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State-militia relations: the case of Iraq and the Badr Organization

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1. Introduction

The US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, Operation Iraqi Freedom dethroned Saddam Hussein who ruled the country with an iron fist since 1979, creating a security vacuum. Despite the state-building efforts facilitated by the US, three years later Iraq entered a period of civil war between Shiites and Sunnis fuelled by the Sunni insurgency. The Coalition scored some victories during the Surge, but soon the insurgency, along with foreign sponsors and fighters developed into an unprecedented Salafist Jihadist project spanning across Iraq and Syria – the Islamic State (ISIS). Claiming a status of a Caliphate, ISIS reached its peak in 2014 when it controlled 100,000 square kilometres of territory and enforced an extreme version of Sharia law upon population under its control (Mapping Militant Organizations, 2019).

In the Middle East, different actors, both state and non-state armed groups, have been competing to reshape the region based on their ideological or religious visions. While insurgents have challenged the Westphalian system and the Sykes-Picot agreement[1], which shaped the post-Ottoman empire in the Middle East, some non-state and para-institutional armed groups, such as militias, have worked along governments to help reach its common objectives in counterinsurgency campaigns. Some established themselves as political parties, whose armed wing serve as a remnant of past combat operations.

Shia militias in Iraq have gained a considerable legitimacy since 2003, allowing their members to hold posts in the government and form a state-assembled umbrella organization Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) against ISIS. PMU was founded because the Iraqi army collapsed when ISIS attacked major Iraqi cities in 2014 and significantly contributed to defeating the group. Iraq's political establishment, supported by the United States, and since 2003 pre-dominantly Shia, has approached Shia militias in very different ways – some were targeted for suppression, however, some were cooperated with, due to the aligned goals and ideology.

Another actor has been involved in Iraq's domestic affairs. Iran has developed a network of influence by empowering some Shia militia groups by providing materiel assistance, which became apparent in the fight against ISIS, but took roots much earlier, all the way back to the 1979

[1] Sykes-Picot Agreement between Britain and France came into the effect after the World War I and created colonial protectorates in the Middle East, dividing the region into spheres of influence (Gasper, 2017, 203).

Islamic revolution in Iran. Next to the weapons and training, Iran has been exporting the Shia ideology to Iraq via friendly Shia militias.

Badr Corps was founded as a part of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and after the regime change in Iraq it developed into a political organization with its leader Hadi al-Amiri holding a position in Iraq's security committee. The group became the largest faction in PMU and a powerful player in Iraq's politics.

Non-state armed groups have far-reaching consequences on Iraq's ability to claim the monopoly of legitimate use of violence, but due to their popularity, they have an undisputable place in the political and security apparatus. States employ various approaches to militias shaped by different objectives - in a military conflict, groups can serve as cheap force multipliers, however, their relationship with a state does not only depend on operational requirements but also on the particular ideological project state pursues and whether the militia fits in it. Iraq's political establishment is to a large extent affected by the religious authorities that articulate the state's ideological project.

1.1. Research question

This thesis will address the following research question:

What role did operational requirements and ideological alignment play in Iraq's strategy towards the Badr Organization in the period between 2003 and 2016?

1.2. Contribution to academic literature

In the recent years, research on the role of militias has flourished and scholars pay more attention to their relation to states and civilians, yet the problematics remains to be underestimated and not fully understood. Often militias are only studied in the context of civil wars and are seen as simply auxiliary forces or proxy groups. However, operational requirements are not the only incentives for states to employ militias, and ideology plays an important role. This study aims to build bridges across several scholarly fields, namely state-building, non-state armed groups, insurgency and proxy warfare to better understand state-militia relations. Non-state armed groups are fluid – first, they can turn into a pro-government militia, that develops into a political party with representatives incorporated in the government, or second, into anti-establishment insurgents. Moreover, some

can be sponsored by a foreign actor, which makes them a proxy agent. When the group follows the first path, it becomes a participant to the state-building process, because the militia members can influence decision-making on the state level, even when it comes to the official strategy towards militias.

2. Theoretical framework

In this chapter, main argument is built by presenting basic presumptions of the state's monopoly of violence. The theoretical framework of this thesis combines insights from two researchers who have tried to redefine this notion - first, Ahram's concept of violence devolution challenges state's monopoly of violence and second, Staniland's theory of armed group's political roles addresses state's accommodation of militias. Furthermore, the conceptualization of militias is offered to present the conditions under which they emerge, their typology, characteristics and reasons they are employed by states as auxiliary forces. Last but not least, the theoretical framework is complemented by a concept of security force assistance that tackles foreign influence on militias.

2.1. State's monopoly of violence and militias

The most fundamental characteristic of a contemporary modern state, formulated by a famous sociologist Max Weber in his lecture 'Politics as a Vocation', is based on the presumption that concentrates the right to use arms to the hands of the political elites: 'a state is that human community which (successfully) lays claim to the monopoly of the legitimate physical violence within a given territory' (Weber, 1994, 310-311). The state-building process is then characterized by two stages: 'the imposition of order and then the move from coercive to administrative capacity' (Dodge, 2006, 191).

Charles Tilly (1985) refers back to the great philosophers Machiavelli and Hobbes by claiming that states, as places of organized means of violence with relatively centralized and differentiated organizations, aim to achieve the control of the means of violence on their territory. Tilly (1990) considers disarmament of the civilian population and outlawing private armies, but at the same time consolidation of power into the hands of the rulers as one of the conditions for a stable state that was able to defend itself against domestic or external enemies. Control over the use of violence by the state and army centralization are pivotal points for state formation, according to Tilly.

However, Weber's definition and Tilly's theory represent ideal types of state behaviour and state formation in Europe, therefore they need to be supplied with additional concepts that better explain development in states where non-state and para-institutional armed groups have challenged

the state monopoly of violence and established themselves as a parallel source of legitimate rule (Munro, 2013).

2.2. Concept of violence devolution

Ahram (2011, 7) argues that 'few states have ever actually sought a complete monopoly over military force, much less possessed it'. Ahram's concept of violence devolution (2011, 1-24) represents an alternative view on the state's organization of means of violence including the non-state armed groups and provides basic conditions for the choice of the case study in this thesis, which is Iraq's relationship with the Badr militia.

Iraq's colonial experience as a part of the British mandate system after the dissolution of the Ottoman empire negatively affected the country's conditions for effective state-building. The military regime of the Ba'ath party in the Cold War era successfully centralized coercive power into the hands of country's dictators with the help of two superpowers – the United States and the Soviet Union, yet mainly to install domestic political and social control by terror to prevent insurgency. The US-led invasion in 2003 and the consequent occupation dismantled Iraq's state apparatus and allowed non-state actors and insurgents to flourish (Choucair-Vizoso, 2016).

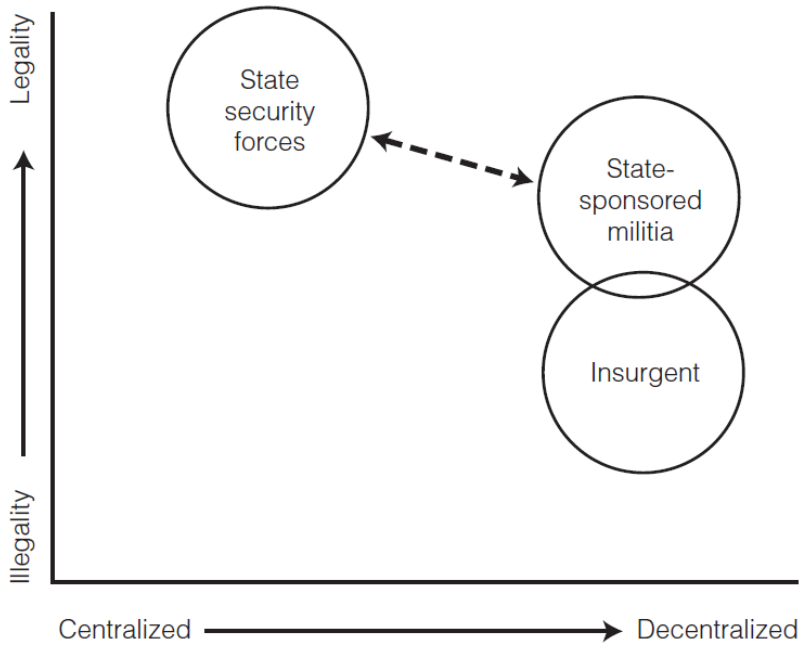
The basic principle of the concept is that in many countries of the Third World, competition between state and non-state groups for control of means of coercion continues to be unresolved. The concept describes cooperation and collusion between state and non-state actors as a substitute for traditional central control over the use of violence.

First, the conditions for selection of states need to be met. The theory applies to late-developing states (LDSs) in the Third World with a colonial experience and a late development characterized by dependency on other states. Postcolonial era assured them protection from superpowers, thus it was not a necessity to build conventional armed forces like in Europe. The main challenge for LDSs was to ensure internal security, for which building up local militias was the answer. This reliance on para-institutional violence wielders is an alternative technique of violence devolution that departs from the wide-spread perspective that states naturally seek monopoly over violence. The para-institutional violence is represented by the creation of temporary alliances between state and non-state actors to join forces against a common enemy,

most likely insurgents. The non-state actors can retain a considerable autonomy to use of force and often refuse to disarm.

Second, the bilateral relationship between the state and the insurgents in a civil conflict is joined by the state-sponsored militias, creating a trilateral relationship as demonstrated in Figure 1. The state is the legal purveyor of violence and coercion through agents – army, police and judicial system, and even if a substantial portion of citizens takes up arms and rises against it, the state still enjoys the right to suppress them based on international norms. Insurgency is defined as 'a protracted political-military struggle directed toward subverting or displacing the legitimacy of a constituted government' (US Government, 2012, 1). Para-institutional actors stand in between, sharing characteristics of insurgents and the state. Insurgent groups, as well as militias, can be suppressed, contained, incorporated, or colluded with by a state and their political position can change too – militias may become insurgents and vice versa (Staniland, 2015, 772).

Figure 1. Conceptual map of violence devolution (Ahram, 2011, 10).



To sum up, there are two different perspectives on the monopoly of violence: theories of the state-building claim that government consolidates violence to assure security, but countries in the Third World have followed a different development and devolved the right to use violence into the hands of non-state armed actors. This thesis explores the interaction among the three groups of

organized violence in Iraq – state forces, militias and insurgents. It analyses mechanisms of violence decentralization in Iraq on the example of the Badr Corps that evolved from an exiled non-state militia to a para-institutional group assisting the state forces in quelling the insurgency. Moreover, it discusses Iraq's utilization of non-state armed groups when dealing with existential security challenges, even when it involved unconstitutional actions.

2.3. Conceptualization of militias

There is a wide spectrum of lenses being used to study militias, ranging from socio-political organizations to terrorists, each carrying some sort of simplification. Here, an overview of militia types is presented to better conceptualize the Badr militia.

Militias are not a new phenomenon. Citizens organized themselves to guard their cities and interests already around AD 990 in Europe, often not shying away from resisting to royal demands of their kings (Tilly, 1990). But these small, decentralized and locally raised militias were later substituted with large and centrally organized national armies, however, not every state followed this development (Ahram, 2011). Especially in the Middle East, militias continue to play an important role in protecting a particular sect, village or ideology.

Militias, also referred to as paramilitaries, civil militias, or civil defence forces, are 'armed groups that operate alongside regular security forces or independently of the state, aiming to shield the local population from rebel demands or depredations and seeking to acquire its loyalty or collaboration' (Jentzsch et al., 2015, 755). They can appear as 'surrogates to a state's military, police, and intelligence services', or emerge independently outside of the control of the state as a proxy (Hughes, 2016, 200). Militias are usually non-state actors, but this category does not encompass the full dynamics of state-militia interaction, therefore referring to them as para-institutional actors better appreciate the spectrum of possible cooperation with the state (Ahram, 2011, 9).

Militias can emerge in all kinds of wars, irregular civil conflicts, insurgencies, wars against foreign occupiers, or conventional and symmetric nonconventional wars. They can be formed within communities as a bottom-up process or by states as a top-down process (Jentzsch et al., 2015, 758). The relation to the state is important as militias are often controlled or co-opted into the apparatus, but their loyalties are not rigid and they can pursue different interests to those of the

state (Carey & Mitchell, 2017). They are not merely ‘puppets’ of the state that can be called upon whenever needed. They are better described as ’potential allies to the state’, indicating that their alliances are fluid and unreliable (Staniland, 2015, 771). Militias can undermine the central authority of the state, for example by refusing to comply with the state's demands, building up their own power base or collaborating with other militias (Ahram, 2011).

One type of militias, those being called foreign proxies, can serve as an agent of a foreign government, threating the state's stability. They can operate as allies of the state regime against an adversary that is common for both states. Iran has been sponsoring foreign proxy actors, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, Houthi rebels in Yemen, groups fighting for Bashar al-Assad in Syria, or in Iraq where Iran has fostered ties with several Shia militias that took part in the war against ISIS in the organization called Popular Mobilization Units (IISS, 2019). Due to the Badr Corps’ ties to Iran and the shared Shia ideology, it would be logical to understand the group as a foreign Iranian proxy. Analysing the Badr Corps in the context of Iranian influence is important, however, it does not determine the Badr Corps to be simply as an Iranian agent, because next to its military force, it is also a salient socio-political movement within Iraq.

Militias cooperating with governments are called pro-government militias. The most extensive database of pro-government militias introduced by Carey, Mitchell and Lowe (2013, 250) identifies 332 pro-government militias around the world between 1981 and 2007. They are characterized as armed groups that have a link to the government but exist outside of or parallel to the regular security apparatus and have some level of organization (Carey & Mitchell, 2017, 128). In the database, Badr Corps is conceptualized as a pro-government group after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 when it was aligned with the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). Its main purpose is described as protection of the state, national and religious authorities and fighting insurgents (Carey & Mitchell, 2014).

Militias are also known for providing social services and protecting the local population from violence. Hezbollah has succeeded in penetrating legitimate political authority and established itself as a parallel military security and social-welfare provider in southern Lebanon (Early, 2006). Berti (2013, 1955) argues that ‘both armed groups and political parties are, at their core, social organizations, defined as organized, collective efforts on the part of a number of people to bring about or resist social change’. Armed groups, as well as political parties, have a particular manifest, existential goals and a generally shared ideology. Badr’s political dimension is illustrated

throughout its existence as a part of a political organization Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq and its later trajectory as an independent political party, the Badr Organization, with its elected representatives in the Iraqi parliament.

For the purposes of this thesis, Badr is categorized as a Shiite pro-government para-institutional militia that has a proxy dimension due to its transnational ties with Iran. As discussed in the analytical part later on, Badr emerged as a product of the top-down process facilitated by IRGC, the branch of Iranian armed forces. However, Badr is also analysed as a political actor with considerable popular legitimacy and electoral power.

2.3.1. Operational usefulness of militias

Militias are first and foremost useful partners for states to counter common enemies. This chapter offers an overview of the relevant roles of militias in conflicts to understand reasons why states use militias.

Militias can offer cheap, dispensable and deniable services for a state in a civil war and serve as a force multiplier for the state's armed forces when they are weak (Hughes, 2016). Jentzsch (2014) argues that militias can become significant instruments for counterinsurgency campaigns when they cooperate with state forces. Counterinsurgency campaigns are characterized as 'wars waged by governments against a non-state actor' (Dixon, 2009, 356). Even Western states have opted for supporting non-state armed groups in various conflicts – for example, the US provided aid to the non-state armed group consisting of Kurdish fighters, Peshmerga, in their fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria (Gunter, n.d.). Obtaining intelligence as one of the challenges of counterinsurgencies can be effectively delegated to local militias as they can have better access to the local knowledge (Kalyvas, 2006). Eck (2015, 924) confirms this hypothesis by claiming that states 'subcontract the task of control and repression to allied militias that have the local intelligence skills necessary to manage the civilian population'. Militias can enhance local security that is necessary for the state's provision of public goods or be providers of services themselves.

This thesis inquiries into the Badr Corps's operational utility in the period of American occupation, sectarian war and the war against ISIS. It explores roles this militia had during the observed period and ways Iraq's government utilized its strength. In the next sub-chapter, a theory of armed order is discussed to better grasp violence devolution in state-militia relations in Iraq.

2.4. Theory of armed groups political roles

Staniland (2015, 771) claims that 'rather than always pursuing Max Weber's monopoly of legitimate violence, governments have complex, often unexpected relationships with non-state armed groups' and presents a theory to describe strategies states pursue towards militias that will be applied to the case study in this thesis.

Despite the popular belief that militias are mainly used for their operational strength, there is another important variable in state-militia relations - ideology. Staniland (2015, 771) argues 'that regime ideology plays a crucial role in shaping state strategy toward militias'. He has developed a theory of armed order that outlines a typology of state's strategies towards militias according to their ideological fit and operational utility to the government. These include suppression, incorporation, containment, and collusion. His theory is particularly relevant for this thesis, because first, it encompasses rich variations in state-militia relations, and second, it takes into account ideology as a guiding principle of state strategy toward militias.

After the fall of Saddam Hussein and his Sunni authoritarian regime based on the Ba'ath ideology that systematically banned Shia celebrations and murdered popular religious Shia leaders, Iraqi society divided along two sectarian lines that allowed Shia majority sect to dominate the democratic electoral process and carry its ideological preferences (Jacoby & Neggaz, 2007). These preferences determined strategy Iraq pursued towards the Badr Organization - a strong militia founded in Iran, but after 2003 operating in Iraq to eradicate Baathists from Iraq, and pursuing a Khomeini's Shia ideology of velayat-e faqih. However, this ideology is alien to Iraqi Shiites as the main Shia religious authorities in Iraq reject it. This thesis will analyse how Badr's allegiances interfered with Iraq's Shia governance project, using Staniland's theory.

2.4.1. State strategies towards militias

First, militias can be *suppressed* to break their power so that they disintegrate or make concessions. Second, *containment* occurs when a militia rises beyond the officially acceptable level of violence according to the state. Third, '*collusion* is a strategy of active, sustained cooperation between a state and an organized armed actor' that can take various forms, such as coordinated approach against enemies or provision of guns, training or logistics (Staniland, 2015, 775). Militia's activities can sometimes divert from state's goals resulting in tension, but their violence is not always aimed against the state. Collusion can be a short-term alliance against a common enemy,

resulting in either suppression or incorporation, or it can be of a long-term duration that develops into further cooperation. Finally, *the incorporation* strategy seeks to demobilize militia and integrate it into a political establishment to eliminate non-state violence. It represents a process of formal demobilization or transition of pro-government militias. Incorporation happens 'when a state decides to shift away from a collusion strategy in favour of integrating militias into the state or ruling party apparatus' (Staniland, 2015, 775). This process can be traced especially in LDSs.

2.4.2. Ideology and threats

State's ideological project influences strategy employed towards militias. Ideology 'refers to the boundaries of the polity and its relationship to the state that the regime wants to construct and defend' (Staniland, 2015, 776). It reflects into norms about acceptable behaviour, laws, boundaries of political discourse and state institutions, as well as to the strategies – a small militia pursuing distinct ideology than the state will be suppressed, and on the contrary, a strong group with corresponding ideology might be colluded with or incorporated. Ideology is embedded in political goals, beliefs and views on which political symbols are acceptable. It is interconnected with political power in parties, bureaucracy and military, but particular political leaders do not necessarily have to be ideologues, but ideology shapes their preferences and predispositions.

Next, it is necessary to theorize political threat and alignment as it affects the state's strategy towards militias. Threat represents the state's worst fears, be it a revolution, ethnic fragmentation, religious radicalism or sectarianism. Different groups can be threatening to different governments – for the purposes of this thesis, it is important to note that Shia militias are not as threatening to the Iraqi government as much as Sunni or Kurdish militias. In fact, the Badr militia has shared the same threat with the Iraqi government in the form of Sunni insurgency and the Islamist extremism that at times led to their cooperation, but Badr's ties with Iran or insufficient control of its members could pose a threat to Iraq's stability and independence. Therefore, the interaction between these two actors varies substantially and will be examined throughout this study.

Staniland divides militias into three categories, depending on their ideological position in the state – ally, enemy, or grey zone, as demonstrated in Figure 2. Operational usefulness symbolizes the importance of militia for the state in a conflict, while ideological fit describes to what extent do states and militias share a common view on norms and laws. Where these two variables meet, there are six armed group political roles.

Figure 2. Armed Group Political Roles and Government Strategies (Staniland, 2015, 779).

		Operationally Valuable?	
		Yes	No
Ideological fit	Ally	*Armed ally* Strategy: collusion (deep)	*Superfluous supporter* Strategy: incorporation
	Gray zone	*Business partner* Strategy: collusion	*Undesirable* Strategy: containment
	Enemy	*Strange bedfellow* Strategy: collusion (thin)	*Mortal enemy* Strategy: suppression

Operationally useful militias are colluded with. The depth and durability depend on the ideological fit, creating a wide range of possibilities. Especially collusion with *armed allies* tends to be deep and multifaceted as state and para-institutional forces operate closely because militia members are represented in the security apparatus, where they receive intelligence, training and resources. The political threat from militia is missing because they employ the same symbols as the government. 'If the operational value of a militia ends, it shifts into a superfluous supporter role and is likely to be targeted for incorporation' (Staniland, 2015, 781).

Militias that are not operationally useful can be either *superfluous supporters, undesirables* or *mortal enemies*. 'Superfluous supporters are groups whose existence and behaviour are compatible with the government's ideology, but whose continued existence does not provide operational benefits to the regime' (Staniland, 2015, 780). They are incorporated into the state apparatus or a ruling party when they have served their main purpose. Incorporation of superfluous supporters is considered as a mechanism for ruling elites to centralize control over coercion, thus it is relevant for this thesis.

This range of political roles of armed groups and government strategies is the main tool to analyse Iraq's interaction with the Badr militia between years 2003-2018. The theoretical framework is further supplied with a concept of Security Force Assistance that completes the full picture of Iraq's state-building efforts in a security environment that yields non-state armed groups and interference from other states because Staniland's theory does take into consideration import of foreign ideology.

2.5. Security Force Assistance

Analysing the Badr militia without realizing its ties with Iran is incomplete, therefore, this thesis employs the framework of Security Force Assistance (SFA) missions to encompass Badr's relation with Iran and its consequences on Iraq's strategy towards the group.

Pursuing foreign interests has led countries to substitute large military presence with limited missions in the form of SFA, that entails 'training, advising and equipping allied militaries' (Biddle, et al., 2017, 89). Assisting with building a security apparatus is parallel to the state-building that is rarely a result of purely domestic dynamics (Bakke et al., 2017). State-building in Iraq after 2003 has been closely facilitated by external assistance from the United States, but also from Iran. Biddle, Macdonald and Baker (2017, 91) argue that 'Iran has long provided SFA to Hezbollah, Hamas and others and now provides SFA to the Iraqi state government'. The assistance has been facilitated not only to the government but to the friendly militias as well, including the para-institutional Badr Organization. Iran has provided training, advising and weapon supplies to these militias that have had a rather controversial role in the Iraqi security environment, yet have gained solid legitimacy in fighting ISIS (Frantzman, 2020). Together with the materiel assistance, Iran also exports its ideology based on the concept of Islamic guidance that is used to complement the training of militia members.

Considering Iranian ideological influence on the Badr militia is relevant because the group has been a subject to Iraq's state-building efforts and integration into Iraq's security forces. Thus, having a group with ideological, material and military ties to Iran as a part of the state apparatus can pose a security threat to Iraq. This point is taken into account while analysing Badr-Iraq relations.

3. Research design and methodology

To address the main research question - what role did operational requirements and ideological alignment play in Iraq's strategy towards the Badr Organization in the period between 2003 and 2016, a research design with one case study will be employed. The case study is 'a spatially delimited phenomenon (a unit) observed at a single point in time or over a period of time, where clearly defined political or social units and institutions are usually the main phenomenon of study' (Gerring, 2007, 19). The case study closely examines Iraq's strategies and interactions with the Badr militia in a determined time frame that is divided into two periods depending on the change in the state's strategy.

3.1. Case study selection and limitations

The choice to pick the Badr militia as a representative of a larger number of Shia or even Sunni militias in Iraq was made due to the availability of primary resources, its ideological ties to Iran and Badr's presence in Iraq since 2003. Moreover, by choosing one Shia militia from the myriad of other existing Shia militias in the Middle East, the author aims to point out to a larger phenomenon of states employing para-institutional armed actors even when that challenges their monopoly on violence. The reason why the case study relies on only one Shia militia is because it aims to generate in-depth knowledge on Iraq's interaction with this particular group, due to its considerable domestic influence. The Badr Organization is considered to be Iraq's most powerful militia with its leader Amiri functioning as one of the top commanders of PMU and other members holding posts in the government (Alaaldin, 2017; IISS, 2019).

The time-frame between 2003 and 2016 allows a comprehensive analysis of Iraq's treatment of the Badr militia during the state-building in the post-Saddam era. 2003 is important as a year marked by the US invasion and a consequent US-facilitated state-building that prioritized militias' incorporation. While being in the midst of the war against ISIS in 2016, Iraq experienced a shift in the strategy towards militias, departing from the strategy of collusion initially used to counter ISIS, back to the strategy of incorporation.

The collection of data necessary to conduct an in-depth analysis of state-militia relations relies on primary and secondary courses. Due to the mainly clandestine nature of militia's operations and lack of primary sources regarding the ideology of all actors, the analysis is mainly based on leaked diplomatic cables and indirect resources. A series of leaked American diplomatic

cables from 2003 until 2010 and leaked Iranian cables from 2014 provide rich insight into the deteriorating situation in Iraq at that time, yet the information might suffer from bias, therefore must be crosschecked with several other sources. Triangulation of resources will enhance the credibility of the study (Salkind, 2010). Another important source is a 2007 series of interrogation reports of Qayis al-Khazali, a captured leader and a founder of Shia militia group Asaib Ahl al-Haqq, that offers insight into the Iranian interference in Iraq. Data is also collected from secondary sources, such as reports, articles, official documents, policy papers, dossiers or previous research that offer valuable information from interviews with Iraqi officials.

3.2. Method

This thesis seeks to test and build on the theory outlined in the theoretical framework. In particular, the main objective is to engage in a contextual, historically embedded *process-tracing plausibility probe* of the theory of armed groups political roles, considering not much research has been done to test hypotheses included in this theory. Plausibility probe aims to determine whether more intensive testing is warranted. Because of the relatively recent publication of the theory and the lack of research done in this field, it is necessary to 'uncover new or omitted variables, hypotheses, causal paths, causal mechanisms, types, or interactions effects'. Case study findings can also 'establish, strengthen or weaken historical explanations of a case' (Staniland, 2015; George & Bennett, 2005, 109). Process-tracing allows discovering 'causal mechanisms linking causes and outcomes together' (Beach, 2017, 4). This thesis will inquire into causal mechanisms of state's strategies towards militias as outlined in Staniland's theory to test whether the example of the Badr-Iraq's government fits into this framework. This method identifies 'steps in a causal process leading to the outcome of a given dependent variable of a particular case in a particular historical context' (George & Bennett, 2005, 176). The dependent variables identified in this study are mechanisms of militias entering a particular type of relationship with a state, be it suppression, containment, collusion or incorporation. The main independent variables leading to the production of the outcome – ideology, operational requirements and electoral incentives, are traced in a backward manner to uncover causal mechanisms.

4. Shia ideological projects

In this chapter, characteristics of Shiism as a minority sect of Islam in the world, but a dominant sect in Iran and Iraq, and a comparison of two Shia ideological projects, are discussed. The Shiite community is not just a religious fraction or a homogenous grouping but a loose 'cultural designation, which may differentiate a certain group from another in religious terms', but above all, it could be loosely characterized as an ideology in the sense that it guides norms and boundaries of a state polity (Jabar, 63, 2003).

The chapter begins with a discussion on Iran's Shia governance project which forms a substantive knowledge for understanding Badr's activities in Iraq. Then follows an analysis of the Iraqi ideological project dominated by Shiites, and thus by the Shia religious authorities. Understanding religious leaders is important because they have a significant political power by issuing fatwas[2] - it is them who can encourage electoral attendance, mobilize fighters when a threat arises and influence militia's operations. The ideological position of the Badr militia is introduced further in this chapter, which is key for understanding how the Iranian project spreads across borders to Iraq via the group's activities. Grasping the magnitude of ideology in Iraq's governing and Badr's activities is necessary for engaging in a comprehensive analysis of the state's strategy towards militias based on the Staniland's theory in this thesis.

4.1. Iran's Islamic governance

The founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran Ayatollah Seyyed Ruhollah Khomeini developed a unique doctrine of Islamic governance specific to Iran, 'velayat-e faqih', applied in the country since the 1979 Islamic revolution (Chehabi, 1991). This concept, translated from Persian as 'guardianship of the jurist' means in words of Khomeini 'governing and administering the country and implementing the sacred laws of the sharia' (Farazmand, 1996, 247-8). It justifies the rule of clergy over the state and gives all the decision-making to the hands of the Supreme Leader (Aarabi, 2019). The foundation of this political society is a divine plan that can spread irrespective to national territorial boundaries. And it has been feared by other states in the region, especially Iraq

[2] 'Authoritative legal opinion given by a mufti (legal scholar)' (Oxford Islamic Studies, n.d.).

and Lebanon, where they have maintained secularism due to the multi-ethnic and multi-religious demographic (Aarabi & Ansari, 2019).

4.2. Iraq's Shia foundations

Shia clergy have significant political power in Iraq and determine what symbols are acceptable in the boundaries of state apparatus.

Iraq is a parliamentary state and despite its Shia majority of 60-65%, it has maintained the separation of religion and the state throughout the history, which could be among other factors contributed to the authority of Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who rejected Khomeini's theory of velayat-e faqih and instead called for a 'civil state' (Alaaldin, 2017). He represents a relatively moderate Shia strand in Iraq based on secular constitutionalism and a traditional quietist role of Shia clergy (Nasr, 2006). Sistani is the most influential Shia jurist in the world, but he refrains from expressing direct political recommendations on who to vote but rather approves of candidates beforehand. He only steps in due to critical nature of the situation and retreats once the political order is restored (Khalaji, 2005) Yet he has such an influence that he approved of the wording in Iraqi constitution regarding Islam being one of the sources of legislation among other religions, which symbolized Sistani's effort to promote religious freedom (Cesari, 2014). Velayat-e faqih was opposed by another influential cleric Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, who would substitute it with the idea of a 'guardianship of the people' (velayat-e umma) (Rubin, 2014).

Another power base is concentrated around the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and its leaders, the Hakim brothers, exiled in Iran during Saddam's regime. Abdul Aziz al-Hakim founded SCIRI, a Shiite political party aiming to import Iran's Islamic revolution to Iraq and introduce a Khomeini-style theocracy (Rubin, 2014).

Shiites in Iraq have their unique identity – they are Arab and follow local religious authorities rather than Khamenei. Iraqi Shia fighters are primarily nationalists and it is mainly militia leaders who are pro-Iranian (Alaaldin 2017; AEI, 2007). But despite doctrinal differences between Iraqi and Iranian Shiism, there are features shared by both Shia sects that differentiate

Shiites from Sunnis, such as celebrating the Ashura festival[3], the visual imagery of Ali and Husayn or worshipping the same mosques in Karbala, Najaf or Samarra that are visited by thousands of Iranian Shiites each year (Nasr, 2006).

4.3. The Badr Organization – development, objectives and ideology

The Badr Corps was founded in the early 1980s as the armed wing of SCIRI. It was formed as a Shiite insurgent group seeking refuge in Iran, consisting of exiled Iraqis, who fled away from Saddam's persecution against Shiites, and Iraqi prisoners of war. Since its foundation, Corps was a subunit of IRGC's Quds forces, which was demonstrated even years later by the origin of Badr fighter's weapons carrying a label saying 'Property of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (Steinberg, 2017; Daragahi, 2018). SCIRI's main intentions were to spark the Islamic revolution in Iraq based on the Khomeini's revolution in Iran and the trained Badr fighters were supposed to make it happen (Thurber, 2014). However, later it became clear that they would rather try to adapt features of Iranian Islamic Revolution to Iraq's local context (IISS, 2019). The group's enthusiasm for armed resistance is embedded in its name originating in a Quranic verse: 'Allah had helped you at Badr when you were helpless: then fear Allah: thus may ye show your gratitude' (Qur'an, 3:123).

Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s was an important learning experience for its fighters, fighting alongside Iranian troops against Saddam Hussein. Iran trained them and established relations that have lasted until the present conflicts, such as close ties with Muhandis, later leader of a Shia militia Kataib Hezbollah and one of the founding members of the Badr Corps, and Hadi al-Amiri, the Badr's current leader. Amiri and other Badr leaders spent their formative years in Iran, receiving academic education and military training (IISS, 2019). The Badr Corps conducted cross-border insurgent operations into Iraq and work towards subverting the Baath regime from Iraq's Shia south by gathering intelligence and carrying acts of sabotage (Rayburn & Sobchak, 2019).

[3] Festival commemorating a slaughter of Imam Husayn in Karbala by a Sunni Caliph in 680 C.E. Husayn was a son of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib, who is recognized as Prophet's Muhammad successor by Shiites (Nasr, 2006).

The US-led invasion allowed SCIRI to relocate to Iraq after years in exile, rebranding its military wing to the Badr Organisation of Reconstruction and Development (Arosoaie, 2015). Badr members were seen distributing food and doing charity work in poor areas of Baghdad (Daragahi, 2003). According to various sources, Badr was believed to have between 4,000 and 10,000 operating members around that time (Daragahi, 2003; Thurber, 2014).

Diplomatic cables illustrate Badr's journey from a SCIRI militia towards a political organization trying to appear independent and credible, while still retaining a well-armed army of fighters. In a Badr Organization conference in June 2005, the main objectives and goals were presented to a group of high-level attendees, including the president and prime minister, American officials, but also representatives of Sunni and Christian parties, which was seen by the attendees as a step away from the influence of Iran. Badr introduced its own political agenda, separate from SCIRI, but based on the photographs hanging in the venue, the group wanted their allegiances to look like they lie with the SCIRI leader Abdul Aziz al-Hakim and Ayatollah Sistani (U.S. Embassy in Iraq, 2005a). Crosschecking this information with Khazali interrogation reports, it appeared that the alignment with Sistani came upon a recommendation from Tehran, months before the 2005 parliamentary elections, to concentrate Shia votes towards one current (AEI, 2007). Nevertheless, the truth was that Badr has fostered ideological affinity with Iran since its foundation (IISS, 2019). Throughout the analysed period, Amiri repeatedly denied any interference from Iran and dismissed the notion that Badr would be an Iranian agent (U.S. Embassy in Iraq, 2006a). Amiri insisted that there was not any conflict between following the Iranian religious authority and him being Iraqi political and military leader – 'Khamenei has all the qualifications as an Islamic leader. He is the leader not only for Iranians but the Islamic nation' (Parker, et al., 2015).

Khazali explained in detail the real sources of the loyalty of the Badr Organization from his position of an insider within the complex environment of Iranian operations in Iraq. He claimed that Badr members are primarily loyal to Ayatollah Khamenei, then to Shiism, Islam and finally to Iraq. Badr's initial goal was to start an Islamic revolution in Iraq under Khomeini's vision, but the group eventually developed into more of a business group, whose members primarily fought for money (AEI, 2007).

Resources disagree about later SCIRI and Badr trajectory. It is clear that in 2007 SCIRI renamed to Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and that the party faced internal schism on

how close it should remain aligned to Iran. Some sources claim that Badr separated from ISCI in 2007 (Cesari, 2014; Steinberg, 2017), some say in 2012 (Mansour & Jabar, 2017; Ali, 2013), but the important point is that ISCI distanced itself from Iran, while Muhandis and Amiri followed a more Tehran-oriented politics since then (U.S. Embassy in Iraq, 2004).

4.4. Security force assistance – the Iranian style

In this sub-chapter, the way how Iran trained, advised and equipped the Badr Corps and how has the ideology crossed Iran-Iraq borders, is discussed to explore the group's operational utility.

The main instrument for advancing Iran's plans has been the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, established after the foundation of the Islamic Republic to protect the revolution against the opposition. IRGC developed from a paramilitary group to a most influential organization in today's Iran that directly answers to the Supreme Leader and operates parallel to the Iranian conventional army (CFR, 2019). IRGC's Quds Force, unit formed in 1982 to liberate Palestine from Israeli occupation, became over time responsible for exporting revolution beyond Iran's borders in the Middle East by fostering ties to several non-state military groups in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon or Yemen, the so-called 'proxies'. Quds Force was for a long period led by Iranian general Qassem Soleimani, who coordinated Shia militias in Iraq already since 2005, but became widely known for its hands-on approach against IS in Iraq and Syria (Aarabi, 2020; CEP, 2020). One of the commanders of PMU and former Badr leader Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis said when looking back at the period after Saddam's fall that 'Iran contributed to the establishment of our jihad forces. It developed them – especially the Badr Organization – and [its] Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps [IRGC] supported us and trained us (…) – materially, financially and politically' (MEMRI, 2017).

4.5. Training, advising and equipping

Iran's Shias are relatively homogeneous as they follow the only religious leader who is at the same time the formal head of the state – Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Therefore, the ideological-political training that IRGC provides to affiliated militias across borders is based on the same values of velayat-e faqih like in Iran and the Supreme Leader 'has a responsibility to spread Islam to other

countries and regions of the world' (Aarabi, 2020, 28). IRGC textbooks illustrate how militias have been subject of indoctrination during the training, by being told that they are preparing for the return of the Twelfth Imam and the global Islamic revolution. Iran's Shia ideology 'is the glue that binds the IRGC and its Arab Shia Islamist proxies together'. The ideology also rejects the concept of the nation-state, therefore the militias subscribing to it could have an interest in transnational pan-ideological projects such as velayat-e faqih (Aarabi, 2020, 32).

The intelligence obtained by the American forces illustrates Iranian interference already since 2005. One American commander expressed that 'Iran was conducting a full-scale unconventional warfare campaign in Iraq to dominate the emerging Iraqi Government'. There was evidence that Iran supplied explosively formed projectiles (EFPs)[4] to Shia militias, IRGC were sending Iranian citizens to create front companies to facilitate their covert activities. Moreover, Iran would provide extensive financial support, guidance, training and logistics to Badr and other Shia militias, such as the Sadrists (Rayburn & Sobchak, 2019, 498-9).

Qayis al-Khazali confirmed the Badr Organization received financial assistance and training from Iran. Training would happen in complete secrecy, usually lasting for a month. Preparations were done on one-on-one personal basis and fighters would travel separately to Iranian training facilities, located near Tehran. He claimed that Badr was trusted by Iran to such extent that they would receive training in surface to air missiles (SAM) - training not provided to any other Shia militias. Moreover, he suspected Iran from supplying military and political advisers to the Badr Organization, but they were most likely not in command positions (AEI, 2007).

In 2014 Iran was the first foreign country to provide assistance to Iraq after Mosul was conquered by the Islamic State, sending troops to help tackle the insurgency (Chulov, 2014). Iranian commanders openly travelled to Iran and coordinated on-ground operations within PMU (MEMRI, 2017). However, through force of arms, Iran tried to impose what was not in the hearts and minds of ordinary Iraqis, as Iraqi Shiism lies on different foundations (Rubin, 2014).

[4] Complex explosives, that more effective than improvised explosive devices (Rayburn & Sobchak, 2019, 498).

4.6. Chapter summary

To summarize, two competing ideological projects were discussed– Iraqi Shiism and Iranian Shiism. Badr's ideology is defined by a strong anti-Baathist orientation that continued to be one of the top priorities even after Saddam's fall, and a sectarian allegiance to the Iranian Supreme Leader. Badr's founding principles were to spark the Islamic Revolution, but since Iraq has developed into a civil state, the group has pragmatically reoriented into an organization with both political and armed wings to participate in the political establishment. The ideological depth is apparent in the close ties Badr has had with Iran that is beneficial for both parties – Badr fighters receive training and weapons, Iran fosters an allied para-institutional actor in Iraq. Next chapter explores the dynamics of the ideology in the relationship between the Iraqi government and the Badr militia.

5. State strategies towards the Badr Organization 2003-2016

This chapter outlines two main strategies Iraqi government employed towards the Badr militia based on the Staniland's classification – these being incorporation and collusion. Strategies are analysed in-depth to trace what role did operational requirements and ideological alignment play in the state-militia relation. Thus, each sub-chapter on the particular strategy contains two levels of analysis: first, main security challenges and Iraq's operational requirements are matched with Badr's utility. Second, ideological alignment of Badr and the Iraqi government, together with electoral results that installed the ruling political party in power, are explored.

5.1. Strategy: incorporation (2004 – 2010)

The most important law regarding militias came into effect in the mid-2004. The CPA Order 91 was a major achievement as it scheduled integration of militias and other non-governmental armed groups. It specifically ordered disarmament of nine major militias, including the Badr Organization, and was accepted by all party leaders. The plan relied on each militia member to choose whether they want to join the new Iraqi security apparatus or return to civilian life. Order 91 prohibited and outlawed all militias and armed forces outside of government control (OSF & UNF, 2004, 33). It guaranteed that 'militia elders would receive pensions, militia academics would re-enter the workforce, and the young militia members would receive training and could join the armed forces on an individual basis' (U.S. Embassy in Iraq, 2006b).

5.1.1. Main security challenges and operational requirements

The US-led invasion in 2003 successfully orchestrated Saddam's fall but left Iraqi state completely in shambles. The administrative body responsible for re-building of the new state, the Coalition Provisional Authority was led by Paul Bremer, who was appointed by the US president George Bush. In the same year, the Iraqi Governing Council was assembled to assume limited governing functions. The body began working on the most pressing issues - de-Baathification, the dissolution of the Iraqi Army, and the control of weapons. De-Baathification forced Baath party members loyal to Saddam out of their offices across the whole country, including senior civil servants and university professors, which significantly disrupted reconstruction plans (Rayburn & Sobchak,

2019, 140). Disempowering Iraqi security apparatus was supposed to avoid civil war from erupting, but eventually left thousands of ex-soldiers without jobs and frustrated, who then marched back home and merged back to their communities, taking their arms with them (Dodge, 2006). It was necessary to build back independent Iraqi security forces (ISF) that were meant to constitute a main role in the provision of security for Iraq (Biddle, et al., 2017). ISF was composed of several components: army, police, national guard and border control. CPA created the Iraqi Civil Defence Corps (ICDC) that consisted of former security services employees, but also militia members. ICDC operated alongside Coalition forces and assisted in counterinsurgency operations to support US military footprint on the ground (OSF & UNF, 2004). This force was recruited locally, trained in member's native environment and 'widely recognized by the Iraqi people' (Rayburn & Sobchak, 2019, 214).

SCIRI had a strong relationship with the Americans that gave it a source of legitimacy after the invasion (Thurber, 2014). CPA endorsed SCIRI and assured its members get seats in Iraqi Governing Council. Hakim managed to extend the reach of the Badr Organization by integrating individual members of the militia into ICDC by negotiating with Bremer (Rayburn & Sobchak, 2019, 217). Badr fighters were heavily recruited into the ICDC's 36th battalion deployed in Najaf and Fallujah in late 2004 to counter the Mahdi Army (Dodge, 2006). Amiri was appreciated by some American officials for his 'comprehensive assessment of Iraq's political, economic, and security challenges' and his willingness to disarm militias (U.S. Embassy in Iraq, 2006b). CPA's and Badr's objectives aligned at that time and allowed a coordinated approach towards common enemies – former Baathists turned insurgents and Sadrists. There was a brief period of operational utility of the Badr militia when it joined Coalition forces to counter the Sadrist uprising and that strategy can be characterized as collusion, however, the main objective remained integration.

The US-sponsored and Shiite-dominated governments led to a massive psychological and physical dislocation of Iraqi Sunnis that caused a loss of their identity and eventually a wide-spread insurgency movement (Hashim, 2012). Resistance came also from the Sadrist movement, the Mahdi Army, that recruited from Baghdad slums and opposed the US occupation. Mahdi Army seized previously quite Shiite areas in Najaf, Amara, Karbala and Kufa and had to be suppressed by ISF (OSF & UNF, 2004).

Integration of militias into the ISF, the Badr Organization, in particular, was one of the top issues of negotiations between Maliki and the American Ambassador taking place throughout the

year 2006 (U.S. Embassy in Iraq, 2006c). But the process was taking too much time, and as of March 2006, only two per cent of the Badr forces were integrated into the ISF. Amiri personally demanded Badr members to reintegrate into regular life and receive pensions from the government, and for that, he needed more funding from the US government (U.S. Embassy in Iraq, 2006b). Despite the slow process, Badr still gained influence and had its members integrated into the Federal Police, the Ministry of Interior's Emergency Response Division, and the Iraqi Army's 5th and 8th Divisions (IISS, 2019).

The insurgency evolved into a full-fledged sectarian war between Sunnis and Shiites in 2006 after the bombing of Al-Askariya Mosque (Hashim, 2012). The Badr Organization continued in its operations despite efforts to integrate its members into the state apparatus, that would force them to follow state orders. The group was playing by their own rules to counter the Sunni insurgency. Its members were accused of killing prominent Sunni clerics, commit human rights abuses in the Ministry of Interior (MOI) that was under their control (abuses were considered as understandable by Amiri because they were targeting the ex-Ba'athists who were committing the same crimes against Shiites), or having an assassination list for Sunnis who collaborated with the Ba'athist regime. One of their self-proclaimed members was also detained for carrying EFPs (U.S. Embassy in Iraq, 2005b, U.S. Embassy in Iraq, 2006d, U.S. Embassy in Iraq, 2009). Further accusations were made against members of MOI who would carry acts of violence against Sunnis with apparent official approval and in official uniforms and vehicles (Rayburn and Sobchak, 2019). The Badr Organization became known for organizing Wolf Brigades to protect Shia neighbourhoods from Sunni attacks, but their tactics were far too aggressive (Thurber, 2014). However, the Shia population would turn to them for protection, as the Iraqi army was not capable of that (Alaaldin, 2017).

One cable from March 2006 shows Amiri's position as a member of the Iraqi government on one hand and leader of the Badr militia on the other, affected his decision-making towards dissolving the militia, that was considered by the Coalition officials as a threat to stability in Iraq. He agreed that militias should be under the control of the state because they make the Iraqi government look weak and ineffective, but only if the state and the Coalition would be able to protect the Shia community. Moreover, the police did not have enough trained forces to maintain order, thus militias had to take over. Taking a firm stance towards former Ba'athist was his driving force, that translated into his position towards the status of non-state militias inside Iraq. Ridding

Iraqi government of former Ba'athist was according to him more of a pressing issue then disarming the militias (U.S. Embassy in Iraq, 2006b).

The operational utility of the Badr militia was briefly appreciated by the US troops in a coordinated strategy against the Mahdi Army, but due to Badr's violent operations against Sunni insurgency promoting sectarianism, they were not aligned with the official state strategy and instead targeted for incorporation.

5.1.2. Ideology and electoral incentives

The ideological project of the Iraqi state in the observed period depended on the authority of religious leaders and dominant political parties. The way how it translated into state's strategies towards the Badr militia is analysed in this chapter.

The regime change symbolized a big turn for Iraq's Shiites, long persecuted by Saddam's secular, but very anti-Shia Ba'athist regime because they would finally get a political representation in the parliament, eventually forming the ideological basis of the new state. The political sphere in Iraq was between 2005 and 2018 dominated by Shia Islamist Dawa party that produced three prime ministers over time - Ibrahim al-Jaafari, Nouri al-Maliki and Haider al-Abadi. Maliki's first term as prime minister from 2006 to 2010 is relevant as his policies towards militias were consistent. Dawa party ideological orientation developed from the efforts to build an Islamic state to more secular and pragmatic governance.

The Islamic Revolution inspired many members to apply the same ideas to Iraq after Saddam's fall, but due to the different strands within Iraqi Shiism and the multi-ethnic nature of Iraq, Shia Islamists had to shift from revolutionary Islamism to pragmatism. The new Iraq state was defined by several ethno-sectarian communities in a pluralistic federal arrangement. Despite compromises Dawa had to make to include other parties into policy-making, there was a continuous tension within the party, dividing members into the Maliki wing, that grew closer to Iran, and the Abadi wing, that has pursued closer ties with the US (Hasan, 2019).

In the observed period, Prime Minister Maliki would follow a policy of the non-state armed actors' integration into MOI, because of the perception of militias being problematic and illegitimate, an idea originating from the Dawa founder Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr (Mansour &

Jabar, 2017). Al-Sadr argued that Iraq should be a strong state and not rely on paramilitaries, therefore Dawa has never formed a military wing like SCIRI has (Mansour, 2017).

In regards to Badr's political activities, its members were represented in the government – Amiri himself was a member of the Council of Representatives and Bayan Jabr al-Saulagh was appointed as Minister of Interior after 2005 elections won by the Shia coalition (Steinberg, 2017). It is important to note that the unified Shia coalition was supported by Sistani, who gave it its blessings before elections (Khalaji, 2005). Sistani believed in free elections and backed the authority of state institutions in his fatwas – he was against 'anything that disrupts the peace and prevents Iraqi officials from carrying out their duties in serving the people', therefore denouncing activities of non-state militias (Raphaeli, 2004).

Badr's leader Amiri was appointed to act as one of the members of a security committee within the Shia coalition, thus the militias were entrusted with a high level of responsibility to deal with the Sunni insurgency. Having managed to gain a position as the head of the Security and Defence Committee despite the then Vice President's wishes (who was Sunni) as something that he considered as a mistake he could not prevent from happening, points at Amiri's power and influence in politics (U.S. Embassy in Iraq, 2006e). Due to his position in the Iraqi government, Amiri affected the process of militia integration in the sense that it probably took longer than expected and was not fully completed – at least as long as Badr is concerned. He claimed that independent 'Islamist Shia militias were necessary because neither the Coalition nor the Government could protect the people' (U.S. Embassy in Iraq, 2006b). The ideology factor is apparent here, as it's clear for him that only community-based militias could fight the Sunni insurgents. Therefore, he would hamper the process of militia integration into Iraq's security forces, that were unable to fight back.

During the observed period, the Badr Organization was ideologically aligned with the Iraqi government. Even though they did not share the exact Shia ideological project – Badr adhered to the rules of velayat-e faqih, but Iraq's political establishment preferred a non-theocratic ethno-sectarian pluralistic federal arrangement, the prime minister chose to integrate it. The ideology came into a play in the Maliki's perception towards militias – he worked towards Badr's integration to get the group under the state control. Badr did not represent a considerable danger to the state with its vision about revolutionary Islamism, because these ideas have never gained popularity in Iraq, which was contributed to Sistani's and Mohammad al-Sadr's influence.

5.1.3. Chapter summary

All in all, the Badr Organization was becoming part of a problem itself, when its fighters were contributing to the sectarian violence against Sunnis and thus their operational usefulness was decreasing. According to Staniland's theory, when militia loses operational value, after serving its main purpose, it shifts into a category of a superfluous supporter and is targeted for incorporation. Nevertheless, these types of militias still follow the ideology that is compatible with the state. CPA's main objective at that time was building of a robust security apparatus and outlawing non-state armed groups that threatened the state's monopoly of violence. Badr' main purpose was to get rid of Saddam Hussein and remaining Baathists – the first goal has been met and the group was awarded for it by gaining benefits for its fighters, yet the second goal was not met entirely and Badr continued to use tactics more characteristic for insurgents, tactics learnt in Iranian exile.

During the observed period and in the course of the highest levels of sectarian violence, there was a lot of effort invested into integrating Badr fighters into the army and the police, even by Amiri. The reason Maliki wanted the disarmament and integration was the effect Shia forces had on the sectarian violence. But the apparent reason for Amiri was to guarantee his fighters and their families state benefits and most likely to expand influence over the police and the army. The integration of Badr militia was significant, considering its members were represented in the government and the security forces, but has not succeeded completely, because the government did not appear to have complete control over Badr fighters who would commit acts of violence irrespective to the government efforts to calm the sectarian war down. Prime Minister Maliki attempted to demobilize and integrate the Badr militia into the state apparatus, to eliminate non-state violence committed by disobedient militia members. But because of the Badr's pro-government nature and Shia ideological allegiance, its members did not revolt against the state like Sunni insurgents, who aimed at a complete regime change, the Badr militia was not suppressed, nor contained, which are strategies employed for groups in enemy or grey zone. Incorporation of Badr members into positions in government, thus their move from coercive capacity to administration is a key stage of state-building.

To assess the power of ideology on Iraq's government strategy towards militias, and the Badr Organization, in particular, one needs to take into consideration several existing religious Shia figures who impact the electoral process and post-election decision-making. Ayatollah Sistani had a considerable influence on election attendance that eventually helped the Shia parties to win, but

it was a sign that he believed in the state establishment, rather than in non-state armed groups' legitimacy. Dawa anti-militia stance is contributed to Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr, which led to Maliki's policy of Badr fighters' incorporation as much as possible to decrease its ability to act as a non-state armed group. Pro-Khamenei ideology of velayat-e faqih appeared to play a role against the incorporation of the Badr militia to the state apparatus in the case of Amiri. Even though he supported militia integration, when the sectarian war broke out, he did not believe the state can protect the Shia population and therefore there is a need for non-state militias to take justice into their hands.

5.2. Strategy: collusion (2010 – 2016)

The official sign of a shift in state's strategy towards militias was symbolized by the creation of the Popular Mobilization Units or the al-Hashd al-Shaabi in June 2014, in the face of attacks by the Islamic State, but Maliki already started shifting his strategy towards militias since his second term in 2010. PMU is an umbrella organization, consisting of several independent militias. It was officially assembled and formally commissioned by Prime Minister Maliki, by a move that had no legal basis, 'aside from his constitutional office as commander-in-chief' (Sowell, 2015). Maliki signed a decree to form the Commission for the Popular Mobilization Units that was directly tied to the office of prime minister. But it violated Article 9 of the Iraqi constitution, which specifically prohibits the formation of militias outside of the framework of armed forces. This step brought different paramilitaries together under one organization that was formally separated from the state security apparatus (Mansour & Jabar, 2017).

Maliki's successor Haider al-Abadi recognized the legitimacy of the PMU Commission and provided further funding, but he aimed at gaining better control over the militias. The prime minister issued an order in February 2016 that confirmed PMU as 'a part of the Iraqi armed forces, and linked to the general commander of the armed forces' (Mansour, 2017). In contrast to Maliki's collusion strategy, Abadi desired to incorporate militias back to the state apparatus (Mansour & Jabar, 2017). In November the Iraqi Parliament institutionalized it by the law (Saliba, 2016). As one official said, the 'goal is to ensure it is the state that has a monopoly over violence but we all know within the Shiite establishment that it is ultimately only the religious establishment and the hawza[5] that can disband or delegitimize the factions within the PMU' (Alaaldin, 2017).

It is necessary to highlight that by 2010 Badr has integrated into Iraq's state apparatus to such extent, that there is a very thin line between the strategy of incorporation and collusion, but because the group has maintained a distinct organizational hierarchy and was granted legitimacy in PMU, collusion is relevant.

5.2.1. Main security challenges and operational requirements

The security situation started to deteriorate since 2011 as the Islamic State of Iraq was conducting acts of violence and terrorism daily, killing hundreds of people (Raphaeli, 2011).

[5] Seminary of traditional Shia Islamic studies consisting of Ayatollahs (Riazaty, 2016).

In summer 2014 ISIS attacked Iraqi cities of Mosul, Kirkuk and Salah ad-Din, and approached the gates of Baghdad and Erbil, the ISF that were meant to play the main role in the provision of security for Iraq nearly collapsed, leaving weapons and equipment the US supplied them with behind (Ali & Kagan, 2014; Biddle, et al., 2017). Several militias, most of them Shiite, consisting of mobilized fighters were joined together to form the umbrella organization Popular Mobilization Units with the intention to fight against ISIS. The most prominent groups were the Badr Organization, Asaib Ahl al-Haqq, Saraya al-Salam, Kataib Hezbollah, Liwa al-Imam Ali, Liwa Ali al-Akbar, Liwa Abul Fadhl al-Abbas and Kataib Sayid al-Shuhada (Al-Khafaji, 2019). Estimations of the organization's number of fighters vary from 60,000 to 142,000. Militias operating within PMU were diverse, but most of them belonged to the Shiite sect (Mansour & Jabar, 2017; Knights, 2019). PMU was de facto commanded by Muhandis, Amiri and Soleimani, therefore the control over militias belonged to them, not to the commander-in-chief (Steinberg, 2017). Militia members received salaries from the Iraqi state, as well as weapons are provided by Bagdad, however, after high numbers were supplied by Iran (IISS, 2019). PMU fighters were involved in several ground offensives, tipping the balance against the favour of ISIS. The credits of Samarra defence are contributed to them, as well as protecting Baghdad, liberating Jurf al-Sakhar from the Sunni Islamists and keeping the pilgrimage routes to Karbala and Najaf (Knights, 2015). Clearing Jurf al-Sakhar was particularly important at that time because it came ahead of thousands of Shia pilgrims travelling to commemorate Ashura (George, 2014).

The Badr Organization constituted the largest group within the PMU (IISS, 2019). At the beginning of the conflict, Badr claimed to have approximately 10,000 armed men at their disposal, while at the end of the conflict its troops numbered somewhere between 18,000 and 22,000 fighters, yet the organization itself claiming even 50 thousand (Steinberg, 2017; Knights, 2019). Badr's main role in PMU was the provision of expertise and manpower, such as the armour, artillery and missiles directorates. Its members were also points of liaison with Sunni Tribal Mobilization Forces, that are also supported by the US, and hold several leading positions such as chief of staff, chief of operations, and head of religious instruction and training directorates. During the war, Amiri left his post of Transport Minister that he held before and became a full-time commander of PMU and a military governor of the Diyala province, that shares a long border with Iran. Diyala has been known for being a breeding ground for Sunni extremists and Badr together with other Shia militias carried out several operations to clear the province from IS fighters.

However, Amiri's governance was not fully successful and terrorist attacks continued (Adnan & McFate, 2015). Badr members together with Iranian operatives were seen in the province collecting local intelligence about ISIS (IISS, 2019).

All in all, the Badr Organization played a significant role in Iraq's counterinsurgency strategy as the strongest group in PMU and its leader Amiri holding the position of one of the three PMU commanders, thus its operational usefulness has increased considerably since the previous observed period. It was to a large degree attributed to the force assistance from Iran. Badr, as well as other militias in PMU, have proved that territorial integrity of Iraq is their foremost objective that they will protect against the ISIS's claims to maintain Islamic caliphate, which has also been a goal of Iran. It was demonstrated by Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif who stated that 'If Iraq dissolves, there will be chaos in the region. No one wants that.' (Esfandiary & Tabatabai, 2015, 6-7).

5.2.2. Ideology and electoral incentives

The depth and durability of state-militia collusion depend on the ideological fit, which is explored in this chapter.

Elected Iraqi officials were more and more getting under the Iranian grip. In his second term since 2010 and after the US troops withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, Maliki began openly working with several militias, including the Badr Organization, upon demand from Iran. Maliki lost the 2010 elections and was indebted to Iran for supporting him in the post-election government formation and becoming a prime minister (Raphaeli, 2011). Other reasons were to counterbalance his Shia political opponents and Sadrists and protect Shia shrines from Sunni protesters, and since August 2013, mostly it was due to the mounting threat posed by the Islamist extremists (Mansour & Jabar, 2019). Maliki shared a general closeness with Iranian Shia Islamist worldview, yet not the ideology of velayat-e faqih, but had to balance his views considering his dependence on both the US and Iran (Eisenstadt, et al., 2011).

Maliki maintained close relations with the Badr Organization that was part of his 'state of law' campaign that after elections in 2010 assured Amiri the position of Minister of Transport (Arosoaie, 2015). MOI was also governed by Badr representative. By securing this position, Badr was able to direct the flow of money and weapons from the Iraqi government to militias, because

MOI is central in Iraqi security apparatus, as it controls federal police and intelligence agencies, and administers the budget for arms procurement (Steinberg, 2017; George, 2014). When the war in Syria broke out in 2011, Iraqi Shia militias served as an instrument of Iranian policy to fight along with Assad's regime, with Maliki's consent. By 2014, seven Shia militias became operational and supported Maliki in his actions: Badr, Kataib Hezbollah, Asaib Ahl Al-Haq, Harakat Hezbollah Al-Nujaba, Kataib Sayyid Al-Shuhada, Kataib Jund Al-Imam, and Kataib Imam Ali (Mansour, 2017).

After the fall of Mosul in June 2014, Sistani recognized the severity of the security situation and released fatwa calling upon all eligible male adults to engage in jihad against ISIS and volunteer to the ISF. He did not encourage the formation of popular militias, but because ISF could not absorb such amount of volunteers due to its past mismanagement, fighters would join the paramilitary units instead (Al-Khafaji, 2019). He later demanded that after cessation of violence, militias should be disbanded and their members integrated into the Ministry of Interior and Defence (Mansour, 2017). Maliki used his fatwa to start a campaign to direct volunteers into the existing militias that now had a strong legitimacy, allowing them to appear in public – in contrast to their previous role as outlaws (Mansour & Jabar, 2019).

When Abadi became prime minister in 2014, the Iranian regime did not worry to lose influence over Iraqi politics despite Abadi's less sectarian orientation and friendliness towards the West, because there were still many ministers left who leaned towards Iran. The Ministers of Municipalities, Communications and Human Resources were Badrist and in a 'complete harmony' with the Iranian regime. Moreover, Ministers of Transportation, Oil and the Foreign Minister had a 'special relationship' with Iran. This special relationship is illustrated when Soleimani came to the Minister of Transportation Bayan Jabr to ask for a favour to access to Iraqi airspace to fly planes full of weapons and supplies to support Assad in his fight against rebels, and Jabr approved of it (Risen, et al., 2019).

The ideological allegiance to Khamenei affected Badr's relations with Abadi in the way that Amiri often criticized Abadi's military plans, his governance or mistreating the PMU fighters. Badr also supported Iran's intervention in Syria. In sum, Amiri did not believe that the state apparatus under Abadi was strong enough to centralize violence under its rule, therefore the group preferred to keep its non-state autonomy that is aligned with Iran's policies based on the transnational doctrine of velayat-e faqih (Mansour & Jabar, 2019). Next to military operations,

Badr focused on building political support in other areas, such as Mosul where they opened offices that were nevertheless closed soon, or in Kadhimiya district of Baghdad, where the Badr Corps fighters were seen to enforce a more appropriate dress code according to the Islamic law (IISS, 2019; Rubin, 2014).

5.2.3. Chapter summary

In the context of state-militias dynamic, Sistani's role can be seen as supportive of state's central role in the monopoly of violence, which was demonstrated in his fatwa, addressing volunteer fighters to support Iraqi Security Forces. He has never intended to undermine the state's authority by encouraging the formation of non-state armed groups, but Maliki used his fatwa as an ideological boost. Both Maliki and even Abadi knew that the units were indispensable in the fight against ISIS, which was illustrated in Amiri's confident statement: 'I told Abadi: If you want us to give you all our weapons and we sit at home, we don't mind, but then if [the Islamic State] takes Baghdad, this is not our problem' (George, 2014).

Badr's operational value in the war against ISIS cannot be questioned and due to the scope of state-militia cooperation and the ideological fit, the group can be in this period considered as an armed ally. Iraq's strategy is consistent with Staniland's theoretical arguments that militias deploying Islamist symbols and demands are extensively colluded with. Shia Islamist symbols were deliberately used by Maliki to mobilize fighters to join primarily Shia militia groups to counter the Islamic State. The collusion was deep and multifaceted as Badr members had access to first-hand intelligence from MOI, received weapons from the Iraqi government that were, however, imported from Iran, and training from Iranian operatives.

According to Staniland's theory, allied militias should not pose a political threat as they employ the same symbols as the government. Nevertheless, there are reasons to think Badr could pose some threat considering its ideology is aligned with the Iranian authority of Ayatollah Khamenei that contradicts Iraq's secular parliamentary system of governance. In contrary to Sistani's objectives, the ideology of velayat-e faqih approves of the non-state character of armed groups. Khamenei's goals were expressed through activities of IRGC Quds force that actively supported the Badr militia in its anti-ISIS operations by providing exclusive training and weapons, that bypass state's authority. Moreover, as the ideology of velayat-e faqih promotes transnationalism,

militia members did not shy away from conducting operations in Syria. It was also obvious that Badr focused on clearing areas from IS depending on the meaning they have for Shiism, rather for the whole multi-religious Iraq. All of these activities oppose Iraq's efforts to gain a monopoly of violence.

6. Conclusion

The main objective of this thesis was to explain the role of operational requirements and ideological alignment in Iraq's strategy towards the Badr Organization in the period between 2003 and 2016. The interaction between the Badr Organization and Iraqi state served as a case study and a method of process-tracing plausibility probe was used to uncover causal mechanisms that led Iraqi state to employ a particular strategy towards the group.

This thesis analysed a process of violence devolution in Iraq, a country with a colonial history, exogenous state-building projects, and multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian population. The reliance on the non-state and para-institutional armed actors for protection is a common phenomenon in recent history as the state would favour one sect or ethnicity over the other.

Iraq's government employed two main strategies towards the Badr militia – incorporation between 2004 and 2010, and collusion between 2010 and 2016. Incorporation of ideologically aligned superfluous supporters in the first analysed period is a sign of elites attempting to centralize control over the coercion by the disarmament of the civilian population and outlawing private armies, a mechanism described by Weber and Tilly. The US-facilitated state-building and the new Iraqi establishment worked together to impose an order that would allow a move from coercion to administration. Iraq incorporated some Badr members into the political and security establishment, however, the strategy was not entirely successful, because Badr has retained its operational utility and has not been fully integrated. The Badr Organization transformed into a political party but maintained its military wing for the whole time.

On the contrary, Maliki's collusion with militias in the second observed period points towards the alternative concept of violence devolution, when LDSs collude with the para-institutional armed groups as the competition for power control remained to be unresolved. Due to the imminent threat from the insurgent Islamic State and the Iraqi army's collapse, Maliki opted for collusion with Shia militias to face a common insurgent enemy that posed an existential threat to Iraq. Maliki, as well as Amiri, considered the Badr Organization, among other pro-government militias, to be the only actors capable of defending Iraq from this threat, because of the weak military.

6.1. Role of operational requirements and ideology in state strategies

To address the main research question, the Badr militia fits into a typical characterization of a force multiplier in conflicts when the state's armed forces are weak. State's operational considerations were formed by militias' utility, gained after years of experience in irregular warfare. The threat of ISIS led to the wide-spread mobilization of Shia militias, uniting under the officially assembled PMU organization, that heavily contributed to ground counterinsurgency operations.

However, operational requirements were not the only factors influencing state decision-making regarding militias. Ideology played a significant role in Iraq's strategy towards the Badr Organization, which is consistent with Staniland's theory. Ideological fit determined that state chose to incorporate and collude with the group in the observed period between 2003 and 2016. The Badr Organization is a relatively large group – since its return from exile, it has doubled its active members to approximately 22,000, constituting the largest militia within PMU. Even despite such strength and disobedient members that posed a threat to Iraq's establishment, the group was incorporated and colluded with due to the corresponding ideology of Shiism. Nevertheless, Shia sect is not a homogeneous community and several currents were competing each other. Iraqi Shia authorities - Ayatollah Sistani and Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr, both rejected ideology of velayat-e faqih and supported authority of Iraq's state establishment, free of the unchecked influence of militias. Despite the effect, Sistani's fatwa had on the mobilization of Shia militias and the creation of mainly non-state anti-ISIS formation PMU that was facilitated by Maliki, Sistani intended to support official Iraq Army with the mobilized volunteers.

The ideology of velayat-e faqih, originating from Ayatollah Khomeini, highlights religious authority over the rule of the civil state and promotes it across national borders. This ideology was exported via IRGC Quds force that facilitated Badr's training and weapon supplies, and was followed by the group members themselves - as its leader Amiri often demonstrated in his speeches. Since Badr members were integrated to such extent that they held posts in Iraq government, their stance towards militias was taken into consideration. Even though Amiri admitted that non-state armed groups should be incorporated into state's apparatus, he maintained that as long as the threat of Sunni insurgents' lasts, militias should be operational to protect Shia communities – a position supportive of the existence of armed groups outside of the state.

6.2. Implications for further research

This thesis intended to uncover new causal mechanisms and types of the theory of armed groups political roles. Two main observations were made regarding this goal. First, even ideologically aligned militias can pose a political threat affecting the state's strategy towards non-state armed groups when the group follows a different religious authority. And second, the role of foreign ideologies has to be taken into account in the case of particular militias. It was demonstrated that research inclusive of ideas and ideologies is viable, therefore further testing is warranted.

This thesis produced an in-depth analysis of one militia, but because each state-militia relations in Iraq has a different dynamic, additional research focusing on other groups might bring fruitful results. Moreover, it would be interesting to continue with the same analysis as presented in this thesis after 2016, as this year marked another shift in the state's strategy towards militias.

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