into factions that were linked to either KDP or PUK and—within these factions—each group followed particular individuals in the respective party. In fact the inner circle of KRG follows a tribal pattern that resembles a "dynastic republicanism" (Owtram, 2016, p. 121); more specifically, Masrour Barzani, the son of Masoud Barzani, was appointed as Chief of security while his nephew, Nechirvan Barzani, became KRGs Prime Minister in 2006. Similarly, Jalal Talabani's son, Qubad Talabani, was appointed as Deputy Prime Minister, while his brother Pavel Talabani was head of security in PUK dominated areas.

Given the emergence of severe sectarian violence in Iraq, KRG sought to promote a religiously pluralistic and democratic government. As a result, many parties flourished in the aftermath of 2005, while minorities (whether ethnic or religious) were allocated seats in the 111-seat parliament and promoted women's participation by setting a 30 per cent quota. Much of these efforts aimed at preserving the already accomplished autonomy and, at the same time, establishing and projecting a distinct image from their Arab counterparts in Baghdad.

Practically, KRG became entitled to govern its own people and territory under its own authority. However, its financial dependence on the central government of Iraq—which as per the constitution, increased its revenues (Costantini & O’Driscoll, 2020, p. 221; Jüde, 2017, p. 857)—and foreign policy limitations posed within the constitution of 2005 bounded KRG to Iraq. At the time, Kurdish officials were claiming on international media, “[i]n spite of our right to our own state, we don’t raise this slogan . . . We only seek federation within a democratic Iraq” (Hirst, 2011). In fact, the October constitution of 2005 attempted to adjust the relationship between Erbil and Baghdad. In order to safeguard this new direction, the Iraqi constitution granted the Kurds the position of Iraq’s presidency. It should be noted that the President of Iraq as per the 2005 October constitution, is a symbolic office as the executive power in Iraq lies in the Council of Ministers and the Prime Minister.

7.5.3.1. State-Society: The informal Referendum of 2005

Even though KDP and PUK had already agreed since 1992 on the principle of a federal Iraqi state, along with other opposition groups of the Iraqi National Congress, the decision to remain within a federal Iraq had strained the relations between the Kurdish leadership and its constituency. The Kurdistan Referendum Movement (KRM) organized numerous pro-independence protests between 2004 and 2005 and gathered 1.7 million signatures to pressure KRG to declare independence. In 2005, KRM even conducted a referendum within Iraqi Kurdistan during the Iraqi National Assembly election, according to which over 97 per cent of the voters wanted an independent Kurdish state (Ahmed, 2012, pp. 112-130; Costantini & O’Driscoll, 2020, p. 6; Mohammed & Owtram, 2014, p. 79). However, no regional power was keen on an independent Kurdish state. Similarly, the US—like Great Britain over eighty years ago—viewed the Kurds as a buffer between the Shi’a and Sunni communities (Jongerden, 2019, pp. 68-69). American support for an independent Kurdish state would further aggravate the sectarian tensions within Iraq and

exacerbate even more relations with states like Turkey, Iran and Syria, who would view such a development as *casus belli* against their sovereignty.

On the other hand, despite the structural restriction posed by the regional dynamics, the Kurds were aware that they were the ‘favourite’ group of the Americans on the ground, who seemed to have come to stay for a while in Iraq. Having guaranteed the territorial, institutional and political autonomy from the central government in Baghdad, the KRG leadership's next concern was to preserve the financial booming of KRI and further develop its economy. On the one hand, Baghdad allocated 17 per cent of the total Iraqi national budget to KRI (Chorev, 2007, p. 7), which would secure the Kurdish leadership some liquidity for its public sector. On the other hand, Barzani aimed to replace the foreign aid that developed throughout the 1990s through the financial support, first, from the NGOs and, later, the OFFA, by making use of its natural resources to build and develop a long-term sustainable economy in the post-2003 era (Mohammed & Owtram, 2014, p. 75). KRG hoped to become the new financial hub of Iraq or the new ‘Dubai’ by providing the only safe environment for Foreign Direct Investments into the Kurdistan Region, as the rest of the country was enduring a devastating financial meltdown. This required political stability, which was offered by the new arrangement between Erbil and Baghdad. By the same token, the Kurdish constituency, despite its desire for self-determination, ultimately preferred prosperity and growth instead of economic “decline or conflict for the cause of independent statehood” (Natali, 2007, p. 26). Thus, KRG exchanged statehood for economic prosperity.

Nonetheless, this was not the end of the efforts for independence. In fact, the tension around the referendum also concerned the population of the oil-rich disputed territories in Kirkuk, which—though subjected to several Arabization processes throughout the decades—was a mosaic of ethnicities, including Kurds, Turkman, Assyrians and other ethnic communities. The Kurds managed to add Article 140, which stipulated a three-step plan to resolve the status of the disputed territories between the KRG and the central government of Baghdad by 2007. The citizens of the area of Kirkuk and other disputed territories would conduct a referendum in order to solve the issue. It should be mentioned that it did not occur within the timeframe set by the constitution, rendering it null (Jongerden, 2019, p. 69).

7.5.3.2. Foreign Relations / Foreign Policy Nexus

The fine line between autonomy and independence was dictated in the constitution under Article 110, which referred to KRIs foreign and diplomatic relations. The way in which the foreign relation/foreign policy nexus was engaged and addressed rendered it abundantly clear that neither the US nor the new government in Baghdad was willing to allow the Kurds to secede. More specifically, the Kurds were granted powers to engage in foreign relations, and international affairs that would not breach Iraqi sovereignty as foreign policy and diplomatic representation were exclusive authorities of the Federal government along with “negotiating, signing, and ratifying international treaties and agreements; negotiating, signing, and ratifying debt policies and formulating foreign sovereign economic and trade policy” as stated in the first paragraph of Article 110 (Kinninmont, Stansfield, & Sirri, 2013, p. 20; Mohammed & Owtram, 2014, pp. 69-70). By the same token, Article 121/4 allowed KRG to establish representation or offices in embassies solely in relation to “cultural, social, and developmental affairs” (Barwari, 2010). Initially, KRI did not have a ministry of foreign affairs but a Department of Foreign Relations (DFR). Falah Mustafa Bakir, who was for decades in the higher echelons of KDP and worked directly under Barzani, headed DFR since 2006 and was treated as a Minister of Foreign Affairs.¹⁴³ The constitution attempted to legally limit KRG from exercising an independent foreign policy and solely allowing Iraqi Kurds to engage in foreign relations and international affairs as a federal region.

7.5.3.2.1. Representations and Financial-Oriented Foreign Policy

KRIs foreign relations unfolded in two ways. First, KRG was able to expand and upgrade its diplomatic representation abroad. For decades, the Kurdish leadership had an active para-diplomacy, which was mainly channelled through the Kurdish diaspora, who effectively acted as unofficial representatives abroad, beyond the Middle East states with Kurdish minorities—Turkey, Iran and Syria—such as the US, Israel, Egypt, Greece, UK, France, Germany and USSR as well as established contacts with the UN in New York (Gunter, 1993, p. 304). Foreign relations had peaked in the 1990s, mainly due to the NFZ, which technically transformed the Iraqi Kurds’ relations with Western countries from clandestine covert to open one. In 1992, the US had

¹⁴³ Bakir serves as a foreign minister between 2006 and 2019. He was succeeded by Fuad Mohammed Hussein.

representatives both in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. The Iraqi Kurd's foreign policy goals were mainly to attain support, be it politically, financially or militarily. KDP had a more active presence on the international political scene than PUK. Much aligned with the strategic culture of Kurdish leaders, Barzani was adamant in overseeing all the foreign relations and “maintained a separation between Kurdish delegations negotiating with different actors such as Baghdad, Iran and the United States among others” (Sadoon, 2017, p. 162).

After 2005, KRG upgraded this network with a more official hue. Today, Erbil hosts thirty-five representations from various countries, some of them general consulates,¹⁴⁴ consulates and representative offices, while Sulaymaniyah has only the Iranian Consulate General. It should be noted that although the Israeli-Kurdish relations date back in the 1960s, KRG does not have a representation in Israel. However, the Kurds have offices in Palestine as KRGs representation is limited to the states that the Republic of Iraq recognies. Interestingly, as the Jewish Kurdish representative of Jewish Affairs in KRGs Ministry of Religious Endowments and Religious Affairs told the author, he has an open relation with Israel and its further fostered by Jewish Kurds in Israel. KRGs attempt to differentiate and ramify its foreign relation beyond the confines set by the constitution is evident in its ambiguous relations with Israel. Masoud Barzani expressed his will to officially establish relations “since many Arab countries have ties with the Jewish state”¹⁴⁵; similarly, Jalal Talabani met with Israeli defence minister Ehud Barak at a conference in Greece in 2008, publicly shaking hands (BBC, 2008). While many unverified sources claim that Israeli-KRI relations have evolved into various sectors, including security and trade, there is no evidence-based proof to substantiate the exact degree of their relations (Bengio, 2014, p. 8). Having said that, even though Iraqi Kurdistan has either mission or representation offices rather than embassies, its leadership’s scope is ‘parallel diplomacy’ as stated by the KRGs Head of Foreign Affairs, including a mission to the European Union (Palani et al., 2019, p. 6).

¹⁴⁴ The official website of KRG states that it has the following representations; Armenia, Consulate General Belarus, Consulate Bulgaria, Trade Office China, Consulate General Czech Republic, Consulate General Denmark, Consulate Egypt, Consulate France, Consulate General Germany, Consulate General Greece, Consulate General Hungary, Consulate General India, Consulate General Iran, Consulate General Italy, Consulate General Japan, Consulate Jordan, Consulate General Korea (Republic), Consulate General Kuwait, Consulate General Netherlands, Consulate General Palestine, Consulate General Poland, Consular Agency Romania, Consulate Russia, Consulate General Saudi Arabia, Consulate General Spain, Consulate Sudan, Consulate General Sweden, Embassy Branch Office Turkey, Consulate General United Arab Emirates, Consulate General United Kingdom and finally, Consulate General United States.

¹⁴⁵ Quoted in Bengio (2014)

To a large extent, the representation is mainly within KDPs ranks or in some few cases PUK; for example, at the time of the writing, Shoresh Ismail Abdulla, a PUK member, is Minister of Peshmerga Affairs, Begard Dlshad Shukralla, Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources, among others. The official rhetoric of KRG representatives, however, remains firm and committed to Iraqi unity, stating in various instances that foreign policy belongs exclusively to the central government of Baghdad (Mohammed & Owtram, 2014, pp. 69-70). Nonetheless, while its representation abroad is more limited than Iraq's, most KRIs offices are not located within the Iraqi embassies. Interestingly, according to the KNA Foreign Relations Committee chair, the Kurdish representation abroad usually resides in more impressive locations (Kinninmont, Stansfield, & Sirri, 2013, p. 21), which—within the realm of foreign relations—signals a spirit of competition and detachment from Iraq.

The ambiguity of the foreign relations/foreign policy nexus is further reflected in the way Iraqi Kurdistan projects itself. The official logo, representations abroad as well as official government's website refer to the Iraqi Kurdish entity as KRG but also Kurdistan Region rather than KRI. Like any other state, they have an internet geographic top-level domain (.krd); e.g., the www.gov.krd. The departments of KRG eventually were renamed ministries, e.g., Ministry of Health or Ministry of Peshmerga. In the section of the department of foreign relations, the description of the services clearly indicates that foreign relations are not limited to cultural, financial and developmental affairs. Indicatively, the services include “strengthening bilateral relations with the international community”, “liaising with the diplomatic community in the Kurdistan region”, “Providing legal and authentication services to the people of the region and its citizens abroad, promoting” and “encouraging meaningful political and economic relations with the international community, especially with neighbouring countries”. All of which symbolize that KRG seeks to expand its foreign relations beyond cultural, financial and developmental affairs.

Second, the Kurdish leadership employed “energy diplomacy” based on oil and gas (Mansour, 2017b, p. 456) by launching “The Other Iraq” campaign, aiming to attract Foreign Direct Investments in Kurdistan (Chorev, 2007, pp. 5-6). KRG has been able to exercise a financial-orientated foreign policy due to the vagueness of the constitution, particularly in relation to the oil-fields in the disputed territories. More specifically, Article 112/1 stipulated that the “‘present’ fields [i.e. referring to the ones that were being produced at the time] shall be managed in partnership” between Baghdad and Erbil; however, the Kurds claim “that the lack of mention

of ‘future’ fields means that the responsibility to develop” fields in thereafter do not pertain under the Constitution (Kinninmont, Stansfield, & Sirri, 2013, p. 21). This allowed KRG to continue para-diplomacy and legitimize itself in the international area through business deals, mainly with big oil companies (Costantini & O’Driscoll, 2020, p. 5). Attracting foreign investors became its foreign policy.

An indicative example was the establishment of the Kurdistan Development Corporation (KDC). The corporation describes itself as “an initiative established [in 2003] jointly by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and international business people to advise on, develop and implement micro and macro development projects within the stable and prosperous region of Iraqi-Kurdistan”. KDC’s board is comprised of various political figures including KRGs Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barzani. Its main sectors of focus are banking, land development and franchises.¹⁴⁶ By the same token, the oil and gas sector became central to KRGs foreign policy as it pursued deals with state-owned companies such as Russia’s Gazprom and Turkey’s Genel Energy. The business relations would build a platform for KRG to engage with these states.

The financial-oriented foreign policy expanded KRG relations with numerous states beyond the traditional stakeholders such as Iran, Turkey and the US. Many key countries of the Arab world, such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and especially UAE, have gradually developed a mutual financial interest throughout the years in infrastructure, agriculture investment, mutual visits, trade representations, and tourism (Cengiz, 2022; Charountaki, 2016; Ibish, 2017; Williams, 2014). An interesting development in this process was that many Arab countries have become more sympathetic to KRG. The Gulf in particular view Iraqi Kurdistan not only under the prism of expanding their business cooperations but also the antipathy the Sunni monarchs have towards the Iranian-backed Shia Iraqi government.

Iraqi Kurds have become more visible in the region and the international arena after 2003. Nevertheless, some Kurdish officials argue that in the aftermath of Saddam’s fall, the Region’s¹⁴⁷ foreign policy became less effective politically. For example, according to KRG representative Ihsan (2010), prior to 2003, KRG was “the only gate for everything for Iraq because Saddam

¹⁴⁶ The official site of KDC is <http://www.kurdistancorporation.com>; however, for a more detailed review see their LinkedIn profile <https://www.linkedin.com/company/kurdistan-development-corporation>. For more examples of Kurdish attempts on attracting and promoting foreign investments see Kurdistan Regional Government, ‘Invest in the Future 2008’, ‘Invest In The Future 2009’, and ‘Invest In Democracy 2011’, <http://www.kurdistaninvestment.org/publications.html>

¹⁴⁷ Region is an alternative term of KRG.

Hussein was in power, no one was ready to deal with him, and everybody was dealing with [the Kurds]" (Mohammed & Owtram, 2014, p. 77). Be that as it may, the Region utilizes its foreign relations to display its success domestically as well. The official government website press releases are dominated by international affairs rather than domestic issues. Interestingly, the foreign policy issue is never mixed in the bundle of disputes in intra-Kurdish relations, be it between KDP and PUK or even between KRG and the central government of Baghdad.

The post-Saddam era undeniably allowed the Kurds to crystalize their organisational, institutional, and political structure, established already since the 1990s. If anything, the institutions validated the geographic tribal and ideological affiliations of KDP and PUK and the conflicting personal ambitions of KRGs leaders, allowing them to invest more in foreign relations, diplomacy, and international visibility rather than consuming each other in endless vicious conflicts.

7.6. Conclusion

KRGs main political drivers stem primarily from the dynamics of KDPs and PUKs leadership, with the balance tilted slightly towards the former. In this sense, when examining the role of the strategic culture, the leadership's perspective of the system, the state-society relations and even the institutions, one needs to take into consideration two main factors: first, the dominance of Mustafa Barzani within KDP, despite the plethora of parties within KRG, and second, the relationship and balance with Jalal Talabani and PUK, who both managed to hold power on both the domestic and foreign affairs of the Iraqi Kurdish political establishment. Talabani's and Barzani's course of actions demonstrate that despite their ideological differences and rift between them, they share a similar strategic culture, which is characterized by playing off international and regional players for the sake of personal/party survival. In this sense, KRGs strategic culture is dependent on the harmony between KDP and PUK. Another characteristic of KRGs strategic culture is that it capitalised on the rift among its bordering states – Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. As demonstrated above, Iraqi Kurdish leadership will capitalise either on a common front (KDP-PUK) when in harmony or against each other. At the same time, when in harmony, KRG seems to express the will of both parties, but in disharmony, it becomes apparent that KRG displays Barzani's agenda due to the structural organisation of KRG.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, two leaderships illustrated the flexibility of the ideological background; that was evident when Talabani aligned PUK with an Islamic Iran, Barzani's rapprochement with Turkey when PUK and KDP, in different times, conspired with Baghdad's government against one another. KDPs constant efforts to reach out to the US and even Israel automatically stirred Iran's antipathy towards Barzani. Equally, Iran's isolation from the international market renders Tehran less appealing in Barzani's eyes. The common aversion perhaps fostered the relationship between Iran and PUK. At the same time, the 1980s demonstrated the total detachment of the Iraqi Kurdish struggle from the Kurdish movement as a regional effort. This implies that the leadership's decision-making is more susceptible to the perception of the system and strategic culture that is entrenched in the personal/party survival rather than the ideological commitment to 'Greater Kurdistan'.

The structural opportunity that arose with the first Gulf War after the devastating Anfal operations provided KRG with full sovereignty over most Iraqi Kurdistan. This was the turning point for the Iraqi Kurds on two levels: first, they were able to develop the necessary political, institutional and financial prerequisites for a statelike actor; and, second, the rearrangement of their relationship with Baghdad. The peaking point occurred after Saddam's fall in 2003, as the new constitution of the Republic of Iraq granted and safeguarded KRI's economic, military and political autonomy. KRGs relation with the central government of Baghdad in the post-2004 era resembles more state-to-state relations than state-to-political party relations (KDP and PUK) (Sadoon, 2017, p. 31); even though KRG, as a whole, is not viewed as an equal in the eyes of Baghdad primarily due to the formers financial and legal constrained by Baghdad.

For the Iraqi Kurdish parties, autonomy, as opposed to independence, was the only plausible, viable and sustainable option in the immediate aftermath of Saddam's fall. As Stansfield (2003, p. 121), argues, the Kurdish leadership "accidentally found a system", which satisfied both Barzani and Talabani, "alleviating the concerns" of the US and the neighbouring states regarding the Kurdish minorities. Undoubtedly, the Kurdish leadership never relinquished the desire for an independent state. Given the structural constraints, it compromised by accepting a high-level of autonomy and independence from the central government of Baghdad. However, the exposure of the Iraqi Kurds in the post-Saddam era increased dramatically. The acquisition of economic development and presence in the international and regional arena replaced the bid for independent statehood, which drove Kurdish political parties since the early twentieth century. The

manoeuvring around the restrictions posed by the Iraqi constitution of 2005 proved fruitful as, in the decades that followed, Iraqi Kurdistan attracted numerous investors across the globe and cultivated relations resembling that of state-to-state.

As a result, Kurds in Iraq have achieved a much higher level of autonomy and financial development than their brethren in the neighbouring states. KRI has come the closest to the imagined longed-for “state that is home to the Kurdish nation”, making it a “hub” for many within the Kurdish community as many Kurds have moved from Turkey, Iran and Syria as well as the Western diaspora to Iraqi Kurdistan (King, 2013, p. 205). This modernised KRI much faster than predicted and placed the Kurds on the international map.

Chapter 8: KRG's Foreign Policy

8.1. Introduction

Like any other actor in the international system, KRG formulates its foreign policy based on preserving and promoting its interest. The autonomous status of KRI allows its leadership to view Baghdad as any other external/foreign entity, which creates a certain complexity in their relations. However, similar organic ties also occur with other neighbouring states, Turkey, Iran and Syria, mainly for two reasons: first, the substantial Kurdish populations in Turkey, Syria, and Iran perplex the relations between Erbil and Baghdad. In turn, the Kurdish political actors within these states are also intricately engaged with KRG within the transnational political Kurdish scene. Secondly, KRI's geography inherently poses security and economic challenges. Like any landlocked actor, KRG faces "the structural challenges in accessing world markets", rendering the Kurds dependent on their bordering neighbours for overall development and external trade (Faye et al., 2004). In this sense, even though the Iraqi Kurdish leadership has attempted throughout the previous decades to attain a strong presence within the international arena, historically and in practice, its foreign policy is 'trapped' within the walls of and mainly concerned with Iraq, Syria, Iran, and Turkey.

These states have a substantial portion of Kurdish minorities and view the developments in KRI as central to their security concerns. Thus, the foreign policy dynamics between KRG and its neighbouring states are characterized by "structural suspicion" (Mustafa & Aziz, 2016, p. 153) as they are intricately linked to the latter's relationship with the Kurdish minorities present in each of these states and vice versa. Nevertheless, the intra-Kurdish rivalry within Iraqi Kurdistan and among the numerous Kurds within Greater Kurdistan adds a layer of complexity to this dialectic and, by extension, to the KRG's foreign policy decision-making (Kaya, 2017, p. 276). In fact, KRI has carved its own 'autonomous and distinct' space both in relation to Iraq and the other Kurdish communities in other states. KRG consistently promoted the notion that Kurdistan is different from Iraq and that the Iraqi Kurds are distinct from other Kurdish minorities in the region in order to encourage foreign investments in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Similarly, the dialectics between Iraq's central government and the Region consistently impact KRGs foreign policy choices. Beyond that, on an official level, the Iraqi Kurdish political elite does not officially claim an independent foreign policy but rather highlights that KRG conformed with the Iraqi constitution in 2005. According to the constitution, KRG is legally

allowed to engage in foreign relations that do not contradict Baghdad's sovereignty. However, for decades, the trajectory of KRGs' external behaviour and practice has demonstrated that the Iraqi Kurds have been conducting a de facto foreign policy, which in many instances counters Baghdad's aspirations. If anything, KRG perceives non-Kurdish Iraq as any other foreign entity. The presence of Kurdish politicians and influential figures in Baghdad allows KRG to safeguard and lobby for Iraqi Kurdish foreign policy interests vis-à-vis the central government. A case in point is the resolution of the disputed territories between Erbil and Baghdad – as per the Article 140 and for the autonomous management of natural resources decentralized oil/gas law giving the regions the authority to manage their own hydrocarbon resources (Sadoon, 2017, pp. 29-30).

The structural changes that occurred on an international and regional level throughout the last two decades automatically place the dynamics and variables in the spotlight. As established in the previous chapter, KRG's foreign relations expanded significantly and established institutions in the post-Saddam era, actively gearing its foreign policy mainly toward economic development. It directed its efforts to attract foreign investments from the region and beyond, establish cultural relations, and expand its presence on the international scene. KRG's foreign policy was primarily focused on 'oil diplomacy', especially during the US occupation of Iraq. The regional changes that followed the US retreat from the region, along with the Arab uprisings in 2011, altered the composition of Baghdad's central government; by extension, the Kurds lost their privileged role.

Thereafter, KRG's foreign policy changed significantly and went beyond the economic dimension. This chapter will examine a number of foreign policy choices between 2010 to 2017. More specifically, the author will study KRG's foreign policy towards Turkey. Even though their relations at prima facia seem to be dominated by oil diplomacy, the political dynamics that emerged between the two much affected the Kurdish issue in the region as a whole. The political cooperation between the two has been contingent on their relations with Baghdad and PKK, the US role during the occupation of Iraq and the increasing influence of Iran on the central government. KRG actively sought to engage with Turkey as opposed to other neighbouring countries in order to counter Baghdad. Thus, this study will explore the structural opportunities favouring KRG's rapprochement with Turkey instead of Iran or Syria. Equally important is to examine Iraqi Kurdish response to the emergence of ISIS in the summer of 2014.

Similarly, the upheavals that swept the region in 2011, particularly the Syrian civil war and the fall of Mosul in the hands of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), provided unprecedented

attention to KRG. Hitherto, the regional changes that occurred in Syrian and Iraqi territory – including Iraqi Kurdish territory – provided new structural opportunities and constraints for KRG’s foreign policy. While the very confrontation against ISIS is not of great importance, the emergence of ISIS in Iraq triggered Barzani to make a series of foreign policy choices, including expanding its military apparatus and international visibility. In addition, this chapter will also seek to examine the controversial foreign policies vis-à-vis the Syrian Kurds on two occasions, namely, during the emergence of Rojava and the siege of Kobani. Finally, the author will analyse Barzani’s foreign policy choice to hold the referendum in 2017.

Given the dual centre of powers within KRG, it is essential to examine the dynamics between Talabani and Barzani and their implications on the Iraqi Kurdish leadership. For the first decade of the 21st century, the KDP and PUK had a power-sharing agreement that favoured Barzani’s dominance within KRG. In turn, this harmony assisted KRG in projecting a consistent image vis-à-vis its foreign policy. However, in times of tension, the implications on KRG’s leadership is twofold: first, the two leaders engage in contradicting policies to hobble each other and second, given the institutionalised dominance of KDP, KRG becomes Barzani’s vehicle at the expense of Talabani, and by extension PUK’s constituency. Thus, the variables of perception and strategic culture of Iraqi Kurdish leadership are contingent on KDP-PUK dynamics.

The following section will initially frame the structural suspicions that define Turkey-KRI relations. Then, the author will illustrate what fostered a change in the dynamics and examine the implications on KRGs relations with the Syrian Kurds and PKK. Section three will examine the double-edged foreign policy of KRG. On the one hand, the emergence of ISIS offered an unprecedented opportunity for the Iraqi Kurds to expand their military apparatus and enhance their international presence. However, at the same time, it had a negative implication on its domestic affairs, affecting both its state-society relations and KRI’s institutional integrity. In addition, amid these developments, KRG was put under the spotlight to take a stance regarding the developments in northern Syria. The last section will examine what triggered the highly controversial choice to conduct the referendum on September 25, 2017.

8.2. KRG’s Foreign Policy Toward Turkey

A new era of relations between Turkey and Iraqi Kurds commenced in 1991 when Turkey agreed to concede its territory to the Coalition forces in order to implement an NFZ over Iraqi Kurdish

territory to protect its population from attacks against Baghdad. The 2000s marked a transitional period with many instances of crises between the two as both – Erbil and Ankara – were exposed to regional changes with the US invasion of Iraq as well as to radical domestic changes that fueled the mutual suspicion. Although the Iraqi Kurds were considered the Americans ‘ favourite group’ within Iraq, the US’ ‘One Iraq’ policy inhibited KRG from seeking formal independence (Isakhan, 2015; Natali, 2010). Thus, KRG engaged with Ankara within a framework of a federal region. The first direct meeting between the two sides took place in Baghdad in 2008 when Ahmet Davutoglu, at the time Erdogan’s Senior foreign policy advisory and Turkish Ambassador to Iraq, Murat Ozelik, met with KRI’s Prime Minister, Nechirvan Edris Barzani and the Kurdish Iraqi president, Jalal Talabani. Soon, Ahmet Davutoglu, Turkey’s Foreign Minister, visited Erbil, offering KRI de facto recognition (Fidan, 2016). Turkey’s increasing regional involvement provided a gateway for KRGs political and economic ambitions. The US withdrawal from Iraq and the Arab uprisings favoured the closer relationship between Turkey and KRI.

There is a disagreement among scholars regarding the partnership of the two; it has been characterized as being a temporary marriage (Romano, 2015), “Catholic marriage (Olson, 2008), or even brotherly relations (Mustafa & Aziz, 2016, pp. 150-151), primarily because it is based on mutual economic interests, which withstood even in times of friction. For instance, at the nadir of KRG-Turkish relations in 2007, the bilateral trade was estimated at \$1.4 billion in 2007 (Bahcheli & Fragiskatos, 2008). As the Kurdish Head of the Investment Board of the Kurdistan Region, Herish Muharram, stated in 2008, “Turkish companies had by far the largest presence in Kurdistan’s economic development - surprising but pleasing statistic” (Mills, 2013). By 2012, Turkey dominated 80 per cent of construction contracts in KRI and goods (Fidan, 2016), indicating KRG’s dependency on Turkey (Natali, 2010; Tugdar & Al, 2018, pp. 134-135). The following section will analyse the emergence of their relationship despite structural suspicion formed by the direct contradictions between Turkey’s anti-Kurdish policies and KRG’s nationalist ambitions. In order to understand the Region’s foreign policy towards Turkey, this section will trace the structural changes that occurred to encourage Erbil’s and Ankara’s relations as well as KRG’s perception of the system and strategic culture, which define not only its relations with Ankara but also its foreign policy vis-à-vis other Kurd.

8.2.1. The Persistent Structural Suspicion

KRGs relationship with Turkey, traditionally, is turbulent as it is contingent on the latter's domestic concerns of the Kurdish population. The fact that the Iraqi Kurds had achieved a high level of autonomy constituted a major threat for Ankara, which – since the late 1970s – had to confront the resurgence of the Kurdish nationalist movement within Turkey. The Turkish Kurds militant organisation, Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) - headed by Abdullah Ocalan, had its headquartered and training camps in Syria. Eventually, PKK became popular on both sides of the 320,000 km Turkish-Iraqi border (Olson, 1992, p. 477) and was able to establish a sanctuary, known as Lolan camp, in KDPs stronghold within northern Iraq, an area which also borders Iran and Turkey. Turkey carried out attacks against PKK bases in KRGs territory throughout the 1980s. Since the early 1980s, PKK had allied itself with both KDP and PUK. Barzani and Ocalan had expanded their cooperation and committed themselves to the 'Principles of Solidarity' to counter Ankara's and Baghdad's anti-Kurdish policies (Gunter, 1993, pp. 303-304). However, it is worth noting that this cooperation was feeble as it could not withstand the ideological, political, and societal differences between the Iraqi Kurds and the Kurdish Turks. By the mid-1980s, KDP and PKK began to fall out as the latter attempted to gain influence within Iraqi Kurdistan (Bryza, 2012, p. 54). During the same period, Turkey and Iraq signed a series of security agreements, such as the 'Frontier Security and Cooperation Agreement' of 1983 and 'Border Security and Cooperation Agreement' a year later that allowed Ankara to carry out attacks against the Kurds in northern Iraq and at times in cooperation with Baghdad (Charountaki, 2012, p. 189; Olson, 1992, p. 496). Both Iraq and Turkey sought to curb Kurdish presence, especially in crucial oil-rich areas and protect oil pipelines that cross Iraq to the Turkish port, Dortyol (Olson, 1992, p. 478). However, at the outset of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Turkish President Ozal shut down these very pipelines as part of the Western sanctions against Saddam, leaving Ankara-Baghdad relationship tainted.

The aftermath of the Gulf War of 1991, however, generated a structural change that rendered KRG and Turkey "de facto allies" (Charountaki, 2012, pp. 188-189). The Coalition forces would not have been able to employ an NFZ across the 36th parallel without Turkish assistance. In practice, Turkey provided military protection to the Iraqi Kurds and access to international humanitarian aid. This de facto alliance had many liabilities for both sides. The Region's increased political and territorial autonomy during the 1990s alarmed Turkey. However, at the time, Turkey sought to strengthen its cooperation with the West (Larrabee, 2007, p. 106) and accepted to assist

the Iraqi Kurds on the condition that PKK would not continue its operations from northern Iraq. In addition, Turkey had always had an eye on northern Iraq, particularly in oil-rich Kirkuk, inhabited by Turkmen, among other ethnic minorities.¹⁴⁸ Turkey also sought to undercut their efforts for greater autonomy at every opportunity, forging a close relationship with Kirkuk's Turkmen community.

In turn, Barzani and Talabani had to concede to Turkish demands regarding the PKK on their territories, given the urgency for military protection against Saddam. KRGs leadership allowed Turkey to target PKK within its territory. Neither Barzani nor Talabani was initially able to admit their respective compliance openly and, at times, threatened Turkey publicly (Olson, 1992, p. 491), primarily due to the fact that Turkish attacks had caused numerous casualties to the Iraqi Kurdish population. These issues were put aside – at least temporarily – and in the early 1990s, KDPs spokesman, Hoshyar Zevari, retreated that “Turkey is our lifeline to the West and the whole world in our fight against Saddam [...] We are able to secure allied air protection and international aid through Turkey's cooperation. If Poised Hammer is withdrawn, Saddam's units will again reign in this region and we will lose everything” (Gunter, 1993, p. 303).¹⁴⁹ Inevitably, the new situation ended the relations between the Iraqi Kurdish leadership and PKK. In fact, after a decade in which PKK was active on Iraqi Kurdish territory, both Barzani and Talabani were wary of Ocalan's intentions to expand and increase PKK influence in KRI (Charountaki, 2010, p. 177). At the same time, Iran's increased influences in Iraqi affairs garnered the West's and some of the key Gulf countries' support for Turkey's raids within Iraq (Olson, 1992).¹⁵⁰

Conversely, the gradual increase of Ankara's regional influence did not neutralise the structural suspicion between the Iraqi Kurdish leadership and Ankara. Their relations kept treading a fine line: on the one hand, KRGs high level of autonomy and the possibility of independence would certainly be considered a severe blow to Turkey's domestic Kurdish policy. On the other, any vacuum of power within the Iraqi Kurdish leadership may offer fertile ground for PKK to

¹⁴⁸ As Lundgren (2007, pp. 89-90) the Turkman population in northern Iraq and particularly in the oil-rich disputed territories “have been marked by a balancing act of protecting what are perceived as Turkish national interests”. The Turkman account for over one million in northern Iraq have historical relations (Olson, 1992, p. 490). For more on the Turkman population of Kirkuk and their relation to Turkey see Bahcheli and Fragiskatos (2008, pp. 69-72); McDowall (2004, pp. 390-396)

¹⁴⁹ According to Gunter (1993, p. 303), at the time, Talabani seems even more vocal than Barzani about how that Turkey was a friendly country to Kurds. Turkish leaders referred to him as dear brother. PUKs leader at a point stated that “the people in northern Iraq will never forget the help of the Turkish Government and people in their difficult days” and suggested that the people may “want to be annexed by Turkey”.

¹⁵⁰ Much the GCC politics toward Iraq is contingent to the latter's antagonism with Iran, which ever since Al-Maliki's administration has increased its influence in Iraqi affairs.

expand its influence. Albeit KDPs suspicions of Turkish imperial intentions in Iraqi Kurdistan, Barzani's antagonism toward Talabani compelled Barzani close to Turkey. (Gunter, 1996, p. 234). KRG was aware that Turkey would impede any genuine independence efforts. However, given Turkey's willingness to provide the Iraqi Kurds with a lifeline to the world, Barzani, sought to engage with Turkey as a partner.¹⁵¹

The international and regional changes that occurred in the aftermath of 9/11 and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 set the Turkish and Iraqi Kurdish relations in a transitional phase. Initially, KRGs leadership pursued a wait-and-see policy vis-à-vis Turkey's new government under the leadership of Tayeb Erdogan in 2002. Indeed, Turkey's foreign policy in the first years of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) was focused on maintaining the country's foreign policy on the same course as the previous government, namely, channelling its efforts to strengthening its partnership with the West (Olson, 2006, p. 17) and the EU accession process. Erdogan's nuance within the foreign policy was geared toward economic development and trade to enhance Turkey's dire financial situation. After the fall of Saddam, Ankara resumed relations with Baghdad under the Iraqi Interim Government (2004-2005) and then with the Iraqi Transitional Government (2005-2006). KRG conducted its financial-oriented foreign policy with Turkey within the realm of the federal system. Although the US promoted cooperation between KRI and Turkey (Park, 2014), the latter viewed the Iraqi Kurds as a source of instability. The chronic structural suspicion between the two was displayed in various instances until 2007; for example, KRG condemned Turkey for its mistreatment of the Kurds in south-eastern Turkey, while Ankara accused Barzani of continuing to support PKK and referred to him as a 'tribal leader'. Against this backdrop, Ankara focused more on cooperating with Baghdad to downgrade KRG (Bryza, 2012, p. 55).

The structural suspicion between Turkey and KRG may not be understood without identifying Iran's position vis-à-vis the Iraqi Kurds. The KDP-PUK antagonism finds its pulse in the regional *bras de fer* between Tehran and Ankara, who tend to use the Iraqi Kurds to hobble each other's efforts of expansion in the region (Gourlay, 2016). Barzani is associated with Turkey, and Talabani with Iran. There is no organic alliance in both cases, given the ideological and political differences. The leftist PUK has little in common with Islamist Iran other than their shared

¹⁵¹ In this new partnership, Barzani gave the impression that Iraqi Kurdistan may be a good example for Kurds within Turkey as opposed to PKK and sought to mediate and enhance the legitimacy of more moderate Turkish Kurdish parties, albeit unsuccessfully.

antipathy towards Barzani, who has a track record of cooperating with the US and Israel, and gradually expanding relations with the Arab Gulf states (Ali, 2017). By the same token, Iran's increased influence on the central government of Baghdad impelled KRG to improve its relations with Turkey. Thus, with KDP dominating KRG, one may safely argue that a similar structural suspicion also exists between Iran and KRG. In Barzani's eyes, what renders Tehran less appealing than Ankara is the former's isolation from the global economy due to Western sanction. Within the realm of KRGs financial-oriented foreign policy, the Iraqi leadership actively chose Ankara over Tehran.

Despite the tensions with Turkey, KRG intended to mend relations with Ankara, which was evident as numerous secret meetings were held between Barzani and Turkish National Intelligence Organisation (MIT) officials (Sadoon, 2017, p. 430). KRGs leadership considered "Turkey is an important country" and had repeatedly attempted to "extend our hand of friendship to them and hope they will take it" as Nechirvan Idris Barzani, KRG official, stated.¹⁵² Nechirvan - Masoud Barzani's nephew and later Prime Minister (2006-2009; 2012-2019) and the current Region's president, is considered the 'engineer' of this approach. (Hurriyet Daily News, 2012; Park, 2014, p. 45). For Turkey, the involvement in the developments in Iraq and oil-rich KRI was a great opportunity to invest in its geoeconomics position as a transit corridor for natural gas from the region to Europe (Drakoularakos, 2018). At the same time, Ankara was cautious of the Iraqi Kurds, whose increased autonomy signalled possible future claims for an independent Iraqi Kurdish state constituted a threat as it could reverberate separatist tendencies among the Kurds within Turkey. To add to the challenges AKP had to face upon its arrival to power (Barkey, 2011), the Kemalist political vestiges known as the 'deep state' put AKP and Erdogan at risk of a coup – a long tradition in Turkish politics.¹⁵³ Thus, until Erdogan fringed his Kemalist rivals in 2007 (Romano, 2015, pp. 89-91), AKP's leadership did not diverge significantly from the previous foreign policy during this time.

Nonetheless, Turkey distrusted the Iraqi Kurds, the US' favourite partner in Iraq, who, to a large extent, dictated not only the future of KRI but also Iraq. Until 2006, Iraq's central government was relatively weak, and the Kurds were considered the 'Kings of Iraq'. KRG

¹⁵² Nechirvan Idris Barzani quoted in Sadoon (2017, p. 436)

¹⁵³ Erdogan did not have a strong standing in the Turkish political system. The previous Kemalist establishment had banned him from the Turkish political life since 1997-1998 for more details see Ketola (2013) and Cinar (2016).

representatives made their way to the international political scene via their financial-oriented foreign policy. The Iraqi Kurds had extensive control over oil-rich disputed areas within the Kirkuk and Diyala governorates. With the assistance of American legal advisors, KRG was able to curtail federal authority in intrinsic ways. The Iraqi Kurds had the right to hold an independence referendum by 2009 – as per the 2005 Iraqi constitution. The adoption of the right of the Iraqi Kurds had a dual purpose. First, it was used to demonstrate to the KRGs constituency that its leadership was advancing their rights, and secondly, it was used as leverage against Baghdad, Ankara, Damascus and Teheran. As such, the leadership stated that the KRIs union with the new Iraqi Republic was dependent on the goodwill of the Iraqi Kurdish leadership.

8.2.2. Winds of Change

KRI is landlocked and surrounded by four hostile governments. In order to survive both financially and politically, Iraqi Kurds require an alliance.¹⁵⁴ The US occupation of Iraq facilitated the good relations between Erbil and Baghdad. Even though the US curtailed any possibility of Iraqi Kurdish independence mainly to preserve the US legacy of war, it granted KRG extensive aspects of autonomy within Federal Iraq. However, upon the US withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, the new government in Baghdad sidelined the Kurds from the administration. Thus, KRG sought to extend its hand to Turkey. The Iraqi leadership sought to cultivate relations with Turkey to counterbalance. In Nechirvan Barzani's words, Ankara became the “door of hope” (Hurriyet Daily News, 2012). If they had to choose between Turkey, Iran, Syria or Iraq, many officials – most of whom belong to KDP - would choose Ankara (Park, 2014). The structural opportunity for the rapprochement between Turkey and KRI stemmed from mainly three interlinked factors: first, the discovery of new oil fields in KRI; second, the gradual deterioration between Erbil and Baghdad and thirdly, Erdogan's foreign policy turn. Initially, the discovery of Sheikan fields Tawke area, Taq Taq, amongst others (Al-Sahlawi & Noreng, 2014, p. 28; Charountaki, 2012, p. 191; Mustafa & Aziz, 2016, p. 154), forced Erbil and Baghdad to revisit the contested issue of disputed territories and the legislations regarding oil exploitation that were left purposefully vague in the 2005 constitution. The newly elected Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki was committed to fortifying

¹⁵⁴ Many KRG leaders have retreated the need to find at least one neighbour that would back them for more see interview in Hurriyet Daily News (2012)

Baghdad and setting a new pace in post-war Iraq. His iron fist curbed Iraqi Kurdish influence from Baghdad while gradually sidelining non-Shia members within his administration.

Given the political impasse, Barzani unilaterally passed the hydrocarbon legislation in 2007 (Petroleum Law) by surpassing the regional process,¹⁵⁵ enabling KRG to sign Production Sharing Agreements (PSA) with international corporations and share revenues in exchange for oil extraction (Voller, 2013, p. 72). The US-backed supported KRGs initiative by passing a congressional bill (FY2008, HR 1585, September 2007) and enhancing its “independent contracting of oil deals” (Charountaki, 2012, p. 191). From KRGs perspective, the oil field discoveries would be a launching pad for both its image as an autonomous entity and its financial oriented foreign policy.

According to KRGs foreign minister, Falah Mustafa, business “means you have more and more interaction with the outside world”; similarly, Sarbaz Hawrami, senior adviser to Barzani, outrightly claimed that the scope of attracting these companies meant common interests and close relations with their governments.¹⁵⁶ Turkey was essential for the international investors’ confidence in KRI and could become a transit corridor like in the 1990s “for transport and sale of Kurdish oil/gas” primarily, given Baghdad’s “continuing threat of blacklisting and legal action” (Sadoon, 2017, p. 452).

In the meantime, after intense domestic turmoil, Erdogan had established his power within Turkey, and, by extension, he was able to redirect his foreign policy orientation (Altunişik & Martin, 2011; Barkey, 2011, pp. 667-669; Cinar, 2016). Ahmet Davutoglu, Erdogan’s chief foreign policy advisor and later Turkish Foreign Minister, promoted the ‘Strategic Depth’ Doctrine, which entailed zero-problem diplomacy (Alexander, 2006; Aras, 2014; Drakoularakos, 2018; Kirişçi, 2009). This re-oriented Turkish foreign policy towards the East and away from the West. It also had a new approach regarding the Kurds. According to Safeen Dizayee, KDPs representative in Ankara (1992-2003), thereon, Turkey viewed KRG as a solution to its Kurdish problem in Turkey, acknowledging that the Iraqi leadership was more influential and closer to the US (Felsch, 2016, p. 45). The most crucial element that cultivated some level of trust between Barzani and Erdogan was the former’s delay of the 2007 Referendum on Kirkuk and other disputed territories. KRG was unable to conduct the referendum, not only because certain legal preconditions were not met

¹⁵⁵ For the full text of the Petroleum Law see (KRG, 2007).

¹⁵⁶ Quoted in Akreyi (2017, p. 92)

based on the constitution but also due to the fact that no one, including the US, Syria, Iran and Baghdad, would support such a move; thus, risking to shatter much of the financial achievements and perhaps isolate KRI allowing al-Maliki to take over oil-rich regions. After all, oil was and remains the backbone of the Kurdish economy; jeopardizing that would also imperil its political achievements.

Davutoglu's historic visit to Erbil in 2009 made it clear that Turkey would deal with Barzani and al-Maliki as leaders of two different entities. The three had cooperated on different issues and even "established a Trilateral Mechanism to develop cooperation with a view of eradicating the PKK in Iraqi territories" a year earlier under the US aegis (Charountaki, 2012, p. 192), which allowed Turkish military forces to enter KRIs territory to attack PKK bases, for the first time in a decade. Despite the tensions with Baghdad, in the face of the Iraqi election of 2010, the two main Shia parties were looking for support from the Kurdish parties. For the Kurds, this was another opportunity to assert and expand their influence. They demanded that Article 150 to be implemented (which entailed funds for Peshmerga and changes in the oil and gas law); al-Maliki promised to implement them if he won (Van Wilgenburg, 2012, p. 52). Even though, in retrospect, al-Maliki had barely shown goodwill towards the Kurds, KRGs strategic culture to always reach out and negotiate with Baghdad seemed to take centre stage once again. Just like in the past, the central government did not keep its promise.

The structural changes in the regional system at the onset of the Arab uprisings directly impacted the KRIs and Turkey's relations, which were already improving significantly on multiple fronts. Iraq was not immune to the unexpected Arab uprising that swept the region in 2011. The rampant corruption and the ongoing instability had already put al-Maliki in a difficult position almost from the beginning of his second term. In the face of falling regimes across the region and the US withdrawal from Iraq, the Iraqi Prime Minister attempted to enhance his powers further and marginalize key tribal and religious leaders both within the Sunni and Shia community, such as the anti-Kurdish Sunni governor of Nineveh province, Atheel al-Nujaifi as well as his brother Osama, speaker of the Iraqi Parliament and the prominent Shia religious leader Moqtada al-Sadr. The former announced that he would cooperate closely with Barzani in oil production, while al-Sadr, during his visit to Erbil, promised to support a no-confidence vote against al-Maliki (O'Driscoll & Baser, 2019, pp. 5-6; Van Wilgenburg, 2012, p. 52).

Al-Maliki's refusal to fulfil his promises to the Kurds at the end of 2011 led the Region to unilaterally and independently sell oil to the international markets and sign oil deals with companies such as Exxon Mobil, which had agreed with KRI and Turkey – independently from Baghdad – to build new pipelines that connect to Ceyhan (Černý, 2017, pp. 241-242). As a response, Baghdad withheld the Kurdish share from the national budget (17 per cent of the total) and stationed Iraqi forces in oil-rich Kirkuk to avert Peshmerga forces from taking over the fields (Al-Sahlawi & Noreng, 2014, p. 26). Interestingly, the KRG stated that “the sales were legal, they were of surplus oil produced from refineries located within the Kurdistan Region, and it continued to allot funds from oil sales to Iraq's federal treasury” (Ustun & Dudden, 2017, p. 13). From Barzani's perspective, Iran, Turkey and even the US would consider Baghdad's retaliation a liability for their own interests vested in both Baghdad and Erbil. It is important to note that Barzani's strategic culture of bidding regional forces against each other had a central role in approaching and cultivating relations with Baghdad. Thus, KRG was counting on them to either mediate with or force the hand of Baghdad for a more favourable compromise on KRGs behalf vis-a-vis the disputed territories (Al-Sahlawi & Noreng, 2014, p. 31).

The gradual increase of Iranian influence in Baghdad and al-Maliki's marginalization of Iraqi Sunni Arabs contributed to the distancing of Turkey-Iraq relations (Bryza, 2012, p. 58; Park, 2012, 2014). In addition, the persistent domestic turmoil in Iraq's non-Kurdish areas of Iraq rendered KRI – comparatively – a more stable environment for foreign investors, leading many Chinese and Russian oil companies operating in Southern Iraq to move to KRI (Al-Sahlawi & Noreng, 2014, pp. 24, 26). By 2013, against Baghdad's and Washington's wishes, KRI and Turkey agreed on a direct 50-year economic agreement (Anadolu Agency, 2014; Middle East Eye, 2015a; Romano, 2015, p. 295; Serdaroglu, 2015). KRGs foreign policy towards Turkey, based on the mutual interest in economic development, has allowed Iraqi Kurds to enhance their autonomy from Iraq's central government and cultivated a financial dependency with Ankara. KDP promoted all these agreements. In an attempt to counterbalance Barzani's effort, PUK engaged in trade agreements with Iran. However, PUK would conduct unofficial deals with Iran and by extension, they were more limited than the ones between KDP and Turkey that were forged under official dealings of KRG (Chorev, 2007, pp. 4-5). Reports indicate that unofficial trade from KRI to Iran reached \$4 to \$5 billion in 2014 (Iddon, 2017). Overall, however, Tehran's stance toward KRI is not at the expense of its relationship with Baghdad. Like many states, Iran has representation in

both Erbil and Baghdad, although it is a consulate and the latter an Embassy, while the Region has a “de facto embassy” in Tehran (Entessar, 2018, p. 73). In addition, KDP officials in their KRG capacity have visited Iran; both Masoud Barzani and his nephew have visited Ahmadinejad and Rouhani in Tehran, respectively.

The *bras de fer* between Turkey and Iran in Syria after the 2011 uprisings, to some extent, enhanced the competition between KDP and PUK. Erdogan’s stance against Assad’s regime and his assistance to the Syrian opposition amplified the Iranian-Turkish rivalry as Tehran was heavily invested in Damascus (Al-Sahlawi & Noreng, 2014, p. 28; Çağaptay & Evans, 2012, p.). Already by 2012, the Syrian crisis provided many opportunities for KRI and Turkey to test the resilience of their relations further. More importantly, it was an opportunity for the Region to enhance its regional role, juxtaposing its alliance with Turkey with its Kurdish identity within Syria. On the other hand, the regional turmoil caused a decrease in oil prices, seriously affecting the money flow in Iraqi Kurdistan (Wilgenburg & Fumerton, 2015: 5). The disturbance of the economic stability of KRG - would soon impact the clientelistic networks of both KDP and PUK, eventually disturbing the harmony of their relations.

8.2.3. KRG Mediation in Northern Syria

Assad regime's decision to withdraw from northern Syria and not challenge the growing political and military power of the PKK-backed Syrian Kurds PYD (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat) and its military wings, the YPG/YPJ, in 2012 triggered a new era for the Kurdish transnational political scene. At the time, Assad's survival looked grim,¹⁵⁷ in light of which he had to reduce the open fronts within Syria to focus on fighting the Turkish-backed-Syrian opposition Syrian National Council (SNC), among other opposing groups. However, in practice, he withdrew his forces from Kurdish-dominated areas in northern Syria, allowing PYD to take control of the area.¹⁵⁸ Whether intentionally or not, this decision threatened Turkey’s domestic security as northern Syria became a safe haven for PKK and “a geographic and strategic buffer against further intervention in Syrian affairs” (Allsopp & Van Wilgenburg, 2019, p. 174). Moreover, Iran enhanced its military support to Syria’s regime, further alarming Turkey, whose foreign policy shifted rapidly from “zero

¹⁵⁷ For more on the military and political situation of the Syrian civil war see Hokayem (2017); Khaddour (2015); Phillips (2015, 2016)

¹⁵⁸ Assad continued to pay the salaries and allowed the function of the state in those areas (Allsop, 2015; Gunes & Lowe, 2015; Phillips, 2016).

problems with neighbours” to “zero neighbours without problems” (Mustafa & Aziz, 2016, p. 156).

Historically, KDP and PUK have influenced other Kurdish parties in the region. Thus, it is common to find offshoots or sister organisations of these parties in Syria that have evolved and adapted to the political realities of the Kurdish Syrian political scene. The legacy of KDP-PUKs ideological antagonism thrives even in northern Syria. For instance, KDPs offshoot in Syria (KDPS) is at odds with PUKs traditional ally Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party (KDPP), led by Abdul Hamid Darwish. Interestingly, KDPP, like PUK, seceded from KDPS in the 1960s. Within this context, the emerging forces in northern Syria seem to reflect similar ideological antagonism. The Democratic Union Party and its Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG/PYD), an offshoot organisation of PKK, have also evolved in their own way.¹⁵⁹ The Syrian crisis provided fertile ground for PKK as it increased its influence among the Syrian Kurds through YPG/PYD in mainly Kurdish areas of Al-Hasakah, Afrin and Kobane in July 2012 (Hasan & Khaddour, 2021). Talabani was one of the first to support the Syrian Kurdish struggle within the context of the Syrian uprisings and gained substantial influence. The fact that Barzani had a different stance on the Kurdish issue in Syria complicated KRGs position toward the Syrian Kurds. KDPs commitment to Turkey dictated its relations with other Kurds (Kaya & Whiting, 2017, p. 86; Natali, 2010).

KRGs foreign policy in Syria aimed to increase its influence and establish control in northern Syria. The strategic culture of KRG in terms of its dual power of centres was entirely on display; in other words, KDP and PUK chose opposing and conflicting sides in northern Syria. Barzani assisted Syrian Kurds in establishing Kurdish National Council (KNC) in October of 2011 in Qamishli and mediated to open communication channels with the Turkish-backed SNC to fight the Assad regime. KNC was an amalgam of alliances among different Syrian Kurdish parties and youth and women movements¹⁶⁰ from across the spectrum of the large range of Kurdish political actors in Syria with different political ideologies similar to that of Iraqi Kurds.¹⁶¹ PYD’s militant

¹⁵⁹ For more on PKK and PYD relations see Kaya (2017).

¹⁶⁰ As Allsopp and Van Wilgenburg (2019, p. 54) note the nature and number of the parties within the KNC alliance changes “due to parties leaving, splitting or merging” These are some of the parties within KNC in 2017: The Kurdish Union Party in Syria (Yekîti), Kurdistan Democratic Party-Syria (PKDS), Kurdish Reform Movement-Syria, Kurdish Democratic Equality Party in Syria, Kurdish Democratic Patriotic Party in Syria, Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria (KDPS), Kurdish Democratic Union Party in Syria (Democratic Yekîti), Kurdistan Democratic Union, Kurdish Democratic Left Party in Syria, Kurdistan Left Party-Syria, The Kurdish Future Movement in Syria – (Syrian Yezidi Assembly and Avant-garde Party Kurdistan-Syria).

¹⁶¹ For more of the political fragmentations of the Syrian Kurds prior to the Syrian civil war see Allsopp and Van Wilgenburg (2019, pp. 47-55)

nature allowed it to be one of the most influential parties in protecting the Syrian Kurds, rendering it popular among the population (Kaya & Whiting, 2017, p. 6). In essence, the Syrian Kurds have common demands regarding Kurdish rights and realizing some form of autonomous rule. However, within the context of the Syrian civil war, the Syrian Kurds formed two main poles that came to represent two different political philosophies of Kurdish autonomy: the Barzani versus the Ocalan approach (Abdulssattar, 2020). One was led by KNC, which aimed for Syrian autonomy with statelike characteristics similar to the Region's model, and another was led by YPG/PYD, which "aimed to develop an ordering based on the idea of autonomous assemblies" (Jongerden, 2019, p. 65).

In contrast to Barzani's proposal, PYD espoused a more decentralized bottom-up approach to the Kurdish Syrian autonomy "whereby local communes govern within the unity of Syria" (Kizilkaya, Hamdi, & Salman, 2021, p. 10). Initially, PYD joined KNC and "committed to power-sharing" while "downplay[ing] its ties to the PKK and to present itself as a movement dedicated specifically to serving the Kurds in Syria" (Kaya, 2017, p. 281). Soon many Ocalan-inspired Kurdish parties established an alternative coalition, the People's Council of West Kurdistan (MGRK) at the end of 2011 (Abdulssattar, 2020). Barzani attempted to mediate between the two camps in two conferences in Erbil - Hawler I and II - on July 2012 and December 2013, respectively.¹⁶² In the first conference, KNC and PYD agreed to administer the Kurdish areas jointly. However, PYD "entrenched control, erecting its own checkpoints, establishing local councils, distributing food and fuel and often refusing entry to KNC fighters" (Phillips, 2016, pp. 133-134). Turkish Kurdish leaders also attended the second conference. They formed a joint Kurdish delegation to participate in the "Geneva II" talks, end the media war between the two parties, and form a committee to release detainees in PYD prisons (Abdulssattar, 2020). The agreement, however, did not fully come through. At the beginning of 2014, MGRK's decision unilaterally establish three autonomous cantons, the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), also known as Rojava [West Rojava], in north-eastern Syria, approximately 80 per cent of Syrian Kurdish territory, stretching from Afrin in the west, to Jazira in the east and Kobani at the centre. Barzani was not the only one to oppose PYD's move (Rudaw, 2013).

¹⁶² Hawler is Erbil in Kurdish.

Beyond the mediation attempts, KRG has trained and supported Syrian Kurdish opposition groups. According to KRGs Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, KRG “have done some training” to help Syrian Kurds defend their territory against extremists; however, he emphasized that the Iraqi Kurdish leadership did not intend “to interfere in the internal affairs of Syria”.¹⁶³ The dealing with Syrian Kurds at times raised Turkey’s suspicions vis-a-vis Barzani’s intentions, particularly since PKK attacks increased within Turkey in the summer of 2012 (Bryza, 2012, p. 61). Indeed, Barzani became a vital ally to many among the Syrian Kurdish leadership, given his relations with the US and Turkey, who were backing the Syrian opposition (Kinninmont, Stansfield, & Sirri, 2013, p. 34) and rendered the KNC “more receptive to the SNC” (Phillips, 2016, pp. 133-134), but lacked the widespread sympathy of their constituencies.

After 2013, Barzani’s popularity decreased, Talabani’s increased. PUK supported PYD indirectly via Kurdish National Alliance (KNA) that broke off with KNC, which was also close to PYD. At the same time, Talabani supported KNC, but unlike Barzani, he did not oppose PYD. Some unofficial sources claim that PUK had played a crucial role in mediating between Assad’s regime and the PYD through which Damascus “surrendered control of northern Syria to the PYD in 2012 in exchange for it remaining neutral in Syria’s domestic conflict” (Allsopp & Van Wilgenburg, 2019, p. 184). Much of this was based on the traditional alliance between PKK and the Syrian regime (Tejel, 2012); however, there is no concrete proof that this agreement regarding northern Syria took place. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that PUKs leadership has supported PYD and hosted many of its members in Sulaymaniyah. The relationship between PUK and PYD grew closer after Talabani’s stroke in December of 2012, weakening PUK's transcending influence. Talabani, - prior to his death – bypassing official routes, mediated between Tehran and Damascus and the PKK for a deal in which the two formers would provide weapons to Rojava in exchange for not mending with Iranian Kurdish affairs and not contesting Assad’s authority beyond Rojava (Savelsberg, 2014, pp. 98-99). It was common practice for Talabani during the periods of disharmony with KDP. Although there is little evidence to prove that the Talabani’s mediation occurred (Černý, 2017, p. 257), PUK eventually grew closer to PYD during the Kurdish struggle to fight ISIS from 2014 and on.

¹⁶³ Quoted in Devi (2013)

8.3. The ISIS Threat: KRGs Double-Edged Foreign Policy

This section will examine KRGs response to the emergence of ISIS and how it affected its foreign policy choices between 2014 and 2016; namely, its active foreign policy to expand its military apparatus, its reserved policy vis-à-vis the siege of Kobani and, finally, its international visibility. At the same time, given the extraordinary experiences of KRG, the variables that to some extent were constant throughout the previous decades, such as that of the state-society relations and the validity of institutions within the Region, endured impacted KRGs legitimacy negatively and, in turn, affecting the foreign policy decision-making of the leadership thereon.

8.3.1. Foreign Policy to Expand Military Apparatus

Initially, the emergence of ISIS constituted a golden opportunity for KRG. The former's expansion across the Syrian border and throughout the Iraqi Arab Sunni populated areas in June of 2014 swiftly defeated the Iraqi Forces (Isakhan, 2017a; 2017b, p. 438), not only in Mosul and Tikrit but also the units deployed close to the disputed territories (Nineveh, Kirkuk and Salaheddin). This rapid disintegration of the Iraqi army forced al-Maliki to formally request KRG to safeguard the oil-rich areas from ISIS (Isakhan, 2017b, p. 438). Indeed, Barzani deployed 30,000 Peshmerga, 'liberating' the territories. Even though the Peshmerga faced low-scale fights against ISIS and some local non-Kurdish resistance, the Iraqi Kurdish forces were able to take over Diyala, Salaheddin, Nineveh plain (east of Mosul), Sinjar and Zummar, which are west of Mosul and includes Ein-Zaleh oil field, and finally, the city of Kirkuk city, including its military airport and oil-fields (ICG, 2015, pp. 1-2). By the end of June 2014, KRG had expanded its territory by 40 per cent (Owtram, 2018a, p. 81). With this achievement, along with the collapse of Iraq's central governments, which was in a state of emergency, Barzani, on July 1st 2014, saw an opportunity to declare that it was the right time to hold the referendum on Iraqi Kurdish independence as per the Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution, and make sure that Iraqi Kurds do not get drawn into Iraq's chaos (Rudaw, 2014b).

In an unexpected turn of events, at the beginning of August, ISIS advanced toward KRIs territories defeating the Peshmerga spectacularly in a matter of days. Even though ISIS did not run over the core Kurdish territory (Pollack, 2014) – nor did it intend to – the Salafi-Jihadists advanced and managed to occupy “three Ninewa towns (Bartella, Gweir and Makhmour) in a radius of about 67 km northwest, west and south-west of Erbil”. By August 6th, ISIS fighters reached 40 km from the Kurdish capital and captured “the strategic town of Makhmour on the road between Mosul and

Kirkuk” (ICG, 2015, pp. 1-2). The revered Peshmerga had taken a heavy blow with a loss of 1,200 men and women and over 5,900 injured fighters in an attempt to defend KRI borders from ISIS (Secat & Gallego, 2015, p. 233), and caused the retreat of the Peshmerga forces from various areas including Sinjar, home to the Yazidi community,¹⁶⁴ unintentionally facilitating the massacre of the Yazidis. The genocide of the Yazidis caught international attention along with ISIS’ capture of the Mosul dam – key to Iraqi infrastructure (Isakhan, 2017b, pp. 442-443).

KRGs leadership used ISIS’ advance as leverage to enhance its relations with the West beyond the oil sector and seek military aid. Peshmerga’s setback was attributed to the lack of equipment and indirectly blamed the US for not supplying the Region with the same quality and quantity of weapons. According to Lieutenant General Hegmadem Osmat, ISIS “had more modern weapons than us [Peshmerga], they came with tanks, RPGs, and heavy artillery... For every mortar, we shot at them, they would shoot a dozen back”.¹⁶⁵ As Isakhan aptly points out that the Peshmerga was underfunded compared to the Iraqi forces, mainly due to the fact that the US was committed to a ‘One Iraq Policy’ and sought to curb KRGs efforts to proclaim independence so as to safeguard its legacy of 2003 war in Iraq (Isakhan, 2017b, pp. 443-444). Very much in line with Barzani’s strategic culture, Barzani was able to capitalize on the tragedy of Sinjar by appealing for military aid for KRGs forces. He launched an international appeal that convinced the Obama administration to aid Peshmerga forces. The disintegration of Baghdad on the one hand and ISIS’ advance in the area of American financial interest on the other propagated the US to lay aside – briefly – the One Iraq policy by aiding the Peshmerga. From the US perspective, Obama’s administration had kept a safe distance from engaging with the ISIS phenomenon in the region; however, the possible collapse of KRI would be calamitous for US interests there. Initially, the US assisted the Iraqi Kurds with airstrikes to retake Makhmour and sent an advisory mission to Erbil.¹⁶⁶ Eventually, along with UK and France, the US provided the Iraqi Kurdish forces with military aid and training.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ It should be mentioned that according to many interviews conducted by the author in Dohuk on September 2016, the Yazidi’s were at owe with the peshmerga forces as they were guaranteed protection. However, upon the arrival of ISIS no forces were to be found in and around Sinjar.

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in Frenkel (2014)

¹⁶⁶ It should be noted that the Senate, initially, was against arming the Kurds directly, claiming it would cause instability in the long turn and threaten the unity of Iraq. For more see Klimas (2015). However, later on the US felt compelled to intervene given the extent of the humanitarian crisis. See Obama’s statement on Iraq (Obama, 2014),

¹⁶⁷ It should be noted that the Senate was against arming the Kurds directly, claiming it would cause instability in the long turn and threaten the unity of Iraq. For more see Klimas (2015)

Interestingly, the traditional disagreements between the two parties amplified; KDP disproportionately received weapons and training from the international coalition. Against this backdrop, PUK had to rely on Iran's and PKK's military assistance against ISIS. On the battlefield, KDP and PUK fought off the Salafi-jihadists separately and in discord, "preferring competition over coordination", which rendered the Peshmerga forces "less effective" (Paasche and Gunter 2016). The common threat failed to soften the bitterness between the two. Indicative of the depth of the crisis was an incident in June of 2014 when ISIS attacked Jawala (PUK held-area), and KDP remained idle (Holland-McCowan 2018: 14). Another prominent example of how the KDP-PUK rift had negatively impacted KRGs relations with its constituency was the security situation in Sinjar. After the defeat of ISIS, the traumatised locals that felt abandoned by the Iraqi Peshmerga viewed YPG and PKK as their saviours, effectively delegitimising KRG and particularly KDP "as the dominant player in its own territory" (Stephens 2015: 235).

Another negative implication of KRGs foreign policy to expand its military apparatus was that it came at the expense of holding the referendum. At the beginning of July, before ISIS advancement on KRIs territories (August 1-15), Fuad Hassan, chief of staff to Barzani, and Falah Bakir, head of foreign relations, were already in Washington bargaining for defensive weapons in exchange for postponing the referendum (Slavin, 2014), even though at home, Barzani was giving the impression that the referendum was afoot (Černý, 2017, p. 245). While it is not clear how this scenario would have played out if ISIS had not advanced toward KRIs territories, one can confidently argue that in July 2014, KRG aimed for international recognition if it were to join the fight against ISIS to save Iraq. According to Peter Galbraith, Barzani bargained for US recognition in exchange for Peshmerga troops joining to save Iraq (Galbraith, 2014). Having said that, after the defeat of the Peshmerga, Barzani had no bargaining power. Iraqi Kurds were able to retrieve their lost territories from ISIS by the end of August only due to the international coalition's assistance. Subsequently, in September 2014, KRG announced – once again – the delay of the referendum indefinitely. Soon after, Barzani requested the recognition of the Peshmerga forces as a legitimate part of the Iraqi Forces, given that they were vital in the international fight against ISIS; he also requested that Baghdad directly fund the Peshmerga while at the same time giving them the freedom to independently purchase weapons from third parties "without Baghdad's approval" (Isakhan, 2017b, pp. 444-445). In exchange, the Kurds would participate in the negotiations to form a new government in Baghdad in September 2014.

On a regional level, Iran was equally eager to assist KRG. Amidst the crumbling of the Iraqi government and the Syrian civil war, Tehran urgently needed to protect Iraq from further falling into the hands of the Sunnis and fight for ‘the resistance axis’ to maintain access to Hizbullah in Lebanon. As Barzani acknowledged himself, Iran was the first to provide Iraqi Kurds with weapons (Aziz & Kirmanj, 2019, p. 156). Conversely, the Iranian Quds forces assisted PUKs Peshmerga division along with PKK (Natali, 2015, p. 1516), not KDP forces. Barzani could not associate himself with Iran out of fear of further damaging the relations with Turkey. The relations between Erdogan and Barzani had become dire after the former announced the referendum. Even though Ankara avoided any spasmodic moves against the Region, Turkey did not contribute to the defence of Erbil against ISIS (Černý, 2017, p. 253). To Turkey’s dismay, the numerous setbacks in Syria, the defeat of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Iran’s growing influence in Iraq and the region had increasingly become isolated, the asymmetry gap between KRG and Erdogan’s administration shrunk, rendering KRI “the only corridor through which it can reach out to the Arab world” (Mustafa & Aziz, 2016, p. 162). To some extent, according to a KDP former lawmaker, this forced KDP “to rethink its position vis-à-vis both Iran and the independence issue” (ICG 2015: 15). Ankara silently accepted the gradual progress in KRG-Iranian relations after August 2014, as Iraqi Kurdistan gained international visibility amidst the unexpected chaos. KRG and Turkey continued to depend on each other financially even after 2014, despite KRGs and its constituency's disappointment with Turkey’s inaction to support the Iraqi Kurds in their fight against ISIS.¹⁶⁸

8.3.2. Kobani: A Reserved Foreign Policy

As ISIS’ threat remained imminent at the borders of KRI, on the other side, Syrian Kurds were also victims of the atrocious Salafi-Jihadists advancement. The city of Kobani, a strategic corridor of oil pipelines and refineries in northern Syria, was sieged and attacked in September 2014. Despite YPG’s bravery, after a month of fighting, ISIS had managed to capture 40 per cent of the town. Unlike the case with KRI, the international coalition’s response was initially passive (Černý, 2017, p. 261; Secat & Gallego, 2015, p. 233). The US was reluctant to alienate Turkey, a key NATO ally. Ankara, on its part, after accepting 180,000 refugees from Kobane, closed its borders with Syria (Pamuk, 2014). Turkey viewed ISIS’ attack in northern Syria as an opportunity to

¹⁶⁸ According to ICG (2015, p. 15), Turkey is not popular among Iraqi Kurds; even though “they succeeded in investing in Kurdistan, but they failed to win the Kurds’ trust”.

weaken and annihilate PYD forces. To this end, the Turkish military forces prevented Turkish and Iraqi Kurds from joining the fight against ISIS in Kobani (Whitcomb, 2014; Zaman, 2014).

By the same token, KDP could not directly assist the Syrian Kurds in Kobane and closed its borders with Syria. The only access to Kobani was via Turkey. KRG claimed to have sent some ammunition for light weapons and mortar shells a couple of weeks into the siege, but according to Syrian Kurdish officials, the shipment was “symbolic” did not reach Kobane and has remained in the northern Syrian province that borders with KRI (Reuters, 2014). Despite the unsuccessful attempts of Barzani to dominate the Kurds in Syria, he continued to assist KDPS by training its members on Iraqi Kurdish territory. On May 18th 2013, PYD arrested over 70 members of KDPS trying to cross the border from KRI to Syria. According to PYDs statement, the activity of any armed group that does not abide by SKC and does not belong to YPG is illegal (Van Wilgenburg, 2013). In fact, a possible fortification of KDPS military wing could change the dynamics of KNC – which was dominated by PYD - and by extension, become more sympathetic to Syria’s Arab opposition forces, as well as Turkey (Bill, 2013, p. 48).¹⁶⁹

Nevertheless, PYD had started to receive substantial attention from the US, especially in the face of mounting pressure due to the disastrous humanitarian situation in Kobane. Obama’s administration had to acknowledge that YPG and, by extension, PYD were important partners in the fight against ISIS (Allsopp & Van Wilgenburg, 2019, pp. 188-189). The US, who had previously endorsed Turkey’s national security threat, had to redirect its discourse regarding PYDs affiliation with PKK; “thus discounting the Turkish argument that they are two sides of the same coin and that any arms supplies for the YPG will inevitably also end up in the hands of the PKK, who could then direct them at Turkish soldiers” (Černý, 2017, p. 262). US assistance did not reach the Syrian Kurds until the last weeks of October 2014. Ankara had to succumb to the pressures both from the international community and domestically. UN envoy, Staffan Mistura, urged Ankara to take action against the siege of Kobane and open its borders to the Syrian Kurds (Middle East Eye, 2015b). Meanwhile, numerous protests took place in Turkey against Turkey’s inaction (Pamuk, 2014).

¹⁶⁹ Interestingly, the grievances ran so deep that Barzani refused to open the border for PYDs leader Salih Muslim who was in Sulaymaniyah at the time, to depart via Baghdad instead of Erbil to return to Rojava for his son’s funeral. His son was killed by ISIS in Syria.

KRGs inability to conduct a more active foreign policy to stand by the side of its brethren in northern Syria has not been emphasized enough. Therefore, Barzani had to tread carefully. Almost since the beginning of the siege, KRG called upon the international community to support Kobani (Cakan, 2014). On the one hand, Barzani had to consider his constituency and uphold his ‘obligation’ to the Kurdish cause; ISIS constituted a common threat to all Kurds across geographical, tribal or partisan divisions. On the other, Turkey remained an important partner in KRGs oil diplomacy and a counterforce to the central government of Iraq and Barzani’s domestic rival, Talabani, who was backed by Iran. Despite the disappointment of Turkey’s inaction during ISIS’ incursion on KRI in August, Ankara remained an important gateway for Iraqi Kurds. The thorns of the structural suspicion had already emerged in 2014, after Barzani announced that KRG would hold a referendum. Thus, actively engaging in Kobani unilaterally without Turkey’s consent would further aggravate the relations between the two. In fact, KRG sent 150 Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga to Kobani only at the end of October 2014 via Turkey, which required the latter’s approval (Coles, 2014; Pamuk & Salman, 2014). The assistance was part of the multilateral efforts to combat ISIS on the US’ side. KRGs delicate position was carefully worded by Falah Mustafa, KRGs Foreign Minister, during an interview in early October 2014:

“We do understand that there is huge pressure on Turkey; hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees are already in Turkey; Turkey is in the frontline as well fighting ISIS [...] next door neighbour [...] but this is a humanitarian situation and it is our moral responsibility for all of us [...] to help the besieged Kobani”(Recknagel, 2014).

In the official rhetoric, KRG avoided publicly blaming or attacking Turkey for its inactions, precisely due to the fact that KRI-Turkey relations are contingent on Turkey’s Kurdish concerns, particularly PKK. Equally important is to bear in mind that KRGs Peshmerga be they of PUK or KDP, had taken a heavy blow from ISIS merely a couple of months prior to the siege of Kobani and would have probably been disintegrated if it were not for the US-led assistance. In fact, although they retrieved most of the territory occupied by ISIS, KRG still had a 1,035 kilometres-long frontline with ISIS. After US’ involvement in northern Syria, the Iraqi Kurdish leadership played a crucial role in mediating and coordinating between the US and YPG. KDP had allowed YPG representatives in the US-led situation room in Erbil (Tastekin, 2014; Van Wilgenburg, 2013), but it was PUK that established contacts with YPG (Allsopp & Van Wilgenburg, 2019, pp. 171-173, 189). The very cooperation between Erbil and Sulaymaniyah is the main element of the

success of KRGs mediation efforts. The strategic culture of KRG is defined either by the harmony or the lack thereof between KDP and PUK.

Iraqi Kurdish unprecedented military force, alliance in the international coalition against terrorism, and the seizure of the disputed territories were essential assets for KRGs independence bid and long-term national aspirations. More importantly, however, KRG had further increased its autonomy from Baghdad. Regardless of the quality and the conditions of the Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga mission to Kobani, KRI sent troops across their borders independently from the Iraqi army for the first time. Along with these numerous opportunities came the end of the golden decade of economic boom, burdening the state-society relations, exacerbating the KDP-PUK rift and ultimately challenging - for the first time - KRGs legitimacy.

8.3.2.1. The Disintegration of State-Society Relations and the dual Centres of Power

Along with the golden opportunity to expand KRGs military apparatus came the end of the golden decade of economic booming, which exacerbated the rift between the dual centres of powers in KRG, straining the state-society relations. ISIS' presence in Mosul triggered a severe decline in the economies and political crises of both Iraq and KRI. The latter's GDP decreased by more than 50 per cent in 2014 from the previous year (Manis, 2016). Baghdad continued to withhold KRGs share from the national budget in retaliation to the presence of the Peshmerga forces in the disputed territories. Iraqi Kurdish population poverty rate doubled as KRG was still unable to pay salaries while the oil prices dropped, affecting further the overall economy. It is noteworthy that KRG pays 70 per cent of the Iraqi Kurdish working force (Secat & Gallego, 2015, p. 234). Oil revenues became the only source of income, mainly exporting oil directly via Turkey (Park, 2016, p. 459; Tugdar & Al, 2018, p. 136) and Iran (Bahgat, 2014). The government insisted on attributing the financial crisis to foreign investors' reluctance due to ISIS' presence and the cost of the large numbers of IDPs and refugees. Nonetheless, the Kurdish government received significant financial aid assistance from the international community as well as the presence of regional and international NGOs in Iraqi Kurdistan led to an "influx of foreign currency" (Costantini & O'Driscoll, 2020, p. 10). However, KRGs constituency was well aware that the Iraqi Kurds could overcome the financial crisis if it were not for the corruption and clientelism that shrouds the tribal-partisan politics, according to unofficial sources (Aqra & Eleftheriadou, 2016).

At the same time, Barzani's presidential final and second term ended in the summer of 2013. Nevertheless, due to the ISIS threat, the President asked the parliament to extend his term (Rudaw, 2015). While the parliament voted for a two-year extension, many Iraqi Kurds viewed this move as merely another example of Barzani's corrupt and authoritarian rule. Gorran came second in the parliamentary elections shortly after, displacing PUK to the third position. Gorran – known as the movement for change – emerged in 2009. It was a movement that broke away from PUK, campaigning against the corruption of the two parties and their tribal politics. The emergence of Gorran in the Kurdish political scene disturbed the fragile PUK-KDP dynamics (Hama, 2020; Jongerden, 2019, p. 70). The emergence of Gorran in the Kurdish political scene disturbed the fragile PUK-KDP dynamics. KRGs Deputy Prime Minister and PUK official explained that Gorran, which emerged mainly in PUK-controlled areas, “wrecked the balance” as PUK and Gorran were

“needed to look increasingly anti-KDP, which weakened the entente between the KDP and PUK. All this harmed national unity in favour of domestic political considerations. The fight over the KRG presidency and other political disputes were a symptom, not a cause of this. The internal disputes were not based on policies, but on personalities and political rivalries”.¹⁷⁰

The political tensions escalated into a crisis in 2015. Barzani shut the parliament due to the opposition's growing protests for his resignation, eventually leading to attacking KDP offices, mainly in PUKs stronghold in Sulaymaniyah. Refusing to resign, once again, on the grounds of the precarious situation, Barzani claimed that he will step down when Kurdistan gained independence (Rudaw, 2016). Nevertheless, he managed to attain a second extension until 2017, as the Consultative Council (Shura Council), “based upon a legal interpretation that the president's seat should not be vacant” (Palani et al., 2020, p. 6).

Unsurprisingly, simmering competition emerged within both KDP and PUK. The latter's leadership split into two camps: namely, one that supported Masrour Barzani, Masoud Barzani's son and head of KDPs intelligence, and another that supported the Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barzani, who was also the President's nephew (ICG, 2015, p. 7). The profile of the two men differed. The son of the President had a key role in security affairs; however, Nechirvan was well respected in the international community. Similarly, PUK in 2014 saw a divide in its leadership.

¹⁷⁰ Quoted in Romano (2020, pp. 359-360)

With Jalal Talabani subsiding from the political scene due to health issues, his wife, Hero Talabani, along with Iranian-backed Mulla Bakhtiari, head of PUKs security, contested Barham Salih, who was considered a technocrat and had good relations with Western states and the Barzani family (Abdullah, 2018; Hama, 2020; ICG, 2015). The intra-KDP conflict added to the already troubled state-society relations that stemmed from the KDP-PUK rivalry.

8.3.3. International Visibility

The Iraqi Kurdish leadership used the political and financial crisis as political leverage in its foreign policy. Barzani bearing in mind to safeguard the gains cultivated since 2014 – in terms of territory and autonomy from Baghdad, sought to enhance KRIs international visibility by promoting its importance and role in the war against ISIS and its state-building image of being unique and different from Iraq.

The Region hosted approximately 2 million refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), a 30 per cent increase in Iraqi Kurdistan's total population. Many of the IDPs were from Kirkuk, with an amalgam of ethnic and religious backgrounds. Despite abandoning the Yazidis in Sinjar in 2014, from then on, the Region promoted the image of being the protector of the Yazidis. The government took various initiatives to institutionalise the image of an open and pluralistic society as opposed to Baghdad, a sectarian state. In 2015, it passed Law 5- the 'Protection of the Components of Kurdistan', which recognizes all the ethnic and religious minorities in Iraqi Kurdistan, such as Turkmen, Chaldeans-Syriacs-Assyrians, Armenians, Yazidis, Mandaeans, Kakais, Shabaks, Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians among others; while all the religious minorities have representation in Iraqi Kurdish Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (Aqra & Eleftheriadou, 2016, p. 10).¹⁷¹ The paradox in this effort renders it a tool for the state-to-be image for 'foreign eyes' is that the Iraqi Kurdish society is Sunni and conservative. Iraqi Kurds were the only Kurds that joined ISIS- albeit in low numbers compared to other ethnicities.¹⁷² The Iraqi Kurdish society is profoundly religious, and to some extent, it reacted negatively to the efforts to recognise none Abrahamic religions.

¹⁷¹ To go the extra mile, Law 5 gave the ability of members of the Christian and Jewish community who have left can claim properties.

¹⁷² See Paasche and Gunter (2016)

Interestingly, many Sunni Arabs from the disputed territories were displaced in Kurdistan, including prominent figures and community leaders whom the Iraqi leadership sought to ameliorate relations (Palani et al., 2020, p. 5). KRG became the main provider as well as a mediator for the international non-governmental organisations for all the basic needs of these communities. In fact, due to the refugees and IDPs, the Region saw an influx of international aid; but as Dazayee told the author, “what has been provided is not to the same magnitude or scale of the crisis” (Aqra & Eleftheriadou, 2016, p. 7).

In order to tip the balance of the rift in Kurdish favour, the Iraqi leadership had ordered a de-Arabization of the disputed areas. According to Human Rights Watch, the Peshmerga forces demolished homes of Arab residents in areas of Kirkuk and Nineveh governorates between September 2014 and May 2016; and the Arab population trying to return is being mistreated and forced outside the areas.¹⁷³ At the same time, in an effort to gain legitimacy among the non-Kurdish communities, most of whom were IDPs in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Region cultivated relations and supported them in various ways. Within the two years, the IDPs became more politicized and were driven into the polarization between Erbil and Baghdad, a rather unusual trend within these communities as they traditionally have a passive stance. Many ethnic and religious groups, with the exception of the small Jewish and Zoroastrian communities, established their own militias or units operating either under the command of KRGs Peshmerga or Baghdad (Aqra & Eleftheriadou, 2016, p. 13; Roussos & Drakoularakos, 2022). KRG financed and aided the groups militarily in order to draw them away from Baghdad.

Equally important was the military enhancement of the Iraqi Kurdish forces. Since August 2014, the KRG has experienced unprecedented military aid, which kept amplifying as the operation for the liberation of Mosul was approaching. The leadership was at the forefront of the international coalition against ISIS. It ensured to be present in the most important international events and conferences regarding countering terrorism, such as the Munich Security conferences in which Barzani and his team attended as part of a separate delegation from Iraq.¹⁷⁴ In a study conducted by Palani et al. (2019, pp. 5-6), based on the Xebat Newspaper published by KDP, Barzani, from 2014 until 2016, conducted over 250 meetings with senior delegations and leaders Barzani not only from Iran and Turkey but also from the US, UK, France, Germany, Italy and

¹⁷³ For more details of the de-Arabisation policy in the disputed territories see Human Rights Watch (2016)

¹⁷⁴ For a detailed list of the attendees see the official website of Munich Security Conference 2014.

Netherlands in regards to “the war against IS, the international support to the Peshmerga and the IDPs”.

The influx of military aid counterbalanced the political and financial crisis to some extent. As the Battle for Mosul was approaching, the Iraqi Kurds provided 40,000 to 50,000 Peshmerga fighters. KRG and the central government of Baghdad agreed that the peshmerga forces would not enter Mosul city (Paasche & Gunter, 2016, p. 19). Instead, they would have an auxiliary role in the operations against ISIS and remain stationed in Kurdish villages around Mosul once the Iraqi forces liberated those territories (interview by author, 2016).¹⁷⁵ In the post-Battle for Mosul era, the Erbil – Baghdad relations would once more come at the forefront. Even though KRIs territorial ambitions went no further than the disputed territories, their presence in key areas such as Kirkuk constituted a major issue for Baghdad.

The Iraqi Kurds enhanced their international visibility even more than they did in the 1990s. In contrast with two decades ago, the Iraqi Kurds had fought not only for Iraqi Kurdistan but, as Heman Hawrami, advisor to the KRGs President, put it, the Region is “fighting for Kurdistan and the free world”.¹⁷⁶ Throughout the experience of war, the Iraqi Kurdish leadership managed to capitalise on international attention and display to the international community that it belongs to the free world as an equal state.

8.4. The Independence Referendum of 2017: A Bold Yet Abortive Foreign Policy Choice

The concept of holding a referendum was brought to the table in the summer of 2014 on the grounds that Iraq was already enduring a de facto partition. However, new opportunities, such as military expansion, were temporarily prioritised and once again, receding the referendum motion until the end of the war against ISIS. In fact, after the Battle for Mosul, international visibility was gradually eclipsing and set at the centre stage KRGs political and financial issues.

Contrary to the previous instances, the territorial gains were the greatest in ten decades (and an additional 40 per cent to KRIs territory) and the military apparatus was more significant than ever. On the other hand, KRG had implicitly been in an emergency state, which stemmed

¹⁷⁵ This was the account communicated to the author during the field research conducted for more see Aqra and Eleftheriadou (2016)

¹⁷⁶ Hawrami was interviewed by Martin Denis, for full interview see Al-Jazeera (2016)

from the political crisis of the repeated postponement of KRIs presidential elections. The political crisis also stemmed from the intra-KDP frictions and the increasing PUK-KDP rivalry. Consequently, for Barzani, putting forth the referendum would be the last move as Head of KRI and part of his legacy (Amanpour, 2014).¹⁷⁷; in his own words, “For the first time in Kurdish history, the first republic was the republic of Kurdistan in Mahabad. When they raised the Kurdish flag, I was born in the shadow of that flag. I want to die in the shadow of the flag of an independent Kurdistan”.¹⁷⁸

KRGs independence referendum on 25 September 2017 was a controversial issue both on an international and regional level. It gave rise to a heated scholarly debate that revolved around the referendum’s implications on KRGs foreign policy vis-a-vis the regional and international players (Charountaki, 2020, p. 386; Kaplan, 2019, pp. 30, 35; Paasche & Gunter, 2016; Palani et al., 2020; Park, 2019; Zadeh & Kirmanj, 2017), its relations with its constituency (Charountaki, 2017; Chulov & Johnson, 2017; Degli Esposti, 2021; Palani et al., 2019; Park et al., 2017; Tezcür, 2020), and the intra-Kurdish antagonism (Abdullah, 2018; Costantini & O’Driscoll, 2020; Hama, 2020; Mustafa, 2020; O’Driscoll, 2017; Tezcür, 2020). All these aspects were examined extensively in order to determine and better understand the reasons behind Barzani’s choice to hold a referendum. The international community’s adverse reaction and the regional powers’ retaliations compelled many IR scholars to argue that KRGs move was premature as it would further threaten the unstable region (Aldouri & Mansour, 2017; Costantini & O’Driscoll, 2020; Holland-McCowan, 2018; O’Driscoll & Baser, 2019; Park, 2019; Park et al., 2017). This reading asserted that Barzani miscalculated the international and regional dynamics by overestimating the Iraqi Kurdish relevance vis-à-vis Baghdad (Hiltermann, 2017; Kaplan, 2019; Mustafa, 2020). Interlinking these different aspects allows us to examine how the notions of territoriality, state-society relations, perspective of the system, institutions, and strategic culture play a role in the decision-making of the Region’s referendum.

¹⁷⁷ Indeed, Masoud Barzani was in Mahabad, Iran during the short-lived Iranian Kurdish statelet in the 1940s. For quote see Barzani’s interview in CNN by Amanpour (2014)

¹⁷⁸ Barzani quoted in an interview by MacDiarmid (2017)

8.4.1. The Referendum and Territoriality

The referendum posed the question *Do you want the Kurdistan Region and the Kurdistan areas outside the administration of the Region to become an independent state?* in four languages: Kurdish, Arabic, Turkish and Syriac. The turnout of Iraqi Kurds in KRI, the disputed territories (referred to as *Kurdistani* or Kurdish) and the diaspora reached 72.7 per cent, with barely over 50 per cent turnout in Suleimani and Halabja (opposition-held territories) (Park et al., 2017; Watts, 2017) and the non-Kurdish neighbourhoods in Kirkuk areas, “the vote barely exceeded 30%” (Park, 2019, pp. 46-47). Overall, however, an overwhelming majority - 92.7 per cent – voted Yes, reflecting the numerous opinion polls in past years that reported that most Iraqi Kurds favoured independence from Iraq (Entessar, 2018, p. 80).

On a discourse level, the referendum merely reiterated the will of the Iraqi Kurds for self-determination. While this was a given for the population within KRI, the contestation lay in the population that resides in the disputed territories and gave them an opportunity “to determine their destiny and no one else”, as the President of KRG posited (Amanpour, 2014). Undoubtedly, the referendum per se was not legally binding vis-à-vis Baghdad or the international community (Palani et al., 2020; Tezcür, 2020). It would certainly, however, offer political leverage to KRG for the negotiations with Baghdad regarding the status of the disputed areas and their numerous oil-fields, which are the backbone of both Iraqi and Kurdish economies. The main discord between Baghdad and Erbil was meant to be addressed by putting forth a mechanism – including a referendum - to establish the status of these areas, as stated in Article 140 of the Constitution of Iraq. An Iraq without Kirkuk certainly impedes economic development. Even though KRGs chief of security and son of President Barzani, Masrour Barzani, had stated in the aftermath that Iraqi Kurdish intention that:

“We were ready to negotiate with Baghdad before and after the referendum. The referendum was meant to give us a popular mandate to do this. We have always said that the fate of Kirkuk and the rest of the disputed territories should be decided according to Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution” (Zaman, 2018).

His father, more than any other KRG official, constantly underlined in press conferences on national and international media that the ‘failed partnership’ with Iraq means that it is the right time for Iraqi Kurds to seek independence. Even Masrour himself, in the previous year, had stated

that Iraq should be separated into three different states, Shia, Sunni and Kurdish (Chmaytelli, 2017).

In practice, since 2014, the Peshmerga forces have been present in the disputed areas – with Iraq’s then-Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki’s approval, in order to save Kirkuk from falling into the hands of ISIS. Technically, KRG had extended its territory by 40 per cent and had ensued a process of co-opting the multiethnic population of the areas, particularly in the city of Kirkuk, “which has been fought over by Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen throughout the ages” (Abdullah, 2018, pp. 6-7). As the late head of PUK used to say, Kirkuk is the Kurds’ Jerusalem. Thus, even if the referendum intended to pose the question of self-determination to the population of the disputed territories, KRGs unprecedented military influence in the areas increased the referendum’s gravitas.

8.4.2. The Clarity of the System and Barzani’s Perception

The international visibility that Iraqi Kurds had gained – by hosting refugees and IDPs, the victorious Peshmerga, and the democratic face – would soon fade after the Battle for Mosul. The Region sought to shift the attention from the fight against ISIS to the century-long issue of the disputed territories by engaging the international community to settle the status of Kirkuk. The international and regional structures of the system were relatively more favourable than it was a decade ago when the referendum should have taken place as per the constitution of 2005. The concept of self-determination flourished in an environment where ISIS had challenged the notion of territoriality and borders for the first time since the Sykes-Picot treaty (Gunter, 2015b). KRI has established an extensive network of bilateral economic ties with key international and regional players. In addition, the international coalition against ISIS had fostered closer relations between the Iraqi Kurds and the West. More specifically, the US had demonstrated that it had become more flexible in the ‘One Iraq’ policy under Obama’s administration. The significant military aid channelled directly to the Peshmerga rather than the Iraqi army was indicative of such. However, even though the economic ties were not translated into active political support for the referendum bid, KRGs upgraded position within the international and regional system had undoubtedly been more favourable than ever before.

Traditionally, KRG has relied on its neighbouring states and superpowers for political support. The US, Turkish and Iranian stances are perhaps the ones that would have mattered the

most. The international community expressed their concern for the referendum and advised Barzani not to go through with the polling. By the same token, the UN issued a statement that expressed that the referendum would have “destabilizing effects” (United Nations, 2017). With the exception of Russia—(Zhdannikov, 2017), which did not officially issue any statement for or against the referendum—China, the US, Germany, France and UK urged KRG to cancel or postpone it. They expressed their support for Iraq’s unity, warned against the referendum and expressed concerns about its implications for the fight against ISIS.

The US’ newly elected President initially did not heed the Kurds. In fact, no evidence of objection was presented until a month prior to the referendum, when the Trump administration openly opposed the referendum and suggested mediating for negotiations (Lake, 2017). According to the letter written by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to Barzani – which was delivered on the 23rd of September – it stated that “**At the end of this process, of course, should the talks not reach a mutually acceptable conclusion or fail on account of lack of good faith on the part of Baghdad we would recognize the need for a referendum** (bold and underline sic)”.¹⁷⁹

Before the referendum took place, Barzani posited that “the idea of the referendum and the thoughts were positive” among the international community, including the US.¹⁸⁰ KDPs leadership reckoned that the US assumed that the Iraqi Kurds were bluffing.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, the President said that Tillerson’s letter was vague, stating that “in the draft letter that was brought to us—mid-September by the former US Secretary of State Tillerson—we needed assurances [and] instead of ‘respect’ we wanted the word ‘support’”.¹⁸² Similarly, Masrour Barzani stated in 2018 that the West had no “object to the principle of self-determination” nor the “independence per se”; instead, they were concerned that the referendum would possibly affect the fight against ISIS, stability in Iraq and cause a military confrontation (Zaman, 2018). KRG had gained significant support in the US Congress, which ultimately failed to impact Trump’s foreign policy in the region (Tezcür, 2020). A little over a decade ago, the US cooperated with the Iraqi Kurds in the post-Saddam era. Barzani’s assumptions that the US would not entirely rebuff the referendum were not farfetched. More specifically, contrary to Iraq’s situation in 2006, Iraq’s administration in 2017 was led by al-‘Abadi’s administration, whose policies had brought the country entirely under the wings of Iran,

¹⁷⁹ Letter attached in Lake (2017).

¹⁸⁰ Quoted in Charountaki (2020, p. 393).

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

especially in the security sector with the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilisation Units (PMUs, also known as Hashd al-Sha'bi) that became intertwined with Iraq's security forces. In fact, this view was expressed by many congressmen who viewed KRG as a counterbalancing force against al-'Abadi's administration (McCain, 2017).

Equally ambiguous was the situation with Turkey. Ankara benefited from the pipelines in the Kurdish-held Kirkuk, which, by early 2017, supplied “two-thirds of the oil that arrived in Ceyhan” (Park, 2019). Despite Ankara's warning against the referendum, the relationship between Erdogan and Barzani was accustomed to public denouncements that were not substantiated in practice. In the eyes of KRGs leadership, Turkey was critical regarding the referendum but did not threaten KRG. For example, in late August—just a few weeks before the referendum was due Turkish foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu insisted that Turkey's trade with the KRG and the holding of the referendum were not connected and that Turkey had no plans to close the border (Zaman, 2018). With the end of the Kurdish-Turkish peace process in 2015 and the international attention to Rojava,¹⁸³ Barzani had well-established KRGs position vis-a-vis the Kurdish cause. While there will always be solidarity on a people's level, KRG has disassociated itself politically from all the other Kurdish struggles in the region. It had kept its promise in its dealings with the Syrian Kurds and PKK and had proven to Turkey that it is a loyal ally. KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani could thus tell his audience in 2016 that “We have demonstrated to our neighbours that we are a factor for stability rather than instability in the region”, simultaneously clarifying that “When we talk about independence, we are talking only about Iraqi Kurdistan” (Barzani, 2016).¹⁸⁴ Nonetheless, Ankara issued a statement declaring its objections to the referendum with a particular focus on the inclusion of the disputed territories (Republic of Turkiye, 2017).

By the same token, Iran's and Iraq's reactions were anticipated; al-Maliki claimed the referendum was unconstitutional (Al-Jazeera, 2017), while Iran threatened with punitive actions against KRG, claiming that the referendum was a Zionist plot that benefits the US (Majidiyar, 2017). The remaining regional states' stance, however, was diverse. Syria and Egypt were strongly

¹⁸³ Since 1978, PKK has been in conflict with the Turkish governments. In 2009, the talks between the two parties resulted in periodic ceasefire. Ultimately, in 2015 the peace process totally collapsed. For a more detailed analysis on the peace process see Savran (2020).

¹⁸⁴ Quoted in Romano (2020, p. 358)

against the referendum (Dadouch, 2017; Egypt Today, 2017). Israel, on the other hand, explicitly supported KRG (Heller, 2017). The Gulf states, which had grown more sympathetic to the Iraqi Kurds, were more 'subtly' against Kurdish independence. Within the realm of the Sunni-Shia conflict in the region, KRGs rift with Iranian-backed Baghdad was considered a counterforce and leverage for the Sunni camp. While Saudi Arabia's position was in line with the West (Al Arabiya News, 2017), UAE had discreetly supported Kurdish independence. UAE has not formally taken a stance for or against the referendum, but several UAE officials have openly expressed their support for Iraqi Kurds (Monitor, 2017).

The uncertainty of KRGs discourse regarding the structural opportunity stems from the lack of clarity of the system. The rise of ISIS provoked a regional shock to the structural dynamics; however, the direct and indirect implications of its gradual demise were largely disregarded. The structural dynamics expose that the defeat of ISIS in Mosul coincided with changes in the international and regional levels that could only blur Barzani's perception of the system. The US transition from Obama's to Trump's administration had severe regional consequences. Similarly, for a number of domestic concerns that stemmed from the 2016 coup to the consolidation of PKK-affiliated PYG in Rojava and the gradual rise in popularity of the Kurdish party (HDPs), which peaked in 2017, Ankara reconsidered its Kurdish policy (Park, 2019). Undoubtedly, Barzani overestimated KRGs value for Ankara; he rushed to hold the referendum in order to uphold his legacy before he stepped down as President of KRG and before the Iraqi Kurds lost the international visibility they had gained in the previous three years. However, the transitional period of the US, Turkey's unclear foreign policy, and Al-Abadi's unexpected clampdown blurred the clarity of what would come the day after the referendum.

8.4.3. Institutions, Strategic Culture and KRGs Dual Dynamics

KRG established the Independent High Election and Referendum Commission (IHERC) already in 2014. While the former head of the Commission, Jotyar Adil, at the time, claimed that the establishment based on KRG Law, Article 4 of 2014 is in accordance with the federal constitution (Charountaki, 2020, p. 392); it is based on a KNA Law No 1 of 1992 which has been inserted as all the KNA's laws between 1992 and 2003 into Article 117 of the 2005 constitution. However, the referendum, especially on the disputed territories, remains a joint issue, and it was executed independently from the federal government, contrary to the procedure stated in Article 140. It is

worth mentioning that neither Iraq's nor KRGs constitution "provides for the possibility of legal secession" (Abdullah, 2018).

Interestingly, on a procedural level, the referendum compelled Barzani to reactivate the parliament for ten days which had been closed since October 2015. It is noteworthy that Barzani shut down the parliament due to the efforts of the Kurdish parties to remove him from office after the end of his presidential term. The parliament reconvened close to the referendum date and rendered it challenging for parties and factions to genially oppose the motion out of fear of being called unpatriotic. Only 68 members attended the 111-set parliament for the referendum motion, from which three voted against it. Thus, 42 per cent of the parliament boycotted the motion—(Rudaw, 2017b), which included the Gorran, the Kurdistan Islamic Group (Komal), and some members within PUK—claiming that the vote was "unlawful" (Watts, 2017). Technically, the referendum had the parliament's majority vote.

On the other hand, given the Region's clientelist political structure, it would not be farfetched to assume that, in essence, Barzani forced the parliament's hand. In principle, nonetheless, all the parties - in one way or another - support the notion of independence. The main issue of discord was the referendum's timing, which was associated with Barzani's grip on power rather than with the possible repercussions it would have on a local or regional level (Romano, 2020, p. 362). Thus, the leadership's strategic culture influenced KRGs choice to hold the referendum. By 2017, the discord between KDP and PUK had almost delegitimized KRG as a representative authority for the Iraqi Kurds.

8.4.4. The Shattered Social Contract

The conflict between KDP and PUK had been steadily intensifying, especially since the agreement between Erbil and Baghdad in mid-2016 prior to the battle for Mosul. The deal under the US' auspice resolved the tactical issues concerning the Battle for Mosul, whereby PMU forces would not enter KRI territory, and the Peshmerga would not enter Mosul; secondly, Baghdad and Erbil agreed on a 50/50 distribution of the Kirkuk oil. However, Erbil's bad management of resources resulted in an asymmetric allocation between KDP and PUK led the latter to protest against the deal. The disharmony within the dual centres of power fostered such practices; within KRI the KDP areas would be favoured as opposed to PUK-held areas. Against this backdrop, the former First Lady of Iraq— at the time - Hero Ibrahim Ahmed, sent a letter to the Iraqi Prime Minister

herself condemning the deal stating that “the proceed of the oil exported from Kirkuk are not being spent transparently and fairly in the Kurdistan region. These practices have denied Kirkuk its petrol-dollar dues, which negatively affected the lives of the Kirkuk citizens” (Sattar, 2017).¹⁸⁵ While the issue was never addressed, the rivalry simmered for the following year. KDPs dominance within KRG and the unequal distribution of resources in the past decade had soured the relations and tainted the dual power contract. Already the antagonism between PUK and KDP had spilled over to the Kurdish issue in Syria. PUK – who eventually was supported by Gorran – continued to publicly back PYD and undermined KDPs dominance, especially among the leftists and marginalised groups, especially after the events of Sinjar. This meant that indirectly PKK had increased its popularity among those groups (Allsopp & Van Wilgenburg, 2019, p. 173).¹⁸⁶ Nevertheless, this popularity seems to be limited to its protection services; there is no evidence to suggest that PKK has gained substantial political footing in KRI.

The Iraqi Kurdish political scene seemed to deteriorate as they could not have a common front on the disputed territories against Baghdad. The Iraqi parliament proposed in 2017 that Iraq would not fund the Peshmerga and requested KRG to turn over control of all its petroleum marketing to Baghdad. In exchange, the latter would pay the salaries of public employees in the KRI. KRGs response was – once against contingent to its strategic culture. The disharmony within the dual centre of power was on full display. During the voting of the Iraqi proposal, KDP walked out of the Iraqi parliament in protest, while PUK, along with Gorran and small Kurdish parties, voted in favour. According to Romano (2020, p. 361), the Iraqi Kurdish opposition prioritised rivalry with the KDP over the KRIs national interests.

To a certain extent, the rivalry triggered and reflected the overall state-society relations, which have steadily deteriorated since 2014. The clientelistic networks that were tied to KRGs economy were being challenged. The economic system of KRG is not productive its mainly based on natural resources and consumption (Aziz, 2017, pp. 103-119); thus, the decrease in oil prices seriously affected the money flow and distribution of resources between the two parties. KDPs dominance within KRG exposed the Iraqi Kurds to an asymmetric allocation of money, aid and weapons at the expense of non-KDP members. In 2015, extensive anti-government mobilisations took place to protest against the people's financial hardships, “authoritarian and repressive

¹⁸⁵ The wife of Jalal Talabani, Hero Ahmed, became the de facto leader of PUK after her husband's health deteriorated.

¹⁸⁶ For instance, Gorran supports Rojava's autonomy (Rudaw, 2014a)

practices”, and the concentration of resources on specific families (Degli Esposti, 2021, p. 2318). It is a common practice and part of KRGs strategic culture to utilize “the nationalist card to rally popular consensus around them so as strengthen their position vis-à-vis Baghdad” (Costantini & O’Driscoll, 2020, pp. 224-225) and conceal popular discontent. Much of the public upheavals were sidelined to make space for the referendum motion. The referendum dominated the public debate, portraying the disagreements and turmoil solely on the PUK and KDP rivalry. Even a couple of days before the referendum, Bavel Talabani falsely posted on social media that PUK and KDP had accepted the US proposal for delay (Abdullah, 2018, pp. 5-6). Interestingly, although other key PUK figures like the Head of the PUKs bloc in the Iraqi parliament, Ala Talabani, equally opposed Barzani, ultimately, PUK issued an official statement supporting the referendum.

8.4.5. Kirkuk and the 2017 Referendum

Since 2014, the disputed territories, for the first time in a century, have been under the control of KRG. Kirkuk was divided between PUK, whose forces held areas close to Sulaymaniyah (the east and south), while KDP took the areas adjacent to Erbil (west and north). According to various reports, both parties attempted to co-opt the multiethnic communities and found particular resistance among Arab and Turkmen, who viewed the Kurds as occupiers. Within three years of its presence in Kirkuk, KRG found supporters for the referendum. Most of PUKs members, however, even among those that supported the referendum, objected to the inclusion of Kirkuk. According to ICG (2020, p. 8) interviews, even KDP echelons from within the Barzani family were divided on whether Kirkuk should be included in the referendum, “although none objected publicly”. Ironically, the governor of Kirkuk and PUK official, Najm al-Din Karim, who initially was not publicly advocating for a Kurdish rule, veraciously became Barzani’s supporter (ICG, 2020, p. 8) and issued a directive that included hoisting the Kurdish flag next to the Iraqi flag in all public buildings in mid-2017. According to Arabic sources, Kirkuk’s provincial council voted in favour of the Referendum with 26 out of 40, while Reuters suggests that it was 23 out of 41.¹⁸⁷ In any case, Rebaw Talabani, head of the council, announced that the Turkmen and Arab council members boycotted the vote, indicative of their stance on the referendum. Overall, Kirkuk was

¹⁸⁷ Numbers retrieved from local news outlet (Al-Sumaria News, 2017).

divided. While some areas showed a high turnout, other non-Kurdish areas did not, and only 30 per cent of those who did vote Yes (Park et al., 2017, p. 208).

In the meantime, Baghdad sought to negotiate with KRG –particularly KDP – regarding Peshmerga’s withdrawal from the disputed territories. After Barzani’s refusal, al-Abadi “sent high-level delegations – including the commander of Iranian Qods Force, Qassim Soleimani, to Sulaymaniyah to persuade PUK successfully to withdraw its forces (ICG, 2020, p. 9). However, it should be noted that the current head of PUK, Hero Talabani, denied the allegations (Abdullah, 2018, p. 8), while other sources indicate that Bafel Talabani (son of the late Jalal Talabani) was responsible for making a deal with Baghdad (Aldouri & Mansour, 2017). PUK had reassured KDP that they would remain united against Baghdad come what may (Romano, 2020, pp. 363-364), yet some factions within PUK were striking deals with Baghdad and Iran. On September 25th, 2017, despite the euphoria of the Iraqi Kurds, the nation stood more divided than ever. The Region leadership’s internal divisions seemed to weigh down the pros of the Iraqi Kurds’ international visibility. KRGs dual power dynamics are so entrenched within its strategic culture that it prioritizes internal divisions and their personal ambitions over the progress of KRI.

8.4.6. The Day After

Less than a month after the referendum, Al-Abadi ordered a military operation and ousted the Peshmerga from Kirkuk. As a result, 16 October 2017 became known as the Night of Kirkuk. A joint Iraqi military operation was launched at dawn in the disputed territories; after some local resistance, the Iraqi forces pulled down the Kurdish flag from the city of Kirkuk. Most of PUK Peshmerga’s stood down (Charountaki, 2017), and KDP forces had to retreat. In one fell swoop, the disputed areas, along with its critical oil-fields, were once again under Baghdad’s control. After the Night of Kirkuk, Masoud Barzani announced his resignation and submitted a long letter to the parliament (Rudaw, 2017a).

From KRGs perspective, the international community's adverse reaction indirectly encouraged Baghdad to launch an assault on the Peshmerga. Many KDP officials later argued that the international community’s reaction to the referendum was disproportional and deliberately misinterpreted the intentions of the Kurds (Zaman, 2018). As far as the US goes, its discontent did not surpass public condemnation. What was probably worse – and perhaps unexpected by KRGs leadership was US’ idleness to Baghdad’s threats. On the eve of the referendum, the Iraqi

parliament demanded from Al-Abadi to sanction KRG, send troops to the disputed areas and take control of the oil-fields (Hasan Hama & Hassan Abdulla, 2019). Indeed, Baghdad banned international flights on KRG and imposed several economic sanctions (O’Driscoll & Baser, 2019, p. 2). While Ankara and Tehran “carried out joint military drills on the border with the KRI”, and made several threats against the KRI – including ceasing oil export (Romano, 2020, p. 362). According to Masrour Barzani:

“they [the Iraqi forces] were emboldened by the lack of response or actions by the international community and also of course the United States. If they had not accepted Iraq taking unconstitutional measures, and reacting disproportionately to the referendum, then probably the Iraqi government would not have felt encouraged to use military force to settle political differences with millions of people in a country called Iraq. The people voting in the referendum were Iraqi citizens. The United States could have ensured and convinced Baghdad that the results of the referendum would not automatically lead to a unilateral declaration of Kurdish independence. This was just a vote” (Zaman, 2018).

The financial recession continued as the global market was concerned about possible escalation between Erbil and Baghdad and the sporadic presence of some ISIS cells; nonetheless, the international community did not retaliate with sanctions. After an adjustment period, KRGs new President, Nechirvan Barzani, successfully negotiated with Baghdad concerning the Kurdish share of the federal budget. The deal was a compromise due to KRGs reconciliatory tone and Al-Abadi’s campaign for the Iraqi elections that would take place some months later. This reassured the global market, leading to the return of economic activity in KRI. In 2018, Foreign Policy Magazine did a tribute to KRG’s suitability to “welcome” foreign investors (Foreign Policy Magazine, 2018).

8.5. Conclusion

This chapter explores KRGs foreign policy choices between 2010 and 2017. The author demonstrated that the Region sought to expand the scope of its foreign policy beyond economic development when the rift with the central government of Baghdad gradually increased. KRGs leadership was compelled to seek alliances in its immediate environment. The regional structure favoured a rapprochement with Turkey instead of Iran, which was aligning itself with Iraq and Syria. KRGs foreign policy toward Turkey was defined primarily by the structural opportunity but also by Barzani’s perception of the system as well as KRGs strategic culture. During the first phase of the relationship, the KDPs dominance within KRG and the relative harmony between the two

traditional parties allowed the Iraqi Kurdish foreign policy to display itself primarily based on the two variables - perception of the system and strategic culture. At the same time, territoriality, state-society relations and institutions were effectively obsolete. The creation of Rojava could have been a structural challenge for the relations between Iraqi Kurds and Turks; however, on the contrary, the two managed to align their policy vis-à-vis PKK-back Syrian parties, while KRG displayed its ability for mediation. As it was illustrated, KDPs and PUKs divergent foreign policies vis-à-vis the Kurdish parties within northern Syria mainly reflect the perception of systems and strategic culture of the two leaders. However, it did not seem to affect KRGs foreign policy gravely. In other words, although KDPs dominance within KRG by default implies that the Region's overall foreign policy is more tilted towards the aspirations and is more dependent on Barzani, in practice, KRGs foreign policy depends on the harmony of the two parties and the extent to which PUK contests and challenges.

The emergence of ISIS had double-edged outcomes for KRI. On the one hand, it provided a golden opportunity to expand its territoriality by seizing control of the oil-rich disputed areas. In addition, the Iraqi Kurds expanded their military apparatus immensely along with gaining international visibility as they joined the international coalition against ISIS and hosted 2 million IDPs and refugees. At the same time, however, ISIS' advance on KRI and the Peshmerga's inability to protect vulnerable communities in 2014 and the financial crisis that ensued affected the state-society relations and, to some extent, the functionality of the institutions. More specifically, despite KRGs efforts to co-opt the multiethnic communities particularly, poverty had increased, generating a gradual disruption between the leadership and its constituency. Gorran's popularity increased to the point that it also ruptured the balance within the dual powers of centres, engendering disharmony between KDP and PUK.

Perhaps the most controversial foreign policy choice of KRG up-to-date has been the independence referendum of September 25, 2017. In prima facia, the structural system did not favour such a foreign policy choice. The international community was explicitly discouraging such a move. Iraq was equally determined to retrieve control of the disputed territories. However, Barzani's perception of the system reflected a different understanding of international and regional dynamics. At the same time, KRGs strategic culture was strained almost to the point of a civil war. PUKs and KDPs policy divergence vis-à-vis Baghdad, in essence, facilitated the loss of territory. Barzani's institutional legitimacy further strained the state-society relations. Thus, contrary to the

previous three foreign policy choices, the referendum was also dictated by state-society relations. Finally, the loss of disputed territories, which almost doubled KRIs size, did not belong to the core territory of KRG. One may argue that the notion of territoriality is not of great importance when all other variables are at risk of deteriorating.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

This study examined statelike actors' foreign policy choices by utilising neoclassical realism's theoretical tools. It established that armed non-state actors with specific statelike characteristics - such as a monopoly on violence, territorial base, organised political authority, institutions and a constituency - are capable of conducting foreign policy similar to recognised states. Given the small 'size' of these actors compared to other actors in the regional system, their position and foreign policy behaviour is primarily dictated by structural constraints and opportunities; however, domestic determinants and unit-level factors played an essential role in their foreign policy choices. The study's main argument was that neoclassical realism shed light on the foreign policy of statelike actors and the regional dynamics, essentially rendering a grand IR theory applicable to examining the Middle East dynamic by incorporating the so-called anomalies. In addition, the author argued that regardless of whether a statelike actor seeks international legal recognition as an independent state or seeks autonomy within the host state, it still retains that ability to exercise foreign policy. The different ideological backgrounds and exceptionalist tendencies were framed and classified within the intervening variables of neoclassical realism. Finally, the author assumed that the statelike actors' foreign policy choices would impact the region's structural system.

The thesis employed neoclassical realism to examine the foreign policy of three statelike actors: PLO, a national liberation movement; Hizbullah, an Islamist political party and social movement; and Kurdistan KRG, a secessionist movement. Even though the three case studies had different ideological underpinnings and mandates, their statelike characteristics allowed the study to trace and frame what constitutes the strategic culture, tendencies within the perception of the leadership, the importance of state-society relations and institutions, as well as the territorial dominance and ambitions. Then, during the examination of specific foreign policy options, the study examined which of the aforementioned intervening variables played a role. A general observation was that the perception and strategic culture were significantly more important than the state-society relations and institutions, except when the relations with their constituency were severed. Even though the established institutions were vital in rendering these entities statelike, the institutions played no effective role in foreign policy. This could be explained by the nature of these political organisations, as the leadership has autocratic tendencies. The notion of territoriality

ranked equally high except when the state-society relations were on the verge of collapse (see the list of tables pp. 169 -170).

This study established the main factors that render PLO, Hizbullah and KRG, statelike actors. It provided an extensive definition of what constitutes a statelike actor and what differentiated these entities from other armed non-state actors. More specifically, statelike actors are those armed non-state actors with a high level of stateness. These entities' statehood trappings are displayed in some sort of institutionalised rule over peoples, political organisation of authority and monopoly on violence on a specific territory. These characteristics provide internal sovereignty to these entities. In fact, all three case studies have a political, organisational structure that implements central decisions for a collectivity and claims a monopoly on violence on a specific territory. PLO drew legitimacy from the Palestinian diaspora as well as the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and Hizbullah represented the Lebanese religious Shia community that was concentrated in southern Lebanon, and KRG was a convenient union of the two dominant tribal Kurdish extended families on the Kurdish populated areas in northern Iraqi. Each entity challenged the established sovereignty and achieved to carve its own agency in the regional developments. The PLO took the reins of the Palestinian cause away from the Arab leaders; Hizbullah managed to emancipate the once marginalised Shia community in Lebanon while KRG sought to be at the helm of the destiny of the Iraqi Kurds. In order to achieve this autonomy, each statelike entity established a number of institutions that resemble that of state-building, including those that allow it to have foreign relations. In fact, all three entities had the ability to exert foreign relations and, by extension, foreign policies with other entities, be they states or armed non-state actors. They established representations, missions and offices abroad that served to distinguish these actors as distinct entities. PLO differentiated itself from Egypt and Jordan, Hizbullah from Lebanon, and KRG from Iraq.

For each case study, the thesis examined four foreign policy choices that were a result of structural opportunity and constraints. It is vital to trace the major international and regional developments that generated the opportunities for the foreign policies of these actors and dictated the structural modifiers that directly affected the leadership and its perception in each case. PLO's foreign policy choice to expand its diplomatic mission after Camp David in 1979, Arafat's unilateral declaration of independence in 1988, his implicit support of Saddam during Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and PLO's participation in the Oslo Accords. These foreign policies

were stimulated by a number of structural modifiers such as that of Camp David agreements between Egypt and Israel in 1979, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the first Intifada in 1987, and the end of the Cold War. By extension, these foreign policies allowed PLO's leadership to become a player in the regional system. For Hizbullah, the study selected its foreign policy towards Israel, specifically the July War of 2006, and Hizbullah's three different foreign policies vis-à-vis the Syrian crisis in 2011, 2012, and 2013. The Party of God developed two platforms of foreign policy throughout the years; one via the Lebanese state as a component and competitor of the Lebanese political system and another via IRL as an actor within the regional political system. Both were fueled by regional modifiers such as the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005 and later by the intensification of the Syrian crisis and the spillover into Lebanon in 2012-2013. For KRG, the study examined its relations with Turkey, Barzani's choice of rapprochement with the West and the military expansion in 2013, KRG's reserved stance vis-à-vis the siege of Kobani and finally, the choice to hold an independence referendum in 2017. Turkey's new regional aspiration under Tayyip Erdogan, the Arab Spring and the emergence of ISIS provided KRG with the structural opportunity to expand its foreign relation, which was orientated towards financial development into more active foreign policies independently from the central government of Baghdad. During the periods mentioned above in which these foreign policies took place, structural primacy is evident in each case. These opportunities, in synergy with some of the intervening variables, namely, (in order of relevance) the leadership's perception of the system, its strategic culture and territory, allowed these actors to generate foreign policy choices that, to some extent, influenced the regional dynamics.

Leadership's Perception and Clarity of the System

The leadership's perception of the system is intricately linked with the clarity of the system. All the foreign policies that were examined occurred during drastic international and regional changes, be it the Arab-Israeli wars, the end of the Cold War, the September 11 attacks and their aftermath, or the emergence of ISIS. In most cases, the structural modifiers that arose from these events obscured the system's clarity, subsequently rendering it challenging for the leadership to anticipate and conceptualise the structural dynamics. In other instances, the clarity of the system allowed the leadership to have a better perception of the system. For example, the PLOs foreign policy to further expand its appeal for diplomatic solidarity intensified after the groundbreaking peace treaty

between Egypt and Israel in 1977 and 1979, which was clear that it would alter the Arab-Israeli dynamics as Saadat unilaterally proceeded to a peace treaty with Israel. While in the case of Arafat's support of Saddam against Kuwait, the clarity of the system was obscured. This was evident from Arafat's persistence in reaching out to Moscow in the early 1990s, which indicated that Arafat was unable to anticipate the dynamics of the new world order. Similarly, the triggering events of the July War 2006 occurred after the UN Resolution in which Bush's witch-hunt against the 'Axis of Evil'. The subsequent Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon was an intense structural modifier whose implications and consequences had not been entrenched in the regional dynamics. Another structural modifier that blurred the clarity of the system was the Arab uprisings that swept the region. The initial hesitation of Hizbullah was precisely due to the lack of clarity. By 2012 and well into 2013, when the Syrian crisis had evolved into a sectarian war, the regional dynamics had become more pronounced; thereupon, the Party of God's foreign policy took a turn from supporting reforms in Syria to siding with the Assad regime against the opposition. Similarly, the emergence of ISIS and the aftermath of the Arab spring that impacted Iraq more than any other state in the region generated an ambiguous structural environment for KRG, which was consistently feeling the negative repercussions of the regional developments, financially, politically and with a substantial human cost.

Thus, it was clear that the way the leadership perceived the regional and international dynamics as well as the structural modifiers, directly impacted the foreign policy choice. Precisely due to the fact that these entities have a leadership that is usually composed of a specific figure or, at best, a small committee, there is little space for the leadership to accept or entertain other interpretations of the structural dynamics.

Strategic Culture

The strategic culture is also key to the foreign-policy making. Given that all these entities have leaders whose tenures are long-standing – if not 'for life' – it is quite easy to trace the trends of each statelike actor. More specifically, PLO's leadership's strategic culture was dual tactics and contradictory policies as well as balancing between antagonistic polities in the region and beyond. Hizbullah's strategic culture was primarily dominated by a militaristic hue and some sort of access to and control over the Lebanese state mechanism. This resistance identity was central throughout each choice, and it displayed itself differently. Equally, KRG's strategic culture is characterised

by reaching out and playing off its immediate neighbouring states. This is contingent and dependent on the balance of its two centres of power. The harmony or disharmony of the two main leaders – Barzani and Talabani – dictates the consistency or otherwise in their foreign policy. Similar to the variable of the perception of the system, the leadership's foreign policy is highly influenced by their strategic culture, and it was present in every foreign policy choice that was analysed.

State-Society Relations

Perhaps the most critical element of what constitutes an armed non-state actor, a statelike actor, is its very ability to have a constituency; nevertheless, in all three case studies, it was demonstrated that the relationship with the society has minimal impact on or gravity in its foreign policy choice. At the same time, the study observed that in the instances that the state-society relations played a role, it was when the leadership was at risk of losing legitimacy. Thus, one may argue that state-society relations play a role in foreign policy only when it is on the threshold of collapse. This is evident in all three cases. In the case of KRG, Barzani's choice to hold the independence referendum in 2017 demonstrates that he prioritised the state-society relations, which were on the verge of collapse, over territory that continued to be subject of dispute with Baghdad.

Similarly, Hizbullah disclosed its full involvement in the Syrian crisis because many Lebanese Shia felt that the Party of God was not sufficiently protecting them from the attacks of Salafi-jihadists. By the same token, Arafat's unilateral declaration of independence was also dictated by the severing of state-society relations as the Palestinians of the occupied territories revolted against the Israeli occupation and bypassed PLOs command. Thus, state-society relations played a role in one out of the four foreign policy choices of each actor.

Territoriality

The variable of territoriality arose from the very nature of these statelike actors. Although they have effective control over a territory, it is contested in various instances and ways. Thus, it was an obvious variable that ought to be examined in relation to foreign policy choices. In all cases, the preservation of the already attained territory was vital but also decisive for the foreign policy choice. The notion of territory is diverse but has an equally important role. KRG and Hizbullah dominated their 'natural' territories – KRG over the Iraqi Kurdish areas of northern Iraq and

Hizbullah over the south of Lebanon, which was primarily inhabited by Lebanese Shia. For the former, the ultimate scope was to maximise its territory by incorporating the disputed areas, such as Kirkuk, under its direct rule. For the latter, the notion of the territory remained unchallenged to a large extent. In the case of the PLO, although the primary territory was the West Bank and Gaza, the territory that became vital for Arafat and his foreign policy was Lebanon, followed by Tunis. It was not after the PLO was technically left without a territorial base that it sought to move in OPT in the 1990s.

In other words, the notion of territoriality was displayed differently in each case. Furthermore, it played a crucial role in its foreign policy each time. At first sight, one may argue that territoriality did not rank high in the KRG's decision to hold an independence referendum in 2017, including on the disputed territories. One may deduce that territoriality did not have a role in the face of the total deterioration of state-society relations. Another explanation offered by Barzani himself was that the central government of Baghdad would eventually annex the disputed areas. In either case, one may argue that Barzani prioritised regaining legitimacy mainly among the constituency within its primary – undisputed – territory. Unlike the cases of great and small states, statelike actors' vulnerability generated by the lack of international legal recognition renders their territorial control an essential intervening variable. In other words, the territory of statelike actors should not be taken for granted when examining their foreign policies.

The obsolete variable of bureaucracy

The study showed that the least relevant variable was that of the institutions. While institutional organisation, both for domestic and foreign issues, are vital in the establishment of the stateness of armed non-state actors, the research found no evidence to suggest that statelike actors' foreign policy endured any effect from the bureaucracy in place which mandate is designed to deal with foreign policy issues. Thus, the institutions play no role in either facilitating or inhibiting foreign policy implementation. Instead, these actors invested in creating departments and committees, which imitated ministries to foster foreign relations with states and even established different representations abroad, either missions or informal offices. However, no foreign policy choice of any statelike actor was subjected to any institutional procedure.

This finding was rather expected due to the nature of the political authority of these entities. Incongruously, the most common characteristic of the three case studies is the de facto monarchy

and domineering of these actors, whose absolute authority lies in the hands of the executive political leadership, rendering foreign policy an exclusive matter of the governing leadership. In other words, even though the PLO is comprised of numerous parties, Hizbullah is run by the nine-member Consultative Council (Majlis Shura al-Qarar), and KRG has a pseudo-allocation of power among two main parties (KDP and PUK), in practice their foreign policies were formulated, conducted and executed by Arafat, Nasrallah and Barzani and their inner circles.

Type II and Type III Neoclassical Realism for Statelike Actor

Overall, the four foreign policy behaviours that were examined for each statelike actor demonstrated consistent tendencies among the role of the intervening variables. Thus, the research substantiated that beyond the primacy of the structural system, for statelike actors, the intervening variables of perception of the system, strategic culture and territoriality rank high, while state-society relations are low, and the role of institutions is none existent.

By applying the neoclassical realist methodology prescribed by Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell (2016), the thesis established that these statelike actors are capable of conducting foreign policies and that their foreign policies may be examined in an efficient, structured manner and may be conceptualised in a way that can be utilised as a tool to predict the external behaviour of these actors. Even though the methodology proposed by Type III neoclassical realism, in practice, the primary outcome of this thesis is closer to type II neoclassical realism. According to type III, foreign policy may generate and/or impact structural outcomes, at least on a regional level, given the size of these actors in the international system. This study was able to detect only some tendencies of type III neoclassical realism. It seems that statelike actors influence structural outcomes to some extent, but the study was unable to trace whether these entities were able to produce structural outcomes.

It was clear that when the foreign policies of each of the statelike actors are viewed on a longer-term timeline (from the medium-to-long term rather than a short-to-medium term) for a specific policy as prescribed by type III – they did impact the regional system. However, the result was not consistent between the three case studies. More specifically, Arafat's foreign policy of 'retrieving' the Palestinian question from the hands of the Arab to the hands of the Palestinians impacted the dynamics of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Even though one may argue that the Palestinian issue still lies at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict, PLO's foreign policy – for better or worse –

engraved a distinct path for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. By the same token, Hizbullah's militarised foreign policy has impacted regional dynamics. Whether Hizbullah is viewed as an Iranian proxy or ally, it still remains a substantial threat to Israel and the only Arab power that managed to encroach on IDF. Hizbullah's IRL became a launching pad for the axis of resistance, expanding its power like never before. In other words, Hizbullah, due to its regional politics, has become an indispensable ally to Iran, a significant regional power, and an important factor in the Iranian-Saudi rivalry equation. KRGs foreign policy has also influenced some outcomes of the regional system. First and foremost, accumulatively, KRG is the first Kurdish sovereign entity in the Middle East. Be it via financial development, military participation in the global war against ISIS or an influencer on the Kurdish question, its foreign policies have rendered it an active player in the political scene of the Middle East; however, it has not managed to have an impact of the regional developments as the PLO and Hizbullah.

Thus, further research is required for a more systematic examination of the capacity of statelike actors or even small states to impact the structural system. In fact, there is much that still needs to be examined, even in the empirical cases that were presented in this thesis, particularly in the case of PLO and KRG. The new leadership, in both cases, that took the reins of their predecessors have been surrounded by relatively the same inner circles but have been enduring a totally different regional and international reality from their predecessors. For instance, it would be interesting to compare and contrast the perception of Arafat and his strategic culture with that of Mahmoud Abbas, the current President of Palestine, or between Barzani and his nephew, the current President of KRG, Nerchivan Barzani.

Having said that, on a more empirical note, this thesis provided a different insight on a number of controversial policies, such as Arafat's support to Saddam during Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, whistle opposing states that supported the PLO like Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt to many a few. In fact, Arafat simply did not oppose Saddam. In line with his strategic culture, he was rather vague in taking a clear-cut stance and sought to take advantage of the situation by attempting to mediate between Kuwait and Iraq (both countries hosted a significant number of prosperous Palestinians) in an effort to increase PLOs relevance in the region. In addition, the Palestinian leadership lacked clarity in the face of the emerging new world order and its consequences on regional dynamics. Similarly, Hizbullah's involvement in the war in Syria was another contested foreign policy choice as it put the Party's domestic legitimacy at risk. Lebanon

was unable to remain immune to the sectarian crisis that had attracted regional powers. By extension, the Party was unable to sustain its neutral stance in the initial stages of the crisis, especially with the rise of the Lebanese Salafi-Jihadist threat. Finally, and perhaps the most controversial choice is the KRGs independence referendum in 2017 that led to the Iraqi Kurdish territorial loss. In fact, the referendum was Barzani's choice, and it sought to catch the attention of the foreign players and, at the same time, ease the state-society tensions, which had led KRG to the brink of another civil war. These contested choices were not examined ad hoc. Instead, they were systematically analysed along with other foreign policy choices so as to trace and evaluate which intervening variables determine foreign policy choices.

To conclude, this thesis validated that neoclassical realism may be applied to statelike actors, like any other actor, be it great or small. Their foreign policies can be theorised under the prism of IR. The findings of this thesis suggest that despite occupying a small place in the structural system, they interact with their environment. Statelike actors may impact the structural outcomes rendering them an essential subject of the study within the IR scholarship. The methodology used to frame the intervening variables may be utilised for further research for other case studies beyond the region. This nuanced comparative study revealed that what was once considered exceptionalist or particular, the evolution of IR grand theories may find space to incorporate them as we better understand them.

Table I: Assessment of intervening variables' impact on PLO's, Hizbullah's and KRG's foreign policy

	PLO				Hizbullah				KRG				
	<i>Camp David 1979</i>	<i>Unilateral Independence 1988</i>	<i>Washington talks 1990-1991</i>	<i>Oslo Accords 1991-1993</i>	<i>July War 2006</i>	<i>Syrian Crisis 2011</i>	<i>Syrian Crisis 2012</i>	<i>Syrian Crisis 2013 – 2017</i>	<i>Turkey</i>	<i>Kobane</i>	<i>Western Reapproachment/ Military expansion</i>	<i>Independence Referendum 2017</i>	
<i>Perception</i>	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	
<i>Strategic Culture</i>	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	
<i>State-Society</i>	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	M	
<i>Institutions</i>	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	
<i>Territoriality</i>	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	L	
	N	N	L	M	H	N	H	H	L	N	N	N	STRUCTURAL OUTCOMES

H | High
M | Medium
L | Low
N | None

Table II: Frequency of intervening variables' impact on PLO's, Hizbullah's and KRG's foreign policy

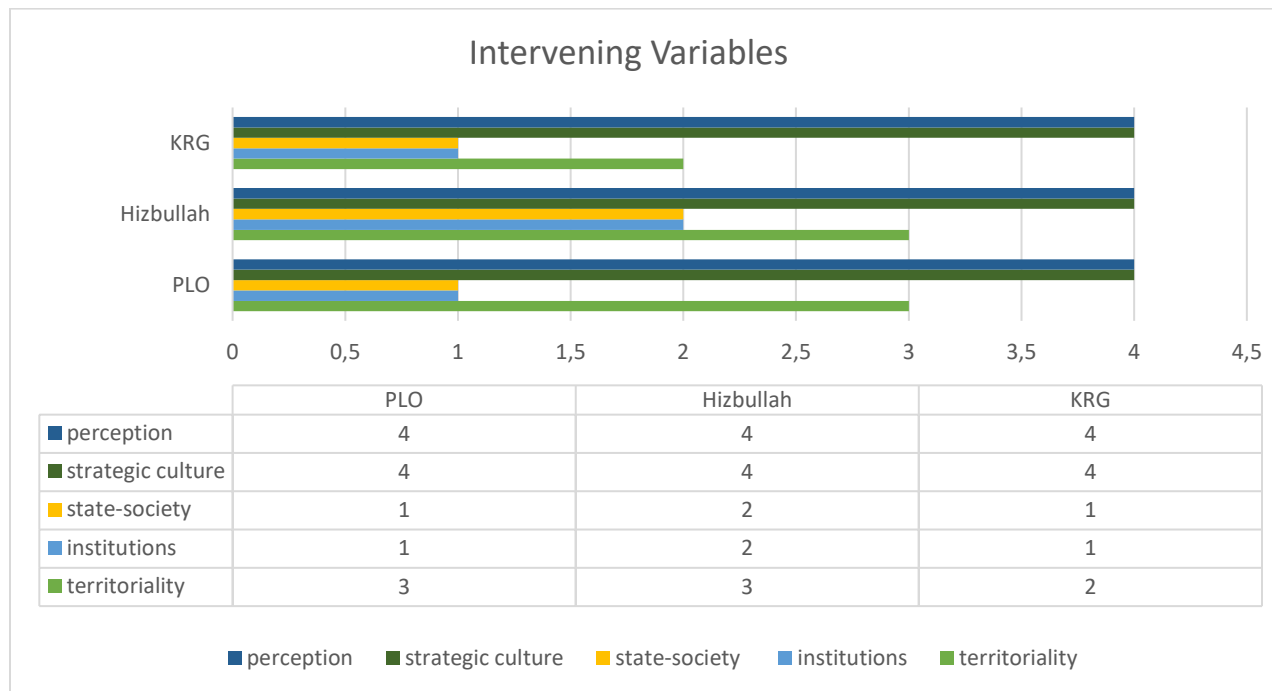


Figure I: Type II neoclassical realism

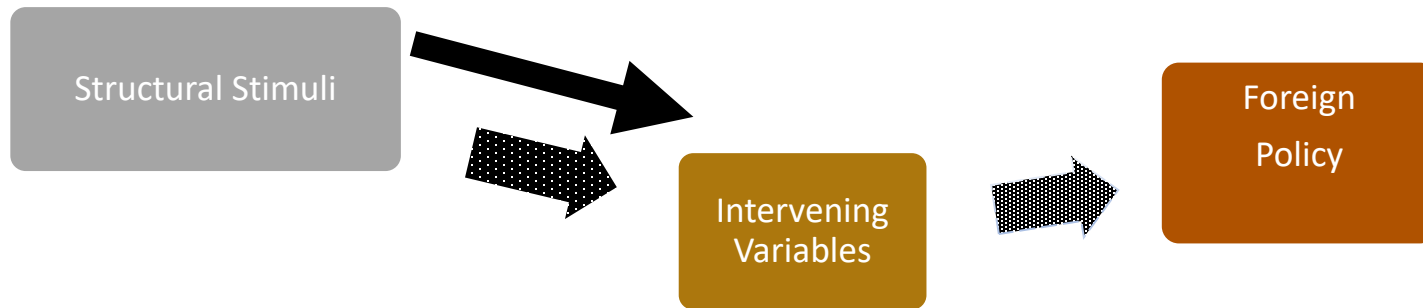
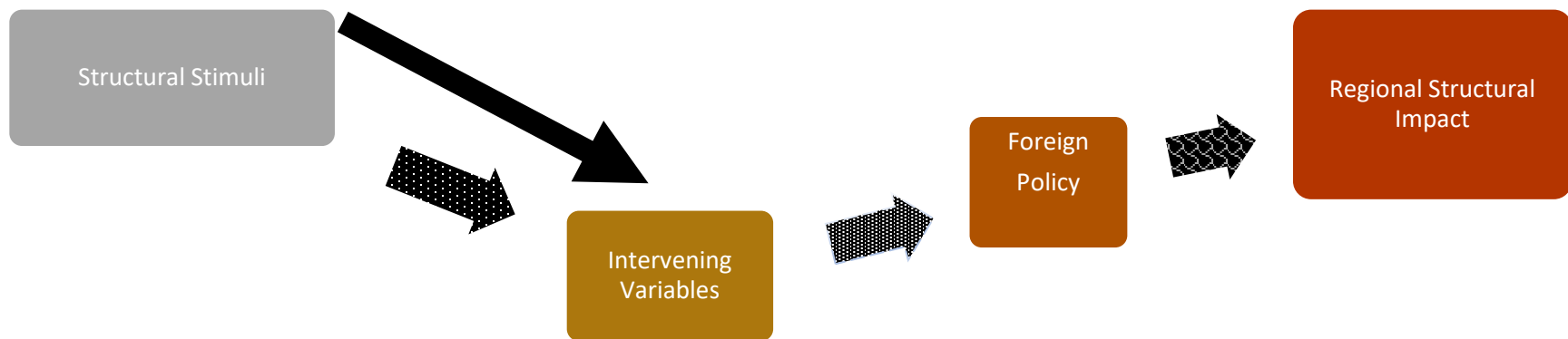


Figure II: Type III neoclassical realism



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