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## **Armed non-state actors in conflict: strategic decision-making in the 2014 IS-KRI conflict**

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## Chapter 2

# Conceptualization<sup>244</sup>

**T**he previous chapter introduced the research question of this study – that is, how to explain the strategic decision-making of IS and the KRI during their 2014 conflict – and why this question is relevant. However, to be able to answer this question, the study needs to address critical concepts to clarify what this study is about. Therefore, this chapter answers what do the concepts of ANSA and strategic decision-making constitute? Defining these concepts narrows down the essence of this study, that is, explaining strategic decision-making by ANSAs IS and the KRI. Chapter 4 further introduces IS and the KRI.

This chapter indicates that ANSAs concern actors in IR that have not been recognized as states by existing states and are willing and able to conduct violence to obtain their strategic goals. Strategic decision-making concerns an actor's choices on ways and means to achieve foreign policy ends.<sup>245</sup> An actor might accomplish those ends by strategic decisions that intentionally seem sub-optimal or counter-productive to outsmart adversaries.<sup>246</sup> This study observes that ANSAs pursue specific policy goals – operating as strategic entities<sup>247</sup> – and possess the ability to make strategic decisions, as well as the capacity and willingness to implement them, if necessary, by violence. So, like states, ANSAs can turn to instruments of power to achieve foreign policy goals.

### 2.1 ANSA

The three elements of the concept – armed, (non-) state, and actor – need elaboration to define what an ANSA is. The sections below address these concepts sequentially, recognizing

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244 An early draft of this chapter appeared as: Wietse van den Berge, "Analyzing Middle Eastern armed non-state actors' foreign policy," *Global Security Studies* 7:3 (2016), 13-31.

245 Gerner, "The evolution of the study of foreign policy," 18.

246 Luttwak, *Strategy*, 3-5. Cf. Donald Robertson, *How to think like a Roman emperor. The Stoic philosophy of Marcus Aurelius* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2019), 39-40.

247 John Warden, "The enemy as a system," *Airpower Journal* 9:1 (1995), 45.

that being armed is a category of non-states, which in itself is a category of actors in IR. One section addresses the alleged difference between states and non-states as actors in IR, starting with what an actor is within IR. The critical fact that some non-state actors are armed further complicates the categorization between states and non-state actors.

### 2.1.1 Actor in IR: decision-making capacity

Without applying the term actor, strategist John Warden used the term strategic entity, which is ‘anything that can function on its own and is free and able to make decisions as to where it will go and what it will do.’<sup>248</sup> Warden’s definition seems in line with the typology of actorhood by Aydinli: ‘(1) some reference to having a decision-making and policy-making system or ability (2) and some reference to having the capacity for implementing the decisions or policies made.’<sup>249</sup>

In their inventory of non-state actors mentioned in the journal *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Baumann and Stengel adopted a typology of actors within IR based on territorial scope and legal status, developed by political scientists Philipp Genschel and Bernhard Zangl. According to Genschel and Zangl, territorial scope refers to whether the actor operates within or beyond the state’s borders; legal status indicates whether the actor performs in the private or public sphere. The territorial scope and legal status then lead to four categories: state actors, private actors, international actors, and transnational actors.<sup>250</sup>

In practice, the typology suggested by Genschel and Zangl proves problematic as categories overlap or cases do not fit either type. IS and the KRI started within a state, but lacking statehood, it seems flawed to label them private actors along with corporations and associations. When IS and the KRI eventually expanded their activities beyond state borders and behaved like states by conducting foreign policies<sup>251</sup>, the public-private dichotomy remained troublesome: were they international actors, like supra-national entities, or transnational actors, like non-governmental organizations, then?<sup>252</sup> By 2014, IS claimed Iraq and Syria as its area of operations while rejecting the existing border between the countries<sup>253</sup>, and the KRI sent *peshmerga* fighters to the Syrian town of Kobani.<sup>254</sup> In 2014, both IS and the KRI had regional relevance. Analysts had to include

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248 *Ibid.*, 45.

249 Aydinli, “Assessing violent nonstate actorhood in global politics,” 427.

250 Genschel & Zangl, “L’État et l’exercice de l’autorité politique,” 512-5.

251 Stephen Biddle, *Nonstate warfare. The military methods of guerillas, warlords, and militias* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 2-3; Gunter, “The foreign policy of the Iraqi Kurds,” 1.

252 Genschel & Zangl, “L’État et l’exercice de l’autorité politique,” 514.

253 For example: “ISIS celebrates takeover of Nineveh province, says the ‘Sykes-Picot borders’ have been removed,” *ISIS Twitter*, June 10, 2014, transl. unknown.

254 For example: “Islamic State reports,” *Dabiq* 5, 15; Mariam Karouny & Omer Berberoglu, “Heavy fighting in Kobani after Peshmerga join battle,” *Huffington Post*, November 2, 2014.

them in political analyses and policy recommendations concerning the region. Although sometimes argued differently<sup>255</sup>, IS and the KRI acted independently because they pursued their interests.<sup>256</sup> In doing so, they sometimes worked in alliances or operated as proxies.<sup>257</sup>

Operating beyond the state and pursuing foreign policies made IS and the KRI enter the realm of international relations and IR. Adopting Aydinli's criteria of being capable of decision-making and actual implementation made IS and the KRI actors within international relations. Differences exist in IR between state actors and non-state actors, though. The following section addresses this difference.

### 2.1.2 (Non-) state actors in IR: recognition

States are legal entities within IR<sup>258</sup>, which are 'mutually exclusive and together exhaustive of political space'<sup>259</sup> based on four criteria: (1) containing a permanent population; (2) controlling a defined territory; (3) having a government; and (4) maintaining relations with other states.<sup>260</sup> However, this does not translate into non-states being non-legal entities in IR. Whether an actor in IR is a state or a non-state actor remains highly contested. It appears that (external) behavior towards (other) states is more important than internal constellation<sup>261</sup>: '[s]tate leaders have a legitimacy that sub-state leaders and groups do not.'<sup>262</sup> The difference between states and non-state actors is primarily that the former possess some form of recognition, which the latter do not have.<sup>263</sup> The dichotomy seems problematic as some non-state actors – such as IS and the KRI – challenge states' monopolies of violence.<sup>264</sup> Violence is particularly problematic when it moves beyond policing into the realm of war.

255 Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State," 20.

256 Gunter, "The foreign policy of the Iraqi Kurds," 1.

257 Cf. Salehyan, "The delegation of war," 494.

258 Freedman, *The future of war*, 28.

259 Ringmar, *History of international relations*, 5.

260 "Convention on rights and duties of states adopted by the seventh international conference of American states. Montevideo, December 26<sup>th</sup>, 1933," *League of Nations*, 1936, 25. Also see: Biddle, *Nonstate warfare*, 11; Mabon & Royle, *The origins of ISIS*, 16.

261 Florea, "Rebel governance," 1005; Gaddis, *Over strategisch denken*, 122.

262 Kiras, "Current irregular warfare," 359.

263 Pfeifer *et al.*, "The politics of recognition," 2. Also see: Coggins, "Rebel diplomacy," 98.

264 Biddle, "The determinants of nonstate military methods," 716; Mabon & Royle, *The origins of ISIS*, 18; Milton, *Structure of a state*, 1; Pfeifer & Schwab, "Re-examining the state/non-state binary," 430-4; Romano, "Sub-state actors and foreign policy risk-taking," 346. For example: Beatrice de Graaf & Saskia Pothoven, "De Islamitische inlichtingenstaat. De Stasi als leermeester?" *Militaire Spectator* 187:9 (2018), 461-4; Graaf & Yayla, "The ISIS files – Policing as rebel governance," 14. Also see: Ezrow, *Global politics*, 3, 61; Kalyvas, *The logic of violence in civil war*, 20-31; David Lonsdale, "Strategy defined," in *Understanding modern warfare*, 2nd ed., David Jordan *et al.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 43; Speller, "Introduction," 2.

Adopting strategist Carl von Clausewitz's view on politics' primacy, war occurs in a political context and is instrumental to a political goal.<sup>265</sup> Whether a state or a non-state actor sets that political goal is irrelevant to Clausewitz, although some scholars wrongfully believe that Clausewitz ruled out non-state actors.<sup>266</sup> However, war was – and sometimes still is – regarded as the realm of states, while non-state actors are or were expected to conduct irregular warfare. States also apply asymmetric or hybrid tactics, and non-state actors sometimes possess regular military forces. Usually, a lack of military capabilities forces non-state actors to use asymmetric tactics. The usage of different tactics suggests a continuum of various forms of violence that merge or split instead of stationary categories. In addition, (military) force does not have to be used to create or pursue an intended effect; a mere credible threat can convince a (potential) adversary to change behavior.

International affairs scholar Stephen Biddle suggested that due to the proliferation of new technologies, the lethal capabilities of both states and non-state actors increased, decreasing the relative difference in lethal power between the two types.<sup>267</sup> Developments in and availability of communications, information, logistics, and organization enable non-state actors to behave as states.<sup>268</sup> The increasingly emerging hybrid forms in between provoke debate on which actors constitute states and which non-states.<sup>269</sup> Another problem concerning the standard criteria used for statehood is that these criteria are Western-centric and leave out non-Western concepts.<sup>270</sup>

As well as discussions on what constitutes a state, criteria also differ among scholars on what constitutes a non-state actor. Foreign policy analysts Daphné Josselin and William Wallace

265 Clausewitz, *On war*, 605-10. Also see: Brian Cole, "Clausewitz's wondrous yet paradoxical trinity. The nature of war as a complex adaptive system," *Joint Force Quarterly* 96:1 (2020), 43; Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy. A history* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 90; Azar Gat, *The origins of military thought. From the Enlightenment to Clausewitz* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 215; Haun, "Air power in the age of primacy," 1, 18; Thomas Hughes, "Deliberate Force. Ambivalent success," in *Air power in the age of primacy. Air warfare since the Cold War*, Phil Haun *et al.* (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 65; Kiras, "Current irregular warfare," 358; Kiras, "The historical practice," 336; Lonsdale, "Strategy defined," 43; David Lonsdale, "The study and theory of strategy," in: *Understanding modern warfare*, 2nd ed. David Jordan *et al.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) 21, 29; Speller, "Introduction," 3. For politics' primacy see: Bart Schuurman, "Clausewitz and the 'new wars' scholars," *Parameters* (Spring 2010), 90-1.

266 Kiras, "Current irregular warfare," 368. For example: John Keegan, *A history of warfare* (London: Pimlico, 1994), 5. Also see: T.G. Otte, "New paths to wisdom. Clausewitz – from practice to theory," in *The practice of strategy. A global history*, Jeremy Black (ed.), (Società Italiana di Storia Militare, 2024), 334; Strachan, "The elusive meaning and enduring relevance of Clausewitz," 125, 131.

267 Biddle, *Nonstate warfare*, 297-300. Also see: Brian Jenkins, "International terrorism," in *The use of force*, 5th ed., Robert Art & Kenneth Waltz (eds.) (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 76; Naim, *The end of power*, 123.

268 Ashour, *How ISIS fights*, 11. Also see: Freedman, *Command*, 504; Leonard, *The age of unpeace*, 3-5.

269 Biddle, *Nonstate warfare*, 6-10. Also see: Pfeifer & Schwab, "Re-examining the state/non-state binary," 431.

270 Mabon & Royle, *The origins of ISIS*, 17-21. Also see: Kiras, "Key concepts," 302; Kiras, "The historical practice," 333; Lawrence, *Zeven zuilen van wijsheid*, 93-99; Rabi', *Contemporary Arab thought*, 140-1; Ringmar, *History of international relations*, 1-11; Romano, "Sub-state actors and foreign policy risk-taking," 348; Umunc, "A hope so transcendent," 189.

defined non-state actors based on three criteria as organizations ‘[1] largely or entirely autonomous from central government funding and control [...]; [2] operating as or participating in networks which extend across the boundaries of two or more states [...]; [3] acting in ways which affect political outcomes.’<sup>271</sup> Additionally, Aydinli observed that ‘shared interests’ and longing to be recognized by other actors are usually part of the academic concepts of non-state actors.<sup>272</sup> In line with recognition by other actors, the differences between states and non-states consist of different interests, formal (trade) relations, and involvement in supra-state institutions that states have and non-states have not.<sup>273</sup> Yet, independent scholar Mohammed Salih argued that IS ‘does not seek to coexist with the nation, carve its place within a nation-based global order, or expand the limits of national imagination to make it more inclusive. It simply seeks to dismantle and supplant the nation (-state) with its desired form of political community.’<sup>274</sup>

This study follows Aydinli’s characteristics of non-state actors: (1) possessing decision-making capability, (2) possessing means to implement these decisions, and (3) aspiring (some form of) statehood. During 2014, despite being non-state actors, IS and the KRI behaved as state actors, claiming a monopoly of violence within the territory they controlled<sup>275</sup> and raising taxes.<sup>276</sup> Eventually, IS proclaimed a state, and the KRI repeatedly suggested independence from Iraq.<sup>277</sup> However, claiming – even possessing – a monopoly of violence in a specific territory proved an ill criterion to decide which actor in IR is a state or a non-state actor. Yet, it seems relevant that a non-state actor is armed, thus able to challenge states and other ANSAs alike. The following section addresses the phenomenon of ANSAs.

### 2.1.3 ANSAs in IR: ability for violence

What separates ANSAs from other non-state actors is that ANSAs are ‘willing and able to use violence for pursuing their objectives.’<sup>278</sup> The ability to use violence implies that ANSAs must possess – or at least have access to – some fighting capacity. This study considers an ANSA

271 Josselin & Wallace, “Non-state actors in IR,” 3-4.

272 Aydinli, “Assessing violent nonstate actorness in global politics,” 426.

273 Ezrow, *Global politics*, 21.

274 Mohammed Salih, “The Islamic State’s visions of political community and statehood and their articulation vis-à-vis nationalism,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2023), 16.

275 Hinnebusch, “Foreign policy in the Middle East,” 26.

276 Florea, “Rebel governance,” 1007-8; “The structure of khilafa,” *al-Furqan Media*, July 6, 2016, video.

277 Christopher Blanchard, “Kurds in Iraq hold controversial referendum on independence,” *Congressional Research Service*, October 3, 2017, 1.

278 Schneckener, “Fragile statehood,” 25. Also see: Tami Biddle, “Coercion theory. A basic introduction for practitioners,” *Texas National Security Review* 3:2 (2020), 31, 62-3; Clausewitz, *On war*, 605-10; Freedman, *Strategy*, 90; Gat, *The origins of military thought*, 215; Haun, “Air power in the age of primacy,” 1, 18; Lonsdale, “Strategy defined,” 43; David Lonsdale, “The practice of strategy,” in *Understanding modern warfare*, 2nd ed. David Jordan *et al.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) 62; Lonsdale, “The study and theory of strategy,” 21; Pfeifer *et al.*, “The politics of recognition,” 7; Speller, “Introduction,” 3-4, 7-8.

armed when that actor can apply its fighting capacity to reach intended strategic effects, that is, ‘use [...] force and the threat of force for the ends of policy’<sup>279</sup>, which will be elaborated on in the next chapter, when discussing strategy.

Within academic literature, both the terms armed non-state actor<sup>280</sup> and violent non-state actor<sup>281</sup> are in use, referring to the same phenomenon. However, this study applies armed, as it refers to a usually objectively observable capability that is or might be applied. In contrast, violent refers to subjective behavior or intent. It depends on the observer whether an action is qualified as violent; this poses a normative issue better suited as a political or legal question. In addition, (military) force does not have to be used to create or pursue an intended effect; a mere credible threat can convince a (potential) adversary to change behavior<sup>282</sup>, creating analytical discrepancies on whether a specific threat is violent. Furthermore, an analytical challenge emerges when a violent non-state actor changes strategy, for example, by stopping violence and joining established political processes; the actor is no longer violent but still can be and could switch back. By using the term ANSA, the categorization remains unless or until the ANSA gives up its fighting capabilities.

Contemporary IR is polyarchic in character, in which – apart from the states – thousands of non-state actors possess the fighting capacity to compel their strategic goals.<sup>283</sup> Some ANSAs have similar or better fighting capacities than some states have.<sup>284</sup> In his study on IS, security studies analyst Omar Ashour stated that ‘[i]t can no longer be taken for granted that the state monopolizes the means of violence. Thus, it cannot be assumed that ASA’s [armed state actors] are universally more capable of defeating armed non-state actors [ANSAs] on the battlefield.’<sup>285</sup> ANSA researcher Adrian Florea reached a similar conclusion in his study on separatist movements between 1946 and 2016: ‘[i]n the contemporary international environment, the Weberian state no longer holds a monopoly over the governance market (if it ever did)’<sup>286</sup>, adding that a multitude of different actors takes over.<sup>287</sup>

279 Colin Gray, *Modern strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 17. Also see: Clausewitz, *On war*, 177.

280 For example: Aydinli, “Assessing violent nonstate actorness in global politics,” 424-44.

281 For example: Coggin, “Rebel diplomacy,” 98; Ezrow, *Global politics*, 37; Hashim, *The caliphate at war*, 7; Edward Last, *Strategic culture and violent non-state actors. A comparative study of Salafi-jihadist groups* (London: Routledge, 2021), 1-6; Schneckener, “Fragile statehood,” 23-40; Phil Williams, “Violent non-state actors and national and international security” (Zürich: *Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule*, 2008), 8-18.

282 Biddle, “Coercion theory,” 97; Freedman, *Strategy*, 158-9; Kiras, “Key concepts,” 304-8; Lonsdale, “Strategy defined,” 31, 62-3; Lonsdale, “The practice of strategy,” 62; Speller, “Introduction,” 7-11.

283 Brown, “Purposes and pitfalls of war by proxy,” 245-6.

284 Biddle, *Nonstate warfare*, 6-10.

285 Ashour, *How ISIS fights*, 5.

286 Florea, “Rebel governance,” 1,026.

287 *Ibid.*, 1,026. Also see: Brown, “Purposes and pitfalls of war by proxy,” 247; Pfeifer *et al.*, “The politics of recognition,” 7.

As ANSAs get involved in international relations, military force is no longer the monopoly of state actors. ANSAs possess a terrible reputation: '[m]ost of these armed non-state actors share a common feature in that by using violent means they do not attach great importance to the distinction made by international law between combatants and non-combatants.'<sup>288</sup> Furthermore, 'most groups and organisations increasingly operate via transnational networks and transnational ties, thereby gaining new room for manoeuvre.'<sup>289</sup> ANSAs do so, aiming for recognition by a significant actor within international relations of a 'political cause, an identity, or the claim to represent a certain group.'<sup>290</sup> Schneckener and ANSA-researcher Claudia Hofmann combined the elements above and provided a valuable definition of ANSAs: 'distinctive organizations that are (i) willing and capable to use violence for pursuing their objectives and (ii) not integrated into formalized state institutions [...], (iii) possess a certain degree of autonomy with regard to politics, military operations, resources, and infrastructure.'<sup>291</sup>

ANSA researchers Stephen Powell and Adrian Florea defined ANSAs as 'anti-government or separatist rebels, ethnic militias, terrorist organisations, hybrid groups, or pro-government militias that have access to arms and employ violent or non-violent means to attain their strategic objectives.'<sup>292</sup> The definition provided by Powell and Florea contains a further categorization of ANSAs, which they did not elaborate on. Other scholars did. In line with international security scholar Phil Williams<sup>293</sup>, Aydinli stated that ANSAs are 'generally divided along the lines of: (1) insurgents, (2) other domestic militant groups, (3) warlords/urban gangs, (4) private militias/military companies, (5) terrorists and (6) criminal organizations.'<sup>294</sup> Schneckener used a slightly different typology, observing two more categories – clan chiefs and marauders – that partly overlap with Williams' and Aydinli's categories.<sup>295</sup> Using somewhat different characteristics, Ezrow added even more categories, including de facto states: 'a geographical entity, usually consisting of a particular ethnic group, which wishes to secede from the parent state that it is a part of and be recognized as a de jure state by the international community.'<sup>296</sup> The different categories compare along five dichotomies: (1) goals, that is, does the ANSA

288 Schneckener, "Fragile statehood," 28.

289 *Ibid.*, 28.

290 Pfeifer *et al.*, "The politics of recognition," 2.

291 Claudia Hofmann & Ulrich Schneckener, "Engaging non-state armed actors in state- and peace-building. Options and strategies," *International Review of the Red Cross* 93:883 (2011), 604. Also see: Fliervoet, "Fighting for Kurdistan?" 9n12. According to the definition of Schneckener and Hofmann, the KRI could be regarded part of the formalized state institutions (via the Iraqi constitution), which it aimed to separate from.

292 Powell & Florea, "Introducing the Armed Nonstate Actor Rivalry Dataset," 179. Original in italics. Also see: Pfeifer & Schwab, "Re-examining the state/non-state binary," 436.

293 Williams, "Violent non-state actors," 8-18.

294 Aydinli, "Assessing violent nonstate actorness in global politics," 426-7. Also see: Voller, "Rethinking armed groups and order," 854-6.

295 Schneckener, "Fragile statehood," 30.

296 Ezrow, *Global politics*, 97. Also see: Jackson, "Warlords," 148; Sadoon, "The Islamic State and the independence referendum," 2.

pursue change or status quo; (2) scope, that is, has the ANSA a territorial or non-territorial scope; (3) tactics, that is, does the ANSA apply physical or psychological tactics; (4) hierarchy, that is, is the ANSA tightly or loosely organized; and, (5) motivation, that is, does the ANSA pursue political or economic goals. Table 2.1 combines the typologies of ANSAs of Aydinli/Williams, Schneckener and Ezrow, indicating how the typologies differ along the dichotomies.

**Table 2.1:** Types of ANSAs and their characteristics according to Aydinli/Williams, Schneckener, and Ezrow.<sup>297</sup>

Aydinli/ Williams	Schneckener	Ezrow	Goal change   status quo	Scope territorial   non- territorial	Tactics physical   psychological	Hierarchy loose   medium   tight	Motivation political   economic
		<i>de facto state</i>	Both	Territorial	Both	Tight	Political
<i>insurgents</i>	<i>rebels, guerrillas</i>	<i>insurgency</i>	Change	Territorial	Physical	Medium	Political
<i>other domestic militant groups</i>	<i>militias, para- militaries</i>	<i>political organization with militant wing</i>	Both	Both	Both	Tight	Political
		<i>paramilitary</i>	Both	Both	Physical	Tight	Both
<i>warlords/ urban gangs</i>	<i>clan chiefs, big men</i>		Status quo	Territorial	Physical	Tight	Political
	<i>warlords</i>	<i>warlord</i>	Status quo	Both	Both	Medium	Economic
<i>terrorists</i>	<i>terrorists</i>	<i>terror organization</i>	Change	Non- territorial	Psychological	Medium	Political
		<i>terror network</i>	Both	Both	Psychological	Loose	Political
<i>criminal organizations</i>	<i>criminals, mafia, gangs</i>	<i>organized crime</i>	Status quo	Non- territorial	Psychological	Tight	Economic
		<i>gang</i>	Indifferent	Both	Physical	Medium	Economic
<i>private militias/ military companies</i>	<i>mercenaries, private military/ security companies</i>	<i>private security companies</i>	Indifferent	Territorial	Physical	Tight	Economic
	<i>marauders, 'sobels'</i>	<i>marauding rebels</i>	Indifferent	Non- territorial	Psychological	Loose	Economic

297 Aydinli, "Assessing violent nonstate actorness in global politics," 426-7; Ezrow, *Global politics*, 85-6; Schneckener, "Fragile statehood," 30; Williams, "Violent non-state actors," 8-18. For an alternative categorization see: Fliervoet, "Fighting for Kurdistan?" 7-11.

Categorization of the cases in this study proves challenging due to the enforced dichotomies. Depending on the argumentation, analysts labeled IS and the KRI in 2014 as different types of ANSAs: de facto states<sup>298</sup>, insurgents<sup>299</sup> or paramilitary, and perhaps even more. The KRI, formally, was part of the Iraqi state bureaucracy, while fighting the Iraqi state at the same time.<sup>300</sup> IS pragmatically changed between different categories, using criminal and terrorist tactics within a broader insurgency.<sup>301</sup>

All five dichotomies indicated above concern outcomes of strategic decision-making.<sup>302</sup> These outcomes might differ according to the situation, making categorizing ANSAs challenging. It also suggests static positions, whereas research indicates flexibility in strategic decision-making and consecutive behavior.<sup>303</sup> Remarkably, strategic decision-making has not been part of the categorization by Aydinli, Ezrow, Schneckener, or Williams.

## 2.2 Strategic decision-making

This study focuses on strategic decision-making. The following sections address the concept's three elements – strategy, decision, and decision-making – to define strategic decision-making. Addressing the concept starts with how strategy relates to policy, grand strategy, strategy, and operations and tactics, followed by a section that establishes the link between decisions and decision-making.

### 2.2.1 Strategy in IR: ends, ways, and means

Analysts heavily debated strategy, and the challenge starts with a lack of a commonly accepted definition of the term strategy.<sup>304</sup> Usually, a strategy involves objectives and allocating resources to meet these objectives.<sup>305</sup>

298 Hinnebusch, "Foreign policy in the Middle East," 26. Also see: Ludovico Carlino, "How Al-Qaeda and Islamic State differ in pursuit of common goal," *Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Monitor*, March 23, 2015; Leonard, *The age of unpeace*, 123. Carlino applied the term 'quasi-state' to IS, whereas Leonard applied 'proto-state.'

299 Noyes, "Pragmatic takfiris."

300 Fliervoet, "Fighting for Kurdistan?" 8, 8n10.

301 Noyes, "Pragmatic takfiris."

302 Cf. Jenkins, "ISIS's calculated barbarity."

303 For example: Ingram *et al.*, *The ISIS reader*, 303. Also see: Gray, *Modern strategy*, 129-51; Last, *Strategic culture*, 6-11; "State building. The Islamic State's trajectory in Iraq," *Jane's Islamic Affairs*, August 8, 2014.

304 Jeremy Black, review of *The direction of war. Contemporary strategy in historical perspective*, by Hew Strachan, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37:3 (2014), 472.

305 For example: Barry Posen, *The sources of military doctrine. France, Britain, and Germany between the world wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 13.

### 2.2.1.1 Policy

Strategy's objectives follow from policy. Policy is the outcome when those politically responsible decide the goals for the actor, as well as how to achieve those goals.<sup>306</sup> Within an actor, the highest level of power is the policy level. Clausewitz stressed politics' primacy but acknowledged that the military's choices influence policy too. So, the 'relationship is not always straightforward or direct.'<sup>307</sup>

Taking a Western-centric<sup>308</sup> and state-centric view<sup>309</sup>, military historian Hew Strachan described policy as 'a statement of one government's intent.'<sup>310</sup> Strachan's view corresponds with Clausewitz's interpretation of policy: '[p]olicy, of course, is nothing in itself; it is simply the trustee for all these interests against other states [...] we can only treat policy as representative of all interests of the community.'<sup>311</sup> Other authors avoid a state-centric view, adopting a broad interpretation in which 'policy may refer to any objective for which war is waged.'<sup>312</sup> However, from the 1920s onwards, other instruments than war have increasingly become accepted as ways to achieve policy goals, such as diplomacy, economy<sup>313</sup>, and domestic policy<sup>314</sup>, leading to so-called foreign policy.

Foreign policy concerns 'the stuff of international relations'<sup>315</sup> and is described as the 'strategies used by governments to guide their actions in the international area.'<sup>316</sup> Alternative descriptions of foreign policy concern 'a set of guides to choices being made about people, places, and things beyond the boundaries of the state'<sup>317</sup>; the collection of implicit and explicit goals concerning challenges abroad, relations with other states, and the collection of strategies and tactics to accomplish these goals<sup>318</sup>; or, '[a] state's foreign policy role implies an identity and defines

306 Hew Strachan, "Strategy in theory; strategy in practice," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 42:2 (2019), 187-8.

307 Lonsdale, "Strategy defined," 43; Luttwak, *Strategy*, 89. Also see: Black, "Strategic practice," 15; George Dimitriu, "Clausewitz and the politics of war. A contemporary theory," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 43:5 (2020), 680; Beatrice Heuser, *The evolution of strategy. Thinking war from antiquity to the present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 8-9.

308 Black, review of *The direction of war*, 473; Strachan, *The direction of war*, 9.

309 Strachan, *The direction of war*, 4.

310 *Ibid.*, 13.

311 Clausewitz, *On war*, 605-10.

312 Lonsdale, "The study and theory of strategy," 29. Also see: Keegan, *A history of warfare*, 5.

313 Hew Strachan, "Lessons from the last 'golden age'", in Russell Glenn, *New directions in strategic thinking 2.0* (Acton: ANU Press, 2018), 153-60; Strachan, "Strategy in theory," 172-5; Strachan, *The direction of war*, 32-8. Strachan linked the development of the term grand strategy to naval strategists Julian Corbett and, later, Alfred Thayer Mahan, with strategist Basil Liddell Hart continuing that development.

314 Strachan, *The direction of war*, 41.

315 Russett & Starr, *World politics*, 162.

316 Goldstein, *International relations*, 147.

317 Russett & Starr, *World politics*, 163.

318 Philip Everts, *Laat dat maar aan ons over! Democratie, buitenlands beleid en vrede* (Leiden: DSWO, 1996), 9.

orientations toward neighbors (friend or enemy), toward great powers (threat or patron), and toward the state system (revisionist or status quo).<sup>319</sup> These descriptions point out instrumental – thus rational – and state-centric approaches, reflecting (neo-) realist approaches towards foreign policy, in the next chapter categorized under the rational actor paradigm.

Broadening beyond the state to any actor operating within international relations would make a definition or description more appropriate for ANSAs. In that perspective, foreign policy analyst Deborah Gerner's definition of foreign policy is spot on: 'intentions, statements, and actions of an actor – often, but not always, a state – directed toward the external world.'<sup>320</sup> In this rather broad definition, the 'external world' for an ANSA means every person or entity that does not belong to the ANSA itself. The 'intentions, statements, and actions' shape foreign policy, either explicitly or implicitly. Explicit behavior includes statements and specific actions, like acts of violence or sanctions. Implicit behavior includes intentionally not doing something, indirect economic influence, and social pressure. ANSAs typically focus on political, military, and economic survival, using their foreign policy to gain the support of recognized states.<sup>321</sup> The different strategies available to achieve policy goals form what is known as grand strategy.

### 2.2.1.2 *Grand strategy*

Grand strategy translates the (foreign) policy goals into ways and means to achieve these goals.<sup>322</sup> The term grand strategy gradually came into use from the 1920s onwards, to describe all possible resources for achieving a political object, including diplomatic and economic resources. According to Strachan, in the 1920s, strategic scholars struggled to explain Germany's defeat in the First World War with Clausewitz's definition of strategy, which left out economic blockades and social unrest.<sup>323</sup> During the Second World War, the Allied grand strategy incorporated national mobilization, coalition diplomacy, and multi-front military campaigns into a single framework.<sup>324</sup> Grand strategy gained further prominence due to nuclear weapons proliferation during the Cold War, which left armed conflict a highly unattractive option. Instead, states aimed to prevent war<sup>325</sup>, making diplomacy and economy

319 Hinnebusch, "Foreign policy in the Middle East," 28.

320 Gerner, "The evolution of the study of foreign policy," 18. Also see: Sadoon, "The Islamic State and the independence referendum," 2-3.

321 Sadoon, "The Islamic State and the independence referendum," 3.

322 Luttwak, *Strategy*, 89.

323 Strachan, *The direction of war*, 15. For an earlier historical example of combining coalition warfare with economic blockades and social unrest, see: Jurriën de Jong, et al., *Waterloo. 200 jaar strijd* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2015), 20.

324 Strachan, "Strategy in theory," 183.

325 Biddle, "Coercion theory," 98-104; Lawrence Freedman, "Introduction – The evolution of deterrence strategy and research," in *Netherlands annual review of military studies 2020. Deterrence in the 21st century – insights from theory and practice*, Frans Osinga & Tim Sweijs (eds.) (The Hague: Asser Press, 2021), 1; Lonsdale, "The practice of strategy," 64-5.

more important than military strategy.<sup>326</sup> Strachan observed an increasing control of politicians over the military after the Cold War: ‘the big change in war has been the overt readiness of the west to use it as an instrument of policy.’<sup>327</sup> Focusing on the United States after 2001, and observing that America’s allies abandoned grand strategy altogether, Strachan argued that ‘grand strategy [...] has assumed more open-ended and long-term objectives, concerned as much with domestic arguments about national strength and resilience, including health, education and the institutions of democracy.’<sup>328</sup>

The foreign policy-related grand strategy typically concerns the – usually combined applied, or overlapping – realms of diplomatic, informational, military, and economic power, often abbreviated with the acronym DIME<sup>329</sup>, sometimes extended with the realms of finance, intelligence, law, and technology.<sup>330</sup> Still, ‘[i]f war is an instrument of policy, strategy is the tool that enables us to understand it and gives us our best chance of managing and directing it.’<sup>331</sup> Yet, the practice of strategy moved into the realm of politicians and the study of strategy to game theorists and mathematicians, instead of military professionals.<sup>332</sup> Strachan concluded in 2013 that ‘[t]oday strategy is too often employed simply as a synonym for policy’<sup>333</sup>, adding that ‘[b]y confusing strategy with policy, and by calling what were in reality political effects strategic effects, governments denied themselves the intellectual tool to manage war for political purposes, and so allowed themselves to project their daily political concerns back into strategy.’<sup>334</sup>

### 2.2.1.3 Strategy

IR researcher Colin Gray stated that ‘[Clausewitz] tells us that strategy is the use of tacit and explicit threats, as well as of actual battles and campaigns, to advance political purposes.

326 Hew Strachan, “Lessons from the last ‘golden age,’” 153-60; Strachan, “Strategy in theory,” 172-5; Strachan, *The direction of war*, 32-8.

327 Strachan, *The direction of war*, 22.

328 Strachan, “Strategy in theory,” 184.

329 “Joint Doctrine Note 1-18 – Strategy,” United States’ *Joint Chiefs of Staff*, April 25, 2018, ii-5-7. Also see: David Betz, “In search of a point. The blob at war,” *Military Strategy Magazine*, December 2020, 22-27; Black, “Strategic practice,” 16; Luttwak, *Strategy*, 86, 260.

330 Maria Constantinescu, “The national security strategy in the current environment. From DIME to a DIME-T approach,” Conference paper, 2021, 22-4; “Joint Doctrine Note 1-18,” ii-2; Konstantin Khomko, “A nation needs more than a DIME,” *Central Blue*, March 24, 2019; Phillips O’Brien, “There’s no such thing as a great power,” *Foreign Affairs* June 29, 2023; Cesar Rodriguez *et al.*, “Putting the ‘FIL’ into ‘DIME.’ Growing joint understanding of the instruments of power,” *JFQ* 97 (2020), 1,267-7. Also see: Freedman, *Strategy*, 238; Gray, *Modern strategy*, 23-43.

331 Strachan, *The direction of war*, 23.

332 Hew Strachan, “Lessons from the last ‘golden age,’” 153-60; Strachan, “Strategy in theory,” 172-5; Strachan, *The direction of war*, 32-8.

333 Strachan, *The direction of war*, 11.

334 *Ibid.*, 21.

Moreover, the strategy at issue may not be military strategy; instead it may be grand strategy that uses “engagements”, meaning all of the relevant instruments of power as threat or in action, for the objectives of statecraft.<sup>335</sup> The difference between grand strategy and strategy is fuzzy; according to historian John Gaddis, it is a matter of scale.<sup>336</sup> ‘Precisely because strategy is a pragmatic business it lacks the clarity and purity which strategic theory so often seeks.’<sup>337</sup>

As grand strategy concerns different instruments to achieve policy goals, the title of this section might – or, should – as well have been written in plural, as different strategies exist. This study focuses on military strategy, and to a lesser extent diplomatic strategy, as a means of foreign policy, while acknowledging that other strategies, such as economic strategy, might be as relevant and occasionally overlap with other strategies.

The different realms historically dealt with variables, or dimensions, that influence strategic decision-making. Historians Beatrice Heuser and Isabelle Duyvesteyn observed through the ages the importance of the dimensions of ‘geography, the population and material resources, as well as allies, and decision-making processes.’<sup>338</sup> Gray observed seventeen dimensions that influence strategy.<sup>339</sup> Without elaborating on the separate strategic dimensions, this study uses Gray’s typology as a reference and a tool for comparing applied paradigms. Still, the dimensions are dynamic, as they emerge or disappear, or change themselves<sup>340</sup>, and are interconnected<sup>341</sup>, causing strategy to be dynamic.<sup>342</sup> Gaddis described strategy as linking unlimited aspirations to necessarily limited capabilities. Gaddis pointed out that a balance between aspirations and capabilities eventually emerges.<sup>343</sup> In line with Gaddis, Freedman argued that strategy ‘is fluid

335 Gray, *Modern strategy*, 17.

336 Gaddis, *Over strategisch denken*, 33. Also see: Luttwak, *Strategy*, 208-11.

337 Strachan, “Strategy in theory,” 187.

338 Beatrice Heuser & Isabelle Duyvesteyn, “Grand patterns of strategy. Old and new,” in *The practice of strategy. A global history*, Jeremy Black (ed.), (Società Italiana di Storia Militare, 2024), 20. Also see: Black, *Geopolitics*, 272; Heuser, *The evolution of strategy*, 17-20

339 Gray, *Modern strategy*, 23-44. Also see: Michael Howard, “The forgotten dimensions of strategy,” *Foreign Affairs* 57:5 (1979), 976-8. Gray’s dimension concern: people, society, culture, politics, ethics, economics and logistics, organization, military administration, information and intelligence, strategic theory and doctrine, technology, military operations, command, geography, friction and chance and uncertainty, adversary, and time. When applicable, this study follows Gray’s terminology.

340 Heuser & Duyvesteyn, “Grand patterns of strategy,” 27. Also see: Otte, “New paths to wisdom,” 347.

341 Heuser, *The evolution of strategy*, 18. Also see: Jack Snyder, “Anarchy and culture. Insights from the anthropology of war,” *International Organization* 56:1 (2002), 31-6.

342 Heuser & Duyvesteyn, “Grand patterns of strategy,” 36. Also see: Jeremy Black, *Military strategy. A global history* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020); Freedman, *Strategy*, 238; Heuser, *The evolution of strategy*, 17. Robert Kaplan, *De wraak van de geografie. Wat de wereldkaart ons voorspelt over komende conflicten en het gevecht tegen het onvermijdelijke*, transl. Margreet de Boer (Houten: Het spectrum, 2012), 42-5; John Warden, “Smart strategy, smart airpower,” in *Airpower reborn. The strategic concepts of John Warden and John Boyd*, John Olsen (ed.) (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2015), 108.

343 Gaddis, *Over strategisch denken*, 32.

and flexible, governed by the starting point and not the end point.<sup>344</sup> Taking such a pragmatic approach, Freedman stated that strategy ‘is the art of creating power.’<sup>345</sup> This definition – or description – is insufficient, as it does not include maintaining power once established.

Clausewitz referred to strategy – what would now be military strategy – as ‘the use of the engagement for the purpose of the war.’<sup>346</sup> Later, Gray adapted Clausewitz’s definition into ‘the use that is made of force and the threat of force for the ends of policy’<sup>347</sup>, a condensed version of the definition used by Ashour: ‘the long-term organisation, distribution, planning, and application of all combat and non-combat resources to serve and achieve the ultimate objective(s) of the entity(ies) discussed, whether state or nonstate.’<sup>348</sup> Other definitions of military strategy concern ‘the conduct and consequences of human relations in the context of actual or possible armed conflict’<sup>349</sup> or ‘the process that converts military power into policy effect.’<sup>350</sup> According to Strachan, ‘[military] [s]trategy is about war and its conduct’<sup>351</sup>, enabling states to use force to achieve policy goals. As such, Strachan argues, military strategy relates to but is distinct from policy, politics, and diplomacy.<sup>352</sup>

Diplomacy – in IR sometimes labeled para-, proto-<sup>353</sup>, or rebel diplomacy<sup>354</sup> for non-state actors – is the central method to implement foreign policy, typically linking the other instruments. Diplomacy serves bilateral or multi-lateral conflict management, communication, and negotiation, all in line with the actor’s foreign policy objectives.<sup>355</sup> Intertwined with diplomacy’s communication element, the ‘informational instrument is about creating, exploiting, and disrupting knowledge.’<sup>356</sup> Diplomacy’s communication includes an actor’s strategic narrative. The economic instrument aims to increase or decrease other actors’ prosperity and sustainability by influencing trade and finance.<sup>357</sup> Economic interdependence

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344 Freedman, *Strategy*, xi.

345 *Ibid.*, xii, 607.

346 Clausewitz, *On war*, 177.

347 Gray, *Modern strategy*, 17.

348 Ashour, *How ISIS fights*, 18.

349 Luttwak, *Strategy*, 2. Original in italics.

350 Lonsdale, “Strategy defined,” 40.

351 Strachan, *The direction of war*, 42.

352 *Ibid.*, 42-3.

353 Mustafa, “Iraqi Kurdistan independence referendum,” 901n51; Stéphane Paquin, “Paradiplomacy,” in *Global diplomacy. An introduction to theory and practice*, Thierry Balzacq *et al.* (eds.), transl. William Snow (Paris: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 49-52; Romano, “Sub-state actors and foreign policy risk-taking,” 342-3; Sadoon, “The Islamic State and the independence referendum,” 3.

354 Coggins, “Rebel diplomacy,” 106.

355 Russett & Starr, *World politics*, 138-44. Also see: Luttwak, *Strategy*, 213-4.

356 “Joint Doctrine Note 1-18,” ii-6. Also see: Leonard, *The age of unpeace*, 11.

357 *Ibid.*, ii-6; Leonard, *The age of unpeace*, 102-9; Russett & Starr, *World politics*, 144-51. Also see: Heuser, *War*, 13.

might prevent conflict but might also raise tensions.<sup>358</sup> The military strategy links politics to violent activities, including war.<sup>359</sup>

#### 2.2.1.4 *Operations and tactics*

Military strategy's effect occurs at the operational and eventually at the tactical level. The operational level 'encompasses a sequence of tactical actions and modi operandi with a unifying objective, in a series of interrelated operations/battles/combat theatres with the aim of achieving an advantage in a campaign and getting closer to a strategic victory.'<sup>360</sup> The operational level links military strategy to tactics, which 'refer to the art and science of utilization and organization of force on the battlefield during engagements with the opposing side(s) or in close proximity to it/them; with the aim of translating combat skills to a position of advantage or an outright battle victory.'<sup>361</sup>

Similar reciprocal relationships exist between strategy and the operational level and tactics. The relationship between the command levels indicates which level decides and influences the underlying levels.<sup>362</sup>

#### 2.2.1.5 *Reflections*

In general, strategy depends on scale, space, and time. Scale applies to the levels that conduct a strategy, ranging from individuals to large organizations, usually categorized as the tactical and operational levels, respectively, while between levels in practice, different strategies can exist and dynamic influencing takes place. Space is the point where expectations and possibilities link up; time is the period the actor conducts the strategy.<sup>363</sup> Within this study, grand strategy refers to connecting ways and means – DIME – for foreign policy ends. As the case studies concern conflict, the military instrument is likely to be a prominent element of grand strategy, though, without ruling out the other instruments. When and how an actor applies them is a matter of choice.

358 Leonard, *The age of unpeace*, 85-7.

359 Lonsdale, "The study and theory of strategy," 35; Russett & Starr, *World politics*, 144-51. Also see: Lawrence Freedman, "Kyiv and Moscow are fighting two different wars. What the war in Ukraine has revealed about contemporary conflict," *Foreign Affairs*, February 17, 2023; Luttwak, *Strategy*, 138.

360 Ashour, *How ISIS fights*, 17. Also see: Lonsdale, "Strategy defined," 44-6.

361 *Ibid.*, 17. Also see: Lonsdale, "Strategy defined," 44-6.

362 Lonsdale, "Strategy defined," 40-5. Also see: Luttwak, *Strategy*, 87-167.

363 Gaddis, *Over strategisch denken*, 32, 253-4, 307; Speller, "Introduction," 13. Also see: Heuser, *The evolution of strategy*, 4.

As such, this study applies a broader, looser view of strategy than the Western-centric and state-centric view of Strachan, as the cases studied here are neither Western nor concern state actors. This study, thus, is more in line with Black's view – state-centric nevertheless –, when he criticized Strachan and indicated the overlap with foreign policy:

‘there is need for a total view of strategy, encompassing domestic and international issues, in order to make the best sense of war-preparation and war-making. [...] strategies emerge in part as the product of coalitions of interest, both domestic and international. The terms by which these coalitions are formed and re-formed become important to the process by which strategies are advanced, debated and reformulated. Indeed, the ability to keep such coalitions going is a key element of strategic activity and a central link between war-making and domestic policies and politics. The changes in this relationship are a crucial dynamic component in the strategic equation.’<sup>364</sup>

### 2.2.2 Decision-making in IR: choices

A decision presupposes ‘a decider and a choice among alternatives with reference to some goal.’<sup>365</sup> The decider requires some authority to do so. That authority follows from the decider's position within the command structure: lower levels act according to instructions or goals from higher levels up to the policy level. Decision-making is about making choices.

Theoretically, three factors affect decision outcomes: (1) the occasion in which an actor made a choice, (2) the individual making a choice, and (3) the organizational environment in which the individual operates.<sup>366</sup> These factors imply rational behavior: ‘consistent, value-maximizing choice within specified constraints’<sup>367</sup>, rationality being ‘the strategic pursuit of stable and ordered preferences.’<sup>368</sup>

Not only are the terms rational and rationality heavily debated among scholars, but a significant concern is which criteria indicate rational behavior.<sup>369</sup> People act according to various potential psychological motivators<sup>370</sup>: they sometimes deceive others – or themselves, for that matter

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364 Black, review of *The direction of war*, 475.

365 Allison & Zelikow, *Essence of decision*, 16.

366 Patrick Haney, “Structure and process in the analysis of foreign policy crises,” in *Foreign policy analysis. Continuity and change in its second generation*, Laura Neack *et al.* (eds.) (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1995), 101.

367 Allison & Zelikow, *Essence of decision*, 18. Also see: Ripley, “Cognition, culture, and bureaucratic politics,” 87.

368 Mintz & DeRouen, *Understanding foreign policy decision making*, 59.

369 For example: John Mearsheimer *et al.*, “Thinking like a state. What makes foreign policy rational?” *Foreign Affairs* 103:1 (2024), 173-9; Robertson, *How to think like a Roman emperor*, 37-44; Keren Yarhi-Milo, “Why smart leaders to stupid things. Is foreign policy rational?” *Foreign Affairs* 102:6 (2023), 154-60.

370 Lloyd Etheredge, “The case of the unreturned cafeteria trays” (Washington D.C.: *American Political Science Association*, 1976); Lisa Legault, “Self-determination theory,” in *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual*

– by proclaiming one thing but acting differently<sup>371</sup>; they might act in ways that others see as irrational while making perfect sense to the individuals involved.<sup>372</sup> Here, ideology might be important, ‘a set of beliefs or ideas that are elaborate, coherent, and integrated and that its adherents put forward to justify the *raison d’être* of their group, organization, or community.’<sup>373</sup> Sometimes, people behave like they expect others expecting them to act<sup>374</sup> – reflecting cultural predispositions<sup>375</sup> – or they behave unconsciously.<sup>376</sup> People usually cannot oversee all possible consequences of their actions, do not acquire a full information position, might have conflicting goals, and might sometimes reach a goal by accident.<sup>377</sup> Since social media, personalized search results on the internet – sometimes including propaganda or fake news – obscure individuals’ views and thus influence rational choice.<sup>378</sup> At best, individuals can satisfy instead of maximize, acknowledging their limited possibilities but hoping to succeed.<sup>379</sup> Thus, decision-making does not necessarily follow a rational process.<sup>380</sup> Additionally, former hostage-negotiator Chris Voss argued that ‘while we may use logic to reason ourselves toward a decision, the actual decision *making* is governed by emotion.’<sup>381</sup> While these ideological and psychological restraints occur at the individual level, these occur at the strategic level too, influencing strategic decision-making.

### 2.2.3 Strategic decision-making in IR: obtaining/holding power

Combining strategy and decision-making into strategic decision-making leads to choices on how, when, and where to apply the relevant instruments of power. However, unlike the term ANSA, strategic decision-making is not merely the sum of the individual elements. Regarding foreign policy ends, the powerplay is primarily – though not exclusively – aimed at other actors in international relations using the DIME instruments. Yet, Clausewitz discerned that reason,

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*Differences*, Virgil Zeigler-Hill & Todd Shackelford (eds.) (Online: Springer Link, 2020); Abram Maslow, *Motivation and personality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 35-51.

- 371 Carol Barner-Barry & Robert Rosenwein, *Psychological perspectives on politics* (Prospect Heights: Waveland, 1985), 45-57; Richard LaPiere, “Attitudes vs actions,” *International Journal of Epidemiology* 39:1 (2010), 7-11.
- 372 David Rosenhan, “On being sane in insane places,” *Science* 179:1 (1973), 250-8.
- 373 Hashim, *The caliphate at war*, 8. Italics added.
- 374 Harold Lasswell, *Power and personality* (New York: W. W. N. & Company, 1948), 15; Lucian Pye, “Introduction. The elusive concept of culture and the vivid reality of personality,” *Political Psychology* 18:2 (1997), 241-54.
- 375 Pye, “The elusive concept of culture,” 253.
- 376 Barner-Barry & Rosenwein, *Psychological perspectives*, 238. Also see: Daniel Kahneman *et al.*, *Noise. A flaw in human judgement* (2021), audiobook.
- 377 Herbert Simon, “Rationality in political behavior,” *Political Psychology* 16:1 (1995), 45-6.
- 378 Leonard, *The age of unpeace*, 67.
- 379 Rod Aya, “The third man. Or, agency in history. Or, rationality in revolution,” *History and Theory* 40:4 (2001), 145-6; Robert Cialdini, *Influence. The psychology of persuasion* (2021), audiobook.
- 380 Jerel Rosati, “A cognitive approach to the study of foreign policy,” in *Foreign policy analysis. Continuity and change in its second generation*, Laura Neack *et al.* (eds.) (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1995), 50; Stone, *Policy paradox*, 233-5.
- 381 Chris Voss & Tahl Raz, *Never split the difference. Negotiation as if your life depended on it* (New York: Harper Business, 2016), 122. Italics in original.

emotion, and chance interact unpredictably.<sup>382</sup> That interaction makes it challenging, if not impossible, to execute plans as intended.<sup>383</sup>

While traditional views on strategic decision-making focused on geography as the decisive factor<sup>384</sup>, modern ideas on strategic decision-making recognize a ‘need to consider each event in terms of cultural perspectives and collective and individual drives, as well as structural factors.’<sup>385</sup> The occasion, individuals involved, and organizational environment influence the context in which strategic decision-making occurs.<sup>386</sup> Most important, and continuing on Clausewitz’s ideas<sup>387</sup>, strategic studies analyst Edward Luttwak observed that ‘the entire realm of strategy is pervaded by a paradoxical logic very different from the “linear” logic by which we live in all other spheres of life,’ and that

‘[w]ithin the sphere of strategy [...], where human relations are conditioned by armed conflict actual or possible, another and quite different logic is at work and routinely violates ordinary linear logic *by inducing the coming together and reversal of opposites*. Therefore it tends to reward paradoxical conduct while defeating straightforwardly logical action, yielding results that are ironical or even lethally damaging.’<sup>388</sup>

Luttwak argued that rational decisions in other realms, in strategic decision-making might prove sub-optimal, if not counter-productive. The reason is that opponents might anticipate the decisions. Instead, actors – state and non-state alike – chose sub-optimal courses of action to surprise adversaries and limit their action perspective. The action-reaction relationships mentioned by Luttwak make analyzing and predicting strategic decision-making challenging, if not impossible, and perhaps more of an art than a science.<sup>389</sup> The relationships also suggest that complexity theory, which assumes context-specific multi-level, multi-directional interactions,

382 Cole, “Clausewitz’s wondrous yet paradoxical trinity,” 43; Heather Venable, “The result is never final. Operation Iraqi Freedom. The greater thirty years war, 1990-,” in *Air power in the age of primacy. Air power since the Cold War*, Phil Haun et al. (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 122-9. Also see: Betz, “In search of a point.”

383 Clausewitz, *On war*, 119-21; Gray, *Modern strategy*, 41; Michael Handel, *Masters of war. Classical strategic thought*, 3rd revised ed. (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 237-45; Luttwak, *Strategy*, 8-13; Peter Paret, “Clausewitz,” in *Makers of modern strategy*, Michael Handel (ed.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 203; Barry Watts, “Clausewitzian friction and future war” (Washington, D.C.: *McNair*, 1996), 9. Also see: Freedman, *Command*, 4; Kiras, “Current irregular warfare,” 354.

384 Clausewitz, *On war*, 348-51; Kaplan, *De wraak van de geografie*, 42-5; Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 510-2. Also see: Freedman, *Strategy*, 238; Marshall, *Prisoners of geography*, viii-ix; Warden, “Smart strategy, smart airpower,” 101-33; Warden, “The enemy as a system,” 40-55. For example: Abu Musab al Zarqawi, untitled letter to *al-Qaeda* leadership, date unknown, transl. United States Department of Defense. The letter’s authenticity is disputed among scholars.

385 Black, *Geopolitics*, 272.

386 Haney, “Structure and process,” 101. Also see: Black, “Strategic practice,” 13-4.

387 Luttwak, *Strategy*, xii.

388 *Ibid.*, 2. Italics in original.

389 *Ibid.*, 3-5, 20-31, 87. Also see: Frans Osinga, “On Boyd, Bin Laden, and fourth generation warfare as string theory,” in *On new wars*, John Olsen (ed.) (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Defense Studies, 2007), 170.

as elaborated in the next chapter, is better suitable for analyzing strategic decision-making than the static, traditional IR paradigms.

## 2.3 Conclusion

This chapter conceptualized ANSAs and strategic decision-making. In IR, ANSAs concern actors that have not been recognized as states by existing states, but which are willing and able to conduct violence to obtain strategic goals. Strategic decision-making is about a decider, who chooses ways and means to achieve foreign policy ends.<sup>390</sup> The actor might achieve the ends by strategic decisions that intentionally seem sub-optimal or counter-productive to outsmart adversaries.<sup>391</sup> This study argues that ANSAs pursue specific policy goals – operating as strategic entities<sup>392</sup> – and possess the ability to make strategic decisions and the capacity and willingness to implement these strategic decisions, if necessary, by violence. So, like states, ANSAs can turn to DIME instruments of power to achieve foreign policy goals. By 2014, that had happened in several cases in the Middle East, including IS and the KRI. Still, IR typically remained state-centric, and categorizing ANSAs proved problematic, making analyzing ANSAs a challenging enterprise. The next chapter addresses how analysts can analyze ANSAs and their strategic decision-making.

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390 Gerner, “The evolution of the study of foreign policy,” 18.

391 Luttwak, *Strategy*, 3-5.

392 Warden, “The enemy as a system,” 45.

