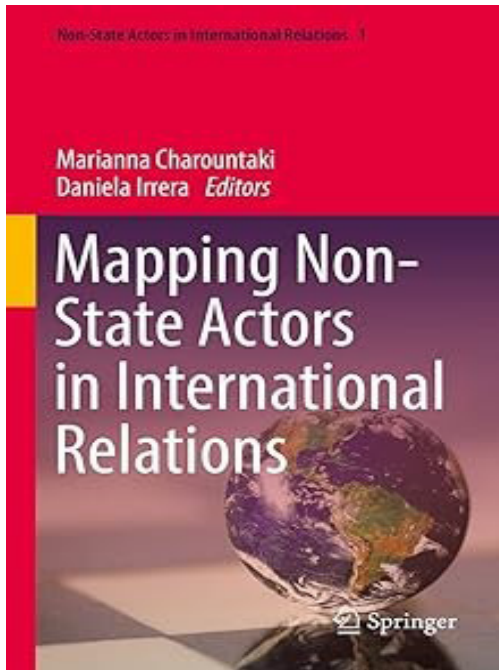




# MAPPING NON-STATE ACTORS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

*by Marianna Charountaki and Daniela Irrera*



Actors in International Relations (IR) system are subjects of international affairs. In the Westphalian order, the International Relations theory has focused on states as the most important actors in global politics but nowadays Non-State Actors (NSAs) are forging ahead due to their outstanding roles and importance in international politics.

There is many literature review focused on NSAs study because specialists in the field unacknowledged this is crucial element for developing a genuine understanding of contemporary international affairs, but usually analysis have been done through the prism of state-centric IR theories.

“Non-State Actors in International Relations” (NAIR) is a Springer book series of two volumes analysing the role

of non-state actors and their agency in the foreign policy domain, firmly grounding Non-State Actors in the ontology of international relations IR theory and creating a closer nexus between Area Studies (AS) and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA).

This book series fills a gap in the current literature and need to be acknowledged by academia students and experts acting in various fields of social sciences (international relations theory, international politics, international security, diplomatic history, conflict theorists, European and Middle East politics), as well as for different level policy-makers and practitioners.

The review presents the 1<sup>st</sup> volume “Mapping Non-State Actors in International Relations”, printed in 2023 under the editorial guidance of Marianna Charountaki, Senior Lecturer in International Politics within the University of Lincoln, UK, and Daniela Irrera, Professor (Full) of Political Science and International Relations, School of Advanced Defence Studies within the University of Catania, Italy.



This first book in the series investigates the role of non-state actors (NSAs) in International Relations in various policy fields and through different theoretical perspectives (Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, or even Primordialism<sup>1</sup>), therefore making a standing point in the lively debate discussing what kind of influence NSAs might have on states and international relations.

This work stands as an insightful and useful handbook that offers a fresh specialized theoretical view on what foreign policy is nowadays, by expanding its scope of analysis through shifting the state-centred perspective towards a more timely-adapted one, wherein non-state actors increasingly affect processes and outcomes in international politics. Moreover, through the areas studies involved in this book, regional contexts and examples are used to improve existing theories related to NSAs.

The seven chapters of this 1<sup>st</sup> volume are authored by specialists in diverse disciplines as International Relations, Political Science and/or Strategic Studies from Europe (4 from UK, one from Portugal, one from Czech Republic, and one from Italy), and Asia (one from UAE, one from Iraq), but all have in common their expertise in parts of Middle East politics and actors.

Chapter 1 – “Conceptualising Non-State Actors in International Relations” authored by Marianna Charountaki, represents a theoretical contribution that frames the role of Non-State Actors in International Relations discipline as an under-examined subject-matter. This introductory study “situates its argument within the current debate of the increasing power of NSAs in international relations (IR) and what this means for the theory” (Charountaki and Irrera 2023, 1) by explaining through a four-fold rationale<sup>2</sup> the importance of the conceptualisation of NSAs within IR theory.

All the argumentative construction in the first chapter is made for non-state actors, similarly as for states in the IR theoretical perspectives, in terms of power and competition between different entities, as well as from the angle of their exerted influence on the international arena, in order to backbone NSA’s position as essential constituents, together with state entities of the IR ontology. Thus, in this respect, the author argues that NSAs can bear different foreign policy roles as agents (particularly

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<sup>1</sup> Theory considering “ethnicity as a fixed characteristic of individuals and communities being embedded in inherited biological attributes, a long history of practicing cultural differences, or both”. (Britannica 2023)

<sup>2</sup> The author’s first argument is that “the practical needs call for simplification in approaching them, on account of their multi-faceted complications”. The second stands in “their ability to influence the behaviour of state entities in a different way requires clarification as to their identity and their involvement in both state and non-state interactions”. The third argument is “NSAs are traditionally perceived through the lens of state interests or identified with institutions (mainly those of an economic orientation)”. The fourth argument brought in the rationale is that „NSAs constitute one component of the evolution of the international system that continues to inform the nature of IR” (Charountaki and Irrera 2023, 3).



states-to-be category) or facilitators (irregular armies and militias) which are similar to the states' assumed roles in this concern.

As a main conclusion, this first study largely, "... offers a conceptualisation of the non-state entities and provides the ground for the book's rationale. In specific, the chapter offers a definition as to what non-state actors are based on a systematic and coherent analysis and creates a typology (of the nature) of NSAs" (Charountaki and Irrera 2023, 1). Therefore, the classification comprised in the study aims to ground Non-State Actors' existence as an intrinsic part of the IR's ontology and addressing their status in the global system in terms of praxis. Thus, this classification shapes the book's main structure, with the following chapters divided among different types of NSAs, each supported by representative examples.

Chapter 2 – "The Power and Impact of Institutions in International Relations: From Intergovernmental to Non-Governmental Organizations" authored by Daniela Irrera, focuses a new approach "on the relationship between IGOs and NGOs and their effect on security and conflict management" (Charountaki and Irrera 2023, 17), by understanding the NGOs' international roles and their transformative power over some sensitive policy fields. This is seen by the author to be needed because even the wide range of organizations are permanently empirically observed, evaluated, and investigated, this type of approach based on their typology (economic, political, religious, cultural, security-focused) corroborated with their *modus operandi* is a new one.

In order for the goal of the research to be achieved, the analysis in this chapter is multi-layered. Thus, at first, international institutions are theoretically investigated from the perspective of their relations with states and influence they have over the global political agenda setting. Next, the most prominent examples of IOs and NGOs are studied to identify their functions and abilities used in influencing global policies. Finally, it is analysed "their potential is particularly deepened in the global humanitarian system as an extremely sensitive field, in which policies, practices, and norms are the result of the match and the collision between the governmental and the non-governmental dimensions" (Charountaki and Irrera 2023, 17). Thus, international organizations are analysed from their roles on the international arena as agents of power in respect to state and governmental power, but also as agents of change.

Chapter 3 – "Irregular Militaries and Militias in International Relations Theory: The Case of Iraqi Shiite militias", co-authored by Sterling Jensen and Waleed Al-Rawi, investigates armed Non-State Actors, focusing on three cases of Iraqi Shiite militias: Wala'ya, Marja'ya, and Sadrist.

This chapter starts from the hypothesis that although "many irregular militaries and militias have more coercive capabilities than states and engage in strategic conflicts in the international environment, yet there is no established epistemology to study them" (Charountaki and Irrera 2023, 35), therefore, by this analysis is intended to fill part of the identified theoretical gap.



In this part of the book there are indicated the roles of armed Non-State Actors ranging from “the cooperation with states to defend the status quo, to working against the state as agents of radical change” (Charountaki and Irrera 2023, 36).

After presenting the three subjects of case studies from different theoretical angles (Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism), the author provides an interesting perspective, namely that “IR theories need more tools to better analyse the extent of the proxy relationship and explain how armed Non-State Actors in some cases can wield more influence in a strategic conflict than can states” (Charountaki and Irrera 2023, 48) and “there is no one-size-fits-all theory that can explain militias’ behaviour” (Charountaki and Irrera 2023, 48), which reflects the need for an NSAs ontology built against IR theories.

In Chapter 4 – “Dilemmas of fundamentalist Non-State Actors in International Relations”, Patrick Finnegan and Vladimir Rauta, both specialists in conflict research and international security field, challenge some of the long running assumptions around the topic of fundamentalism, usually seen simplistically by being religiously triggered, presenting it as “a strategic choice which brings positive and negative consequences to those who embrace it” (Charountaki and Irrera 2023, 53).

This chapter is grounded on studies on the Provisional Irish Republican Army and The Bosnian Serb Army, two ethno-nationalist organisations in Europe, which “held binary views of the world and relied exclusively on force, at least initially” (Charountaki and Irrera 2023, 55), to show how fundamentalists can exist beyond religion, although this aspect is not eliminated. All their analyses is grounded on the idea that fundamentalist NSA should be integrated as such into the IR’s ontology.

Chapter 5 – “The impact of ethnic groups on International Relations” is authored by Maria do Céu Pinto Arena, Political Science specialist, and presents ethnic groups as NSAs capable to play roles both in domestic and in international politics. In this respect, the author explains ethnic identity and/or ethnic conflict through different theoretical approaches of Primordialism, Rationalism, and Constructivism.

The main conclusion of the analysis is that IR scholars have sought to analyse the phenomenon of ethnical conflict by employing the “security dilemma”, which is a narrow approach as ethnic conflicts have a more complex nature, usually bearing actual decisive factors that are political rather than ethnic (Charountaki and Irrera 2023, 89), which make ethnical groups important actors to be thoroughly studied among the IR theory perspectives.

Marianna Charountaki and Radka Havlová, both specialized in the study of Middle East conflicts, co-authored Chapter 6 – “States-to-Be as Foreign Policy Actors” wherein is demonstrated why foreign policy practice is critical for “states-to-be” (the top tire NSAs) survival and further development, through two study cases (Kurdistan Regional Government – KRG and Palestinian Liberation Organisation - PLO).

In achieving the research goal, the authors investigate states-to-be inventory (quasi-states, para-states, failed states, as-if-states, states-within-states etc.) which



give a clearer vision on the subject matter. A pertinent conclusion of this chapter is that “those single entities (which are often a more consolidated iteration of ethnic groups) that are able to progress and develop a distinct role—and thus status—in the regional and international realms are ... states-to-be” (Charountaki and Irrera 2023). Therefore, the debate started from the idea that states-to-be are characterised by attributes similar to those of states and embody power and change agencies, which gives an upgraded role in international relations (Charountaki and Irrera 2023, 98), so that, they can be considered equally as the other actor, therefore the whole study offers new IR ontological insights from the perspective of Foreign Policy Analysis.

Chapter 7 – “Conclusion. Understanding the role of non-state actors in a mutable global system” authored by Daniela Irrera “summarises the main rationale and findings of the book by highlighting the most important issues raised in the previous chapters” (Charountaki and Irrera 2023, 111). This chapter represents a diagnosis of NSAs impact on international relations realm, both conceptually and empirically, “meant to connect these multifaceted entities to the ontology of the International Relations (IR) discipline” (Charountaki and Irrera 2023, 111). Here are emphasized new thesis as the one emitted by Charountaki arguing that “a review of the understanding of NSAs is necessary to grasp the dynamics of their status” (Charountaki and Irrera 2023, 111) in order to fill the theoretical gap by reconnecting IR to area studies in a dynamic post-Westphalian world, because the terminology employed by IR scholars mainly referring to the state cannot help in the analysis of states-to-be.

This handbook offers a strong theoretical foundation from which further debates on IR ontology can be launched. Therefore, the purpose of the book is double-folded: to emphasize the increasing role and importance of different categories of NSAs’ (particularly states-to-be) in the international politics, and to inspire researchers in various policy fields involved in conceptual and empirical studies of NSAs to search for new instruments and methods for a better understanding of the plethora of non-state actors.

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