

Perceptions and Decisions

A Field-Study on Foreign-Policy in Iraqi Kurdistan



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Abstract

Kurdistan region of Iraq (KR-I) has continually evolved in a region amidst turmoil. Currently, the region is exerting internal sovereignty and administers its own foreign-policy. Through the conduct of field-based interviews in KR-I, this study seeks to contribute to the understanding of the regions relationship with its parent state Iraq, from a perspective of foreign-policy decision-making, specifically focused upon the perceptions in strategic dimensions of Kurdish policy-makers. In addition, a theoretical framework is developed to generate a deeper understanding regarding the connection between perceptual images and the decision-making process through an integration of Image theory and Poliheuristic theory. Findings indicate that Kurdish policy-makers perceive their parent state as inherently hostile, equipped with ill-willed intentions, a monolithic decisional structure and great cultural discrepancies. The theoretical framework contributes a theoretically guided explanation utilized through process-tracing which indicate an interaction between images and the decision-making process to some extent, but not enough evidence for claims of causality. The study suggests further research regarding relationships of causality between images and the decision-making process.

Key words: Foreign-policy, Decision-making, Perceptions,
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1 Introduction

Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I) have in recent years evolved into an entity in a position and status which some scholars describe as a nexus of inclusion/exclusion of/from Iraq¹ acting as a de facto or quasi-state.² The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has continuously differentiated itself from other parts of Iraq to such an extent that Natali advocates that it has become “the Other Iraq”.³

In its capacity of a “Quasi-state”, KR-I fulfils the requirements of statehood as defined by the Montevideo Convention of 1933; a permanent population, a defined territory, a government and the capacity to enter into relations with other states.⁴ Currently, KRG’s department of foreign relations maintains representations in several countries and its capital Erbil inhabits numerous international offices of other states.⁵ However, in KR-I, a geographical division between Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) is clearly visible, demarcating what Jüne defines as a “duo-poly”, a dual political structure divided KR-I between the two parties.⁶ This “duo-poly” has in recent years begun to be challenged by the change movement (TCM) with its growing constituency.⁷

Alongside contemporary development, relations with Baghdad (i.e. the federal government) became increasingly entangled by conflicting issues, opposing position regarding constitutional regulations, territorial disputes and grievances.⁸ Subsequently, increasing rhetoric and claims regarding independence has been made by KRG, with KDP in the forefront. While preparing to conduct field-research in KR-I, the upcoming referendum was frequently debated, which led me to the adopt the following research question:

What characterizes the relation between the political parties of KR-I and the Iraqi federal government, from the perspective of KR-I?

How can KR-I’s foreign-policy stance be explained?

¹ Soguk, 2015, p. 958. It deserves mentioning here, that the current reference system is a mix between APA and Oxford, to facilitate for the reader. The reason being that the author deemed it to be too many references to be cited in text.

² Ibid; Jüde, 2017, p. 849.

³ Natali, 2015a, p. 103.

⁴ Jüde, 2017, p. 849.

⁵ Ibid, p. 854.

⁶ Ibid, p. 857. For a detailed account of duo-poly, see theoretical section.

⁷ Ibid; Alan Noori.

⁸ Gunter, 2011; Logan, 2009.

1.1 Purpose

The overarching purpose of this study is to gain an increased understanding of the relation between two entities (e.g. Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan) through the perspective of foreign policy decision-making, especially focusing on the perceptions of decision-makers. A second, more specific purpose of this study is to develop a theoretical framework which aims to analyze the causal interaction of perceptual patterns and the decision-making process. In light of this purpose, the present study is confined to contribute to an increased understanding regarding the causal interaction by providing plausible causal relationships limited to certain aspects. This is due to the isolation of variables in a decision-making process is to large extent outside the scope of this study to isolate.

1.2 Previous Research & Context

This study is situated in the context of foreign-policy analysis, more specifically, in the sub-genre of foreign-policy decision-making (FPDM). It refers to the choices of individuals, groups and coalitions that affect a nation's actions in the international arena.⁹ Herein lies the attractiveness to understand an inter-state relation through the perspective of FPDM. If we understand the process of FPDM in relation to the specific nation, it might illuminate questions regarding current status or possible outcome of inter-state relations.¹⁰

First and foremost, this is to be differentiated from structural or institutional explanations (e.g. neo-realism or cognitive institutionalism) of decision-making. However, this is not to say that these theories hold no value. In contrast, they are most certainly imperative to reach an even more complete understanding regarding the phenomena of decision-making.

Approaches to FPDM constitute a wide range of well-equipped theories.¹¹ To bring them up here would be outside the scope of this study, hence a brief overview of previous research is confined to the cognitive-rational debate as it directly concerns the present study.

The core of the debate concerns questions of actual decision-making behavior of political leaders. The epistemological underpinnings of the rational actor model expect individuals maximize their utility *vis á vis* the expected utility model. In the field of international relations and foreign policy decision-making rational choice theory has contributed significantly; formulated in game theoretic models of deterrence, trade, bargaining, negotiation, arms race and war termination by authors such as Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman.¹²

In turn, this has been criticized by the cognitive school of decision-making based on the claims of "bounded rationality", positing individuals to be cognitively delimited

⁹ Mintz., & Derouen, 2010, p. 3.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 4.

¹¹ For an overview see Mintz & Geva, 1997, p. 2-4, specifically for cognitive approaches see Levy, 2013.

¹² Mintz., & Geva, 1997, p. 4.

in their capability of processing information, consequently, individuals tend to process information through categorization of incoming information in different boxes (e.g. schemata, perceptual images, scripts).¹³ In consequence, it shows that individuals seldom maximize utility as proposed in the expected utility model.¹⁴ However, it is important to emphasize, that the former approach is mainly outcome oriented, meanwhile the latter to an increasing extent emphasizes procedural approaches in pointing out that procedure affects the outcome.

However, both schools have contributed significantly to several aspects of decision-making theory. The cognitive school has prominently focused on the procedural models of decision-making, showing how belief systems, perceptions and framing influence policy-makers, which remains closest to the framework presented in this study. Notable works in this category is Jervis, George, Holsti et al, Hermann and Fischerkeller, Cottam, R and Cottam, M, which present valuable insight how perceptions and belief systems influence FPDM.¹⁵ However, notable work from an integration of the two perspectives is Mintz and Geva, Mintz, Geertz with colleagues in the poliheuristic research program; they assert that policy-makers utilize both heuristic and maximizing strategies in the decision-making process.¹⁶ The ambition in this study is partly to fill the blanks between the poliheuristic research program and studies of perceptions in the decision-making process.

¹³ Mintz., & Geva, 1997, p. 3; Levy, 2013, p. 308.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Jervis, 1976; Holsti et al, 1965; Hermann., & Fischerkeller, 1995; Cottam, R, 1977; Cottam, M, 1994.

¹⁶ Mintz., & Geva, 1997; Mintz, 2004; Goertz, 2004; Opperman, 2008.

2 Theoretical Framework

The level of analysis postulated in the present framework remains limited at the micro- and meso-level. It starts at the micro-foundation by analyzing each interview by the party affiliates and then moves up to generalize the picture of the parties, subsequently contextualizing the analysis at the meso-level. The analytical framework presented in this study consists of an integration of Poliheuristic theory and image theory which will be presented first subsequently followed by the its theoretical integration.

2.1 Poliheuristic Theory (PH)

Poliheuristic Theory postulate a two-stage decision process wherein the decision- or policy-makers employ heuristic and analytical strategies. Policy-makers utilize heuristics (cognitive shortcuts) to narrow down the menu of choice with an explicit use of a non-compensatory analysis. Remaining alternatives are then evaluated in accordance with an expected utility analysis, to maximize gains and minimize risks.¹⁷

Essentially, the first step is characterized by a cognitive screening process which is driven by certain attributes (aspects) (e.g. the political dimension) which must fulfill at least a minimum standard “value” which other dimensions cannot compensate for (i.e. non-compensatory decision-rule) to survive the screening process (i.e. the first stage).¹⁸ In other words, the non-compensatory decision-rule embodies the core aspect of PH as it dictates that certain minimum requirements are fulfilled in regard to a certain dimension (political, economic, militarily, diplomatic) which cannot be compensated for, to survive the first stage.¹⁹ Domestic politics is the essence of PH, whereby the crucial dimension determinant for FPDM is advocated to be the political dimension.²⁰ Consequently, perceived political costs is seen as determinant for decision-making in nations’ foreign policy as the logic of political leaders is at least to hold on their political positions.²¹

¹⁷ For an overview, see Mintz, 2004. For an in-depth account, see Mintz & Geva, 1997, p. 81-101; Mintz, 1993.

¹⁸ Stern, 2004, p. 108-109.

¹⁹ Opperman, 2014, p. 24-26.

²⁰ Mintz, 2004, p. 5-7; Opperman, 2014, p. 25.

²¹ Goertz, 2004, p. 15; Mintz, 2004, p. 6-7; Opperman, 2014, p. 25-26.

2.1.1 Operationalization

To be able to observe the process at hand, the theoretical components need to be operationalized and defined. There are several types of non-compensatory rules of decision-making, in the present study and most employed in relation to PH is the Elimination-by-aspect (EBA) rule of decision-making.²² This model asserts the process of decisions to be made by selecting a certain aspect, whereby all alternative in which the specific aspect is missing are eliminated.²³ Thus, in order to analyze the perceptions with the non-compensatory decision-rule, the political dimension needs to be contextualized and theorized. The survival of political leaders can be threatened in different ways depending on context and the selectorate group (i.e. a specific group, depending on the characteristic of the political system, which facilitate and allow the leader to remain in power).²⁴ For instance, in a democracy, the selectorate group is the majority of the population, as such, a leader becomes sensitive towards the opinions of the population. In contrast, in single-party autocracies the selectorate group is confined to the political party.²⁵

In the context of Iraqi Kurdistan's complex political landscape, definition of the political dimension requires some elaboration. Meanwhile popular elections have previously been held in the region (2005 & 2009), KDP and PUK is stated to dominate economic life, co-opt followers through the introduction of patronage-client relationships, in order to safeguard access to revenues and power to remain completely under the control of the two parties.²⁶ In addition, the main part of peshmerga is under the direct control of the political parties.²⁷ The failure of the unification of the armed forces, the capture of the Iraqi Kurdistan's public and domination of both the public and private sphere, characterizes the system in terms of a duo-poly between KDP and PUK, in maximizing their profits and preserving their power resources.²⁸ With the shutdown of the parliament, the dominance of the political parties in the Kurdish society has become all the more clear.²⁹ As such, the political dimension is defined in accordance within the typology of a single-party autocracy.³⁰ Thus, the selectorate group is confined to the political party. Consequently, what is perceived as threats in terms of the political dimension is tied to the political party's position of power.³¹

²² Opperman, 2014, p. 25; Brulé, 2008, p. 268-269. There are several variations of non-compensatory rules of decision-making, for an overview, see Mintz., & Derouen, 2010, p. 35-37.

²³ Tversky, 1982, p. 295-297.

²⁴ Bueno de Mesquita et al, 2005, p. 41-43.

²⁵ Kinne, 2005, p. 116, 118-121.

²⁶ Jüde, 2017, p. 857; Alan Noori, interview done by author.

²⁷ Ibid;

²⁸ Ibid; Alan Noori, interview done by author.

²⁹ Alan Noori, interview done by author.

³⁰ Kinne, 2005, p. 116, 120.

³¹ Ibid, p. 124-125.

2.2 Image Theory

- *"It is what we think the world is like, not what it is really like, that determines our behavior"*. – K. Boulding.

In the words of Boulding as quoted above, images as an abstract construction is conceptualized "as the total cognitive, affective and evaluative structure of the behavioral unit, or its internal view of itself and the universe".³² Thus images can be conceptualized as mental images, composed of accumulated, experience-based "knowledge" of the surrounding world.³³

Several scholars have subsequently went on to define images, for instance, M. Cottam defines images as "a set of objects people, or countries we perceive as similar".³⁴ Meanwhile Deutsch and Merritt defined images as "combinatorial constructs", meaning that images consists of several dimensions which in turn constructs the image.³⁵ Alexander et al describe images as However, the present study, with previous definitions in mind, draws it definition from R. Cottam which defines "images as *gestalts*³⁶ or descriptive constructs employed to describe the integrative combination of judgement about a unit regarding the threat or opportunity it represented, its relative power, and its relative culture".³⁷

Thus, as an analytical construct, image theory is designated to capture the understanding of relationships in relational terms.³⁸ It attempts to capture the policy-maker's perceptions of each dimension. In doing so, in relational terms, the perceiving actor defines both the view of the other and of the self.³⁹

Images functionality relies on a basic assumption of cognitive psychology, expressed in terms of cognitive limitations (i.e. bounded rationality), meaning that due to an incapacity to process all incoming information in an extraordinary complex reality, people may try to act rationally, but do so within simplified mental representations of reality.⁴⁰ Therefore, humans explicitly tend to utilize images (categories, schemas, perceptual patterns) which serve to organize and simplify the environment.⁴¹ They simplify the environment through accumulating information we assume to be correct; incoming information is subsequently filtered through the images, in turn providing an automatic screening which serves to determine which incoming information is important, false or irrelevant.⁴² Thus, images serve as "road maps" or focal points for policy-makers, when they interpret "reality" utilizing their images in a direct causal link to policy behavior, which is advocated by several scholars.⁴³

³² Boulding, 1959, p. 120-121.

³³ Elgström et al, 2017, p. 482.

³⁴ Cottam, M., 1994, p. 18.

³⁵ Herrmann, 2013, p. 288.

³⁶ The terminology of "gestalts" and "combinatorial constructs" are described as equal in the literature and will thus be used interchangeably. Herrmann, 2013a, p. 288.

³⁷ Cottam, R., 1977, p. 42-43.

³⁸ Herrmann, 2013b, p. 288.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Levy, 2013, p. 308-309.

⁴¹ Cottam, 1994, p. 18.

⁴² Ibid;

⁴³ Elgström, 2000, p. 247; Elgström et al, 2017, p. 481-482; Cottam, 1994, p. 18-19; Cottam, 1977, p. 64; Shimko, 1991, p. 29-35.

2.2.1 Operationalization

In order to be empirically observable, the dimensions constructing the image needs to be defined and operationalized. Thus, we are faced with the question of which facets of national images are deemed to be most important for foreign policy decision-makers? Central to any image is the judgement of threat or opportunity.⁴⁴

Drawing upon the work of Shimko, Cottam, Herrmann and Fischerkeller and Elgström, these are deemed as strategic perceptions, which revolves around an inquiry regarding the counterpart's (actor's) intentions and motivation, relative capabilities and relative cultural and political status.⁴⁵ In order to be able to delineate the content of an individual's image, which is empirically gained through the questions posed by the questionnaire⁴⁶, it is imperative to develop categories or typologies to facilitate approximation and comparison of policy-maker's images, these will be conceptualized in the form of Weberian ideal-types.

The chosen ideal-type images are drawn upon from earlier work on perceptions and policy-making. Holsti and Shimko examined in particular the enemy image.⁴⁷ Hermann and Fischerkeller utilized five ideal-types, the enemy, the colonial, the ally, the degenerate and the imperial. R. Cottam proposed a four-way graph composed of the images conceptualized as "Enemy", "Complex", "Ally", "Imperial" and "The Colonial".⁴⁸ The images utilized in this study is drawn upon these studies while to some extent adjusted for the purpose of the study. Conceptualizations of the ideal typical images are described in this section, meanwhile further operationalization is elaborated in methodology.⁴⁹

The Enemy

Given a perceived threat from an actor viewed as comparable in culture and capability, the threatened actor is presumed to develop an enemy image. Enemy images can be conceptualized, in its ideal typical form, as an extreme form of paranoia.⁵⁰ This paranoia can be described in terms of an evil force that is threatening the perceiver, capable of the most elaborate conspiracies.⁵¹ Holsti has likened its implications of the enemy image as an "inherent bad faith model".⁵² In brief, this ideal typical image is characterized by perceptions of aggressive and evil intentions, centralized and monolithic leadership.⁵³ In line with Cottam, M, perceptions of threat can include potential harm or loss, "challenge" and being an "opportunity for growth, master or gain."⁵⁴

The Colonial

The Colonial image is conceptualized by perceptions of an asymmetrical position of power which emerges when an actor is perceived to be under serious threat. It is defined as a

⁴⁴ Herrmann., & Fischerkeller, 1995, p. 425.

⁴⁵ Hermann, 2013b, p. 288; Elgström et al, 2017, p. 482.

⁴⁶ The questionnaire used in interviews is shown in Appendix A.

⁴⁷ Holsti, 1965; Shimko 1991.

⁴⁸ Cottam, R, 1977, p. 65.

⁴⁹ An increasingly detailed description of the ideal-types can be found in appendix C.

⁵⁰ Cottam, R., 1977, p. 62; Cottam, M, 1994, p. 20.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Holsti, 1965, p. 18.

⁵³ Herrmann, 2013a, p. 288-290.

⁵⁴ Cottam, M, 1994, p. 20-21.

perceptual view that the government and the people of the imperial power is so deeply involved in the decision-making that the perceiver are denied actual sovereignty. The perceptions vary, but mainly revolves around domination, either formally or informally.⁵⁵

The Imperial

This image of imperial perceptual patterns is conceptualized by perceived opportunity to achieve something at the cost of another people.⁵⁶ Considerable distance in culture and capability is inherent to this image, as the perceiver views itself as superior in both categories.⁵⁷

Complex

Complex represents conditions under which no consistent image is found. For instance, if no coherent perceptual patterns are found.⁵⁸ For example, if the previous listed ideal-types represent those phenomena in the capacity of 100 on a numeral scale 0-100, the type of complex is 0 (i.e. no image).

2.3 Theoretical Synergy – Putting the Pieces Together

“Like the blind men, each describing the elephant on the basis of the part he touches, different individuals may describe the same object or situation in terms of what they have been conditioned to see.” – Ole Holsti⁵⁹

The quote above represents a central assumption underpinning the presented framework. We all depart from our interpretation of reality. Similar to scientific theory, readers can think about it in terms of a spectrum on a scale from objectivism and realism, the assumption of this framework is that individuals depart from the middle; we interpret the world, but its not totally detached from “an ongoing” reality.

Poliheuristic Theory is inherently built on the assumption that policy-makers simplify their environment when faced with complicated decision-making by utilizing cognitive heuristics.⁶⁰ Consequently, it becomes imperative to attempt to understand the perceptions of policy-makers have of the nation (state or non-state) to which they are directing their foreign policy strategies. In this case, image theory will be utilized to gain an apprehension of policy-makers’ perceptions regarding strategic dimensions of foreign policy-making. Subsequently, the combinatorial construct (i.e. image), generated by the synergy of dimensions, will be analyzed against the political dimension asserted by PH elaborated above.

As such the theoretical synergy is designated to create a tool which elucidate the implications of perceptions on strategic dimensions in foreign policy on the decision-making process.

⁵⁵ Cottam, R, 1977, p. 67.

⁵⁶ Cottam, R, 1977, p. 66.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid; Cottam, M, 1994, p, 26.

⁵⁹ Holsti, 1962, p. 245.

⁶⁰ Mintz, 2004, p. 8.

This demands further elaboration, however, since one cannot just make the theoretical leap from image to behavior without explanation. So, how do images provoke behavioral dispositions? It does so through three stages which is empirically intertwined. Shimko (1991) suggests them to consist of an analytical stage, an evaluative stage which subsequently generates the third and ultimate stage, choice propensities.⁶¹ Primarily, images have a diagnostic propensity of the situation intrinsic to the analytical stage (a.k.a. “defining the situation”). This influences their understanding of its counterpart’s strategies. In turn, as policies are recommended upon expectations of an actor’s future reaction, previous stages generate predisposition towards a certain choice.⁶² Images can thus provide indications if the perceived actor constitute a threat or an opportunity.⁶³ Additionally, in the context of FPDM, images would thus be able to provide indications regarding how an actor perceives its counterpart’s employed strategies and tactics. Drawing from this theoretical work, the analytical and evaluative stage will be designated as subcategories to complement the analytical categories constituting the ideal typical images.⁶⁴

However, to properly understand the theoretical connections underpinning the framework, a review of the decision-rule applied in the framework of Poliheuristic theory is necessary; the elimination-by-aspect rule of decision (EBA).⁶⁵ In Tversky’s elimination-by-aspect model, aspects (e.g. political dimension) are interpreted as desirable features of a decision, when a certain aspect has been selected, every alternative absent the particular aspect is eliminated.⁶⁶ In addition, Tversky suggests that the model can be asserted as dualistic.

In contrast to the former model, an alternative is only selected if none of the selected aspects is present.⁶⁷ Consequently, it may open up possibilities to distinguish between images exerting threats (disadvantageous EBA) and opportunities (advantageous EBA). This distinction may seem trivial, but remains important. It provides the opportunity to distinguish between how an actor’s decision-making functions when threats arise (whereby the first decision-rule may apply) and when opportunities arise (when the second decision-rule may apply).⁶⁸ Which in addition, remains an important part in image theory.

To summarize, the integration of PH and image theory constitute an attempt to an increased extent contextualize the decision-making process and providing analytical clarity by thoroughly analyzing the perceptions of policy-makers on strategic dimensions. This allows for an increasingly detailed account of point of departure in taking decisions. Additionally, this way, it allows the researcher to analyze whether threat or opportunity guides decision-making procedures, which this theory postulate have an impact on the non-compensatory rule of decision. Thenceforth, established images is analyzed by the predisposed non-compensatory rule to establish their influence in the process.⁶⁹

⁶¹ Shimko, 1991, p. 33-37.

⁶² Ibid; Elgström et al, 2017, p. 482.

⁶³ Cottan, 1977, p. 62, Shimko, 1991, p. 33.

⁶⁴ For a full review of a proposed analytical scheme, see Appenix C.

⁶⁵ There are several rules of non-compensatory decision-making, however EBA is porpogated to be the rule most applicable to Poliheuristic Theory. Mintz, 1993.

⁶⁶ Tversky, 1982, p. 295-297.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ An analytical scheme for image analysis is presented in Appendix C.

3 Methodology

“Every choice is a matter of compromise” – Simon Herbert

Herbert’s accurate observation persistently reveals itself when choosing methodology to examine a phenomenon in time and space; the methodology of choice has implications on *what* and *how* we examine the designated phenomena, ultimately affecting the outcome. Consequently, these choices demand elaboration. This section is thus devoted to review and discuss the methods of choice in the present study.

3.1 Research Design

Due to insufficient material and the theory’s probabilistic assumptions, no hypothesis will be tested. Instead, the ambition of this study is to contribute to an increased understanding rather than explicitly explain the causal mechanisms. The research approach employed in the study consists of mixed approaches; deductive and abductive. The deductive approach was employed previous to the field research in the sense that the formulation of the “skeletal” theoretical framework was created prior to its conduct. However, the integration of the two theories developed successively when the interviews were conducted in the field, in accordance with an abductive approach. The theoretical mechanisms were to some extent operationalized in the section above, but will be further elaborated in the sections below.⁷⁰

3.1.1 Single-Case Study and Field Research

First and foremost, the empirical material in this study was gathered through field-based interviews in Iraqi Kurdistan (i.e. formally known as northern Iraq) for a period of two months.⁷¹ The design of a single-case study was chosen in order to be able to gather as much information about the case as possible, with the ambition of theory development. This choice was based on an agreement with statements in the literature, to develop theory (i.e. causal mechanisms regarding a certain process) through gathering substantial material of one case and developing one’s claims which then can be tested through other, theory-testing, studies.⁷² In accordance, it calls for an intensive research strategy, confined to the specific case, to give the conducted research enough space in order to elaborate findings and empiric materials surrounding the claims and propositions. Thus, the choice for a single-case study is well

⁷⁰ For further operationalization of ideal types and process tracing, see below.

⁷¹ The field research took place between 14th of April until 13th of June.

⁷² Esaiasson et al, 2017, p. 112-113.

motivated.⁷³ However, it remains important to emphasize, by making the choice of a single-case study, there is not sufficient grounds to advocate for the necessity, consistency or frequency of the causal mechanism for a certain outcome.⁷⁴ Thus, the choice of research design solely permits within-case analysis, which subsequently can lead to hypothesis formulations to be tested.

The strategic selection of the unit of analysis (i.e. policy-makers) is motivated by the study's qualitative character, due to in-depth research, random selection of samples would be counterproductive.⁷⁵ The thesis presented in this study consists of interviews from 18 key informants. They were strategically selected along the principle of centrality and intensity. The informants' affiliation with either one of the three largest political parties in Kurdistan and their position as either parliament members, member of the politburo or political advisor, arguably provide high centrality and intensity.⁷⁶

The selection of the three largest political parties were selected previous to travelling to Iraqi Kurdistan based on their involvement in the foreign-policy and in their relation with the state of Iraq. The three parties constitute KDP, PUK and Gorran. Every party have constant representation in the council of representatives of Iraq and had the largest constituency in the last election. In addition, they are the main parties holding cabinets in the governmental structure.⁷⁷ However, it is important to notice that despite Gorran's increased support in terms of constituency, KDP and PUK remain the most powerful political parties in KR-I due to a centralization of economic and military power directly tied to these parties.⁷⁸

Absent the possibility to contact informants prior to the field-research⁷⁹, the selection principle was based on "snowballing", informants and other acquaintances provided the acquired sources. In turn, it proved beneficial in casting a broad social network, providing a diffusion of sources, scattered along the political spectrum of the three political parties and multiple "gate keepers", which prohibited information to derive from a single "gate keeper's" social network, which could otherwise have affected the research.

3.1.2 Material

The material used in the present study is based on field-based interviews and scholarly publications (i.e. articles and books). While the scholarly publications are peer-reviewed, spread over time and from independent sources to the extent that it comes from different universities and institutions around the world, the content of the interviews demand contemplation. The caveats surrounding this kind of interviews is plenty. First of all, the empirical constituting the material base of this interview is all but independent, as part in a

⁷³ George., & Bennet, 2005, p. 19-25.

⁷⁴ Beach., & Pedersen, 2012, p. 9.

⁷⁵ Teorell., & Svensson, 2007, p. 84-85.

⁷⁶ Eaiasson et al, 2017, p. 265.

⁷⁷ A caveat important to mention here is that since 2015, Gorran has been suspended from both governmental and the parliament were closed. However, they remain an important factor in domestic politics due to their political constituency, although their direct influence is severely diminished. In addition, their members to the council of representatives of Iraq still remain.

⁷⁸ Jüde, 2017, p. XX; Democracy in transition.

⁷⁹ For example, several attempts were made to initiate contact prior the journey to Iraqi Kurdistan. Both via e-mail and I personally met the KRG representation in Stockholm.

conflict, several incentives are posed to question its validity. However, the sources are independent from *each other* in several ways. First and foremost, the informants adhere to different political entities. Second, they are scattered in three different cities.⁸⁰ Third, the informants are scattered across the structure of the political parties.⁸¹

However, it's a high probability that the sources naturally contain lack overall independence and exert certain tendency due to their involvement in the current political conflict. This is partly *raison d'état* to conduct this kind of research. Still, it remains important to emphasize, in accordance with Jervis (1976) rationale, actors could have incentives to deliberately project a certain perceptual image as part of an overall foreign-policy strategy.⁸² Unfortunately, this will be hard to determine, since complementary material, such as news articles or speeches, would fall outside the scope of time and space for this study. Consequently, it poses critical questions regarding the materials validity, especially since it's the only source for analysis.⁸³ However, it would not be unthinkable that if the informants were determined to establish a certain image towards the outside world, that news articles and speeches would be different.⁸⁴

3.1.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

The interviews were conducted in accordance with a semi-structure. Thematic questions were developed through the guidance of theoretical categories but still contained width enough to be considered open questions in order to capture the perceptual patterns of the informant. Each thematic have at least two structured follow-up questions. This provides guidelines for a reproduction of the study, although some *contextual* follow-up questions might be lost in the process.

3.2 Part I - Qualitative Content Analysis (QTA)

Qualitative content analysis (QTA) is neither measuring nor counting units of analytical value, in contrast to quantitative content analysis. Rather, this kind of analysis is utilized to allow an increasingly complex interpretative analysis.⁸⁵ The kind of QTA employed in this study is based on a systematic examination to bring forth interpretations systematically and thematically.⁸⁶ As such, the ideal types reviewed below will serve as analytical tools to analyze the interviews. By the adoption of concepts as analytical tools (i.e. analytical

⁸⁰ Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Baghdad.

⁸¹ See Appendix A.

⁸² Jervis, 1989, p. xiv-xv.

⁸³ Eaiasson et al, 2017, p. 296-298.

⁸⁴ This is due to the fact that speeches are produced by the parties themselves which inherently has equal flaws as interviews. News, however, could provide an alternative, but from field-related experience, most news organization seemed tied to the political parties in some way.

⁸⁵ Boréus., & Bergström, 2012, p. 50-51.

⁸⁶ Esaiasson et al, 2017, p. 212-213.

categories containing specified criteria) it allows the researcher to interpret and analyze the qualitative content (i.e. in this case, dimensions and perceptions) to a greater extent. However, by this choice, the adoption of concepts as analytical tools, it might prove a bit more abstract and interpretations might be harder to reproduce. In turn, it might pose questions of intersubjectivity. An attempt to counter this has been made through the systemization and standardization of characteristics and criteria of each ideal type's analytical categories. These are further elaborated below.

3.2.1 Ideal-Types

As stated previously, ideal-typical prototypes of an image's extreme form will be employed to act as a referent in order to approximate and categorize individual perceptual patterns. The ideal-typical images are systemized through breaking them down into several characteristic and standardized features which will serve as indicators.⁸⁷ Ideal types in the context of this study is considered in a Weberian sense, that is, an *ideal* type of the examined phenomena. As such, it is not posed to represent any particular actor's beliefs, rather its functionality lies in terms of a referent in an extreme form on a spectrum; for example, between *Complex* to *Enemy*. Hence, the analytical instrument represented by ideal types are to be used to categorize perceptual patterns into categoric dimensions which generate the combinatorial construct (i.e. image).⁸⁸

The theoretical indicators constitute the following inspired by Cottam, R:

Intention and Motivation

The critical points of note are associated with relative complexity or simplicity in which how motives and intentions are described and the readiness to evaluate them as good or bad.⁸⁹

Capability

As most capability can be measured empirically, the variation will be in terms of intangible factors (e.g. national morale, military training, quality of government, and the will to act).⁹⁰

Decisional Style, Structure and Locus of Decision-making

Variation will mostly be observed between a highly rational style and an *ad hoc* incremental style. The range in the decisional structure will be between monolithic, hierarchical structure and a highly differential, diverse structure, which would be increasingly hard to coordinate.⁹¹

Cultural Status

This perception involves cultural sophistication of efficacy of that country's people. Depictions varies between sophisticated, advanced to backward and inferior.⁹² Cultural assessments especially affect trustworthiness, the perception of a nation's capacity to develop

⁸⁷ For other examples, see Cottam (1977), Elgström et al (2017), Shimo (1991).

⁸⁸ Boréus., & Bergstrlm

⁸⁹ Cottam, R., 1977, p. 64.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Cottam, M., 1994, p. 21.

policy, execute them and achieve its goals.⁹³ Eventually, if violent interactions break out, cultural status affect judgements regarding rules of warfare and demonization.

3.3 Part II - Process-Tracing

The second research question posited in this study postulate a causal explanation which in this case constitute a within-case analysis based on inferences. This is adopted in order to draw inferences from Part I to Part II of the study. In doing so, process-tracing has been put forth as an adequate tool for theory development and theory testing.⁹⁴ It is advocated to allow the researcher to draw causal inferences on a few or a single case, which deems the method suitable for this study.⁹⁵ Process-tracing allows the researcher to link numerous observations and require them to be linked in particular ways to constitute an explanation for the case.⁹⁶ Thus, process-tracing allows the study to build the process in which perceptions on strategic dimensions and the non-compensatory rule of the decision-making process interact.

There are several variations of process-tracing, mainly composed by two dividing lines according to Beach and Pedersen (2011); theory-testing and theory-development.⁹⁷ In accordance with the ambitions of this study, a theory-development variant of process-tracing (TDPT) will be utilized. Essentially, in theory development, theory guides the process by revealing observable implications regarding causal mechanisms, given that the theory is accurate, which is thoroughly chartered by empirical examination.⁹⁸ Thus TDPT is utilized by departing from empirical observation and uses a structured analysis of it to detect observable manifestations of plausible causal mechanisms wherein X is linked with Y.⁹⁹ Following from such an assertion, the causal mechanism needs to be defined. This study follows the basic definition of George & Bennet (2005) that causal mechanisms functionality lies in:

“Ultimately unobservable physical, social, or psychological processes through which agents with causal capacities operate, but only in specific contexts or conditions, to transfer energy, information, or matter to other entities. In doing so, the causal agent changes the affected entities’ characteristics, capacities, or propensities in ways that persist until subsequent causal mechanisms act upon them.” (George & Bennet, 2005, p. 137)

Drawing upon this understanding of the causal mechanism, it is possible to construct a process where X caused Y in the process of A, B, C, in a particular case.¹⁰⁰ Additionally,

⁹³ Ibid, p. 22-23; Elgström, 2017, p. 482.

⁹⁴ George., & Bennet, 2005, p. 207.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 222-223.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 207.

⁹⁷ Beach., & Pedersen, 2012, p. 6-9.

⁹⁸ Teorell., & Svensson, 2007, p. 262.

⁹⁹ Beach., & Pedersen, 2012, p. 23.

¹⁰⁰ Kay & Baker, 2015, p. 8.

Baker and Kay provide helpful guidance in terms of three stages which to structure the process-tracing method.¹⁰¹

- Theorizing variables and empirical proxies
- Collecting diagnostic evidence
- Hypothesis formulation

The remainder of the paper will be structured as indicated above. However, this study is confined to the two first points. Inherent to the design of this study, theorizing variables will include the analysis of the informants' images of the state of Iraq. However, theorized variables will be reviewed in the second part of the analysis which subsequently will be analyzed against the non-compensatory rule defined in the theory section.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 11-18.

4 Situational Context of the inter-entity relationship

“The first thing I see, is that you view this relation as happening in a vacuum” – Alan Noori¹⁰²

In accordance with Alan’s quote, this study seeks to solely examine the relation between Iraqi Kurdistan and the Iraqi federal government. Thus, it remains important to notice that Iraqi Kurdistan have crucial relationships to several other countries, both regionally and globally. Alan along with other scholars, emphasize Iraqi Kurdistan’s dependence on countries like Turkey and the U.S.¹⁰³ Jüde asserts that these countries were essential to their success in state building, while Alan and Natali emphasize the creation of foreign patronage relations.¹⁰⁴ Influence of regional countries such as Iran and Syria is not to forget, as they firmly oppose Kurdish aspirations for self-determination.¹⁰⁵

Besides Iraqi Kurdistan’s gains of internal sovereignty in its capacity of a quasi-state, issues inherent to its contemporary development is important to notice. Three central issues between Baghdad and Iraqi Kurdistan remain unsolved. First, since KRG begun exporting oil independently through Turkey, Baghdad cut the annual budgetary share designated for Iraqi Kurdistan, which severely crippled KRGs economy.¹⁰⁶ Although, the essence of the dispute remains over constitutional regulations of newly discovered oil fields.¹⁰⁷ Second, the “disputed areas”, with one of the most notable locations being Kirkuk¹⁰⁸, represent contested provinces which represent opposing constitutional positions over article 140 and 142.¹⁰⁹ Third, issues regarding peshmerga’s¹¹⁰ salaries also remain unresolved, while Baghdad stipulates that peshmerga’s salaries are to be implemented if they integrate with the Iraqi security forces, KDP and PUK grow weary due historical animosities and mistrust. The internal context in general has bestowed a historical heritage mixed of rivalry and unification among the political parties KDP and PUK. The parties are stated to dominate the internal public and private sphere economically, while previously also dominating political

¹⁰² Alan Noori is a professor in political science from American University of Sulaymaniyah which participated in an interview.

¹⁰³ Alan Noori; Jüde, 2017, p. XX.

¹⁰⁴ Jüde, 2017, p. 858-861; Natali, 2015a.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 862.

¹⁰⁶ Natali, 2015b, p. 152-153.

¹⁰⁷ Ahlberg, 2015, p. 16.

¹⁰⁸ Kirkuk contains very large oil fields which in addition is central to the issue of oil.

¹⁰⁹ Article 140 refers to a referendum regarding whether to belong to Kurdistan region or Iraq, which were due 2007. However, the Iraqi federal government has grown critical of this part of the constitution, and opposition points to article 142, which “implements the Sunnis to review the document by allowing amendments agreed to by a parliamentary majority”, see Gunter, 2011, p. 1629.

¹¹⁰ Peshmerga are the military forces of the KRG. Some are under the ministry of peshmerga, however, the majority of the force is directly under the command of the political parties KDP and PUK.

life; which Jüde describes as a “duo-poly”.¹¹¹ But since the last election, Gorran has challenged at least PUKs political dominance with its growing constituency. However, the most debated topic both publicly and politically during my time in the region seemed to be the referendum relating to whether Kurdistan should declare independence. It is due the September 25th this year. Many of the interviewees participating in this study states that independence remain the only way forward for Kurdistan. However, it should be noticed that some remain fairly skeptical of Kurdistan’s possibilities to independence, both in general and some of my interviewees. However, I am ready to agree with Jüde and state that it remains an open question.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Jüde, 2017, p. 857. In addition, when travelling between Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, respective capital for the two parties, a hint of a geographical division is clearly palpable.

¹¹² Jüde, 2017, p. 862.

5 Analysis – Images of the State of Iraq

As stated previously, the analysis of perceptual patterns will be partitioned into four analytical categories below. However, as these perceptual patterns interrelate, some could belong to one or several categories.

As expected, from an overarching view of the analytical categories there was palpable individual variance between the informants. One significant remark regarding the perceptual patterns is the variance between political parties. KDP and PUK indicated an increasingly firm enemy image compared to TCM which retained a restrictive, but still, enemy image.

5.1 Intention & Motivation

In the context of the perceived intentions in regard to the federal government, participants frequently indicated a perceptual pattern of misogynous intentions toward the Kurds in different forms. The passage below illustrates how an informant viewed the current intentions toward Kurdistan;

“We see all the consecutive regimes, ever since the first establishment of the regime in the 1920s, until today, the way of thinking in the behavior of the regime in Baghdad towards the region has not been significantly different. They oppress, suppress the people of Kurdistan ... There have been regimes that have oppressed or opposed the people of Kurdistan with bombings, like chemical weapons, destroying villages, the towns ... and some like now, they try to foster or breed trouble between the political fractions in Kurdistan, so Kurdistan, or the KRG, wouldn't be as powerful.”¹¹³

Power was a frequently revisited theme in terms of motivation in informant's perceptual patterns;

“They believe in being the powerful and they believe in enforcing themselves.”¹¹⁴

In other forms, intention was perceived to inhibit progress in terms of development and aid;

¹¹³ KDP

¹¹⁴ KDP

“The decision that was made [withdrawing the annual budget], was very political, and I think, the main reason for the decision is to stop the region from its developmental process ...”¹¹⁵

“They, the government, they try to impede aid from Arabic countries with weapons and such, they try and they try”.¹¹⁶

Sometimes, this was also expressed in terms of aggressiveness and unilateral decision-making;

“The aggressive mentality of the people who are ruling Iraq, they don’t believe in democracy, they don’t believe in other peoples’ legitimate rights, still they go, they follow the same policies as the previous rulers of Iraq.”¹¹⁷

“The intention is to continue governing and ruling the way they have been ruling for the past 80-90 years ... This is because the mindset of the majority of the current leaders, the Arab leaders in Iraq, is the same mindset as the ones he just mentioned before ... In their mindset, they believe that they should be the only decision-makers ...”¹¹⁸

Informants from PUK indicated perceptual patterns in similar terms;

“From 1968 until 2003, was the [sic] Saddam Hussein’s government, the Kurds were threatened for their life, despite of speaking about the right [sic]. And now between we have a new Iraq, 12, 13 years, Shia majority government, we have the same feeling ...”¹¹⁹

“The Iraqi government try to withdraw the, let us say, the decided rights of the Kurds”.¹²⁰

“During the past 100 years, we are learning that even in this, the Iraqi government ... ruling by Sunni or ruling by Shia, all of them, the Iraqi political actors are against our rights, they do not give us our rights, and they have agreed only on do not [give] Kurdish anything.”¹²¹

A significant remark is the variance between the previous parties and the TCM, which had a slightly “milder” version of what has been interpreted as perceptions of threat;

“Iraq has since its inception had an unnatural relation with the Kurdistan region ... there is an abnormal relation between the central government and the Kurds, we’ve had so many promises and so many things they could’ve fixed by now but they haven’t”¹²²

¹¹⁵ KDP
¹¹⁶ KDP
¹¹⁷ KDP
¹¹⁸ KDP
¹¹⁹ PUK
¹²⁰ PUK
¹²¹ PUK
¹²² TCM

“Iraq is not that “angled” to give all the rights to our people here, we always struggle for our rights here ...”¹²³

To summarize the analytical stage, in regard to the general trend of interpreted perceptual patterns, ill-willed, threatening perceptions emerge from the perceived intentions of the federal government to inhibit progress, act unilaterally against Kurdistan region’s interest and well-being.

In terms of the evaluative stage, it’s based on the perceptual patterns tied to certain behavior occurring along a continuous spectrum in time and space.¹²⁴ Some of these patterns can be found in the quote’s elaborated above, at least in the past and present, that the government, or the groups associated with it presently, the Shi’ite, frequently tied to unilateral action. Elaborations below assert an interpretation of long-term strategies against Kurdistan;

“So, every time they were weak, they would come and restart the dialogue, but every time they were powerful, they have no reason, no interest in the dialogue ... they look at it as, the moment they gain power, the moment they have no need for us, they turn their backs on us.”¹²⁵

To some extent informants indicated perceptual patterns of being exploited by the federal government, in an opportunistic way as elaborated above, others as being exposed to threats, continuously, as indicated by the quote below:

“You know the Kurdistan region was more or less an experiment field for the Iraqi weapons, they [sic] are not weapon since 1991 until now not experimented in Iraq, in Kurdistan. They use all weapons. Small and middle and strong weapons. Chemical and non-chemical. The Iraqi Kurdistan are [sic] their goal for destruction. The rest of Iraq is a goal for the construction.”¹²⁶

To summarize both stages in conjunction with one another; together these stages of an analytic and evaluative nature that posit the federal government as a perceptual threat, acting unilaterally with subversive and ill-willed intentions against Kurdistan. In addition, all informants but one indicated a strong emphasis on mistrust.

¹²³ TCM

¹²⁴ When the participant indicates a long-term continuation of a certain behavior. This is based upon Holsti’s conceptualization of belief systems. It contains past, present and future. Holsti, 1962, p. 245.

¹²⁵ TCM

¹²⁶ PUK

5.2 Capacity

Regarding relative capacity in terms of economic, military and political power, two participants did not answer/deflected the question¹²⁷, three deemed the relationship imbalanced while 13 participants deemed it balanced but on different terms.¹²⁸ The relationship is illustrated below. However, it is important to emphasize that within this category the greatest individual variance was observed. It might be due to the intangible factors, although a wide range of individual variance in perceptual patterns between topics was observed.

5.2.1 Economics

Perceptual patterns in terms of economics essentially constitute three camps, those perceiving the Kurdistan economy to be in a better position;

“It’s very obviously [sic], here you can see regarding the economy, we are more powerful, especially with the world, we have agreements with governments contracts with governments and foreign companies, the infrastructure is very good, and the economic was growing up very fast, we are in the high position, in a better position ...”¹²⁹

Those perceiving the economy to be in a lower position;

“Definitely financially they are doing better, this is very clear, Kurdistan region is undergoing major economic reform, which will take time, they have access to international loans, assistance, donations which we don’t as a region.”¹³⁰
“Economically you can’t even compare between the Iraqi government and Kurdistan.”¹³¹

And those which perceptual patterns weight the system through intangible factors;

“No, that is only one of the problems, if we speak about corruption, power ... it’s very difficult because if you look to Iraq, once the group came, and tried to go inside the banks, they looted millions of dollars, and you see that then suddenly, by one of the institutions, they lost some millions of dollars ...”¹³²

¹²⁷ Despite deflecting a direct comparison, the informant emphasized how Kurdistan’s capacity improved in comparison to the past years.

¹²⁸ On different terms is relating to intangible factors, as indicated by the analytical categories, if something is empirically measurable, factors such as national affiliation is adopted as a counterweight, rendering the relationship balanced.

¹²⁹ KDP

¹³⁰ KDP

¹³¹ TCM

¹³² PUK

“In terms of stability and democracy, openness and the others [sic] aspect of life, we are better. Rebuilding, development, freer markets. We are better than them. But Iraq is richer than us, that’s the difference we have.”¹³³

5.2.2 Military

In terms of relative military capability, perceptual patterns indicate to a large extent heavy emphasis on intangible factors, such as experience or doctrine;

“They might have more, but our experience and righteousness of our program gives us more power.”¹³⁴

“In terms of doctrine and principles the forces of KRG ... they’re much more powerful than the Iraqi forces. In terms of national affiliation, peshmergas national affiliation is higher than Iraqi forces if Iraq. But in terms of ammunition and armaments, the ministry of defense in Iraq is more powerful, in terms of weaponry. There are many fractions in the Iraqi army, this is one of the reasons why the Iraqi army is not that powerful.”¹³⁵

Or equity from aid;

“In terms of military, of course Baghdad has quite big access to get military support ... However, Kurdistan region as well is getting some help ... The intention is that Kurdistan region peshmerga forces will have access to like also the federal government weaponry”.¹³⁶

Or better organized;

“I think the power is not in the benefit of Iraq, otherwise it would have been difficult for us ... therefore we try to speak about referendum and about before they try to have ... strong air force, and well organized.”¹³⁷

To summarize, the general tendency of perceptual patterns indicates an equity of capacity, but a wide range of individual variance was observed which indicate a tendency towards a more *complex* view of the relative power. An important point is that all informants from TCM either viewed the relationship as imbalanced or fractured.

5.3 Decisional structure and Decisional Locus

The perceptual patterns regarding decisional style and locus indicate a perception of a monolithic decisional structure and a highly centralized decisional locus. Perceived as undemocratic, unilateral and single-minded. The analytical stage can be conceptualized as follows; informant provided the following quite descriptive passage;

¹³³ PUK

¹³⁴ KDP; PUK.

¹³⁵ KDP; PUK

¹³⁶ KDP

¹³⁷ PUK

“They still have the feeling that they are the big brother and we are the younger brother, they are the big and they have to impose their decisions on us, this feeling is still there in Baghdad, despite the change in the regime, despite all changes in the region and the political atmosphere in Iraq ... Because they have their own vision of Iraq, they cannot accept, even within the constitution that Kurdistan region has to have its own powers, has to have its own decision-making, they cannot understand that, even if it’s clear in the constitution, well explained, they are not able to digest that yet.”¹³⁸

Consequently, some informants portray the political environment as highly unequal;

“It is unequal now, it is unequal. The Kurds want to be equal in Iraq, to stay within the boundary of Iraq, and I don’t think that our Arab brothers now accept that equality. They’re not. At the beginning, they accepted that because they were weak ...”¹³⁹

“In the Iraqi parliament, whatever they want they can issue another law, because they are the majority ... they can issue any laws which are against our interests by the majority they hold. We have reached this stage that, we have lost all hope to live within Iraq and to safeguard our rights as a people.”¹⁴⁰

In addition, the perception of that the government, associated with Shia imposes unilateral decisions upon the region. Subsequently, Iranian influence in Iraqi politics was frequently perceived, “this is something not hidden, that Iran control politics in Iraq.” In conjunction with a perception of collaboration between the Shia majority and Iran. The unilateral process of decision-making portrayed as ongoing in Baghdad was rational enough to be directed towards establishing a control over the region in collaboration with Iran, simultaneously as it was characterized by corruption, lies and opportunistic power grabbing and personal interest.

5.4 Culture

The perceptual patterns regarding cultural status interestingly diverged significantly from the ideal-typical image of the enemy, which up to now has been formed. Informants indicated perceptual patterns of great cultural distance in terms of institution building, development and mentality. At the analytical stage, religious ideology and a “backward” mentality was frequently associated with the ruling parties;

“They have an ideology, a religious ideology and to them that is everything, the Shi’ites. We cannot accept this, not in terms of religion, but in terms of human rights, in humanity. So, what they are doing does not go together with the mentality of the current generation, this is from the old days. They beat

¹³⁸ KDP

¹³⁹ TCM

¹⁴⁰ KDP

themselves with chains, they take swords and knives and they hit their heads with it and they even shoot themselves. And they continuously cry about a war that erupted 1400 years ago. What are all these things indicating? This is the mindset, this is the mentality, we do not want to live with this mentality.”

In addition, at the evaluative stage there was frequently a dichotomous relation attached to these kind of perceptual patterns, constituted by an unaccepting mentality toward other ethnicities, and especially the Kurds openness and democratic aspirations. Interestingly, this dimension is akin to Herrmann’s conceptualization of the *degenerate* ideal-typical image¹⁴¹, in the sense that cultural status here, in addition to the expression of a superiority on the behalf of the Kurds, expresses a kind of cultural decay on behalf of the Shi’ites. Another possible explanation could refer to the ethnic politics ongoing in Iraq, apart from other studies which the enemy image has been utilized, as cultural judgements of primacy and subjugation is intimately tied to tensions and violence between ethnic groups.¹⁴²

To summarize, an enemy image is well established in the perceptual patterns of the informants. Intentions are perceived as ill-willed, threatening and a danger to the Kurds. However, an interesting remark is that most of the perceptual patterns of threat inherently relies on the mistrust and exclusion from governmental power. Between the three parties, KDP and PUK retained an increasingly firm enemy image, while TCM, while still maintaining an enemy image, had a milder version in relation to the ideal-type. Capabilities were deemed to be quite equal, although on different terms, which would demarcate an unwillingness to initiate an escalation militarily, but still not be hesitant in standing up against the federal government. The portrayal of unilateral decision-making stands quite clear, elaborate enough to initiate conspiracies “The Iraqi’s jealous and they try to make conspiracy against it. That is the sickness in the mind of the Iraqi”.¹⁴³ However, still, informants maintain that opposite groups bring corruption, “cannot think”¹⁴⁴ and are undemocratic. Perceptual patterns seem to indicate great distance in cultural status, which could be a consequence of the ethnic polarization within the borders of Iraq, in comparison to other studies of the enemy image, which asserted a relative equity in perceptions of cultural status.

¹⁴¹ Herrmann., & Fischerkeller, 1995, p. 430.

¹⁴² Alexander et al, 1999, p. XX.; Herrmann, 2013b, p. 289.

¹⁴³ PUK.

¹⁴⁴ KDP; PUK

6 Part II - Analysis – The Interaction of Strategic Perceptions and FPDM

The established characteristics of the inter-entity relation between Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan, from the perspective of Kurdish policy-makers have been established as an enemy image, elaborated above. This part constitutes a theoretically driven analysis regarding the interaction of the enemy image with the decision-making process which aims to contribute further understanding to their stance in foreign-policy. It is important to emphasize, however, that this only represent one aspect of the decision-making mechanism. In addition, this should be considered a proposed rationale for the plausible causal mechanism to illustrate an alternative perspective.

But in order to properly structure a decision-making process, available choices need to be defined. For the purpose of this study these choices are to be drawn from the interviews. Almost every informant interviewed while conducting field-research in Iraqi Kurdistan opted for either Independence or to remain the present status quo (i.e. retain the internal sovereignty of the KR-I entity). For the sake of illustration, a third option will be added, re-integration¹⁴⁵ with the Iraqi state. The two variables which are stated to influence the process is the non-compensatory rule of decision-making, and as an enemy image derives from perceptions of threats, theory dictates the disadvantageous EBA (DEBA) to be employed. The analysis will be structured in accordance with the three choices below.

6.1 Re-integration with the Iraqi State

As previously elaborated, the Iraqi state embody a threatening posture against the KR-I, from the perspective of Kurdish policy-makers. The minimal prospects of selecting this alternative, to re-integrate with the state of Iraq, seems thus fairly obvious. However, it serves the purpose of illustration of the proposed plausible causal interaction between images of threat and the non-compensatory DEBA which could give an explanatory understanding regarding the maintained characteristics of the inter-entity relation. Therefore, the plausible causal mechanism could be conceptualized as follows:

Perceptual patterns of the Kurdish policy-makers serve to indicate that actions by the federal government of Iraq to constitute an impediment of the political parties' position of power.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ It's important to emphasize here that Iraqi Kurdistan is not a sovereign entity in an external sense, rather they can be stated to have an internal sovereignty. Hence the usage of "re-integration" with the Iraqi state. See, Natali, 2015b, p. 152.

¹⁴⁶ See previous analysis – Part I.

Especially since their perceptions indicate their parental state to be embodied by ill-willing intentions and a monolithic decisional structure. Consequently, it indicates a threat against the logic inherent to DEBA of political survival, which in regards to the Kurdish parties would render the decision to re-integrate with the Iraqi state highly unlikely due to its dictating logic to preserve political power.

In other words, the enemy image indicates perceptual patterns of threats, constitutive of the actions by the federal government. The predisposed choice propensities generated by these perceptual patterns interact with DEBA in terms of interpretations of *what* and *whom* is perceived as threatening against the party's position of power. In turn, the choice to re-integrate with Iraq would not survive the first stage in the decision-making process due to the inherent loss aversion adherent to the political dimension, which is non-compensatory.

Consequently, the analytical and evaluative stages of the different dimensions which synergizes into an image which "brings the threat to life" in the decision-making process, actively relegating the alternative to re-integrate with the Iraqi state.

6.2 Independence or Status Quo?

In regard to the alternative of independence, additional factors need to be incorporated. Mentioned briefly in the contextual section, the influence of regional countries and Kurdish policymaker's perceptions of them needs to be taken into account. In general, the regional countries seemed to be perceived along the following quote;

"For the regional powers, we don't expect any positive role in the process of becoming an independent state"¹⁴⁷

However, when coming down to countries like Turkey, one informant expressed the following;

"I think Turkey, as far as its situation, they will not oppose Kurdistan region's independency if they guarantee that this independency will not have an effect on their population in Turkey, which the KRG or the Kurdistan region political leadership have ... I think the understanding is that Kurdistan and Turkey will have to be good neighbors ... I think Turkey understands this very well now."¹⁴⁸

In contrast, Iran is for most part conceptualized as hostile towards the Kurdish political aspirations of independence by the informants. Iranian influence in Baghdad is perceptually interpreted as an impediment to the Kurds progressive aspirations and an attempt to delimit Kurdistan's development and political aspirations;

"This is something not hidden, that Iran controls politics in Iraq."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ KDP.

¹⁴⁸ KDP.

¹⁴⁹ KDP.

There was quite common between informants to express an association between ruling Shia elite and the government of Iran;

“The surrounding countries, even we are the victim of their policy and interest of surrounding countries, the Shia, Iran, they support Shia in Iraq and Turkey support Sunna in Iraq.”¹⁵⁰

Apart from Iran, the U.S is presented as an influential actor in the regard of independence.¹⁵¹ However their position is ambiguously perceived by those mentioning it and seems by the same informants to direct their foreign-policy strategy towards a unified Iraq, hence not in favor of Kurdistan’s independence.

Thus, in terms of declaring independence, if the decision-making process would be conceptualized in accordance with the plausible causal proposition of DEBA, the perceptual ambiguity of the U.S and the subtle, yet influencing perceptual patterns of Iran as a threatening actor would eliminate the alternative from the process, at least for the time being.

6.3 Status Quo

Consequently, status quo is the only remaining option.

What possibly could bring further understanding to this is that the non-compensatory DEBA asserts a selection of alternatives absent threats to the political position of power. While perceptual patterns of Kurdish policy-makers indicate the Iraqi state’s *intentions* as threatening, a majority deems *capability* to be equal between the two entities. Thus the option of retaining status quo, would, in accordance with the theoretical framework be the most viable option available as it . Additionally, perceptual patterns indicated great distance in terms of cultural stats, positing the Kurds to view themselves as greatly superior in terms of morality, institution-building and ideologically. In turn, it might indicate another incentive to retain the status quo, at least for the time being.¹⁵²

In summary, the most viable option available to Kurdish policy-makers in accordance with the theoretical framework presented in this study would be to retain status quo. This is based on the analysis that it remains the sole option not directly threatening to the political parties’ position of power in regard to the perceptions of Kurdish policy-makers. It is important to emphasize that this analysis is built on, and has hopefully illustrated, a plausible causal mechanism or propensity of images in the decision-making process, especially the non-compensatory rule of decision, which in this case DEBA. However, as this is not based on sufficient material to constitute concretized claims, this analysis is in contrast intended to contribute further towards a deeper understanding regarding the relation between the Iraqi state and Iraqi Kurdistan. In addition, only one of the decision-rules could be illustrated. In

¹⁵⁰ PUK. However, Sunnites is not expressed in terms of a threat by informants.

¹⁵¹ KDP; Alan Noori.

¹⁵² An important caveat needs to be taken into account. The questions used in the interviews were mostly focused on the policy-makers view on Iraq, consequently the material might be a bit skewed in this regard.

contrast to DEBA, its counterpart AEBA¹⁵³, is theoretically asserted to be emphasized if an image of opportunity dominates the perceptual patterns. Instead of asserting an absence of threats, it asserts dimensions in which the specific crucial dimension is favored.

¹⁵³ Advantegous EBA decision-rule.

7 Conclusion

The study sought to contribute with further understanding regarding the inter-entity relation between Iraqi Kurdistan and the State of Iraq through the perspective of foreign-policy decision-making, from the perspective of Kurdish policy-makers. By employing image theory, perceptual patterns of Kurdish policy-makers was analyzed, indicating findings of an enemy image to characterize the relationship from the perspective of KR-I. Additionally, the study sought to further understand the stance of the Kurdish policy-makers foreign-policy conduct by developing a theoretical framework proposed to draw inferences from previously identified perceptual images.

From the perspective of Kurdish policy-makers, the inter-entity relationship was characterized by a quite robust enemy image. Perceptual patterns were analyzed in terms of strategic dimensions in order to capture the relationship in relative terms. These dimensions constitute perceived intentions, relative power, decisional structure and locus and cultural status. Informants perceptual patterns portrayed their Iraqi counterpart as inherently hostile, threatening and a decisional structure which was characterized as highly centralized constitutive of unilateral action on behalf of the ruling Shia elite. In addition, the study found perceptual patterns to indicate a great distance in cultural status, indicating that informants viewed themselves as utterly superior morally, ideologically and institution-wise in regard to their counterparts.

A theoretically integrated framework was subsequently applied to contribute with a theoretically guided explanation to the Kurdish foreign-policy stance towards the Iraqi state. The result constitutes an illustrated interaction of the enemy image and the non-compensatory rule of decision. However, due to insufficient material and solely within-case analysis, no claims of causality can be made.

Further exploration of the plausible causal relationship between images and the non-compensatory rule of decision is thus suggested. Additionally, the great cultural distance remains interesting since it demarcates a rigid departure from previous studies.

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9 Appendix A – List of Interviewees

Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)

Ali Hussein – Head of Department of Relations – Member of Leadership Council - May 21st
Serwan Mohamed – Director – KRG Office of Statistics – Advisor to Minister of Planning – 31st of May.

Karzan Noori – Executive Manager of Department of Relations 28th of May.

Awni H. Ali – Relations Advisor – Kurdistan Parliament – 29th of May.

Serwan Mohamed – Director – KRG Office of Statistics – Advisor to Minister of Planning – 31st of May.

Bashar Mushir – Member of Kurdistan Parliament - 5th of June

Mahmoud Muhammad – Head of KDP Media – Member of Leadership Council – Spokesperson of KDP – 5th of June.

Hoshyar Siwaily – Chief Executive – Head of KDP Foreign Relations Office – 7th of June.

Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)

PUK I – Anonymous – April 26th

PUK II – Anonymous – April 26th

Mala Bakhtiar – Member of Politburo – Chief of Executive Body – 3rd of May.

Rezan Dier Jafaar – Parliament Member of PUK to Iraq – 8th of May.

Sadi Ahmed Pire – Member of Politburo – Foreign Relations – 19th of May.

The Change Movement/Gorran (TCM).

Parwa Ali Hama – Member of the Kurdistan Parliament – 8th of May.

Ayub Abdulla Ismael – Member of Kurdistan Parliament – 8th of May.

Shrosh Haji – Spokesman of Gorran – May 9th

TCM I – Anonymous – 9th of May.

Bahar Mahmud Fatah – Deputy head of legislation committee – Member of Kurdistan Parliament – 11th of May.

Members of the Kurdistan Parliament

The 111 MPs in the Kurdistan Parliament represent the following political lists and parties:

- Kurdistan Democratic Party: 38 seats
 - (Gorran) Change List: 24 seats
 - Patriotic Union of Kurdistan: 18 seats
-

10 Appendix B – Questionnaire

Questionnaire Guide

Questions formulated below are ordered in batteries (i.e. overarching thematic, sub-questions and complementary questions). The overarching thematic remains the main focus of the interview, meanwhile sub-questions and complementary questions are posed when and if opportunity presents itself in the context of the interview.

The person whom is interviewed may cancel the interview at any time and if some topic is perceived as too sensitive the person may just state no comment.

- How would you describe the current intentions of CGoI¹⁵⁴ in relation or towards Kurdistan?
 - o Do you feel you can trust CGoI representatives?
 - o What implications would this have in the current dialogue?
 - Positive/Negative?
 - Why?

 - How would you describe the balance of power between CGoI and Kurdistan?
 - o What implications might this have for Kurdistan in relation to the dialogue with CGoI?
 - Negative/Positive?
 - Why?
 - o How would this affect Kurdistan's political goals?
 - o Do you see any other alternatives which might affect the balance of power?

 - In your view, is there any cultural differences or similarities between CGoI and Kurdistan?
 - o How would this impact the current relation/dialogue in your view?
 - How/why?
 - o Do you see any potential agreements to be made between Kurdistan and CGoI?

 - How would you describe the prospects of Third party involvement?
 - o In your view, how would this affect the current situation?
 - Positive/negative?
 - Why?
 - o Would you consider this to expose Kurdistan to some risks?
 - If yes, what kind of risk?

 - What alternatives (i.e. set of acceptable actions) do you see as possible for Kurdistan in regards to the current relation/dialogue with CGoI?
 - o How would you determine between these?
 - o What factors would you motivate as crucial in relation to your mentioned alternatives?
 - If specific factors are mentioned, what do you view as decisive for their significance?
-

¹⁵⁴ The Central/Federal Government of Iraq will be referred on paper as CGoI.

11 Appendix C – Ideal typical Images

Ideal type:

The Enemy

In its extreme form, the image of the enemy is embodied by perceptual patterns of paranoia.¹⁵⁵ It constitutes a perception of extreme threat, which constitute perceptual patterns of harm, loss, “challenge” and being “an opportunity for growth, mastery or gain”.¹⁵⁶

Intention & Motivation

The enemy’s intention is characterized as simply motivated, evil, highly aggressive and opportunistic.¹⁵⁷

Capability

Capabilities are perceived as equal.

Decisional Style, Structure and Locus of Decision-making

The decisional structure is characterized as monolithic and highly rational. Highly determined, it knows what it want and will use cunning to get it. The surface is a charade designated to lure wishful thinkers. Indicated conciliatory behavior is just a pose, as negotiations is a cover for achieving its objectives.¹⁵⁸

Cultural Status

The perceptual pattern of cultural status should be on an equal level. However, the enemy’s morals may be rotten and its values rotten, but it has an ability to carry out policy, plans and is extremely dangerous.¹⁵⁹

The Imperial

The imperial image emerges when perceptual patterns indicate an opportunity to achieve something at the cost of another people.

Intention & Motivation

Those willing to cooperate with the perceiver is seen as “responsible” individuals with inherently benign motives. Those whom oppose cooperation with the perceiver is seen as ranging from irresponsible self-interested to agents of another power.¹⁶⁰

Capability

In terms of capability, the perceived nation is perceived to have less amount of power than empirical indicators suggest. This is due to the “immaturity” of the people.

Decisional Style, Structure and Locus of Decision-making

Cooperating elites are encouraged although seen as lacking abilities to lead or administrate their nation required for full independence. Elites whom oppose the perceiver are seen as agitators and extremists solely representing their own self-interest. At the extreme, the

¹⁵⁵ Cottam, R., 1977, p. 65.

¹⁵⁶ Cottam, M., 1994, p. 20.

¹⁵⁷ Cottam, R., 1977, p. 65; Herrmann, 2013, p. 289.

¹⁵⁸ Cottam, R, 1977, p. 65.

¹⁵⁹ Cottam, M, 1994, p. 26.

¹⁶⁰ Cottam, R, 1977, p. 68-69.

opposition is seen as rivals of the perceivers power. In addition, there is an absence of public opinion, middle class and genuine nationalism.¹⁶¹

Cultural Status

The perceptual pattern of the population is indicating that the perceived people is inferior and backwards in its cultural status. The people is seen as unsophisticated, incapable of using advanced technology or developing efficient administrative techniques. They are constantly being in need of tutelage.¹⁶²

The Colonial

The colonial image appears when a nation perceives a great threat from a state which is much more powerful, but culturally comparable to its own nation.¹⁶³

Intention & Motivation

The perceptual patterns of intention and motivation are centered around an interest in maintaining the perceiver's nation as a source of raw material, as a locus for investment and selling products. There is cynicism regarding the Imperial power's ideology and strong perception of hypocrisy.

Capability

Capability is seen in asymmetrical terms; the perceived power does not rest with the military force (if a such is present) but with a "hidden hand" potentially manipulating the colony.

Decisional Style, Structure and Locus of Decision-making

Imperial staff and agents are trying to utilize ultimate decision-making control under other cover. Since contact between imperial and native bureaucracies are less formalized and under less routine, perceived diversity within the imperial decisional structure is only slight.¹⁶⁴

Cultural Status

Perceptual patterns indicate that the actor perceives itself as culturally comparable status to the imperial power.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p. 69.

¹⁶² Cottan, R, 1977, p. 69; Cottam, M, 1994, p. 23.

¹⁶³ Herrmann., & Fischerkeller, 1995, p. 429.

¹⁶⁴ Cottam, 1977, p. XX; Herrmann., & Fischerkeller, 1995, p. 430.

¹⁶⁵ Herrmann., & Fischerkeller, 1995, p. 430.

12 Appendix D – Analytical Scheme – Part I

[Enemy Analytical Tools
 Imperial Colonial]

Motivation & Intention

[Overarching elaboration]

- Diagnostical Propensities?
[category specific elaboration]
- Evaluative Propensities?
[Category specific elaboration]

Capability/Capacity

- Diagnostical Propensities?
- Evaluative Propensities?

Decisional Structure & Locus

- Diagnostical Propensities?
- Evaluative Propensities?

Cultural Status

- Diagnostical Propensities?
- Evaluative Propensities?