



**Universiteit  
Leiden**

## Rebel Groups and Strategic Practices

### Applicants

*Eligible proposals must have at least two applicants from Humanities, preferably with an interdisciplinary approach.*

Supervisor Name	Discipline
Prof Dr Isabelle Duyvesteyn	History
Dr Marina Calculli	Area Studies

### Project description

*Provide a brief description of the project (max. 300 words)*

There is an interesting ongoing debate on whether and to what extent the Islamic State (IS), which rose to prominence in Syria and Iraq in 2014, followed a specific strategic approach. Several scholars have pointed out that the Islamic State's way of operating showed many characteristics similar to Maoist Revolutionary People's War. As analogue to Mao and his revolutionaries in China in the 1930s and 1940s, the Islamic State in 2014, after creating liberated zones and a shadow state, defeated the Syrian and Iraqi government forces in a more or less conventional manner to claim power. In contrast to the IS, other armed groups, like Hezbollah or the Houthi rebels, do not challenge directly the existence of states and borders, and seem more compliant with international norms, although they preserve their autonomy from states. Otherwise, rebel groups are similar in their use of violence outside of state control, but they differ in the ways they pursue their objectives and defend their viability. With these puzzles in mind, the project aims to investigate the strategic practices of rebel groups, which in contrast to the state, are currently not very well understood. How do rebels develop strategy? What explains variation among rebel groups' strategies?

The most prevalent violent entrepreneurs in our contemporary world are rebel groups, such as guerrillas, insurgents, terrorists and warlords. Many have challenged the idea that these groups can be strategic actors. Strategic studies as an inherently interdisciplinary academic field of inquiry is currently very much focused on states and Western experiences. How have rebel groups conceptualised strategy, practiced it and learned from it? Rebel groups are highly agile and flexible actors, with often an excellent grasp of their environment and the strength and weaknesses of their opponent. They also tend to learn from each other and copy successful approaches. The project aims to investigate how rebel groups develop and execute strategy.

### Research Trainee Profile

*Each proposal requests two Research Trainees. Describe the general tasks of the research trainees,*

*how these tasks are academically challenging to the research trainees, whether they need any preliminary knowledge (regarding the topic and/or research methods) and which skills the research trainees should have. Also specify which type of students are eligible to apply (3<sup>rd</sup> year Ba, Ma, ResMa).*

Prof Duyvesteyn teaches a research elective on Violent Non-State Actors in International Affairs and Dr Calculli focuses in her work on conflict and political violence in the Middle East. Our experience is that students want their written work to have real world relevance; over the years we have had many students who have written excellent student papers. The proposed project aims to bring these together in a book publication focused on the topic outlined above. We have shortlisted a number of excellent papers written during the past semester, which would qualify for publication in the shape of chapter contributions. (see annex for an overview). The research trainees will be active MA students. They will have knowledge on contemporary history and political affairs.

They will engage in the following academic tasks 1) provide research to complement the material available 2) edit the material, together with the supervisors, 3) prepare the book publication, for which we have an initial interest from Rowman and Littlefield, 4) develop a PhD proposal related to this topic to be submitted in UL, national and international competitions.<sup>1</sup> Prior knowledge in the field of global conflict and war and peace is a requirement. These topics are taught in the MA International Relations, Global Conflict track, which is the largest MA programme in the Faculty and in the MA Middle Eastern Studies. The skills that are required are also taught in these courses and the project will help and train the research students further. See for the specific tasks of the research trainees under Planning below.

### **Collaboration**

*If applicable: Describe how your research improves collaboration and cross-pollination between the disciplines involved (max. 300 words)*

The premise is that there are rebel strategic repertoires and genealogies based on trajectories of adaptation and innovation. The story of rebel strategic practices cannot be told without diving into case material. The Middle East has a rich and diverse history, also in light of its conflict experience. We have material available on the approached adopted by Hezbollah and Hamas for example, which deserves further investigation and analysis. The field of conflict studies is inherently multi-disciplinary, drawing on expertise in history, area studies but also borrowing from political science, psychology and anthropology. The two supervisors combine these areas in practice. Prof Duyvesteyn has a training in liberal arts, history and political science. She has published on military theory and strategy but does not possess any specific area specialisation. Dr Calculli specialised in the Middle East and Security Studies and, and has researched and published on the interaction between states and non-state armed organizations in the Middle East. The collaboration would build bridges between two different institutes and integrate these complimentary areas of expertise. The candidates for the research traineeship should ideally come from the large group of MA students we teach in the MA International Relations and the MA Middle Eastern Studies.

### **Deliverables**

*Enumerate intended project results: papers, research proposals or otherwise. (max 200 words)*

1. An edited book
2. Two PhD proposals<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> We will in particular target the European University Institute autumn 2020 call for PhD proposals. Prof Duyvesteyn has been successful last year in coaching a student in his application. He qualified for the Austrian scholarship.

<sup>2</sup> The applicants realise that the competition for PhD grants is fierce. We, therefore, aim to work towards producing innovative pieces that could be amended to form short research papers that could be published independently in case the applications are not successful.

## **Planning**

*Provide a breakdown of the project into phases with tentative timing (max 150 words)*

The project will run from 1 February till 1 July and consist of three phases:

Phase 1, 1 February – 31 March: collect the relevant papers, identify the gaps in the argument, conduct research for the book manuscript. Research trainee I will focus on the general and theoretical arguments and research trainee II will focus on the case material for the book publication. The choice for their PhD proposal is largely individual but will consist of (parts of) the larger research puzzle of the book (e.g. what is the strategic theory that informs the activities of Hamas?)

Phase 2: 1 April – 31 May: write and edit the material

Phase 3: 1 June – 1 July; synthesis and write up of PhD proposals

## **Student Application**

*Provide information on how to apply e.g. required documents for application (resume, motivation letter etc.) and an email address where student applications should be sent to.*

Applications can be sent directly to Prof Duyvesteyn - [i.duyvesteyn@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:i.duyvesteyn@hum.leidenuniv.nl) . The application file should include a up to date CV, a letter of motivation which should include a demonstration of the affinity with the topic. The application should also include the name of at least two referees (e.g. lecturers who have had close interaction with the candidate) and contact details. Prof Duyvesteyn and Dr Calculli will select the most promising candidates, possibly in consultation with other colleagues, and an interview might be part of the selection process.

Annex I  
Outline of the Book **Rebel Groups and Strategic Practices**

**Contents**

	Preface and Acknowledgements	
	Contents	
	List of abbreviations Tables and Figures	
1	Introduction	
2	A genealogy of rebel strategic thought	
3	Propaganda by Deed	
4	Revolutionary War	
5	Urban Guerrilla	
6	Maritime Strategy	
7	Rebel Practice	
8	Conclusion	

We presently have material that qualifies for publication (some in amended form) on the following topics:

Cases: Hezbollah, Hamas, Kurds/YPG, Colombia, Chechnya and Sri Lanka

Topics: symbolic violence and symbolic capital, propaganda by deed, non-violent resistance, rebel assemblages, violence as communication, psychology and emotion, strategic adaptation