

How the American invasion of 2003 affected Kurdish statebuilding in Iraq

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Abstract

The 2003 American invasion of Iraq had a profound effect on the Middle Eastern region. Among the many affected cases is the Kurdish Regional Government, the autonomous Kurdish region within Iraq. When in 2003 the Kurds joined forces with the American-led coalition in order to overthrow Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath regime, it marked a significant change for the history of the Kurds. This thesis attempted to explain the effect of the invasion on the state capacity of the Kurds. By conducting a process-tracing case study, this thesis has shown that war-making can lead to an increased state capacity. A theoretical perspective was adopted based on Charles Tilly's statebuilding theory. The results show how the invasion improved the Kurdish military by supplying weapons and training, increasing the Kurdish coercive capacity. Additionally, the power-balance within Iraq was affected in favour of the Kurds. This led to a more stable political climate for the Kurds. The resulting instalment of the 2005 constitution allowed for the arrival of countless oil companies drilling oil in the expanded Kurdish territory. All in all, this thesis has shown how war-making can lead to an increase in state capacity.

Key Words: Peshmerga, Kurdish Regional Government, Statebuilding Theory, 2003 invasion of Iraq

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Abbreviations and acronyms

CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KRG	Kurdish Regional Government
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
US	United States
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
YPG	People's Defense Units

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The Kurds are the largest ethnic group of the world who do not possess their own independent state (Serhun, 2021). Because of that, the Kurds affect countless aspects of world politics and (violent) conflict. A recent example is how the Kurds lay at the core of the debate surrounding the NATO membership of Finland and Sweden, where Turkey demands the countries to release ethnic Kurds, because Turkey considers them to be terrorists (Norell, 2022). A less recent example is the Iraq War (2003-2011), where the Kurds played a pivotal role in the conflict mostly by cooperating with the United States militarily. Approximately 15 to 20 percent of the Iraqi population is Kurdish (BBC, 2019). With such a large Kurdish population in Iraq, it presents an interesting research case, especially considering the American cooperation with the Kurds in the war. This thesis will investigate how the intervention of the Americans in the Iraq war affected Kurdish statebuilding in Iraq.

The Iraq War was an armed conflict that lasted from 2003 until 2011. In 2003, a coalition invaded Iraq to overthrow Saddam Hussein and the central government. This coalition was primarily led by the United States; they provided most ground, air and sea forces (Keegan, 2004, p. 1). During this war, the United States collaborated extensively with the Peshmerga, who are the military force of the Kurdish Regional Government (Lortz, 2005, p. 66). The Kurds even played a role in the capture of Hussein (Rai, 2014). This invasion eventually led to the downfall of Hussein and the government, which had widespread effects, not in the least for the Kurdish population of the country. In May 2006, the two main political Kurdish parties in Iraq, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), unified under the Kurdish Regional Government (Rimscha & Rogg, 2007, p. 832). The Kurdish Regional Government was already established since the creation of a no-fly zone in 1992, which was installed to protect the Kurds from the Ba'ath regime (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2018). However, when the PUK and KDP unified in 2006, it led to a more stable Kurdish part of a federal Iraq. For example, a lot of money was made because the Kurdish part of Iraq is rich in oil (Rimscha & Rogg, 2007, p. 832). Some parts of the Kurdish population even see the American invasion of Iraq as a liberation (Krajeski, 2013). This also has to do with the memory of Hussein's government's human rights violations, like the Anfal campaign, where 50,000 civilians were killed with chemical weapons.

Even though the Kurdish Regional Government has its struggles with corruption, labour and inflation, the United States' invasion of Iraq and its cooperation with the Kurds seemingly had a positive effect on Kurdish autonomy and statebuilding. The post-invasion situation in Iraqi Kurdistan has been described as both prosperous and complicated because of the various problems (Sewell, 2023). In a case like this with many processes going on at once, this thesis will focus on the military and economical aspect of Iraqi Kurdistan, and how the 2003 invasion shaped the post-invasion Kurdish Regional Government. Therefore, the black box will be opened in order to assess how the American invasion influenced the Kurdish statebuilding. Even though war is a destructive event which has many negative side effects, here it appears to have partially been beneficial for the Kurds. This thesis will examine how that outcome came to be; testing hypotheses derived from state building theory.

1.2 Objective

In this thesis, I examine how the presence of the United States in the Iraq War influenced the Kurds' ability to engage in statebuilding, specifically the growth of the military and economic sectors. To get a concise understanding of the case, I establish the role of the Kurds in the Iraq invasion, and what

they gained from the conflict. The underlying goal of this is to understand how a minority group and non-state actor can benefit from violent conflict. Of course, war is known to be a destructive event. However, in this thesis, I explain how the American invasion and the resulting war benefited the Kurds in Iraq.

On the other hand, it is important to establish the American interests and goals in this case, as these also shape any effects that it had on the Kurds. I hypothesize that the 2003 invasion influenced the development of the Kurdish military and economy, two important components of statebuilding. I will investigate the economic consequences of the invasion on Kurdish autonomy, specifically the oil industry. Besides that, the military dynamics between the Kurdish Peshmerga and the invading Americans will be assessed. I will make the argument that the invasion was beneficial for both concepts. Altogether, this thesis will attempt to answer the following research question:

How did the 2003 American invasion of Iraq affect Kurdish statebuilding in Iraq?

1.2 Societal relevance

The Kurdish question in the Middle East is one of the important developments shaping the politics and power dynamics of the region. The last 40 years have actually seen an increasing regionalization of the Kurdish question in the Middle East. (Grojean, 2018, p. 264). This is because of the Kurdish involvement in for example the Iran-Iraq war, the Gulf War, the Iraq War and the Syrian War. A further study of how the United States cooperated with the Kurds and its effects, provides insights into how the conflicts transpired in the countries themselves, as well as offering potential regional insights. This thesis will expand upon the knowledge of the topic of how American policy shapes the Middle East. The United States is involved in countless Middle Eastern affairs, the in-depth study that this thesis contains will contribute to a further understanding of American influence in the Middle East. Therefore, this thesis may also inform foreign policy decisions by for example the United States, or any other policymaker or foreign policy analyst.

Because the Kurdish question in the Middle East has been such an extensive source of conflict, this thesis may further inform conflict resolution strategies. Examining how the invasion influenced the Kurdish autonomy within Iraq may, for example, provide lessons that could be used for policy with regards to the Syrian War, where there are also significant Kurdish actors involved in the conflict. The comparison between the Americans cooperating with the Syrian Kurds of the People's Defense Units (YPG) on one hand and the Americans with the Iraqi Peshmerga on the other is quickly made. Because of the similarities this thesis may inform policy with regards to the Syrian case.

Therefore, perhaps the most important goal is to work towards a deeper insight into regional stability. Gaining a better understanding of the impact of the Iraq invasion contributes to further knowledge of conflict and war in the Middle East. By examining how the Americans influenced the post-invasion Iraqi Kurdistan in terms of its military and economy can shed light on the complexity of a post-conflict reconstruction. This brings into play the complex power struggle in the country as well as the ethnic dimension of conflict. Essentially, this thesis hopes to contribute to and inform policy making as well as the broader academic debate surrounding the Kurds in the Middle East.

1.3 Scientific relevance

In this research, I will analyse how the American invasion had an impact on the Kurdish state formation, partially by cooperating militarily with the Kurds. This may provide interesting insights that could benefit other cases where the Americans cooperate with smaller military actors. Examples of these are the Syrian Civil War or the current Somali Civil War (Stein & Stephens, 2015; United States Embassy, 2023).

Furthermore, it is interesting to note the growth in Kurdish state capacity. If we compare the Kurdish community in Iraq and the degree of rights and autonomy with Kurds in other countries like Turkey, Syria and Iran, we see that the Kurds in Iraq have a more stable and autonomous political entity (Council on Foreign Relations, n.d.; Maenza, 2019). This research will contribute to explaining how that variance came to be by explaining the effect of the American invasion on Kurdish state capacity.

Additionally, this research delves into the relationship between a great power and a much weaker non-state actor. This relation leads to very different opinions in international relations theory. This study covers a peculiar cooperation and relation between two actors which may offer lessons for the schools of International Relations theory. Studying how great powers interact with non-state actors may also be helpful in understanding other cases where larger powers cooperate with less powerful entities. This could especially be beneficial for other cases of civil war, where there are numerous actors and militias to account for. Additionally, this thesis uses statebuilding theory which originally was based on pre-modern Western-European states. There is a vast body of academia debating whether this model remains relevant to understand the contemporary world. This thesis' approach applies the notions of this theory to Iraqi Kurdistan: a contemporary case that is a de facto state and autonomous region. By applying statebuilding theory to a non-European region in a different timeframe, this thesis aims to further contribute to the academic discussion about the usefulness of statebuilding theory.

The model of liberal peacebuilding and statebuilding often fails and sometimes does more harm than good (Auteserre, 2017, p. 125). This could be due to factors such as a lack of attention for the long-term prospects when entering combat, not having enough insights in potential side effects and a lack of exit strategy. This research will study how the American intervention impacted the Kurdish statebuilding; the Kurdish political agenda and its targets. This could be considered a long-term effect of intervention, as well as a side effect. This is a side effect because aiding the Kurds was never a foreign policy goal of the US, the Americans rather use the Kurds to further their own policy (Schwartz, 2019). Thus, this research may be beneficial in discovering how intervention affects the long-term prospects of intrastate war, as well as delving into a side effect.

While there is a vast body of academic work on the Iraq invasion and Iraq war, few dive into the specific dynamics and results for the Kurdish community and region. When they do, they often focus on the political and institutional aspect, this study rather focusses on the intertwined military and economic side which may offer a comprehensive understanding. This will be done through the lens of statebuilding theory. Lastly, this thesis will test if the notions of statebuilding theory are still useful in understanding the contemporary world. Since Charles Tilly's defining work on statebuilding theory, many authors have sought to use this theory and test it in different circumstances. The theoretical aspect of this thesis is based on Tilly's work as well as on authors who expanded Tilly's model. Tilly's initial work on statebuilding theory has been derived from European states in the period of 1500-1900. Building on his work, scholars explored if his work is still useful when used in different geographical regions and/or in different periods of time. This has led to mixed results, keeping the academic debate surrounding Tilly's theory alive. This thesis may further inform the debate surrounding statebuilding theory.

The fact that Tilly's empirical data was derived from the period between 1500 and 1900 makes it an interesting application to the contemporary world. The 20th century marked a historical shift in the way that war was carried out. While previously war often was a professional military army versus professional military army, in recent years there are also countless non-state actors involved and the civilian death counts are way higher. Mary Kaldor's work on new and old wars is well known. New wars involve networks of state and non-state actors, and most violence is directed against civilians

(Kaldor, 1999, p. 9). The question whether Tilly's process in which the struggle over resources leads to state formation can still function in the modern world is interesting and this thesis may further inform this academic debate. Contrasting these two visions on war is peculiar: on the one hand there is an academic school that sees war as crucial to the formation of nation states. On the other hand, there is a school that sees how in the current world, war mostly leads to destruction and fuels ongoing conflicts. This research may show whether the war brought any positive aspects with it.

1.4 Structure

The theme, objective and research question were introduced in Chapter 1. I expanded briefly upon the importance and presence of the Kurds in the conflict between Iraq and the United States. I will research how the American invasion influenced the Kurdish statebuilding.

In Chapter 2 I will expand the theory that I shall use, which is statebuilding theory. I will elaborate upon the concepts and formulate the two hypotheses that shall be tested.

In Chapter 3 I will explain the case selection and the methods as well as clearing up all the concepts used in the analysis.

In Chapter 4 I will use process tracing to examine how the interaction between the United States and the Kurds transpired during the Iraq invasion. I will focus on the impact on the Kurdish military and economy. Respectively, I will analyse how the invasion influenced the Kurdish Peshmerga and the Kurdish oil industry.

In Chapter 5 the findings of the analysis will be summarized, and the conclusion of this thesis will be presented. The research question will be answered, and the hypotheses will be evaluated.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter uses the perspective of state building to explain the effect that the American invasion of Iraq had on the Kurdish statebuilding in Iraq. Even though it is just one theory, statebuilding theory can be used to analyse quite some different angles from a conflict. For this research these will be the angles of military capacity and the role of resources. Before proceeding to the hypotheses, I shall provide an overview of statebuilding theory. After starting off broad, I will narrow down to the hypotheses that shall be tested on the case of Kurdish statebuilding in Iraq.

2.2 Overview

State-building theory is an interdisciplinary field that combines facets of political science, economics and international relations, among other fields. It is a theory about the formation and creation of states; about what causes the successful formation of a state and about what constitutes and defines a state. Therefore, statebuilding theory is standing on the philosophical shoulders of social contract philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes. He famously defined the state as having a monopoly on legitimate power, that helps mankind escape from the infamous war of every man against every man (Fukuyama, 2004, p. 1). Looking at the modern world, it has become much more than that; in some parts of the worlds this definition of a state does not exist and in others it has become much more. Now, states are not just about the monopoly on power and the provision of security to its citizens, but also about supplying other things like education and health care. What constitutes a state, or 'successful' statebuilding, has to do with a state's ability to use institutions to provide goods or services for its citizens. Aside from that, a state's legitimacy is also something that matters to what we see as successful statebuilding.

Although statebuilding's philosophical roots date back centuries ago, some of its most important works were published not long ago. The most important authors of the last century arguably have been Francis Fukuyama and Charles Tilly, who were greatly influenced by Max Weber. I will mostly be using Tilly's work to create hypotheses to explain statebuilding in Iraqi Kurdistan.

"War made the state, and the state made war" is perhaps Charles Tilly's best-known academic quote. Despite being known for work on various topics, Tilly's work on statebuilding theory remains one of his most well-known scholarly contributions. Tilly wrote extensively about this topic in several books and articles. Most famous is his 1975's book, that is called *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Tilly, 1975). Tilly investigates the role of war in the formation of states in Western Europe, specifically for the period between 1500 and 1900. He elaborates on the process of how violence and war-making, but also the preparation for war, contribute to the formation of nation-states.

Tilly's statebuilding theory provides a framework for understanding the processes and dynamics involved in the development of states. Specifically, he investigated variations in state capacity for European states. He inspired a large body of scholarship which has been named the bellicist theory of state making (Spruyt, 2017, p. 73). In the bellicist theory, higher levels of warfare create more centralized states with a higher state capacity. Thus, wars can be a great stimulus to centralize state power and to build institutional capacity. This gives the impression that the 2003 Invasion, the Iraq War and impact on the Kurdish part of Iraq may be explainable through the lens of Tilly's bellicist statebuilding theory.

In *War Making and State Making as Organized Crime*, Tilly describes the variations in European state-building (Ertman, 2017, p. 56). He identifies a number of factors that should lead to a higher state capacity: the creation and maintenance of large standing armies, a reliance on land taxes to finance the military and a territory populated by great landlords or by distinct religious groups. Half a decade later he followed up this work with *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 900-1990* (p. 57). In this book he seeks to incorporate socioeconomic aspects into his war-centred analysis, expanding the scope of his argument. He explicitly aims to move beyond dominant perspectives of state formation and structure (Pavone, n.d., p. 1). He argues that two factors explain state form and evolution. The first one is the concentration and combination of capital and coercion within the state. Second is the interplay of war-making states on the international stage of world politics. The preparation for war drives rulers to develop necessary infrastructure for elements like taxation, supplies and administration (p. 2). With this step judiciaries, bureaucracies and other institutions are seen as byproduct of war preparation. In regions where there is significant capital present but where coercive authority lacks, rulers rely on hiring mercenaries who do the fighting for them. When capital is lacking, rulers use coercion to gain resources from their population. Tilly notes that some states also use a mix of purchased force and national armies, when the area has a balanced amount of capital and coercion. Over time, the military superiority of capital-coercive states leads to the model of a nation state. Therefore, a difference in accumulation and concentration of capital and coercion explains the emergence of different state forms. The waging of inter-state war leads to the convergence of the national state model.

2.3 Tilly's model expanded

The applicability of Tilly's statebuilding model beyond its original context in Western Europe has been a subject of extensive scholarly debate, with some arguing for its universal applicability while others argue the contrary (Botea & Taylor, 2008, p. 27). This research aims to contribute to that discussion by adapting the notions of statebuilding theory to the context of Kurdish statebuilding in Iraq. This is unique because I apply the theoretical notions of statebuilding to a de facto state and autonomous region. By applying it to a non-European region in a different timeframe, this thesis seeks to enrich the theoretical landscape of statebuilding scholarship. Therefore, the next section will expand upon the scholarly debate about contemporary statebuilding in non-European contexts.

Tilly's bellicist theory expanded to other geographical regions and other circumstances brings various findings. Thies (2004) aimed to understand the relationship between statebuilding and inter- and intrastate rivalry. Of course, Tilly's work was based on European states before 1900, in a period where the bulk of conflicts were simple interstate wars. But nowadays the amount of interstate wars is not what they have been, and the world did see an increase in intrastate conflicts and wars. Thies examines the effect of internal and external rivals on the extractive capacity of state development in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, North Africa and Asia, from 1975 to 2000 (2004, p. 53). His conclusion is that external and internal rivals increase the extractive capacity of the state in a way that is similar to what Tilly wrote about early modern European states. Given that state expansion also seems to appear when actors are dealing with internal rivals, there are grounds to suspect that Hussein's central Iraqi government rivalry with the Kurds may have contributed to a further development of the Kurdish statehood. This suspicion is being reinforced by Thies' conclusion: he notes that internal political rivals fail to affect the process of statebuilding while internal ethnic rivals cause states to increase its extraction of tax revenues from society and thus increased coercion (p. 68). Therefore, the threat of an internal ethnic rival becomes similar to an external rival (p. 61). This is because in ethnic conflicts, a ruler's base of mobilization is limited to members of his own ethnic group. Appeals to members of other ethnic groups are either impossible or very difficult. Because of

that, most ethnic conflicts become primarily military struggles, in which a victory is determined by the complete physical control of specific disputed territory. At this stage, the character of an ethnic conflict in intrastate war becomes similar to what a ruler may face with an external rival in an interstate war. We see this in the chosen case where the Kurds and Iraqis are fighting over territory in an intrastate war. Kurds are a distinct ethnic group, while Iraqis are of Arab ethnicity. Therefore, I consider the chosen case as an example of an internal ethnic rival, which I hypothesize may lead to increased Kurdish statehood.

This increase, however, should not be seen as very similar to the European development that Tilly writes about (Thies, 2004, p. 69). Nowadays there are aspects of the world that were not present in early modern Europe, which prevents states from developing into stronger states. These processes are the fact that rivalry may not be as big a threat equivalent to war, preventing an extensive development of the state capacity (p. 69). Furthermore, there are international norms that are being enforced by organizations that prevent the resort to full-scale war (p. 69). Secondly, the fact that developing states have not developed into strong states is partially because they are so young. Despite the many similarities between early modern Europe and the contemporary developing world, studies have not yet shown a similar increase in statebuilding. Nonetheless, one can conclude that Tilly's mechanism is applicable to other regions and kinds of war: interstate war has led to increased statehood in developing countries, just not as quickly or extensive as in premodern Europe.

Thies also published an article on war and statebuilding specifically adapted to Latin America (Thies, 2005, p. 451). He argues that focusing on intrastate rivals rather than just interstate war and interstate rivalry allows researchers to investigate the impact of war and rivalry on the development of Latin American states. Similarly, this thesis also uses the perspective of investigating how the Iraqi Kurds as internal rival with the Iraqi central government influenced Kurdish statehood. Thies (2005), uses statistical methods to arrive at a conclusion where he notes that the evidence shows that external and internal rivals affected the Latin America states in a similar way to the general nature of Tilly's bellicist theory. Therefore, he argues that Tilly's model should be generalized for application to the developing world (p. 463). Interestingly, he finds that internal rivals may reduce the state's extractive capacity, due to the destructive nature of civil wars, which often just causes damage to the economy. Here, the Kurdish case seems to be at odds with the literature: I hypothesize an increase in Kurdish statehood due to their part in the fighting, though Thies found that in Latin America, internal rivals tend to negatively affect statehood. The analysis will show if the case of Iraqi Kurdistan fits within the scholarly debate in which Tilly's model is being adapted to different regions and moments in time.

It is interesting to see that despite the fact that there are many scholars and studies who illustrate how inter- and intrastate war has contributed to statebuilding across the globe, it is still a highly debated topic. Spruyt argues that specific relations between war and statemaking are complex and not necessarily positively correlated (2017, p. 93). Sometimes frequent warfare may lead to a stronger state, other times it weakens or even signifies the end for a state. That is why when studying the impact of war on the state, I want to go beyond a broad overview on multiple states and examine how the war in Iraq impacted the Kurdish Autonomous Region. The chosen case-specific design not only allows me to research what the impact was, but how one variable influenced the other. Spruyt makes further contributions to the bellicist theory debate: the kind of warfare has different effects on state organization (p. 94). For example, the existence and distribution of small arms provide cheap means of exercising violence, which makes centralization more difficult. It also altered how warfare can translate into state-making. Spruyt observes that the world has been

relatively peaceful since World War II, certainly among major powers. Therefore, the absence of interstate war led to other forms of statebuilding likely becoming more important.

Applying Tilly's theory to other regions is also what Botea and Taylor did in their research: they took Tilly's theory and applied it to Vietnam and Afghanistan (2008, p. 28). Their goal was to explain variation in state capacity among war prone states in the developing world. Additionally, they wanted to explore how Tilly's causal mechanism would function in contemporary warfare. The results they found were that war can lead to state formation in the contemporary world, outside of Europe. They identified two conditions that seem to be a prerequisite for this: the presence of a core ethnic group that already has a historical legacy (p. 28). Secondly, the war needs to be a revolution that has a unifying ideology. That way nationalism is combined with a strong political ideology, which they consider beneficial for the process of statebuilding. These results emerged from the comparison of Vietnam and Afghanistan; in Vietnam, war positively contributed to statebuilding while war in Afghanistan caused harm to the process of statebuilding. In both cases, the rulers increased extracting resources from society because of the outbreak of violent conflict, as Tilly would have predicted (p. 48). However, in Afghanistan, there was a failure in extraction and repression of the population and their resources. In Vietnam there was more cultural homogeneity and an ideological, revolutionary movement. Under these specific conditions, warfare involving both external and internal enemies can serve to strengthen, rather than fracture, the state.

I would argue that the case of this research is suitable for the theory. The Kurdish legacy dates back thousands of years and the Kurds have been involved in countless conflicts. The Kurdish history in the Middle Eastern region dates back approximately 3.500 years ago, which makes their historical legacy evident (Knappert, 1993, p. 67). Supplementary, I'd argue that the 2003 invasion of Iraq had a role for ideology. Of course, an event like this has many exploratory angles. In this case I would emphasize that the Americans invaded Iraq to remove a brutal dictator and spread democracy in the country (Hinnebusch, 2007, p. 210). Of course, there are many other facets and interests that played a role in this, but the Americans utilized ideology to construct a narrative to legitimize the invasion (p. 211). When the Kurds joined forces with the Americans, they became part of this ideological skirmish. The Iraq War was based on the ideology that dictatorships are better off replaced as democracies and that it was strategically necessary for the Americans to do this, also because they considered it to be morally right (Fisher, 2016). Additionally, the Kurdish fight for self-determination can also be seen as a revolutionary fight in which ideology plays a role. The Kurdish nationalism functions as an ideology which brings together Kurdish communities across several countries to achieve the same goal: Kurdish self-determination (Dalay, 2015). The fighting of the Kurds in the American invasion had a role for ideology because of the role for Kurdish nationalism ideology as well as the ideology that the Americans used to legitimize the invasion.

The two factors that Botea & Taylor consider to be beneficial state-making as the result of war-making are the presence of ethnic homogeneity and the combination of war and revolution (2008, p. 27). In other words, ideology must play some role in the conflict. Of these two, ethnic homogeneity is the most important factor. In 2003, America invaded Iraq with a narrative that contained an extensive role of ideology (Fisher, 2016). This fact combined with Iraqi Kurdistan's ethnic homogeneity makes it plausible that warmaking in Iraq may have contributed further to the development of statebuilding of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Based on statebuilding theory, I hypothesize that the American intervention Iraq was beneficial for the Kurdish statebuilding in Iraq. In other words, I hypothesize that the conflict and the fighting have been beneficial for the state capacity of the Kurds. The concept state capacity can be divided in four dimensions: extractive, steering, legitimation and coercive (Chinese Economic Studies, 2015, p. 28).

Extractive capacity refers to a state's capacity to mobilize economic resources. The state's ability to mobilize and extract financial resources is the core of state capacity and the foundation for the state's ability to realize its other capabilities (p. 30). Coercive capacity refers to the capacity of a state to employ violent means, organizations and threats to maintain its ruling states (p. 28). It is about national defence construction and about maintaining social order while punishing acts of violations of the law. In order to assess the status and development of the Kurdish state capacity, I will disaggregate state capacity into two of its component parts: coercive capacity and economic capacity. In order to analyse the extractive capacity, I will analyse how the American invasion had an influence on the Kurdish access to the natural resource of oil. Analysing how the invasion changed the Kurdish ability to mobilize this economic resource gives an important indicator of their overall state strength. In order to analyse the coercive capacity, the Peshmerga will be analysed. The Peshmerga are the military force of the Iraqi Kurds. Therefore, by assessing the coercive capacity of the Kurds, I will use the term military capacity. Analysing how the American invasion influenced the Kurdish extractive and coercive capacity gives an image of how the Americans influenced the overall state capacity. Coercion and capital are the two main concepts of Tilly's statebuilding theory and by assessing the Kurdish state capacity in this two-fold way, these two concepts also constitute the core of this thesis' analysis.

2.4.1 Military capacity

Now that I have expanded upon statebuilding theory, this section aims to elaborate the causal mechanism of how military capacity plays a role in statebuilding. Furthermore, it is important to address how to conceptualize the various concepts that are mentioned in both the theory and this research. Statebuilding theory offers a convenient perspective on the importance of the military for the state.

Tilly's work on statebuilding has extensively been used, studied and adopted to contemporary contexts in the last few decades. As was the case for Leander, who argued that Tilly's war-makes-states argument continues to be the core for analysing the relationship between violence and state building (Leander, 2003, p. 14). Interestingly, Tilly notes that states were produced as an unintended consequence, by the competition among those who hold the concentrated control over coercion, capital and territory (p. 4). He names three processes that led to modern day state creation; first is the process whereby war-making pushes political leaders to establish a degree of centralised control over the means of coercion and finance. Second is the process whereby this drive to concentration led to the state apparatuses to administer the increasingly centralised means of coercion and capital. Simply said this means that concentrating capital and military coercion raises the necessity for a functioning tax and administrative system. The concentration of coercion and capital and the administrative development led to a third process. It led to the fact that certain groups in society made a claim on the state (p. 5). Tilly called this the central paradox of European state formation. Pursuing war and military capacity led to civilianisation of government and domestic politics. He observed how states were eventually formed as a by-product of the concentration of capital and coercion.

Another author who used Tilly's work in a different context was Herbst. He wrote about the process of statebuilding and war-making, adapted to the context of Africa (Herbst, 1990, p. 117). He compared the role of war in Africa with the role of war in Europe (p. 118). He noted that the state shaping interstate wars that were present in Europe, were not present in Africa (p. 123). Because of the absence of this kind of war, there is no concentration of capital and coercion, which are the things, according to Tilly, that lead to state formation as a by-product. Despite Africa seeming destined for war in the post-colony period, there have not been involuntary boundary changes in the

decades after independence (p. 123). Of course, there have been conflicts, but those were never about the conquest of territory. These conflicts were of a different nature, civil war for example. Herbst concludes that the absence of this state shaping war is the reason that the states in Africa have not become strong.

Work from authors like Herbst raise the question if the case of Iraqi Kurdistan is applicable to the notions of statebuilding theory. Despite the fact that this conflict is not a classic interstate war like those discussed in Tilly's work on the period of European state formation, for the Kurds it is a conflict that is about the protection and ownership of their territory. With 30 million people worldwide, the Kurds are too large a group to treat them as a politically uniform group. However, the Kurds in Iraq overwhelmingly favour independence (Rubin, 2016, p. 27). Because this is their goal and because the conflict for them is about controlling the territory, I consider this case suitable for the theory. This is being reinforced by authors like Botea & Taylor and Thies, whose work leads to the conclusion that Tilly's causal model can also function outside of Europe and in a different time period, under different circumstances of war.

Weber has been of great influence on statebuilding theory. He is well-known for his definition of the state: a human community that successfully claims the monopoly of legitimate physical force within a given territory (Weber, 1919). Because this definition, just like more classic approaches by the contract philosophers, puts so much emphasis on legitimate violence and security, military capacity is a crucial aspect of what is to be a state. Therefore, military capacity plays a substantial role in this research. State capacity can be defined according to a state's ability to respond to challenges to its authority by using force (Hendrix, 2010, p. 274). At the core of this definition, like the one from Weber, lies the power of the national military. Because the military is still the primary tool of a state to respond to challenges to its existence and authority. In statebuilding theory, military capacity is one of the categories / dimensions that can be analysed to assess the status of the state capacity of an actor (Cárdenas, 2010, p. 3; Hendrix, 2010, p. 273). If a state's military capacity increases, then so does its state strength and capacity.

The next step is to connect all of the above theoretical knowledge to the American invasion of 2003. It is important to analyse how this event influenced the Kurdish ability to concentrate their coercion, to speak in Tillyan terms. In other words, it is key to assess how the invasion influenced the Kurdish ability to concentrate and expand their military capacity, in order to establish more control over their territory. Actors that are involved in statebuilding need a variety of skills and provisions to achieve their goals, like financial and managerial skills as well as military training (Myerson, 2017). In other words, good weaponry and training of military units is essential to establish a strong military capacity. Aside from recruiting and paying troops, the military also needs the provision of weapons (Tilly, 1990, p. 81). If an actor's military capacity is strong, then it enables the coercion over a certain territory. If a state's military is strong enough, this prevents the outbreak of new violence. A state's military must be strong enough so it can provide public security and enhance the rule of law (Call, 2008, p. 62). The strength of the military allowing for a strong coercion over the territory therefore is influenced by the provision of military supplies. How the Americans played a role in this regarding the Kurds in Iraq is simple. The American invasion must have improved the Kurdish military in order to reinforce their state capacity. This could, for example, have been done by supplying the Kurds with weapons or by training them militarily. In statebuilding theory, the ability of a ruler to create armies more powerful than those of internal and external rivals is central to the process of statemaking (Botea & Taylor, 2008, p. 33). Therefore, I hypothesize that the Americans increased the Kurdish ability to create an army to become stronger than its opponents by having provided weapons and training to the Kurdish military.

Here, it is good to emphasize that I am not studying an interstate war like Tilly did, but the theoretical framework has shown that his causal mechanism is applicable and perhaps present in a case like Iraqi Kurdistan. This is built on Botea & Taylor's notions that war-making may lead to statemaking if the conflict contains elements of a revolutionary war as well as the presence of ethnic homogeneity with a historical legacy, which are both present in the case (Botea & Taylor, 2008, p. 27). This is being reinforced by Thies' notion that the extractive capacity of a state may increase when the actor in question is battling an internal rival (2004, p. 68). In that case, intrastate war may contain a mechanism in which war-making leads to statebuilding, just like interstate wars as portrayed in Tilly's work.

All in all, this leads to the first hypothesis:

1. *American provision of training and weapons increased the Peshmerga's military capacity, leading to increased Kurdish state capacity.*

2.4.2 Resources

Iraq is the second largest crude oil producer of the Middle East, just after Saudi Arabia (Alfarra, 2023). Despite that, Iraq is one of the poorest countries in the region. Quite a portion of oil lies in Kurdish soil: around 45 billion barrels are estimated to be in the ground of the Kurdish Regional Government. To make this master's thesis feasible and because oil is such a quintessential part of the economy in the Middle Eastern region, I will mainly focus on oil when talking about the role of resources in this conflict.

Statebuilding theory offers a three-stage mechanism about how war contributes to state formation (Botea & Taylor, 2008, p. 28). Resources play a substantial role in this. The first process is the development of administrative capacity to take financial resources from the population and the economy. This is followed by the creation of coercive agencies, which mostly refers to the military. In the third and final part of this process strong national identities are created among the population. This case does show that there are many processes going on that work towards a state and because this process has been influenced by the American invasion, it is important to assess what role the resources played in this. This is mostly because the resource variable can explain the military variable, which brings us back to what Tilly wrote about the connection between coercion and capital. That means that this thesis tests two of the most important factors in the process of statebuilding theory, namely the role of resources and the role of the military. On the one side because these two are the most important, on the other side because this keeps it feasible for the scope of a master's thesis.

As stated in 2.2.1: For Tilly, statebuilding is very much about the concentrated control over coercion and capital (Leander, 2003, p. 14). Tilly even considers that statebuilding and states are a by-product of the historical struggle over resources (Tilly, 1985, p. 183). It is important then to stress that war-making, resource extraction, state making, and protection are interconnected concepts according to Tilly (p. 182). Tilly's causal argument goes as follows: a ruler makes war until the point that he becomes dominant in a substantial territory. This war-making leads to increasing the extraction of the means of war: soldiers, arms, lodging, transport, food and the money to finance it all. The increased war-making capacity then also increases the capacity to extract resources. If this is successful, it includes the elimination, neutralization and cooperation of the rivals of this ruler and its political entity. As a result of all these activities, an organization is created in which there are also tax-collection agencies, courts, police forces, etcetera. And thus, it led to state making as a result of the struggle over resources. Tilly says that war-making likewise leads to state making through the expansion of the military organization. He says this because this expansion includes the war

industries, supporting bureaucracies, the increase of schooling, and education. When a political entity carries out these activities, it checks potential rivals and opponents. As it has enemies, the state also forms alliances with certain social classes. In these alliances resources are loaned, technical service is provided and there is assistance to ensure the compliance of the population. In return for this, alliance members help protect each other against their own rivals and enemies. This is relevant for the case in this master's thesis, since there is cooperation between the Americans and the Kurds of Iraq. The reason that this hypothesis is about oil is because resources are essential to achieving an effective military, as described by statebuilding theory. Iraqi Kurdistan has huge amounts of oil in the ground (Rimscha & Rogg, 2007, p. 832). Unsurprisingly, oil is the main source of revenue for the Kurdish Regional Government (Jaff, 2023). I hypothesize that the American invasion of 2003 influenced the Kurdish relationship with and access to oil. Places like the oil-rich Kirkuk, have been fought over by the American-Kurdish alliance (Rimscha & Rogg, 2007, p. 824). In the analysis, I will look extensively for examples in which it becomes clear that the fighting in 2003 increased the Kurds control of oil rich regions. Statebuilding theory hypothesizes that the availability of extractable resources is one of the core aspects that lead to successful statebuilding (Bakka, 1996, p. 303). The availability of extractable resources is determined by the ownership of certain territories that contain extractable resources. If the invasion is to be positive for the Kurds extracting resources to further their state capacity, then it must have led to the expansion of territory. Therefore, I hypothesize that the American invasion increased the Kurdish access to resource-rich territory. Additionally, Bakka mentions that statebuilding is possible if the resources are extractable. Having territory that contains natural resources does not automatically mean that one can extract these to further the economic gains. In order to be able to extract oil, technical resources are needed which the Kurds historically do not have (Mills, 2016, p. 7). For the arrival of foreign companies, a stable political climate is necessary. I hypothesize that the 2003 invasion made Iraqi Kurdistan a more stable place which enabled the possibility that oil companies arrived to further the Kurdish ability to extract resources in order to reinforce state capacity.

The improved extraction of resources by the Kurds may be observed through statistics on the Kurdish oil output. The period between 2005 and 2014 maintained a decent level of security and even economic growth and development (Mills, 2016, p. 3). This included progress in furthering their oil industry, laws regarding oil and gas were implemented and deals with international companies were made. I hypothesize that the American invasion had a positive effect on the Kurdish oil industry.

In this research I will strive to explain if the conflict in this war actually leads to further statebuilding, with a specific focus on the role of America's invasion. Because Tilly sees state formation as a by-product of the struggle over resources, analysing resources is crucial in this case. Therefore, this section brings forward the following and second hypothesis:

2. The American invasion led to the expansion of Kurdish territory and increased access to natural resources, increasing the Kurdish extractive capacity, leading to increased state capacity.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the methodological tools I will use to answer the research question and evaluate the hypotheses will be presented. First, the case study design will be presented, followed by an elaboration on the method that I will use, which is process tracing. What remains is the operationalisation as well as a critical reflection on the limitations and other considerations on the chosen research method.

3.2 Case study design

In order to investigate the Kurdish aspect of the 2003 American Invasion and its influence on Kurdish statehood in Iraq, this research adopted a qualitative research design. More specifically, I use a single case study approach applying process tracing.

According to Gerring, a case study is defined as an intensive study of a single unit (or small number of units), for the purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units (2006, p. 37). There are some advantages to this approach. Gerring states that a case connotes a spatially delimited phenomenon, observed at a single point in time or over a period of time (p. 19). The advantage here is that it allows the researcher to perform an in-depth study on a single phenomenon, rather than having countless units of analyses which stands in the way of detail. The spatially bounded phenomenon that I work with in this thesis is the Kurdish statehood in Iraq, and how this has been influenced by the American invasion. I explained the causal pathway that lies between these two concepts. By having drafted two hypotheses based on statebuilding theory, I have two causal pathways between the variables that may be able to explain the case, and why it varies. Single case studies can provide a vital contribution to theory-testing in social science (Dadalaury & Ulriksen, 2014, p. 1). However, since this is a single case study, I am realistic about the types of contributions that will be made. Any resulting claims from this study should be considered of low external validity, because the amount of data is low and the complexity of the case in comparison is high. Dadalaury & Ulriksen state that single case studies contribute to strengthening our theoretical understanding of causal explanations, as well as deepening knowledge of specific cases (2014, p. 15). Conclusively, this research deepens the knowledge about the Kurdish aspect of the Iraq war, as well as investigating if the causal pathway derived from statebuilding functioned as expected.

3.3 Case selection

Case selection is an important part of research in order to select the right method for the right research objective. According to Gerring, the process of case selection involves consideration of the cross-case characteristic of a group of potential cases (2006, p. 12). He notes that chosen cases are to be identified by their status, which may be extreme, deviant, and so forth, relative to a population of other cases. Here I made the comparison with the Kurdish communities in Syria, Turkey and Iran. So, because of this, the Iraqi case stands out. I will investigate how the 2003 American invasion influenced the Kurdish statehood in Iraq.

When researching the impact of the invasion on Kurdish statebuilding in Iraq, I consider the case as a deviant case because of the comparison with the broader context of Kurdish populations and political entities in the region. Gerring defines a deviant case as being a case that demonstrates a surprising value, by reference to some general understanding of a topic like a theory or common sense (2006, p. 105). The Kurds in Iraq contain some notable distinctions compared to the Kurds in Turkey, Syria and Iran. Kurdish statehood in Iraq is in a further stage than in those countries; the Iraqi Kurdish region even serves as an example for Kurdish communities in other countries (Congressional Research Service, 2019, p. 1). In recent years the Iraqi Kurds have boosted their

regional and international profile, by means of extensive expansion of political, trade and investment relationships. The Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq was largely successful in providing for the population's welfare (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 168). Despite challenges of aggressive behaviour from Turkey and manipulation of internal affairs by Iran, the autonomy of the Kurdish Regional Government is relatively secure (Balanche, 2023). The Kurds in Turkey, Iran and Syria do not have a similar autonomous region that has these successes. Because we are talking about the same ethnic group in different countries, the Iraqi Kurds come out as a deviant case because their extent of autonomy and success is so different compared to the Kurds in other countries; it is a surprising value. This does deserve some extent of nuance, because the Iraqi Kurds do face several challenges like the internal divide between the PUK and the KDP and political struggles with the central government. This thesis seeks to explain how this deviant value came to be by looking at the role of the 2003 invasion and how it may have contributed to becoming this surprising value.

3.4 Method of analysis: process tracing

To run qualitative research in the case of Iraqi Kurdistan, this thesis will make use of causal analysis by doing a process tracing analysis. Beach and Pedersen's work on process-tracing is widely known and used in the social sciences. Studying causal mechanisms with process-tracing methods enables the researcher to make strong within-case inferences about the causality whereby outcomes are produced, enabling the researcher to update the confidence in the validity of the used theory and its mechanism (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 2). Process-tracing methods are particularly useful to study causal mechanisms in single-case research designs. They define process-tracing by its ability to trace causal mechanisms; it involves attempts to identify the intervening causal process, what goes on between the different variables (p. 1). Therefore, it goes beyond correlation to peek into the black box of causality. They argue that process-tracing methods are the only method that provides the possibility to study those causal mechanisms (p. 2).

There are three distinct types of process-tracing: theory-testing, theory-building and explaining-outcome (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 3). The differences lie in several aspects, including whether they are centred around the theory or the case, the types of inferences that are being made and how they understand causal mechanisms. For this research, I use statebuilding theory's causal model on how war and conflict influenced Kurdish statehood in Iraq. Therefore theory-testing process-tracing is most applicable. Theory-testing process-tracing is defined by Beach & Pedersen as deducing a theory from the existing literature and then tests whether evidence shows that the hypothesized causal mechanism is present in the given case. This allows the researcher to make within-case inferences about whether the mechanism functioned as expected in the case, and whether the mechanism as a whole was present. Therefore, this method will allow me to investigate whether statebuilding is a useful theory to explain the influence of the 2003 American invasion on Kurdish statehood in Iraq. On the one hand, using this method allows me to evaluate statebuilding theory and its notions, on the other hand using process-tracing will offer perspectives on understanding the causal mechanism that is present in the case. This thesis is theory-centric, in which I investigate if the generalizable mechanism of the theory is present in the case. Therefore, this research would classify as a deductive approach (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 9).

3.5 Operationalisation

The process of process-tracing analysis contains dependent and independent variables, and it is important to carefully define and operationalize these concepts. In this study the dependent variable is the Kurdish state capacity in Iraqi Kurdistan. Because the concept of state is such a broad and comprehensive concept, I disaggregate state capacity into two of its component parts, which then become the dependent variable. These are Kurdish ownership of natural resources and Kurdish

military capacity; these two concepts will be analysed to assess the strength of the Kurdish statehood. I consider an increase in those, an increase in Kurdish statehood. The independent variable is the 2003 American invasion of Iraq, this is the treatment that brought extra aspects into the case of which I hypothesize that influenced the dependent variable that is the Kurdish statehood. In the following section, I will define, operationalize and delineate these concepts.

The Kurdish state capacity will be analysed in terms of the above two-fold concept. In addition to collecting numerical data on for example the strength or capacity of the Kurdish army, I will assess and analyse the case in terms of major events and important developments. This approach aligns well with the chosen qualitative research method. Using process-tracing, I will present the data by describing the 2003 Invasion with a focus on the role that the Kurds had to play in it, in order to build an argument as to why it influenced the Kurdish statehood.

3.5.1 State capacity

State capacity refers to the capacity of a state to transform its own preferences and goals into reality (Chinese Economic Studies, 2015, p. 27). There are four major dimensions of state capacity: extractive, steering, legitimation and coercive (p. 28). Coercive capacity refers to the capacity of a state to employ violent means, organization and threats to maintain its ruling status. Extractive capacity refers to a state's capacity to mobilize economic resources. The status of the Kurdish statehood will be analysed by looking at two features Kurdish statehood: their military capacity and their ownership of resources. In this manner, I analyse the Kurdish' coercive capacity and their extractive capacity. These two become the concrete empirically observable aspects upon which to investigate how the 2003 American invasion influenced the Kurdish state capacity. I use these two as measures of the dependent variable because of the empirical link with the conflict. Because it was an armed conflict, military capacity is likely to be a factor that varied. Besides that, the Iraqi ground is rich in oil, especially in the Kurdish part. These two empirical links make it a suitable case for the analysis. Furthermore, In Tilly's work coercion and capital are the two central concepts at the core of statebuilding theory. In this research, military capacity will be used to assess the Kurdish coercion and the access to oil will be used to assess their capital. This way, I have an indicator of economic power and one of military power through which to analyse the strength of Kurdish statehood.

3.5.2 Military capacity

An important part of defining state capacity is a state's ability to repel challenges to its authority (Hendrix, 2010, p. 274). The centrepiece of a state's repressive capabilities is the national military. The strength of the national military dictates whether a state is able to repel challenges to its authority. It is important to note that this is about both internal and external security issues (Savoia & Ken, 2014, p. 443). In the analysis, I will discuss the Kurdish ability in the post-invasion years to repel challenges by using its national military. Any connection to the Americans, may inform the research about how the American invasion influenced the Kurdish ability to repel challenges. For example, this can be examined by analysing how the Americans militarily supported the Kurds and provided them with weapons. Military capacity also will be analysed based on successful involvement in key battles or events. Altogether this creates an image of how the invasion influenced the Kurdish statehood.

3.5.3 Extractive capacity

For an effective monopoly of violence and strong military and police, a state must extract resources (Ottervik, 2013, 10). A state's capacity to mobilize and extract financial resources is the core of state capacity and the foundation for a state's ability to realize any other capacity. In statebuilding theory, this dimension of state capacity is called extractive capacity (Chinese Economic Studies, 2015, p. 28).

Because Iraq and the Kurdish region in particular are so rich in and reliant on oil, I will narrow down the resource concept to oil. It is relevant to the case, and it aligns with the qualitative research design. That means that I hypothesized that the American invasion caused the Kurds to have a better ownership of the oil industry and thus making more money out of it. Empirically, I have to look for evidence which demonstrates that the Kurdish oil industry grew in the wake of or because of the invasion. This can go in multiple ways. The first is the potential expansion of Kurdish territory, which may grant a better access to oil rich territory. The second is the attraction of oil companies, this may be perceived by new oil contracts or the opening of new oil-drilling fields.

3.5.4 The invasion

I hypothesize that the 2003 American Invasion of Iraq influenced the Kurdish statehood. Methodologically spoken, one should regard this as a new set of variables entering the case that influence the dependent variable. In the analysis I will expand on what the American Invasion of Iraq included and what processes were started that included and influenced the Kurds. It is important to assess what new things were brought in that were not there before. A military invasion is quite comprehensive event, with many processes involved. Finding the processes that affected the Kurdish economic and military status is crucial for the two hypotheses that I am evaluating.

There are several events and processes that could fit into this analysis. The first is a direct military event, where Iraqi Kurds were directly involved in the fighting alongside the Americans, for example by carrying out joint operations. But it could also be the Americans supplying the Kurds with weapons, military gear or training. Analysing and identifying major events is also important. A great military victory with Kurdish involvement is also a good sign of strong military capacity, like the mission where Saddam Hussein was captured. This was a large scale, important mission where the Kurds were involved.

For the economic side, it could mean that the invasion gave the Kurds a better access to oil. This could be by obtaining new oil-rich territory, as a result of the invasion. I hypothesized that the Kurds military capacity improved due to the invasion. If their geographical territory increased, then this may have also led to obtaining new oil-rich territory. Besides that, the invasion also profoundly altered the power-balance in the country. By arguing the hypothesis that the Kurdish military capacity increased, I am also arguing that their power in the country increased. This could be the invasion having reduced the power of the central government or, for example, terrorist organisations. I suspect that the removal of Hussein's government improved the regional security and stability. On one hand this may make the country safer, on the other hand it gives more control to the Kurds. I hypothesize that this is beneficial for attracting oil companies to the region. Lastly, any political processes that have been started because of the invasion may have also been of influence. An example of this is the 2005 Kurdish constitution. In the analysis I will explain the American influence on the constitutional process and the link with the independent variables.

3.6 Data collection & time frame

The process-tracing analysis will be conducted by collecting evidence and data from a variety of sources, for example books, scientific articles, news articles and interviews with experts on the topic. This thesis uses primary and secondary sources for the data analysis, to provide a comprehensive analysis of the case. Examples of primary data for this research are American government policies about the operation in Iraq, as well as statistical data to obtain sights of the development of Kurdish statehood before and after the 'treatment' of the 2003 American Invasion. Secondary sources that are to be consulted are academic literature, books and articles. When studying those, I will focus on giving a comprehensive overview of the development of the conflict in which the Kurds and

Americans cooperated when fighting the Iraqis. A wide variety of written sources will be used to extract evidence in the analytical chapters, granting the ability to evaluate the hypotheses.

For evaluation of the hypotheses, it is important to note that I will do a before-and-after analysis. To investigate the influence of a 'treatment' it is important to collect data before and after that treatment. Here the treatment is the American Invasion. The 2003 invasion of Iraq is to be seen as the treatment of the case, which I hypothesize causes the variance in Y. In order to investigate how the American Invasion of Iraq influenced the capacity of the Kurdish Autonomous Region, it is essential to gather data before and after 2003. In the analysis, a brief overview will be given of the Kurdish region in Iraq in the years leading up to the American invasion. Special attention will be given to the Kurdish military and economic situation, through the assessment of the status of the Peshmerga and the Kurdish oil industry. By analysing what the status of Kurdish statehood was before the war and invasion happened, it provides an image of what the baseline status quo was in the region. When describing this baseline of state capacity in Iraqi Kurdistan, I shall focus on its military capacity and its access to natural resources. Of course, those are the hypothesized independent variables that indicate an increase or decrease in state capacity. After establishing what the invasion entailed for the Kurds, I will analyse what the status of the Kurdish region was in the years after the invasion. Again, with special attention to the military and economic situation. With time between the moments of analysis in which the treatment happened, this helps identifying how the invasion influenced the Kurds. Of course, there is the problem of other events also influencing and shaping Kurdish statehood. That is why I will mostly be looking at the outbreak of certain events that caused the hypothesized variance of variables. As a tool of causal inference, focussing on the unfolding of events and the situation over time is a key feature of process tracing (Collier, 2011, p. 824). Collier writes that understanding or a situation is near impossible if one cannot describe the situation at a precise point in time. That is why I chose to analyse the Kurdish statehood in terms of a before and after analysis.

3.7 Reflection

As with any research design, there are always limitations. External validity, for example. Due to this research being about a very specific case in a relatively short amount of time, any results found cannot be directly applied to other cases. They may be able to inform and provide helpful information for understanding other cases, but the causal mechanisms cannot be directly applied. Process-tracing also has its limits. Even though it is one of the most suitable methods for researching causal mechanisms, a theory can never be confirmed with 100 percent certainty (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 21). Because of that, researchers who use process tracing should always be careful in formulating their results and when presenting evidence.

4. Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The following section analyses how the 2003 invasion transpired with regards to the Kurdish community in Iraq. I analyse key events and processes that influenced the Kurdish military, as well as their ownership of the natural resource of oil. Starting out, I describe the situation in the Kurdish Regional Government before the invasion. After a brief history of the Kurds in Iraq, I give an overview of the invasion itself with a focus on the Kurds. To proceed, the argument presents how the Americans influenced the Kurdish military capacity and their ownership of oil. These two variables are seen as an indicator of state capacity, thus allowing me to assess how the invasion impacted the Kurdish statehood overall.

4.2 The Kurds in Iraq: an historical overview

The Kurdish history is so old that the origins are uncertain. What is largely accepted is that they are descendants of various Indo-European tribes, which settled in the Middle Eastern area around 4,000 years ago (Gunter, 2008, p. 3). The name Kurds first appeared when the Arabs applied the name to the mountainous people they Islamized in the region, which was in the 7th century. Early in the 16th century they fell under Ottoman rule, and in 1880 the Kurds carried out their first revolt against the Ottoman Empire. Some scholars consider this the first indication of Modern Kurdish Nationalism (p. 3). The fact that the Kurds have such a large population and a long history dating back thousands of years ago, makes one wonder why they do not possess their own nation state.

During World War I, American President Woodrow Wilson declared that the non-Turkish minorities of the Ottoman Empire should be granted the right of autonomous development (Gunter, 2008, p. 4). In the wake of the war, the Treaty of Sevres was signed. This treaty, that was drafted in 1920, provided local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish area. It even went as far as naming the possibility that the Kurdish people in the future might be granted independence from Turkey. However, in the following years Atatürk's Turkey rose quickly, which altered the entire situation. The successive and definitive Treaty of Lausanne, which was signed in 1923, recognized the modern Republic of Turkey without any special provisions for the Kurds. In the decades after Atatürk's creation of a secular and purely Turkish state, Kurdish revolt was frequent (p. 5).

The Kurdish political situation in the Middle East therefore is largely shaped by Western Allies because of their role in the drafting of the Treaties of Lausanne and Sèvres. Perhaps the most important event in this history is the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement (Gunter, 2008, p. 11). This was a secret agreement between the French and the British, to divide the Fertile Crescent and Mesopotamia between French and British rule (Samir, 2022). The Fertile Crescent contains the entire geography of Kurdistan. The land there is very rich in, for example, natural resources and agriculture. Because of that, the great powers both wanted power over the region, France and Britain were even considering sharing it. Which peoples historically lived in these regions was not something they took into account. The eventual artificial borders that were drafted because of the agreement did not consider national, religious and cultural characteristics adequately. This generated endless conflicts, including the Kurdish question. The territory that was historically inhabited by the Kurds was divided over Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran.

Saddam Hussein's Anfal campaign in 1987 and 1988 caused genocide, sometimes in the form of chemical attacks against the Kurds in Iraq (Gunter, 2008, p. 14). The Anfal campaign was launched as the culmination to end Kurdish aspirations for greater autonomy and independence (Hiltermann, 2008). The Iran-Iraq war caused the Kurds to rebel against the Iraqi government and to form an alliance with Iran (p. 3). This was considered treason by the Iraqis and the Anfal campaign was

launched as a revenge (p. 2). After the Gulf War in 1991 and the failure of the subsequent Kurdish uprisings, a mass flight of Kurdish refugees took place. They mostly fled to the mountains, which led to the United States creating a safe haven and a no-fly zone in which a de facto Kurdish state began to develop in northern Iraq. This was an important step towards Kurdish autonomy and self-determination. It even led to the United Nations condemning the oppression of the Kurds, which is an important symbol of official international mention and protection. The Kurdish de facto state, however, was divided between the KDP and the PUK, which led to a civil war. This was ended in 1998 after mediation by the United States.

In sum, the current political situation in which the Kurds find themselves has several causes. Despite a long history in the region and a large population, the Kurds were not accounted for in the Treaty of Lausanne and the Sykes-Picot agreement. They pulled the shortest straw in the political processes of the creation of new states in the Middle East and the drawing of borders and therefore there exists no independent Kurdistan today.

4.3 Before the invasion

In order to investigate the influence of the invasion on Kurdish statehood, I will first assess what the status of Iraqi Kurdistan was in the years before the invasion. Therefore, in the next section the status of the Kurdish oil industry and military will be assessed in the years leading up to 2003.

4.3.1 Military

The Peshmerga are the main Kurdish military entities in Iraqi Kurdistan. They have always been the main military force of the Kurdish Regional Government, and they have been involved in countless conflicts and wars, like Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Iraqi-Kurdish wars and the Iran-Iraq War, just to name a few (Lortz, 2005). The Peshmerga always played an important role in the Kurdish struggle for autonomy and self-defence, during which they faced many challenges. One of the main aspects that has always limited the military power of the Iraqi Kurds is their internal division (p. 63). The Iraqi Kurds have been divided politically for quite some time, between the KDP and the PUK (Gunter, 1996, p. 240). Because of that, the Peshmerga has also been divided along the lines of this political separation between the two parties. This tension heightened in the Kurdish Civil War, that lasted from 1995 to 1998. During this civil war, the KDP Peshmerga fought against the PUK Peshmerga directly (Lortz, 2005, p. 63). Eventually this conflict was resolved in 1998 by a ceasefire, which has been backed by the United States (p. 64). During the Kurdish civil war, 3,000 to 4,000 Kurdish fighters and civilians died, and many others were displaced (Hama & Salih, 2023, p. 309). Besides that, the Kurdish Region's economy suffered huge damage and the fighting also resulted in the closure of the parliament and the establishment of two separate administrative zones, one controlled by the PUK and one controlled by the KDP.

The bottom line is that this internal political divide historically has always been detrimental for the strength of the Iraqi Kurds, also with regards to their military. The fact that they were having internal fights, rather than being able to respond to challenges as a unified Peshmerga leads to the notion that the Kurdish military strength in this period was quite weak. Throughout the second half of the 20th century, the Kurdish internal conflict was a substantial factor in diminishing the overall combat strength of the Peshmerga (Lortz, 2005, p. 2)

Aside from the obstacle of the internal division, it is important to assess the Kurds' ability to respond to challenges by using military force. Even though the Kurds have been split between the KDP and PUK since 1964, there was one time where they were able to unite (Aziz & Cottey, 2021, p. 231). This was in 1988, when Saddam Hussein launched the Anfal campaign in order to annihilate the Kurds. This caused the Kurds to unite against their common enemy, under the name of a joint PUK-KDP

Kurdistan National Front (Lortz, 2005, p. 56). Unified, they were able to gain some success like seizing military centres and towns throughout the Kurdish part of Iraq, partially due to the support of Iran. However, the Iraqis began using chemical weapons on the Peshmerga and the Kurds. The Kurds lacked any protective equipment and aside from Peshmerga, Kurdish citizens were also hit by mustard and sarin gas from the Iraqis (p. 57). Eventually, many Kurds and Peshmerga had to flee Iraq altogether. Eventually, 4,000 villages were destroyed, 1.5 million Kurds were displaced and between 150,000 and 200,000 Kurds were killed. This event nearly destroyed Peshmerga combat effectiveness altogether. What remained was a few thousand Peshmerga fighters who used small arms like AK-47s, RPGs and light machine guns to carry out guerrilla tactic warfare (p. 58). Eventually, in 1991 the Americans intervened by installing a no-fly zone in Northern Iraq, to protect the Kurds (Alaaldin, 2021). The creation of this no-fly zone is also the event that led to the creation of the Kurdish Regional Government (Owtram, 2017). This intervention is seen as one of the best humanitarian interventions in recent history (Alaaldin, 2021). It staved off a genocide, and it allowed the Kurds to protect and provide services to their civilians. The intervention of the Americans was needed for the Kurds to be safe in Iraq.

This section illustrated that the Kurdish military was weak in the years before the millennium. The Kurds were politically divided in two, because of the clash between the PUK and the KDP. This division also expressed itself in the military, leading to a fractured and weakened Peshmerga. At the low point it even led to a civil war where Iraqi Kurds were fighting and killing each other. Additionally, the example of the Anfal campaign and the no-fly zone functioned to exemplify the fact that the Kurds were not able to protect themselves against outside threats, like the one from the Iraqis and the genocidal attacks. They were not able to use their military to respond to challenges, they needed the Americans to intervene. Therefore, for this section I conclude that the military capacity in this era of Iraqi Kurdistan was weak.

4.3.2 Oil

After the above section on the Kurdish rocky road that was the 1980s and 1990s, it may come as no surprise that during the era before the American invasion, the economic state of the Kurdish Regional Government was weak as well. This section will expand upon that. We take oil production as the key aspect to analyse as extractive capacity, in order to assess the general strength of the statehood. In the 1990s, the Kurdish oil industry was not in a good condition because of various reasons.

Firstly, the Kurdish oil industry was suffering because of the sanctions of the United Nations (Mills, 2016, p. 7). Because of the Gulf War and the Anfal Campaign, the United Nations installed sanctions against Iraq starting in 1990 to restrict oil revenue in order to weaken the military (Lopez & Cortright, 2004, p. 91). Because the Kurdish Regional Government is a part of Iraq, these sanctions also had their influence on the Kurds. Because of the sanctions, no international oil company could realistically operate in the region of Iraqi Kurdistan. The sanctions from the United Nations included the suspension of customary trade and financial relations (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1999). The sale of Iraqi oil was restricted, and the country's financial assets were frozen. This was reinforced by the aforementioned internal divide from the PUK and the KDP. Because of that, the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan was politically unclear, which made it more difficult for international oil companies to operate in the region (Mills, 2016, p. 7). At the peak of the PUK and KDP divide, it even led to the aforementioned Kurdish Civil War.

Furthermore, the Kurds themselves did not have the technical or financial resources to make progress regarding the exploration and development of oil in their region (Mills, 2016, p. 7). For

example, there was a lack of underground data regarding the location of oil reserves (Mackertich & Samarrai, 2015, p. 183). There was virtually no seismic data and the data that was available either avoided the mountainous Kurdish region or was quite close to existing Iraqi oil fields. While this is already a substantive obstacle, there was also a lack of service sector. So even if one knew where in Iraqi Kurdistan the oil was, getting access to it was extremely difficult (p. 184). Additionally, there is the geographical issue. Some areas are richer in oil than others and because of that, the Kurds and Iraqis have disputes over certain areas (Mills, 2016, p. 7). One of these, for example, is the city of Kirkuk. In the ground of Kirkuk there is estimated to be 38 billion barrels of oil (Al-Rawi, 2018). It is estimated that around 6% of the world's oil reserves lie in the ground underneath Kirkuk (Hama, 2015, p. 151). Because of this, the Iraqis and Kurds have long been in competition about who is to control Kirkuk. This is reinforced by the fact that it lies exactly between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the federal government territory as the most important of the many disputed territories (Charara, 2018). The city mostly is inhabited by Kurds and Turkmen. Since the 1960s, the Iraqi government has launched multiple campaigns against these groups in order to claim Kirkuk for their themselves. During the 1990s, the Kirkuk oil-area was controlled by the central government, which prevents the Kurds from generating revenue from this oil rich region.

This section portrayed the fact that in the years leading up to the American invasion, the Kurdish access to oil was very limited, which negatively affected the Kurdish economy. This in turn weakens their statehood. This was caused by various factors. The Kurds lacked access to oil-rich regions like Kirkuk and there was a lack of technical and financial resources that hindered the exploration and development of oil. Furthermore, the United Nations' sanctions as well as the internal political divide between the KDP and PUK negatively influenced international oil companies' ability to come to Iraqi Kurdistan.

4.3.3 Sub-conclusion

In this thesis, military capacity and natural resources, specifically oil, are the defining variables for assessing the state capacity of Iraqi Kurdistan. As has been portrayed in the above section, both of these aspects of the Iraqi Kurds were in poor shape, meaning that I consider the Kurdish state capacity weak in the 1990s. This was mostly caused by the internal divide between the PUK and the KDP, the effect of the United Nations' sanction and Hussein's Anfal campaign. In the following section I will expand upon the question of how the American invasion provided opportunities for the Kurds.

4.4 The invasion

The invasion of Iraq by the United States (and its coalition partners) in 2003 marked a turning point in the history of Iraq, but also the wider Middle East region. The military campaign which went under the name of Operation Iraqi Freedom aimed to remove the dictatorial Saddam Hussein from power because of the issue of Weapons of Mass Destruction, the infamous WMDs (Hinnebusch, 2007, p. 209). There has been written more about this in academia than one can read, and the causes and reasons for this invasion have been widely discussed. Eventually, no WMDs were found, 4.400 American troops died, and an estimate of 300,000 Iraqis died (Nawaz & Sagalyn, 2023). This section will focus on what happened on the ground, and the role of the Kurds, as well as the influence that it had on the Kurds in Iraq. But first, I will provide a quick recap of the invasion.

In March 2003, American forces invaded Iraq in order to destroy the WMD's and to end the reign of Saddam Hussein (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). Even though the initial invasion itself was brief, the aftermath eventually led to the Iraq War that lasted until 2011. Officially, the Americans never stated that this had to do with the 9/11 attacks, but in the wake of the terrorist attacks,

United States' President George W. Bush cited the possibility of Hussein acquiring chemical, biological and nuclear weapons (Wong, 2008). On March 19th, Bush announced that coalition forces had begun operations to remove Saddam's regime from power (Rayburn & Sobchak, 2019, p. 81). In various regions of the country, special operations units were conducting operations in order to prepare for the large-scale invasion. Just a few weeks later, on April 9th, American forces fought in Baghdad. On this day the famous statue of Saddam was toppled.

On April 2nd, Lieutenant General William Wallace had a call with Major General James D. Thurman. He asked him "Okay, Bubba, we're here. Now what?" (Rayburn & Sobchak, 2019, p. 111). This short moment was a foreshadowing as well as a significant expression as it shows that the invasion brought many processes and factors that had effects that were not accounted for. When the invasion was launched, there was a sense of optimism among the Americans that it would be a quick and relatively bloodless expedition (Kaplow & Neuman, 2023). The opposite was true, however: it led to a decade of civil war, no weapons of mass destruction were discovered, and it caused the death of more than 300,000 people (Nawaz & Sagalyn, 2023). In the short weeks between the initial invasion and the toppling of the Saddam's statue, the invasion set many processes in motion. The Kurds in Iraq were also greatly affected by the invasion, as will be portrayed. In the following section I will zoom in and expand upon facets of the mission where the Kurds were included, as well as describing the collaboration itself.

4.5 Kurds and Americans cooperating

In April 2002, George Tenet, the director of the CIA met with the Kurdish leaders Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani in Washington (Mokeddem, 2021, p. 584). The result of this meeting was that the Americans accepted the assurances that the Kurds asked for: assistance and support if Hussein were to decide to attack the Kurds. This effectively started the cooperation between the Kurds and Americans. The Peshmerga, who numbered around 100,000 fighters, made the Kurds of high value for the Americans (p. 585).

To give an impression of how the Kurds and Americans cooperated I will discuss Operation Viking Hammer. The goal of this mission was to defeat Ansar al-Islam, a terrorist group situated in the Kurdish part of northeastern Iraq (Peltier, 2005, 29). The Kurds had actually been fighting with Ansar al-Islam for several years before the Americans arrived. It was believed that the camps of Ansar also provided sanctuary for Al-Qaida. Therefore, the Kurds and Americans were easily united in this mission. The fighting only lasted three days and included the use of airstrikes, as well as on the ground fighting, which was mostly done by the Kurds. 350 Americans fought alongside approximately 7,000 Peshmerga (p. 30). For example, the collaboration happened by providing air support and indirect fire as well as assisting with commanding and controlling the troops (Finlayson, 2005, p. 17). One of the Americans also noted that the presence of the American Special Forces led to a significant morale boost for the Peshmerga fighters. During the fight against Ansar al-Islam, the Americans supported the ground troops by launching Tomahawk missiles at enemy targets (Lortz, 2005, p. 65). The Kurdish ground troops were armed with AK-47's and rocket-propelled grenades, among other weaponry (p. 67).

Eventually, Ansar al-Islam was defeated by a joint effort of the Americans and Kurds (Peltier, 2005, p. 30). This mission eliminated a longstanding enemy of the Kurds and made the region more secure for them. Additionally, 7,000 Peshmerga fighters were training alongside the US army in order to be more resistant to Al-Qaeda (Hagood, 2015). In this period the Peshmerga also provided intelligence about Al-Qaeda to the Americans. With the Ansar al-Islam gone, the Kurds focused on securing the

Green Line, the border between the Iraqi part and the Kurdish Regional Government, opening the way for the coalition to be able to secure the north (Finlayson, 2005, p. 17).

Eventually the Ba'ath army was beaten and surrendered, which happened sooner than the Americans expected (Mokeddem, 2021, p. 586). This brought celebrations among the population, but also looting and a lack of order. As this situation was achieved earlier than expected, the coalition forces were unable to maintain security and order. As a solution, the United States relied on the Kurdish leaders to end the looting and maintain local security. Denise Natali, who at the time was an Iraq expert at the National Defense University in Washington, indicated that the Kurds were very reliable allies (Mokeddem, 2021, p. 587). This was being reinforced by the power of local knowledge. Large numbers of Peshmerga forces were placed at the disposal of US officials (p. 588). These soldiers had a facilitating role, which was mainly being put to use because of their knowledge of geographical positions of the region (p. 589).

4.6 Military capacity

As described earlier, the strength of the Peshmerga before the invasion was diminished because of the Kurdish internal divide between the PUK and the KDP. However, the 2003 American invasion generated a sense of urgency with regards to Peshmerga unification (Van Wilgenburg & Fumerton & 2015, p. 2). The KDP and PUK both recognized that if they were to benefit more from a post-Saddam power vacuum, unification could be beneficial for American support, as well as to secure funding from the central Iraqi Government. The outbreak of the conflict presented Hussein as a shared enemy for the PUK and the KDP, which unified them. After the Ba'ath regime collapsed, the KDP and PUK took steps in order to unify their military forces and administrations by signing a Strategic Agreement (Arif, 2022, p. 2). This political settlement prevented both parties from engaging in another conflict (with each other) and laid the groundwork for unifying their divided administrations. An immediate result of this was that the parties were able to support American forces in a more efficient way, for example with the PUK supervising the Kurdish forces in Kirkuk and the KDP commanding the forces in and around Mosul (Van Wilgenburg & Fumerton & 2015, p. 3).

The coming of the Americans also had its influence on the quality of Kurdish combatants themselves. The United States provided training to the Peshmerga starting in the year 2003, increasing their troop strength and thus military capacity (Cancian, 2022, p. 1460). This training was in counterinsurgency tactics rather than modern system tactics for conventional warfare. Although the Peshmerga were valuable allies for the Americans, the Americans were aware of the Kurdish aspiration of having an independent state. Because US officials were worried that an overly competent Peshmerga may lead to an independent Kurdistan, the training was not as extensive as it could have been (p. 1461). The Americans did not want the Kurds to secede from Baghdad, and therefore they trained the Peshmerga to be counterinsurgents. Nonetheless, the Americans did support and cooperate with the Peshmerga, but contained it to a certain extent in order not to cause secession of the Kurds.

One Peshmerga brigade includes around 3,000 fighters (Fliervoet, 2018, p. 15). Between 2003 and 2011, the Americans invested 92 million dollars in order to develop eight Peshmerga brigades (Knights, 2014). Apart from training, the United States and some European countries started to provide arms and equipment to the Kurdish Regional Government to be used by the Peshmerga (Yoshioka, 2020, p. 178). This started in 2003. A concrete example of training happened during Operation Ugly Baby. In 2003, Turkey announced that it would not allow the American invasion to take place on Turkish ground or through Turkish air (Jones, 2005, p. 10). The goal of the operation was to insert large battalions of troops into Iraq (Alger, 2023). During this mission, American soldiers

trained Kurdish Peshmerga soldiers as a reactive force company to any hostile activity (Jones, 2005). This was an important step for the Americans; Turkey's parliament had refused to authorize the deployment of 62,000 American troops from Turkish soil into Iraq (Boudreaux & Zaman, 2003). This was a surprising move considering that Turkey and the United States are allies through NATO. The solution lay in cooperating with the Peshmerga; the northern front against the Iraqi Army consisted of American Special Forces in combination with the Peshmerga (Woodward, 2004, p. 52).

4.7 Balance of power

When analysing the influence of the American invasion on the Kurdish military, it is necessary to consider the balance of power within Iraq. The invasion is considered as a systemic change at the regional level with implications at the international level that has led to a change in the balance of power in the Middle East system (Hinnebusch, 2003, p. 154). It then becomes key to assess what the influence on Iraqi Kurdistan has been. The region saw a decline of the Arab power, and the fundamental balance shifted to non-Arab states like Iran (Cengiz, 2022, p. 326). The fall of Saddam's regime triggered an internal transformation, in which the old security paradigms shifted. This meant that the invasion caused the emergence of Iraq as a weak state, in which sub-state actors emerged, such as Shiite militias and the Kurds. Since 2003, the Iraqi Kurds had more control over their affairs than at any time in Iraq's history (Congressional Research Service, 2019, p. 1). Because of the US-led invasion, the Shiite majority and the Kurds instantly became the dominant factions in Iraq (Rogg & Rimscha, 2007, p. 839). This was being reinforced by the defeat of Ansar al-Islam during operation Viking Hammer, as described earlier in this chapter.

The 2003 invasion of Iraq was beneficial to the power of the Kurdish military because it altered the balance of power within Iraq in favour of the Kurds. The 2003 invasion as an important event marks an essential follow-up to the 1991 Gulf War. The 1991 Gulf War led to the creation of the Kurdish Regional Government (because of the American installed no-fly zone), the US invasion of 2003 propelled the Kurds into the future (Wahab, 2023). Due to the defeat of Hussein's central regime, the power of the central Iraqi military was weakened and due to joint missions like operation Viking Hammer, the Kurds were able to defeat Ansar al-Islam. The defeat of the Baathist regime eventually was of positive effect on Kurdish rights, and it enabled their political and economic power to grow (Wahab, 2023). More data supporting this argument will be presented when evaluating the second hypothesis.

4.8 Territory

The areas that formed the Kurdish Regional Government before the 2003 invasion were not all territory that the Kurdish historically saw as theirs. The Kurdish part of Iraq and the part of the central government was divided by a border called the Green Line. The collapse of the Iraqi Army in 2003, combined with the southward advance of the US Army in coalition with the Peshmerga resulted in a wiping out of the Green Line (Yoshioka, 2020, p. 173). Because of the Kurdish claim to certain regions and the weakened state of the Iraqi army, the Kurds expanded their control over the regions of Ninawa, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din and Diyala. In order to protect the population and to recapture land that they lost during the Arabisation policy from the Saddam regime. The Kurds are very persistent in claiming certain places or cities; former Kurdish president for example once called Kirkuk the 'heart of Kurdistan' (Anderson, 2018, p. 318). Even though many areas south of the former Green Line hold large Kurdish populations, these disputed territories have no legal definition as to who is to own them (p. 174). The United States government even allowed the deployment of the Peshmerga in these regions after the war was over, in order to maintain security. So, what we see here is that the Peshmerga gained access to new territories that the Kurds lost in the past, because the Iraqi army was weakened due to the American invasion. In these new regions, the

Kurdish Regional Government provided public services like healthcare, electricity, education in Kurdish languages while the Peshmerga provided and secured public order (p. 175).

This, however, was no easy process because of the ethnic diversity (Yoshioka, 2020, p. 175). A city like Kirkuk for example also has Arab and Turkmen populations. Therefore, the Peshmerga was deployed in the northern part of town, while the Iraqi Army was deployed in the southern part. This was the same for the police forces of the two groups. Because of this uncertainty with regard to who holds the land in disputed territories, neither the Kurds nor the Iraqis were willing to make long-term economic investments. Even though the invasion led to an expansion of Kurdish territory, it is worth noting that this was not a comprehensive victory but rather one that has been limited and hindered by obstacles like a lack of clear governance and the emergence of Islamic State (Stephens, 2015, p. 234). Another example of this is that the anti-terror measures were quite ineffective because of the lack of coordination between the Iraqi Army and the Peshmerga (Yoshioka, 2020, p. 176). A result was that the Kurdish region itself became a safer place than the disputed territories. The Americans tried to solve this problem by deploying troops specifically for enforcement of order, which did not solve the problem. Even though the Kurds did gain territory due to the invasion, there has been limited governance over these territories. The invasion did have a positive impact on the Kurdish region and their access to new oil-rich regions, but it does not solve all their problems. The Kurdish Regional Government is still a region with a broad variety of challenges. But that does not take away the fact that the Kurds acquired access to new regions in the wake of and because of the American invasion.

4.9 Natural resources

In the earlier part of this chapter, I explained why the Kurdish oil industry was not doing well in the years leading up to the invasion. This was partially due to the United Nations sanctions, which made oil trade virtually impossible and the KDP-PUK division, which led to a civil war from 1994 to 1998 (Mills, 2016, p. 7; Gunter, 2008, p. 14). Shortly after the invasion in 2004, a number of bold oil companies began to explore the oil potential that lies in the ground in the Iraqi Kurdish region (Mills, 2016, p. 7). Many other companies were deterred by the political risk and the lower perceived revenue compared to other regions nearby, but not all of them. As a result, the Kurds founded the Ministry of Natural Resources in 2006. This became the Kurdish counterpart to the federal Ministry of Oil, from the central government in Baghdad. The Ministry of Natural Resources started up processes of exploration to develop the oil industry.

The Kurdish oil policy was carried by the new Kurdish minister for natural resources, Ashi Hawrami, who had extensive experience by working in the British oil industry (Mills, 2006, p. 8). He came up with an investor-friendly policy, promoted production-sharing contracts and played a role in the allocation of oil territories to companies. His leadership was very beneficial for the Kurdish oil sector, and he allowed it to develop much faster than it would otherwise have done. In the years afterwards, various companies entered Iraqi Kurdistan to start drilling and exporting oil (p. 8). The first was the Turkish company Genel Enerji, which signed a production-sharing contract for the Taq Taq field, a large oil field located in Iraqi Kurdistan. The actual production of oil there started a few years later in 2008, and since then more than 225 million barrels of oil have been produced (Genel Energy, 2023). Joining Genel Enerji was the Swiss company Addax, who signed a contract to also produce oil in the Taq Taq field (Mills, 2016, p. 8). Addax' production in Taq Taq also started in 2008, their daily output fluctuates between 20,000 and 40,000 barrels a day (Reuters, 2009). The Norwegian company DNO signed a production-sharing contract in 2004 and discovered the Tawke field in 2006. Production began in 2007 and last year they drilled more than 45,000 of barrels of oil

per day (DNO, 2023). The Canadian company Western Zagros Resources also signed a deal in 2004 and began drilling the Kalar-Bawanoor exploration block (Mills, 2016, p.8).

The 2003 American invasion of Iraq also led to political changes, which included the ratification of a new constitution of Iraq in 2005 (Mills, 2016, p. 3). Among the reasons to invade Iraq was a lack of democracy (Jawad, 2013, p. 7). This necessitated the drafting of a constitution, after the toppling of Hussein, in order to establish democracy in Iraq. This new constitution changed the status of the Kurdish region as a region within a federal Iraqi state, which allowed the Kurds to enter oil contracts with companies (Mills, 2016, p. 3). As emphasised in the previous paragraph, this led to a flow of companies who set up processes to eventually drill large amounts of oil from the Kurdish ground. The 2005 Constitution of Iraq has American fingerprints all over it. One of the key players in the talks over Iraq's 2005 constitution was Zalmay Khalilzad, who, at the time, was America's ambassador in Iraq (Flintoff, 2005). Khalilzad was closely involved with the negotiations, engaging directly with the present factions and also going back and forth with proposals and ideas. At the time, his frequent meetings with Iraqi president Jalal Talabani were often shown on Iraqi television which eventually led to Talabani defending himself against charges that he was too closely guided by the Americans. The council that shaped the constitution had its first meetings at the United States embassy in Baghdad, which caused many American and British diplomats to become involved in the process (Al-Ali & Auf, 2020, p. 26). Because the new constitution was shaped right after the war and because of the American involvement in the process, one can safely say that this constitution would not have happened if it were not for the 2003 invasion. Otherwise, Hussein would still be in power in 2005. America's role in this constitutional process has been heavily criticized, for example by some saying that it is a failed American attempt to transform Iraq into a US-friendly democracy (Al-Ali & Auf, 2020, p. 8).

To connect America's role in the constitution and how it led to Kurdish autonomy it is important to note what America's preference was when the constitution was being drafted. For the Kurdish part in the coalition war effort, the Iraqi Kurds received a guarantee of protection in order to maintain their autonomy in Northern Iraq (McCool, 2021, p. 31). At the time, American Defense Secretary Robert Gates famously told the Kurds "We will not abandon you". Because the Kurds were part of the winning side after the invasion, their influence during the drafting of the constitution was strong, especially with American backing (Oettershagen, 2015, p. 26). Therefore, the Kurdish political parties the KDP and the PUK had a profound influence in the process (Dodge, 2020). The new constitution adopted aspects of consociationalism, which benefitted and ensured rights for minority groups. This approach at the time was advocated by the American Senators Joseph Biden and Leslie Gelb (McGarry & O'Leary, 2007, p. 674). Marina Ottaway, Middle East Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center, even went as far to say that the Iraqi Constitution was essentially an American product and not a negotiated agreement among Iraqis (Marsi, 2023). The constitution eventually led to autonomy of the Kurdish Regional Government within Iraq, which allowed the Kurds to develop their oil industry. The Kurds transformed the post-invasion opportunities into an economic boom (Wahab, 2023). For example, in the capital of Erbil a building frenzy broke out and within years the city contained new hotels, gated communities, private schools and two universities. Additionally, a substantial part of rural Kurdistan that was destroyed during the ethnic cleansings of the Anfal campaign in the 1980s was rebuilt. In the years after the invasion, Iraqi Kurdistan was relatively more stable than other parts of Iraq (Rodgers, 2023).

5. Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

The goal of this research is to investigate what the effect of the 2003 American invasion was on the status of the Kurdish statehood within Iraq. Based on statebuilding theory, two hypotheses have been formulated in order to assess how the invasion led to a change in state capacity of the Kurds in Iraq. I approached the case by conducting a process tracing analysis on how the invasion affected the Kurdish Peshmerga forces and the oil industry. I hypothesized that the invasion was beneficial to the Kurdish military and economy. Since the Kurds have a de facto state within Iraq, this appeared to be a fascinating case on which to test the notions and expectations of statebuilding theory. I hypothesized that the Kurds actually benefited from the conflict, which is counterintuitive because in the contemporary world, war is found to be often destructive and of negative impact to anyone involved.

5.2 Findings

Based on the notions of statebuilding theory, the analysis chapter attempted to answer the following research question:

How did the 2003 American invasion of Iraq affect Kurdish statebuilding in Iraq?

Two hypotheses were drafted in order to answer the research question, hypothesizing that the invasion was beneficial for the Kurds because of the positive impact on the Kurdish oil sector and the Peshmerga. This allows for the evaluation of the effect on Kurdish state capacity, because the oil sector was used as an indication of the extractive capacity while the Peshmerga served to assess the influence on the coercive capacity. The hypotheses were tested by carrying out a before-and-after analysis, using the 2003 American invasion as the treatment on the case.

The first hypothesis was: *American provision of training and weapons increased the Peshmerga's military capacity, leading to increased Kurdish state capacity.* The analysis has made clear that the state of the Kurdish Peshmerga in the years before the American invasion was quite weak because of a number of reasons. Firstly, the strength of the Peshmerga was weakened because of the division between the PUK and the KDP (Gunter, 1996, p. 240). The Kurds in Iraq have historically been divided between these two parties, which also reflected in the military. This resulted in the Peshmerga forces being divided between these two factions. The peak of this was the Kurdish Civil War, that lasted from 1995 to 1998 (Lortz, 2005, p. 25). The Kurds in this period were not able to respond to any challenge using their military force. This was portrayed by the Anfal Campaign. The Iraqi government carried out a genocide against the Iraqi Kurds, destroying thousands of villages, killing between 150,000 and 200,000 Kurds and displacing millions (Lortz, 2005, p. 56). The Peshmerga could barely respond to this since they only had access to light and small arms (p. 58). The internal division of the KDP and the PUK, the Kurdish Civil War and the occurrence of the Anfal Campaign serve to portray the Peshmerga's weakness before the 2003 invasion.

The American invasion of 2003 brought many changes to Iraq and the Middle Eastern region. The Kurds were a valuable ally to the Americans in this operation; around 100,000 Peshmerga fighters joined forces with the Americans to fight against the Ba'ath regime of Saddam Hussein (Mokeddem, 2021, p. 585). As a result, the Americans started training the Peshmerga fighters (Cancian, 2022, p. 1460). Aside from training, the invading coalition led by America supplied the Kurds with weaponry starting in 2003 (Yosioka, 2020, p. 178). This improved the strength of the Peshmerga. Additionally, the Kurds facilitated the important landing of American forces in Northern Iraq, because the Kurds refused the use of their territory for the invasion (Boudreaux & Zaman, 2003). As a result, Northern

Iraq became an important front which was formed by joint forces of Peshmerga in cooperation with American Special Forces (Woodward, 2004, p. 52). This allowed, for example, the defeat of the Ansar al-Islam, a terrorist organisation that the Kurds were battling for a few years (Peltier, 2005, p. 30). This is also an example of how the power balance in Iraq was changed. The invasion weakened actors like the central Iraqi government and smaller actors like Ansar Al-Islam, resulting in the fact that since 2003, the Iraqi Kurds have had more control over their region and affairs than at any time in Iraqi's History (Congressional Research Service, 2019, p. 1). The collapse of the regime also led to the signing of a Strategic Agreement between the PUK and the KDP, which increased the unification of the Peshmerga (Arif, 2022, p. 2). All in all, the hypothesis has been verified because the analysis has shown how the American invasion led to an increase in military capacity of the Peshmerga. This signifies an increase in coercive capacity, which means that their state capacity did increase.

The second hypothesis read as follows: *The American invasion led to the expansion of Kurdish territory and increased access to natural resources, increasing the Kurdish extractive capacity, leading to increased state capacity.* The analysis has shown that the Kurdish oil industry, and thus their extractive capacity, was weak before the invasion. Because of the Anfal Campaign, the United Nations carried out sanctions against Iraq which rendered oil trade virtually impossible (Lopez & Cortright, 2004, p. 91). The aforementioned divide between the PUK and KDP made the political situation in Iraqi Kurdistan unstable and sometimes violent, which also had a negative impact on oil trade. Furthermore, there was a lack of technical or financial expertise to conduct oil production (Mills, 2016, p. 7). There was barely any seismic knowledge regarding oil in Kurdish soil and there was a lack of service sector (Mackertich & Semarrai, 2015, p. 183). Even if one knew where the oil in Iraqi Kurdistan was, there was no way of getting it out of the ground and selling it. Lastly, the Kurds lacked access to oil-rich, historically Kurdish, territories like the city of Kirkuk (Charara, 2018).

The analysis has shown how the invasion positively affected the Kurdish oil industry. The joint fighting of the Americans and Kurds against the Iraqis led to the expansion of the Kurdish territory, including oil rich regions. The Kurds gained control over regions like Ninawa, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din and Diyala (Yoshioka, 2020, p. 173). The lack of technical and financial resources for oil production also shifted; the defeat of the Ba'ath regime led to a new stability for the Kurdish region which allowed for the arrival of international oil companies (Mills, 2006, p. 8). This was reinforced by other political changes: after Hussein was defeated the Americans helped instigate the 2005 Iraqi Constitution in which the Kurdish Regional Government got the status of as an autonomous region within the federal state of Iraq (Mills, 2016, p. 3). This allowed the Kurds to enter oil contracts and in the years after, many oil companies came to Iraq to drill large amounts of oil. The second hypothesis has also been verified, the analysis has shown how the invasion increased the Kurdish oil sector by expanding their oil-rich territory and how the new political environment allowed the arrival of oil companies. This means that the Kurds' extractive capacity increased, which means that their state capacity increased.

5.3 Discussion

The central theorem to Tilly's statebuilding is how war-making leads to statebuilding (Tilly, 1975). This thesis attempted to investigate if the 2003 American invasion had a positive effect on Kurdish extractive capacity and their coercive capacity, which were the two dimensions of statehood that were analysed. To concretely assess this, I researched the influence on the Kurdish Peshmerga and the oil industry. As portrayed, the effect has been found to be positive. The American invasion changed the political landscape of Iraq, reinforced the strength of the Peshmerga and led to the arrival of oil companies who were able to drill oil in the expanded Kurdish territory. Therefore, I can conclude that, although the war-making did not lead to the actual creation of a nation-state, the

results do indicate that the conflict and fighting had a positive impact on the capacity of the Kurdish Regional Government. The results and conclusion state that the American invasion eventually led to an increase in the Kurdish coercive capacity as well as an increase in the extractive capacity, and an increase in state capacity. Therefore, both hypotheses have found to be verified.

Despite the findings of this thesis that consider the American invasion to have been of positive influence on the Kurds in Iraq, the Kurds still face severe challenges in their steps towards autonomy. Even though the American invasion caused the KDP and PUK to unite against the Iraqi government and sign a Strategic Agreement, the division between these two parties has been increasing in recent years (Jaff, 2022). These tensions have for example resulted in members of government refusing to attend political meetings and ministers refusing to return to their offices. The KDP and PUK divide weakens the effectiveness of Kurdish government. The effectiveness of the Kurdish government is also hindered by problems of corruption and due to nepotism (Aslan & Qadir, 2021). The dispute between the two parties also increased the worries among the population because of the memories of the internal war that took place in the 1990s. Another challenge is the presence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). This is a more radical political militant organization that Turkey considers to be terrorist, and consequently the Turks launched attacks against the PKK in the territory of Iraqi Kurdistan (Clingendael Institute, 2022). The PKK's military presence and their activities in Iraqi Kurdistan are a serious challenge to the Iraqi Kurds and it jeopardizes the sovereignty of the Kurdish Regional Government (Aslan & Qadir, 2021). Furthermore, the Iraqi Kurds have challenging relations with neighbouring countries. Turkey for example has deep-rooted fears that a sovereign Kurdish political entity within Iraq may cause strong Kurdish nationalism in Turkey. Lastly, there is still the problem of disputed territories in Iraq. Claims to certain territories are shaped by sectarian, economic religious, ethnic and national security considerations (Aprim, 2022). The question who is to live in what precise territory in Iraq so far has not been given a clear answer with multiple groups claiming the same territory.

5.4 Recommendations

Due to the limitations of a master's thesis and other aspects such as the availability of data, this thesis assessed the Kurdish state capacity by looking at the military capacity and their access to the resource of oil. These are of course only two factors, even though they are important ones. Therefore, this thesis would be further supplemented by research that explores different aspects of Kurdish statehood. This could be, for example, by looking at the functioning of the Kurdish tax system or the Kurdish provision of public goods to its citizens. These are two very different ways of assessing the capacity of the Kurdish Regional Government, and thus it would supplement the approach that I took. Studying the development of those variables over the years may give a more precise assessment of how the Kurdish statebuilding developed over time.

Because of the similarities between the Americans cooperating with the Peshmerga in the Iraq war and the Americans cooperating with the Kurdish militia of the YPG in the Syrian War, this thesis may give some interesting research angles for the case of Syria. As has become clear, the results of this thesis show that the 2003 American invasion presented opportunities for the Kurdish military and economy, which furthered their state capacity. Consequently, it raises the possibility that in Syria the war may provide opportunities for the Syrian Kurds to take steps towards more autonomy. Here the Tillyan notions on statebuilding echo through, perhaps here the war could eventually be of positive impact on some actor's state capacity.

Expanding research in which the notions of statebuilding are being applied to other non-western contemporary cases like Syria is also something that I would recommend. Tilly's original theory on

statebuilding was based on European states between 1500-1900 and has often proved to be a helpful theory for understanding the world. Many authors, like Herbst (1990), Botea and Taylor (2008), Thies (2005) and Spruyt (2017) have applied the theory of statebuilding to different contexts and periods of time, with varying results. More research is necessary to make sense of the contemporary dynamic between war and state capacity. In recent history, the world has seen a rise of intrastate wars and a proliferation of non-state actors (Dosse, 2010; Ataman, 2003, p. 42). Therefore, exploring what the role and results have been for non-state actors in intrastate war has become a topic that presents many interesting cases upon which to conduct research. Despite the many challenges that the Kurds have faced over the years, this thesis has shown that there are opportunities for them as well.

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