al-Hashd al-Shaʿbi: Contesting Hybrid Statehood in Iraq

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The state's monopoly on violence is taken for granted by most citizens of wealthy Western nations. The idea that any group besides the government would brandish weapons and undertake coercive action against citizens in the public realm sounds like a dystopian mirage to those used to the Western Weberian conceptualization of state sovereignty and violence. Yet, in many places in the world, this is a part of daily reality. So too in Iraq. Coercive organizations that are not aligned, and in fact, often at odds with, the government in Baghdad have been present to varying extents for decades. In the 1930s, tribal militias outnumbered the central military 8 to 1 according to certain estimates (Gulmohamad 2020, 260). In the 1970s, Kurdish rebels fought for independence with Iranian support (Yaphe 2014, 129). The onset of the 21ˢᵗ century saw an explosion in the amount, prominence, and violence of coercive organizations in Iraq. In part, this was a result of the US-led invasion in 2003 and the subsequent years of civil warfare and sectarian violence that the US' chaotic and ill-planned occupation triggered. The overthrow of Saddam Hussein's Sunni-dominated government and the disbandment of the Iraqi army left a heavily armed country struggling with politicized sectarian and ethnic divisions in a power vacuum (Ahram 2011, 88). This vacuum exposed dozens of fault lines. The US struggling to establish control; regional powers aiming to expand their influence; domestic political and religious movements vying for influence in the new state; opportunistic criminal organizations terrorizing the citizenry; and tribal and neighborhood forces mobilizing to protect their communities meant that violence intersected every level of society. After years of hardships, however, the civil war ended. The presence of armed groups did not. Coercive organizations big and small remained armed and influential at local and even national levels. Some engaged in criminal and even political activities, often undermining the central state's authority.

Ironically, it would take the emergence of a new, or rather: rebranded, coercive organization in 2014 to unite Iraq's many armed actors. In that year, the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS), itself initially an offshoot of al-Qaeda in Iraq, emerged from its footholds in civil war-torn Syria onto the Iraqi scene. It quickly conquered north-western Iraq down to the outskirts of Baghdad, meeting little opposition from the perennially corrupt and dysfunctional Iraqi army. This is best exemplified by the fall of Mosul, Iraq's second city, which was abandoned by the army facing an IS force of only an estimated 1500-2000 fighters (Gaston 2017a). IS' brutally repressive, extremist, sectarian regime and the trauma of Mosul's surrender quickly mobilized the Iraqi population. Iraq's many coercive organizations and its government came together in the form of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF, or al-Hashd al-Shaʿbi in Arabic).

To fight back, Iraqi Prime-Minister al-Maliki established the Hashd on June 11 2014. This would be an organization paid and directed by the state, but made up of previously non-governmental coercive organizations. While many units from the local to the national level were established with the purpose of joining the PMF, over half of its roughly 60 component parts predate it (Gulmohamad 2020, 262). This had not been the first effort to engage with the armed groups outside of the state. Already in 2013, the government had started to engage Iraq's armed groups in military coordination against ISIS in the 'Sons of Iraq' framework. This framework itself had initially been established by the United States in 2008 (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 2; Gaston 2017b). After the fall of Fallujah in January 2014, al-Maliki created the Popular Defense Committees in March to defend the outskirts of Baghdad (al-Khoei 2019, 101). However, the fall of Mosul in June would trigger a reinvigoration of this effort on a national level. The highest Shiʿa cleric of the country, ʿAli al-Sistani, issued a religious ruling (fatwa) saying "all citizens who are able to bear arms and fight the terrorists, defending their country and their people and their holy places, should volunteer and join the security forces to achieve this holy goal" (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 3). This fatwa did not, as some assert (Gulmohamad 2020, 262; Derzsi-Horváth, Gaston, and Saleh 2017) create the PMF. However it gave the government's efforts much-needed religious and social legitimacy. The response was massive. According to Mansour, 75% of men in Shiʿa provinces aged 18-30 joined the PMF by 2016 (although

most would have become reservists) (Mansour 2016b). Al-Sistani called for people to join the security forces. However, the army was distrusted and disliked, causing most to join coercive organizations outside of the state (al-Khoei 2019, 101–2). A common quip in Iraq today observes that while Saddam Hussein used to call the Iraqi army the fourth strongest in the world, by 2014 it was barely the fourth strongest in Iraq, weaker than the PMF, the Kurdish Peshmerga, and tribal mobilization units (Mansour and Jabar 2017, 5).

Identifying the Issue

The PMF had been largely ad-hoc and informal in the heated moments of its inception. Before long, executive and parliamentary efforts to regulate and control the fighters now on the government's payroll emerged in the months and years that followed. IS was steadily driven back over the course of 2015 and 2016 through the concerted efforts of the US-led coalition against IS, the Iraqi state, the PMF, and Iranian forces. The recapture of Mosul was declared in July 2017 (*BBC News* 2017), with al-ʿAbadi claiming IS' total defeat in Iraq in December 2017 (Chmaytelli and Aboulenein 2017). With IS' defeat, the question of the future of the Hashd became prominent. Popular opinion highly favored its continued existence due to its merits in defeating IS, especially when compared to the Iraqi army's failures (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 144). Furthermore, the PMF offered the government an opportunity to organize the country's many armed groups under its wings and to make them dependent on, and subjected to the state. Especially PM al-ʿAbadi's term (September 2014-October 2018) saw repeated efforts to define the rights and duties of Hashd members and its chiefs of staff (the Popular Mobilization Committee or PMC). This included parliamentary bills and executive orders, which for example forbade links between political parties and Hashd groups (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 8), and attempted to increase oversight into the exact membership of the Hashd in order to be able to pay fighters directly, rather than having it funneled through the PMC (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 58–60). The PMC – dominated by the leaders of Kataʾib Hezbollah (KH), one of the Hashd's member groups loyal to Iran – is officially under the Prime-Minister's direct control. It is outside of existing ministries and receives a yearly budget approved by the parliament (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 148).

In practice, however, the PMC has been able to undermine Prime-Ministerial oversight and control. Some of the groups that make up the Hashd use their practical operational independence from the government to pursue independent foreign policy aims that run counter to those of Baghdad. Examples of this include PMF soldiers fighting in Syria in support of president Assad (Gulmohamad 2020, 275, 277), rocket attacks on Saudi oil facilities (Coles and Nissenbaum 2019) as well as US diplomatic and military targets in Iraq (*BBC News* 2019b; Davison 2020; *BBC News* 2020a; U.S. Department of Defense 2020). These are often seemingly related to tensions between the US and Iran (Shaikh 2019, 3). Additionally, the lack of oversight and an air of untouchability have contributed to widespread criminal activity among elements of the Hashd. Crimes include mafia-style extortion, racketeering and kidnapping, as well as executions of political and civilian opponents (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 91–92, 112–16). In the military realm, there are allegations of war crimes, such as mass executions of POWs and Sunni civilians in and after the battle against IS (Human Rights Watch 2016; Amnesty International 2017). The PMC has also been able to thwart the oversight and control mandated by the aforementioned laws and executive orders. Furthermore, due to the dragging of feet in the implementation of an employee registration system, the Hashd's true size and composition remains opaque, allowing corruption throughout the entire chain of command (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 58).

With the onset of major anti-government protests in the summer of 2019, Hashd groups drew the ire of the Iraqi public, particularly in the Shiʿa south of the country. The protests' demands were broad, covering economic problems, the failure of the government in providing services such as electricity (Browne 2020), the Hashd's criminal elements (Felbab-Brown 2019, 7) and calls for increased Iraqi sovereignty. The

last demand stemmed from frustration both with the US and Iran. The US for its military presence in Iraq, as well as the air strike assassination of Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the leader of Kataʾib Hezbollah and the vice-chair of the PMC, and Qassem Soleimani, the leader of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force (**IRGC-QF**) in January 2020 (*BBC News* 2020a). Iran because of the coercive groups that serve as its proxies in Iraq, the most important of which are leading Hashd groups, such as KH, Asaʾib Ahl al-Haq (**AAH**), and the Badr Organization (Kullab and Abdul-Zahra 2020; Browne 2020). Public opinion further soured when government forces, including PMF forces, violently repressed protesters using, among others, live sniper fire (Georgy 2019) and abductions (Amnesty International 2019). Some 600 protestors were killed and many thousands injured in the first half year of the protests (Amnesty International 2020). The new interim Prime-Minister, appointed in May 2020, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, has made countering the Hashd's influence in the Iraqi state, as well as its criminal elements, one of his top priorities (Government of Iraq 2020). He has encountered fierce opposition and has been unable to move against the PMC in a decisive manner (Knights 2020b; Salim and Loveluck 2020a; Aboulenein 2020; Alshamary 2020).

This poses the puzzle that this thesis aims to address: Why does the PMF remain so elusive and independent from the Iraqi state, despite years of state efforts to incorporate them into the national security forces? This question is even more relevant in light of the public outrage at the PMF, and the state's efforts to hold elements of the Hashd criminally accountable for transgressions in response. Therefore, the thesis seeks to answer the question of why the Iraqi government has so far been unable to integrate the Popular Mobilization Forces into the regular state security structures.

Before beginning to engage with this complex question, it is necessary to acknowledge a potential normative bias in this puzzle's phrasing. Integrating the PMF into the state's security structures is not an inherently valid policy aim. This thesis' research puzzle is not meant to imply that this integration is necessary, or inherently 'good'. Rather, the puzzle refers to the failure of the government's active efforts to do so. It is not the failure of the emergence of this 'inherent virtue' of monopolized violence that is under scrutiny, but rather the failure of years of efforts from the Iraqi government in attempting to bring it about. Avoiding a normative judgment, this thesis assesses the power dynamics and interactions that drive the tug of war between the Prime-Ministers of Iraq and the different (groups of) organizations that make up the Hashd.

Argument

In approaching this research puzzle, this thesis proposes a three-pronged explanation. Firstly, the PMF resists reform due to the aims of different factions within the Hashd, the pro-Iranian Hashd groups prime among these. Secondly, this is facilitated and worsened by political reluctance to double down on reform efforts, especially with Shiʿa factions within the Iraqi parliament and government. Lastly, the PMF leverages its power and independence to compound and perpetuate the government's inability to exercise control over it. This has made its reform and integration unfeasible.

Firstly, the 'Pro-Iranian Hashd' (PMF factions that are supported by, and swear allegiance to, the Iranian regime) are the key to the opposition to reform in the PMF. This group's power and resource bases have made it considerably influential and crucially independent from government support and oversight, as well as independent from popular support. This power and independence becomes problematic due to its alignment towards the government. This faction is only occasionally aligned with the central government's policies and is often indifferent, or even explicitly opposed to them. This combination of its lack of interest in following the government's aims, and its independence and power to act against the direct orders of the body that supposedly governs and directs it (i.e. the PM's office), form a critical combination.

This influence is made even greater due to the fact that the Iranian Hashd holds effective control over the PMC, as this institution is dominated by members of Kataʾib Hezbollah (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 147). This gives it the ability to allocate the PMF's government funding as it sees fit. Those

groupings that are not on Iran's good side have to find alternative sources of income (for example through corruption, as well as popular contributions channeled through religious or tribal institutions). Often, they suffer chronically insufficient funding, lower wages and inferior equipment. Because of this, the Iraqi government's funding of the PMF has failed to make it dependent on the PM in a significant way. In fact, even militias not instinctively aligned with the pro-Iranian Hashd, such as those made up of Iraq's religious and ethnic minorities, find themselves under its effective control simply to be able to access government funds (Gulmohamad 2020, 281, 288).

The second key impediment is a lack of political will from within the parliament and government itself. Firstly, Hashd-linked parties (although officially forbidden) hold significant portions of Iraq's parliament. The biggest Hashd party is that of al-Sadr, whose Iraqi nationalist ideology is conducive to further Hashd integration (Ezzedine, Sulz, and van Veen 2019, 12). The pro-Iranian Hashd also maintain a large parliamentary presence, however, and have become entrenched in many of Iraq's security ministries. The Ministry of the Interior (MoI), which directs the federal police forces, has long been dominated by the Badr Organization (Gulmohamad 2020, 269). Current interim-Prime-Minister al-Kadhimi has been purging Hashd leaders from key government positions in an attempt to reduce this influence (Badawi 2020).

Aside from these direct Hashd influences in the parliament and institutions, there is a significant part of the current Shiʿa political elite in Iraq that actively support the existence of the Hashd as a separate security force. These politicians fear a collapse of the post-Saddam empowerment of the Shiʿa majority in Iraq. The Hashd are used as a coup-proofing method, much superior to the US-trained, multi-sectarian, and ineffective Iraqi Armed Forces (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 139, 152). Supporting the Hashd is also an easy way to assure Iranian support and potentially secure political advantage for opportunistic politicians. The idea of the Hashd remains quite popular under Iraqi civilians according to election results, as well as survey data (NDI 2019; Ezzedine, Sulz, and van Veen 2019, 12). As mentioned, however, this popularity is waning, and recent protests have also turned on elements of the PMF, especially in the Shiʿa south of the country.

These elements are manifested in the third part of the puzzle: the employment of this leverage to actively undermine the government's integration attempts. The Iranian Hashd's effective material, institutional, political leverage over the Iraqi government, as well as its ability to employ political violence, has made it incredibly powerful in resisting its attempts to rein it in. As Knights, Malik and Al-Tamimi paraphrase an Iraqi military official: "the Hashd's track record of refusing orders is partially visible and partially invisible because the Iraqi prime minister knows better than to issue orders that senior Hashd commanders will not follow" (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 103). When direct attempts at countering these groups are made, the consequences have often been painful. Government officials appointed to increase oversight and control over the PMF have been intimidated into resignation, or even assassinated. Aside from avoiding regulatory scrutiny, Hashd groupings have also been able to avoid judicial oversight. In the rare occasions that Hashd members have been investigated or arrested for (war) crimes, they are often quickly released due to 'lack of evidence' (Amnesty International 2017, 12–13). In a few high-profile cases, this was preceded by armed standoffs between the armed groups and state security forces in the middle of major Iraqi cities (Knights 2020b; Salim and Loveluck 2020a; Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 92). Most recently, the popular protests over the past years and the subsequent political crises have forced Iran and its proxies in Iraq to accept al-Kadhimi as interim Prime-Minister, despite their preference for other candidates (Nadimi and Malik 2020). He has made reducing the Hashd's power one of his main missions (Government of Iraq 2020; *Atalayar* 2020). The pro-Iranian Hashd appear to have taken up the glove al-Kadhimi put down, continuing to fiercely resist the government's efforts despite the unrest in the country (Malik 2020b; Alshamary 2020). All this indicates that the core incompatibilities informing the Hashd's interaction with the rest of the Iraqi state remain. This dynamic is unlikely to change without major upsets to the very nature of these institutions.

The Nature of the Hashd in Academic Literature

In this section the state of the 'field' of Hashd literature will briefly be explained in order to indicate the need for additional work. The literature that exists on the Hashd in English is generally quite descriptive and policy focused. This has meant that most of the major themes in the literature surround the nature and inner workings of the Hashd, rather than the theoretical implications that derive from it. Some themes cut across this literature. These are of course not mutually exclusive or unrelated. Those identified here are whether the Hashd can be understood mainly from a domestic Iraqi light, or rather through a focus on the regional dynamics driving it. Another theme is the importance of sectarian divisions in explaining the phenomenon of the Hashd. Lastly, there is a distinction between works that, often implicitly, treat the Hashd as a monolithic actor and those that engage with the complex divisions and contradictions they perceive to exist under the umbrella of the Hashd.

Firstly, the Iranian influences in key elements of the Hashd have led many to analyze the PMF as a feature of the region's political tensions and rivalries. Several authors consider the IRGC's influences within the (Iranian-aligned elements of) the Hashd to be aimed at establishing it in Iraq after the example of Hezbollah in Lebanon. Hezbollah's model is taken to be defying central state authority militarily; engaging socioeconomically with a Shiʿa constituency; and engaging with and even participating in the central government. According to these authors, the Hashd is going the way of Hezbollah, or at least intends to do so (Seliktar and Rezaei 2020; Alaadin 2017). Others have rightly criticized this view of the Hashd. These authors do not deny Iran's involvement in the PMF, nor its important influences on key groupings within it. However, as Ezzedine, Sulz, and van Veen point out, domestic Iraqi political, religious, and social dynamics are key to understanding its role. Framing it as an Iranian proxy overlooks critical complexities (Ezzedine, Sulz, and van Veen 2019, 20; see also: Mansour and Jabar 2017). Rudolf similarly dismisses the Hezbollah analogy (Rudolf 2019, 3–4), instead emphasizing the manner in which the regime seeks to use the Hashd as a praetorian guard, meant to suppress uprisings while providing the state with plausible deniability (Rudolf 2019, 20). Other authors explicitly underline both the domestic and regional dynamics at play within the Hashd, exploring both in detail (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020; al-Khoei 2019; Cambanis et al. 2019). Haddad succinctly points out that the PMF is firmly situated within Iraqi politics and society. It is exactly for that reason that it is heavily entangled in regional power struggles. According to Haddad, this is not a quirk of the Hashd, but rather a fundamental characteristic of post-2003 Iraq (Haddad 2018, 22–23).

A related issue is that of the Hashd as an essentially Shiʿa-dominated sectarian actor, engaged in a struggle with, or even brutally suppressing, Sunni opponents, or rather a pluralistic and complex network in which sect is only one of many axes. Especially in earlier works the image of the PMF as a new iteration of the sectarian violence that has long plagued Iraq was popular. This was before the Hashd attracted significant groupings of non-Arab Shiʿa fighters, when news of war crimes in Sunni areas was fresh. Duman and Sönmez go so far as to warn that the PMF might be a Shiʿa IS in methods, if not in ideology (Duman and Sönmez 2018, 183–84). Others have considered the non-Shiʿa forces to be window-dressing in order to give the PMF a veneer of pan-Iraqi legitimacy. These point to the dominant position of Shiʿa forces within the Hashd (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 280; Knights, Smyth, and Ali 2015). Perhaps unsurprisingly, authors that prefer the domestic, complex explanations of the Hashd tend to consider this view too unidimensional. These point to the participation of non-Arab Shiʿa groupings, but also the very prominent political differences between different Shiʿa elements of the Hashd (Haddad 2018, 3–4; al-Khoei 2019, 100). This view is central to this thesis' analysis.

Lastly, a mistake of many superficial news articles, as well as some larger works, is to simplify the Hashd into a monolith. This tends to happen implicitly when a paper's focus is on (the danger of) Iran's domination of the Hashd. However, as all in-depth analyses tend to make explicit, there are distinct groupings

within the PMF. The 'pro-Iranian' group is by no means unchallenged in its dominance (see for example Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020; al-Khoei 2019). While most earlier works might only distinguish between the first two or three groupings (Mansour and Jabar 2017), the fourth and fifth groups used in this thesis are often also included in more recent works, as these groups became more prominent over time.[1] These groupings are the Iran-backed 'Walaʾi Hashd', the 'Shrine Hashd' (attached to Iraq's prominent Shiʿa shrines and its highest Shiʿa cleric al-Sistani), the 'Sadrist Hashd' (attached to a different cleric, the Iraqi nationalist, leftist Muqtada al-Sadr), the 'Tribal Hashd' (these tribal forces are distinguished by their type of organization and institutional origins, as is explained in the next chapter), and lastly the 'Minority Hashd' (composed of non-Arab and/or non-Shiʿa groupings). These groups are by no means centralized or free of ambiguity, but their overlap in resource bases and alignment make them a useful distinction for the purpose of the typology introduced in the next chapter.

Due to the novelty of the Hashd and the frequent shifts it has known in terms of composition, power dynamics and legal status, it should perhaps not be surprising that most engagements with it have been descriptive, rather than academic or theoretical. Most of the works cited in this section are policy papers written by think tanks in the global West. These tend to implicitly focus on the Hashd as a threat to the Weberian sovereignty of the Iraqi state. Most of them include policy recommendations aimed at reducing this threat and increasing Iraq's state authority (for example: Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020; Day 2020; Cambanis et al. 2019; Felbab-Brown 2019; Mansour and Jabar 2017). These recommendations tend to be influenced security sector reform (SSR) and demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) literature, if not explicitly based on it (Rudolf 2019). Other reports focus on the Hashd in (international) law, assessing its legal status and the government's liabilities towards it (Smith and Singer-Emery 2019; to a lesser extent: Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020). Some reports are not aimed at a general overview of the Hashd, but rather focus on specific aspects of it, such as illicit weapon transfers and missiles (Amnesty International 2017; Shaikh 2019), or human rights violations (Amnesty International 2020; Human Rights Watch 2016). Some book chapters on the PMF do exist, but these have so far had a historiographical-descriptive, rather than a theoretical perspective (Seliktar and Rezaei 2020; Gulmohamad 2020). Conversely, recent theoretical papers that use the Hashd as a case study or example do (sparsely) exist, but often lack the specific knowledge or depth required to properly engage with an actor as complex and multi-faceted as the PMF (for example: van Veen and Fliervoet 2018; Cambanis et al. 2019, 22–38).

The aim of this thesis is therefore to fill the key gap in the literature of the Hashd that has been identified here. Descriptive, policy-focused treatises on the Hashd abound and offer extensive depth and diversity in perspectives and conclusions. Theoretical engagements are nearly entirely lacking. This thesis will fill this gap by attempting a theory-driven approach to understanding the different groupings of the Hashd as actors, as well as their interactions with the Iraqi state. In doing so, it will not only engage in the debates surrounding the Hashd outlined above, but also with theoretical issues applying broadly to armed groups and their interactions with the state. By building these theoretical engagements specifically on the case study of the PMF, this thesis is able to give this complex player the descriptive depth it requires. At the same time, it allows the theoretical benefits of this actor as a case study to be explored to the fullest. In so doing, it will be able to contribute meaningfully to both the 'field' of 'PMF studies' and all the relevant policy recommendations that might emerge from it, while adding this rich case study to the existing theoretical fields it intersects with.

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[1] A notable exception being Abbas, who already identified roughly the same five groupings in his 2017 paper (Abbas 2017).

Methodology

In order to engage with this new actor, this thesis opts for an inductive approach. Using secondary literature and news reports, I analyze the Hashd in an in-depth, qualitative exploration. I aim to apply relevant theoretical frameworks and discussions, while simultaneously using this new case study to test and enrich the theoretical debates that it relates to. What this amounts to is a 'heuristic' approach, "inductively identif[ying] new variables, hypotheses, causal mechanisms and causal paths" (George and Bennett 2005, 75). Using this method, I infer the causal mechanisms behind the PMF's resilience against state oversight. Additionally, this thesis uses an original typology of the coercive organizations that make up the Hashd, in order to understand their loyalties, as well as their attitude towards the Iraqi government. This typology consists of two axes which are based on different fields of existing theory. One axis identifies the main resource and support bases of coercive organizations. This serves as an approximation of their loyalties. These loyalties are fundamental in explaining the behavior of armed groups. The second axis presumes the alignment between a government or state and armed groups to be a spectrum. It qualifies the type of alignment any particular Hashd group has towards the Iraqi executive. This is vital to explaining their behavior in the Iraqi context. On one hand, therefore, this thesis is an attempt to construct an in-depth historical narrative on this chapter of Iraqi history and this (group of) actor(s) in the Iraqi landscape. On the other, it is a theoretical exploration of the behavior of hybrid security actors, and the ways in which 'the state' relates to and interacts with them, touching upon fundamental questions of statehood and sovereignty.

As mentioned in the previous section, few academic and theoretical treatises of the Hashd exist, meaning that the sources used in this thesis tend to be reports by think tanks, such as the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Chatham House, and the Clingendael Institute. Additionally, extensive use was made of press releases and news articles in English and to a lesser extent in Arabic, as well as Iraqi government documents. The executive orders and laws pertaining to the PMF were accessed through the Washington Institute for Near East Policy's report 'Honored but not Contained', which contained English translations thereof (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 173–203). Interviews with relevant actors in Iraq would certainly benefit this thesis' empirical footings. However, the limitations of the security situation in Iraq, as well as difficulty in gaining access to Iraqi government sources, and the often covert goings-on within key PMF groups, made this infeasible. Because of this, the empirical approach that is taken in this thesis necessarily depends heavily on secondary sources, as well as open source primary data such as news articles, interviews, and   surveys.

Theoretically, the thesis engages with the literature surrounding two key subfields. The first of these is the literature surrounding what is conventionally referred to as non-state armed groups (NSAGs). As the proliferation of rebel groups, NSAGs, or coercive organizations have long posed a challenge to traditional sovereign states, this field knows a rich history. The literature surrounding these groups' internal workings and underpinnings in terms of power and support is highly relevant to the workings of the PMF. So too is the literature surrounding their interactions with one another and the roles they play within the state. The second subfield this thesis engages is that of sovereignty. The traditional, Weberian understanding of this concept sees armed groups as a nuisance or a threat. Practitioners engaging in conflict resolution (CR), have therefore often engaged in activities such as security sector reform (SSR) and demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR). These practitioners focus on the establishment of stable and peaceful orders in the security sector, usually with the aim of concentrating armed force in the state. As a counter to this conceptualization of the state, 'hybridity' has emerged in the literature. This field takes a new, critical approach to the concept of sovereignty. It challenges the notion that the state is the only actor in a territory that can, or should, exercise power and violence. These authors point to examples where power is exercised by many different (types of) actors, of which the state is only one particular type

This thesis continues first by assessing the state of the field in the theoretical realms that it engages with in chapter two. In this section too, the typology used to assess the power bases and alignment of different coercive organizations is introduced. In the third chapter, the thesis engages with the first aspect of its contributions surrounding the Hashd: namely the inner workings of the Hashd itself. It is in this section that the aforementioned typology is applied to the different clusters of armed groups within the Hashd. It demonstrates the diversity of this organization and isolates the Walaʾi Hashd as the key to understanding the Iraqi government's predicament. The fourth chapter engages with the second aspect: political and institutional reluctance to crack down on the Hashd. It explores the parliamentary and ministerial influences that different parts of the PMF have, as well as the political alliances they have forged. The realm of public opinion is also assessed. The fifth chapter analyzes the specific strategies and methods of counteracting the Prime-Minister's office's efforts at controlling the PMF and the PMC that form the praxis behind the government's failures. The last chapter draws these elements together and summarizes the empirical and theoretical contributions of this thesis. This thesis does not introduce specific policy recommendations, preferring a more theoretical angle. The last chapter does, however, also consider the most recent developments and potential avenues for the future.

Chapter 2: Locating Armed Groups Within 'the State'

This first chapter assesses the state of the literature that is key to understanding the Hashd. This literature has grown a lot since the 90s due to the rise of the 'New Wars' theory. This theory, introduced by Mary Kaldor, argues that the post-Cold War era heralded a new type of warfare. In these 'new wars' the role of states has diminished in favor of a rise in hybrid, transnational, non-state armed groups. Rather than grand interstate wars, conflicts would now be intra-state, and often asymmetrical, featuring a powerful state and weaker, but persistent smaller groupings (Kaldor 1999; Berti 2016, 2). This theory has been hotly debated and refuted (Henderson and Singer 2002; Newman 2004; Kaldor 2013; Ahram 2016, 208). The most common argument is that there is nothing new about these 'new wars' and their characteristics. Nonetheless, the notion of the importance of non-state actors in modern conflict has remained, continuing to fuel fruitful theoretical debate.

Before we can start to explore this it is necessary to include a note on terminology. A wild variety of terms and definitions exist for what broadly might be called 'armed groups'. The difference between these often focuses on scope, for example whether criminal gangs are included (Hofmann 2006, 396; K. Krause and Milliken 2009, 204–5; Schneckener 2009, 8–14), or whether the focus is exclusively on groups seeking independence (Podder 2013, 35; Mampilly 2011, 3; Yeşiltaş and Kardaş 2018b, 7), or whether a normative value is attached to the term (Mampilly 2011, 3; Berti 2016, 3–4). The most common term in modern literature is non-state armed group (NSAG) or a variation thereof. Most definitions of this term include a provision that the group is independent from any state's armed forces (San Akca 2009, 590). Van Veen and Fliervoet reject this inherent opposition between armed groups and the state. In fact, they reject the separation between 'state' and 'non-state' actors entirely. They see this binary distinction as artificial, instead treating alignment vis-à-vis the state as a continuum on which 'insurgents' and 'rebels' form one end, and 'paramilitaries' or 'pro-government militias (PGMs)', as well as official state armed forces, form the other (van Veen and Fliervoet 2018, 7). This thesis joins their critique of the separation between the 'state' and 'non-state' security actors. As is explored below, this distinction is often blurry and can be unhelpful. The case of the Hashd is a key example of this. It is more useful to use a broad term and to spend time specifying the level and types of autonomy that a group enjoys, as in done in the next chapter. Therefore, this thesis employs the terms 'coercive organizations' (borrowed from van Veen & Fliervoet) (van Veen and Fliervoet 2018, 5), and 'armed groups' interchangeably. These are defined as distinct organizations that exist over extended periods of time, that use amongst other things (the threat of) force or violence to achieve their aims.

The first section of this chapter considers the extensive theory surrounding coercive organizations. It explores a field of theory surrounding their nature as actors, as well as their motivations, and their roles in modern conflict and states. The different academic fields and regions involved in this literature are as broad as the global, multidimensional concept of armed groups itself. The second cluster of literature that this chapter engages with specifically concerns the interaction between armed groups and the concept of the state. On the one hand this intersects with highly theoretical concepts such as Weberian sovereignty and statehood. Especially the idea of weak or fragile states, and the notion of 'hybridity' are important. On the other, it touches upon the concerns of practitioners, and the strategies of security sector reform (SSR) and the related concept of demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR). All of these theoretical considerations inform this thesis' typology of coercive organizations. The chapter finishes by introducing this original typology.

Armed Groups: A Contested Concept

Armed Groups' Behavior

The core motivations that drive armed groups, particularly in political, civil war contexts, has been a hotly debated topic in academic literature. As with the study of behavior in general, a core division in this literature is that between structure and agency. Rationalist theorists, focusing on the agency of individual actors (in this context usually group leaders), have focused their debate on the question of whether insurgent armed groups are motivated by 'greed' or 'grievance'. 'Grievance scholars' identify social and political grievances caused by marginalization along ethnic or nationalist identities as the core drivers of armed groups (Gurr 1970; Peterson 2004; K. Krause and Milliken 2009, 210). Toft refers to this as the role of fear, or uncertainty in preventing peaceful resolutions of disputes (Toft 2009, 25–26). Ideological motivations are also key to Blair et al., who argue that armed groups are most likely to cooperate when they share ideological convictions, with shared religious identity being a particularly strong motivator (Blair et al. 2020, 40–41). The greed argument posits that social grievances and political disputes are not at the root of conflict. Rather the opportunity for predation creates conflict and social and political fissures to sustain itself (Collier 2000; Berdal and Malone 2000; K. Krause and Milliken 2009, 210).

However, as Krause and Milliken point out, if greed were sufficient, conflict would occur in any high-resource, low-exploitation cost environment, but it does not. Conversely, many conflicts do not neatly follow any ethnic, tribal, religious, or any other identity-based lines. This undermines the argument of identitary grievances as the sole drivers of armed groups (K. Krause and Milliken 2009, 210). While, in the 1990s, international organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations focused extensively on the issues of greed versus grievance, the debate later shifted to a more structuralist perspective (Wennmann 2009, 266). Here the focus became "the primacy of feasibility over motivation" (Collier, Hoeffler, and Rohner 2009, 24). That is, the main motivator and limitation to conflict and mobilization is the effectiveness with which a conflict can be financed. This is in turn a function of the cost of mobilization and the types of conflict financing available (Wennmann 2009, 272–75; Weinstein 2007, 327–28). Relatedly, Greenhill and Major argue that any actor in a peace process will act as a spoiler if "they had the material wherewithal to do so." This implies that structural capabilities motivate their behavior, rather than any agency-based preferences or convictions (Greenhill and Major 2007, 9–13). Similarly, Otto argues that armed groups switching sides in civil wars are motivated by structural factors. For example, the amount of payoff that is expected based on their patrons' capabilities and the amount of peers they must share with (Otto 2018). In the realm of national independence movements, Krause argues that the amount of strong, or 'significant' organizations, and their mutual power relations determine the behavior, radicalism, and ultimate success of these movements in what he dubs 'movement structure theory' (P. Krause 2017, 198).

Armed Groups and States

Armed groups play diverse and controversial roles in states, at times blurring the distinction between the state and the non-state. The discussion of the desirability of these dynamics, as well as their implications for statehood, are reserved for the next section. However, the theory of armed groups' origins and motivations cannot be addressed without touching upon state-coercive organization relations and their implications. To start, states make eager use of armed groups that are usually considered non-state. Hobsbawm believes armed groups find this cooptation irresistible, saying they will all "sooner or later be tempted to take the easy road" and work for the state (Hobsbawm 2000, 61). From the state's perspective, unofficially 'employing' these groups has clear advantages. They are often cheap means of building state capacity. Moreover, local militias have local knowledge and connections, making them more efficient and legitimate in their native areas. Cooperating with otherwise hostile or marginalized armed groups can also help tie them to the state which they might otherwise oppose (Wehrey and Ahram 2015, 14–16; Day 2020, 7). Additionally, they can be a

form of popular mobilization and engagement with an otherwise distant central government. Conversely, using pro-government militias (PGMs) in illegal or unpopular violence against civilians can provide a veil of plausible deniability for the state, allowing it to avoid outrage or prosecution (Ahram 2011, 14–15; Rudolf 2019, 11).

Particularly in autocratic states, paramilitary organizations can function as effective 'coup-proofing' methods. Coup-proofing refers to any actions a regime takes to prevent military coups (Quinlivan 1999, 133). A key part of this tends to be the creation of parallel, redundant military structures that are endowed with a particular loyalty to the regime. This can be due to identitary ties (e.g. shared ethnic or tribal descent) and/or the provision of advantages by the regime. This parallel military structure serves the purpose of preventing the regular military from staging a coup (Quinlivan 1999, 133; 141; Bensahel and Byman 2004, 136–38). The Middle East has a particularly extensive history of coup-proofing, as does Iraq itself. Even when disregarding the rich history of coup-proofing under Saddam Hussein, the Sahwa, or Awakening initiative created under US president Obama, can be interpreted in this manner. Not dissimilar to the PMF, the Sahwa engaged Sunni militias in the fight against Al-Qaeda during the Iraqi civil war. This was part of an American plan to give them a stake in the Shiʿa-dominated state and prevent them from rejecting the new Iraqi state outright (Wehrey 2018). As will be argued in chapter four, the PMF also serves coup-proofing functions.

However, employing PGMs also brings considerable downsides and risks to states. While often cheaper, armed groups may lack the professional training and equipment of a regular army (Wehrey and Ahram 2015, 5). Rogue PGMs might engage in human rights abuses or criminal activities, undermining the state's legitimacy by association (Day 2020, 9). Moreover, they may not ultimately share the state's goals, instead seeking personal advancement politically or economically. In fact, armed groups might use the authority and funds the state grants them to subvert state power, or even to launch a coup of their own (Ahram 2011, 14–15; Wehrey and Ahram 2015, 5). Of course, this risk can in its turn be diminished by coup-proofing tactics as well (Migdal 1988, 214–22; Quinlivan 1999, 133; 141; Ahram 2011, 15).

It would also be a mistake to see these paramilitary arrangements as calculated and controlled regime choices at every step of the way. 'Principal-agent' theory sees the government (the principal) as simply employing and directing the paramilitaries (agents) as directly as tools in a toolbox. This view needs to be nuanced. As mentioned, armed groups may subvert the government's aims and undermine its authority. But even when this stays out, changing such military arrangements once established is difficult. Authors such as Ahram and Rudolf indicate the risk of path dependency. This means that a course of action, once chosen, limits or even eliminates other paths that could have been selected. The actors themselves, but also society as a whole, get used to a certain type of violence exercised by certain types of actors, and rearranging those expectations is a tricky process (Ahram 2016, 208–19; Rudolf 2019, 12). Furthermore, actors might become entrenched in state institutions, or profit extensively from independent sources of income such as criminal activity. This may make them less susceptible to the government's efforts to shut them down once their use has run out (Day 2020, 13).   So far, this phenomenon of PGMs has been addressed mainly from a top-down perspective, with states as the actors with the most agency. However, Sayigh points out that with falling state capacity and increasingly fragmented societies in the Middle East, this 'hybridization' of the security sector has become more bottom-up. From this perspective, states merely legitimize pre-existing fragmentation of the security sector. They do this partially because it suits them, but also because they have little other choice (Sayigh 2018). Furthermore, armed groups may actively attempt to participate in state governance through participation in elections. This is often considered a sign of moderation or pragmatism of an insurgent armed group (Calculli 2020b). Krause argues elections can in fact be used as a strategy to deradicalize a group by forcing it to seek approval of the electorate (P. Krause 2017, 198).

Nonetheless, Matanock and Staniland find that participating in elections often coincides with violence over long periods of time (Matanock and Staniland 2018, 711), creating 'armed political parties' (Calculli

2020a, 356). Calculli argues that these parties might in fact use participation in a political system which they find illegitimate as a means to protect their autonomy from the state. Through joining the democracy they disavow, they hope to change it 'from the inside' in what Calculli calls "the continuation of 'war by political means'" (Calculli 2020a, 360–61). In their typology of election participation, Matanock and Staniland identify five strategies along two axes: overt-covert, direct-indirect, and nonparticipation. For example, when an armed group expects to receive significant support in elections, but the state is strong enough to block its direct participation, it might opt for a covert-direct strategy. This would mean setting up an independent party, but denying all official ties. Alternatively, if a group is entirely blocked from participating, or expects insignificant electoral support, it might choose and overt-indirect strategy. This means committing violent acts to indirectly influence the success of certain parties it opposes or supports, and so on (Matanock and Staniland 2018, 713–17). They specify that covert-direct participation hinges on the difference between "knowledge and acknowledgement". a 'public secret' of connections between an armed group and a political party can avoid much of the public backlash and legal repression that an officially acknowledged connection might incur (Matanock and Staniland 2018, 713).

In the Middle East and elsewhere, foreign state support for armed groups has become increasingly common. It often reduces the domestic regime's influence over its national security landscape. Support may be unintentional, for example when a group uses the territory of state B as a safe haven from prosecution for its activities in state A, without state B's permission (San Akca 2009, 610). However, usually this support is direct and calculated. It ranges from safe havens to financial aid, or arms shipments. It can serve as a covert and indirect manner of harassing an opponent while avoiding outright war (San Akca 2009, 611). It often takes place in conflicts where a sustained rivalry exists between different nations (Maoz and San-Akca 2012). In the Middle East, Iran's revolutionary ideology and anti-hegemonic foreign policy have made it into a highly efficient sponsor of armed groups. It trumps other countries in this regard. These usually lack the ideological and political alignment Iran has with many armed groups (Cambanis et al. 2019, 146).

Pro-government militias are clearly only one of many different possible types or orientations of armed groups. However, they indicate the precariousness of the rigid 'state' 'non-state' divide that exists in some of the aforementioned literature in two ways. The first is that certain 'non-state' groups exercise governance and authority beyond merely violent and coercive ways, mirroring strategies of the state. In such instances of 'rebel governance' non-state groups usually call on legitimacy, rather than fear alone, in the establishment of their authority (Berti 2016, 5). Especially when armed groups aim at autonomy or independence, clear 'proto-state' structures can emerge (Podder 2013, 18). At times even attract international recognition, such as autonomous Kurdistan in Iraq, which has a dedicated American consulate ("U.S. Consulate General Erbil" 2020). In other cases, an organization might operate many different state functions while refraining from claiming autonomy or statehood. Hezbollah's 'state-within-a-state' in Lebanon operates hospitals, TV-channels, social organizations, etcetera (Harb and Leenders 2005, 187).

The second fault with the 'state' 'non-state' narrative is the many different types of alignments that exist between these two supposedly separate actors. Insurgent and rebel groups can certainly be separated from the state, who they are explicitly opposing. However, this enmity forms only one of the possible alignments between coercive organizations and 'the state'. As Staniland has pointed out in his conceptualization of 'armed orders', a state of open conflict is not the only indication of armed contestation taking placing within a society (Staniland 2012; 2017). Often, armed groups remain armed after a civil conflict has supposedly ended, moving from an armed order of 'hostilities' to one of 'limited cooperation' or even 'alliance', depending on conflict dynamics. If an end to violence is taken as an end to a conflict, a change in alignment leading to resurgence in violence might be seen as unexpected, or even unrelated. In Staniland's terms, this is simply due to a disregard for non-violent expressions of the same armed order (Staniland 2017, 460). Otto, Scharpf and Gohdes found in a large-N quantitative analysis that a change in alignment in fact

occurred in 25% of groups between 1989 and 2007 (Otto, Scharpf, and Gohdes 2017, 9).

Taking this theory one step further, Van Veen and Fliervoet describe a typology of five types of coercive organizations, organized along their alignment with the state. They see all armed groups as part of the same spectrum. An official national army forms one extreme. Groups like IS, that do not just oppose a regime, but oppose the very nature of a state or even the state system, form the other. Van Veen and Fliervoet reject the categorical separation between state and non-state coercive organizations wholesale. Opposition to and separation from the government is a fluid spectrum (van Veen and Fliervoet 2018, 25–33). This view is key to this thesis' understanding of the dynamic between the Iraqi government and the PMF. In Iraq, state and non-state are simply aspects of the different actors vying for power and influence. Their separation is impractical. One example of this is the Badr Organization's integration into the Ministry of Interior, which started in 2004. Today, Badr members permeate the ministry from its lowest to its highest echelons (Mansour and Jabar 2017, 19). Far from disappearing into the neutral bureaucracy of the Iraqi state, however, the Badr organization as a security actor remains highly independent (Gulmohamad 2020, 11–15; Mansour and Salisbury 2019, 36).

Armed Groups and State-Building
Armed Groups as Threats to the State
In the 'traditional' Western theories of statehood, 'non-state' armed groups are a threat to the state's 'monopoly of legitimate violence'. This concept was introduced by sociologist Max Weber. It considers that the state's primary function and defining characteristic is its ability to be the sole actor in a region that can exercise violence legitimately (Weber 1958, 78). Simply put, the police can legitimately arrest football hooligans, while football hooligans cannot legitimately attack police. Scholars such as Weber and Tilly have traced the development of centralized states in Europe along the lines of this concept. Any state that did not centralize its authority, and therefore control the use of violence within its territories, perished (Tilly 1990). While others, such as Tilly, Mann, and Bourdieu have built upon and nuanced this definition of the state (Tilly 1975, 70; Mann 1984; Bourdieu 2014, 4), the principle of 'Weberian' statehood remains firmly established today. It is generally seen as the paramount indication of state stability and (domestic) strength (K. Krause and Milliken 2009, 202).

States that fail to fulfill this Weberian benchmark for statehood are considered as a problem in the international arena, and dubbed weak, fragile, or even failed states. USAID considers fragile states vulnerable when they are "unable or unwilling to adequately assure the provision of security and basic services to a significant portion of their populations and where the legitimacy of the government is in question." A state is in crisis, when this situation worsens and it no longer "exert[s] effective control over its own territory," "and where violent conflict is a reality or a great risk" (USAID 2005, 1). Other definitions (including those using the term 'weak state') are similar, focusing on a lack of control, legitimacy, and service provision (OECD-DAC 2010, 21). As Kamrava explains, "fragile states can be conceptualized along a continuum of declining state performance, from weak states to failing and then failed state and finally collapsed states" (Kamrava 2016, 7). Nonetheless, debate does exist. Some scholars argue that a state can only be considered 'failed' when it is in active conflict (Rotberg 2004, 5), or even when all government authority and service provision has collapsed (Call 2008, 1492). Another point of debate is whether the focus should be on the strength and functioning of institutions (institutionalism), or on social and political cohesion carried by governments (legitimacy) (Kamrava 2016, 5). According to Boege et al. as many 100 states have been identified as weak by differing indices and reports (Boege et al. 2008, 3). The Middle East is often seen as a hotspot for failed statism due to its high incidence of decentralized states, violence, war, and 'non-state' security providers (For example: Ahram 2019, 11–12; Kamrava 2016).

Militias and other 'non-state' armed groups are usually seen as central to the issue of collapsing state

authority and the emergence of weak states (Yeşiltaş and Kardaş 2018b, 4). Klare goes so far as to argue that these groups "usually seek to eliminate all the vestiges of central government within their area of operations" (Klare 2004, 177). When armed groups fail to capture the state, they create a situation where they can maintain their existing influence. Often this means keeping one foot in and one foot outside of the state, accessing resources and legitimacy while avoiding accountability and maintaining autonomy (Cambanis et al. 2019, 14). These authors argue that it is a vicious cycle in which state collapse and the emergence of non-state armed groups mutually reinforce one another. Failing states cause sub-state communities to become their own security providers. The armed groups that they construct for this then proceed to undermine state authority, deepening state failure (Yeşiltaş and Kardaş 2018a, 264). Davis believes that state engagement with armed groups drives this cycle. Delegitimized states coopt or cooperate with non-state armed groups, aiming for increased effectiveness and legitimacy. Instead they end up more delegitimized as these groups undermine the already failing authority of the state (Davis 2009, 226).

In the related literature surrounding peace processes, militias are often identified as 'spoilers'. This term was first properly introduced and explored by Stedman, who defines it as "leaders and parties who believe that peace emerging from negotiations threatens their power, worldview, and interests, and use violence to undermine attempts to achieve it" (Stedman 1997, 5). He identified three types of spoilers: greedy (profit driven), limited (driven by a specific issue or grievance), and total (driven by 'pathological' and unyielding opposition to peace), and he specified strategies in dealing with each type (Stedman 1997, 10–15). As Podder explains, orthodox counter-terrorism (CT) theory and practice almost invariably identifies every armed group as a spoiler to peace and state stability. She rejects this position, as is explained below (Podder 2013, 17).

In the practitioner's realm, the Weberian conceptualization of statehood long reigned supreme. During the 1990s and particularly the Bush Jr. years in America, 'liberal internationalism' was practiced with a firm confidence in the universality and righteousness of (neo-)liberalism, as well as Weberian state-building (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2016, 232). In conflict resolution (CR) and post-conflict reconstruction of 'failed' or 'fragile' states, the practices of security sector reform (SSR), and particularly disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of armed groups were central. The focus was mostly on economic growth, seen as the engine of stability and continued peace. This perspective is related to the theories of greed and economic structural drivers of conflict mentioned above. Most often, it amounted to the reduction of military budgets and active armed personnel (Toft 2009, 20–22).

The reduction of competing security actors in a state is first and foremost in these strategies. The state must "[regain] a monopoly on violence throughout its territory" (Themnér and Ohlson 2014, 80). It must therefore be strengthened, so that its reliance on PGMs might be reduced (Ahram 2016, 219–20). As Toft explains, "DDR aims to reduce the supply of security personnel, whereas SSR aims to retrain and retain them", meaning that DDR is generally the focus of these strategies (Toft 2009, 19). Day argues that PGMs are in fact often more resistant to DDR, exactly because of their pre-existing entrenchment in state institutions (Day 2020, 16–17). Many typologies of types of armed groups and respective recommended DDR strategies exist. Schneckener warns that the reality of CR is usually messy and convoluted. Identifying which actors have which characteristics and motivations is often difficult, if not impossible. This is particularly true if the driving forces behind CR are foreign actors, which is often the case (Schneckener 2009, 24–25). Foreign involvement in conflict is generally a threat to CR and the prospects of reducing armed groups' influence in particular. As Stedman explains, "spoilers often exist because external patrons provide them with guns, ammunition, capital, [...] sanctuary, [and] support [for] their claims to legitimacy" (Stedman 1997, 51). Conflicts with foreign involvement take significantly longer to resolve on average (Karlén 2016, 118). As Podder argues, "regional peace building [is] key to successful state building" (Podder 2013, 32–33), which severely complicates the

process. Foreign involvement in civil conflicts is very common (Karlén 2016, 117). In the Middle East in the 21ˢᵗ century it has become more and more prevalent along with an intensification of regional and international competition (Sayigh 2018).

Due to the lingering risks of armed groups' resurgence, scholars such as Toft have criticized the overreliance on DDR. Instead of reducing military budgets, the state's military and police forces should be strengthened, so that they might be able to repress armed groups or other actors that might come to challenge its monopoly of legitimate violence once again (Toft 2009, 37). This is compounded by the fact that DDR efforts often focus on the official state, not reaching extrastatal armed groups, leaving them in an advantageous position (Rotmann 2019). Furthermore, failed attempts at SSR in amongst others Libya and Iraq have led scholars to emphasize the need for "political and social buy-in" throughout society (Rudolf 2019, 13). SSR or DDR alone are insufficient if unaccompanied by political reforms to increase social and political cohesion in a country. In such cases, grievances are prone to re-emerge and peace likely to break down (Wehrey and Ahram 2015, 14–16; Podder 2013, 19–21). Lastly, particular contexts might induce cooperation between state actors and non-state armed groups. For example in cases of a military stalemate, when both sides believe they might gain in legitimacy, when economic realities require cooperation, or when mutual external threats cause them to naturally align (Schievels and Colley 2020, 18–20).

'Hybridity': Armed Groups as Part of State-Building

Criticism on this Weberian notion of state-building became increasingly prominent over the years. The problems of liberal internationalism became increasingly apparent, with the Afghanistan and Iraq wars as the primary examples. Lottholz and Lemay-Hébert criticize what they see as the rise of 'neo-Weberianism'. This is a misinterpretation, or even willful appropriation, of Weber's theory surrounding statehood. They argue that the neo-Weberian school is focused on building institutional strength, disregarding social cohesion entirely (Lottholz and Lemay-Hébert 2016, 1479). These authors emphasize the importance of different foundations of legitimacy, aside from the legal-rational bases that are key to the institutional focus of (neo-)Weberian practitioners. It would be a mistake to ignore the other bases Weber outlined such as tradition and charisma (Rudolf 2019, 7). Others add to Weber's vocabulary to add depth to the concept of legitimacy in a modern context. For example: utilitarian legitimacy (the ability to provide services) and international recognition (Mansour and Salisbury 2019, 10). In the case of the Hashd, all of these types of legitimacy are present. These are actively appealed to by PMF forces, and are defended when threatened. This indicates the importance the PMF itself attaches to different forms of legitimacy.

Authors in this school criticize the way neo-Weberianism has placed emphasis on the centralized, unitary, Westphalian state. They consider this notion highly Eurocentric. The trajectories that shaped European states are not simply found in other parts of the world, nor can they necessarily be replicated after the fact. Particularly the legacies of colonialism have had major influences on non-Western state formation (Ahram 2011, 3–4). These authors emphasize that the Weberian trajectory is mainly limited to OECD-member states (Boege et al. 2008, 2; Boege, Brown, and Clements 2009; Rotmann 2019). In fact, Calculli argues that the value placed on Weberian statehood is a normative judgment of how the state 'should' look. She sees it as an expression of the hegemonic world order of liberal, Western states. She points out the hypocrisy with which Western states condemn non-recognized states and non-state armed actors, while cooperating with them when convenient to their hegemonic interests (Calculli 2020b). Due to its particular colonial history, the Middle East is a region in which this Eurocentric model of states is particularly inappropriate (Bacik 2008, 1–2; Kamrava 2016, 19; Boserup and Colombo 2017, 2–3; Lust 2018, 333). Iraq is frequently specifically mentioned as a case study of this (Bacik 2008, 173–211; Ahram 2011, 6). In reality, most states never monopolize violence (Mann 1986, 11), and as Boege et al. found, some 100 states have been identified as 'fragile' in different rankings and indices (Boege et al. 2008, 3). In this sense, the state-

centric international system in fact ignores the "empirical reality of much messier contestations of legitimacy, power and social allegiance in many countries and conflicts – in which coercive organisations play a major role" (van Veen and Fliervoet 2018, 11). "Rather, states tend to function as oligopolists of violence, competing and cooperating with party leaders, local strongmen, tribal leaders, criminals, and other private actors who retain their own armed retinues" (Ahram 2016, 208). Esser goes so far as to argue that at the local level even "a de facto absence of functioning state structures does not automatically translate into anarchy" (Esser 2016, 82).

Recognition of this fact has caused a 'hybrid turn' in peacebuilding literature (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2016, 219). By now, even the UN, OECD, Council of Europe, and other international organizations that previously adhered to liberal, Weberian conceptions of state-building, acknowledge the need to "[engage] locally legitimate structures", rather than applying a Western-based, liberal blueprint (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2016, 223–24). The term 'hybridity' itself refers to the combination of "the logic of the 'formal' state, of traditional 'informal' societal order, and of globalisation and associated social fragmentation" (Boege et al. 2008, 10). These states are therefore seen as 'hybrids', not quite 'modern' or Western, nor quite 'traditional'. Hybridity literature emphasizes that these hybrid structures are not temporary or 'stopgap' solutions that are likely to, or should, be 'fixed' later (Lust 2018, 333–34).

The hybrid turn brought along a critical reassessment of state-building vocabulary. Terms such as strong and weak states, as well as fragile and failed states were seen as normatively loaded and prejudiced against non-Weberian forms of government (Boas and Jennings 2005, 388; Kamrava 2016, 4; Mansour and Salisbury 2019, 3). As Lust points out, a clear and thoroughly defined lexicon exists surrounding Western state structures, but this vocabulary and knowledge is absent when it comes to social institutions (Lust 2018, 335). Lust, emphasizing the layered and overlapping nature of social structures and authorities, uses the term 'layered sovereignty' (Lust 2018). The term 'hybrid' has become quite mainstream, but is not free of criticism itself. It implies a binary distinction, where there is in fact an elaborate and varied spectrum of different types of non-Weberian authority structures (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2016, 221). Additionally, the term is argued to have been co-opted by (neo)liberal interventionists. Facing mounting costs in failing state-building projects in, for example, Afghanistan, these actors use the hybridity paradigm to justify drawing down their efforts and to shift responsibilities away from themselves onto local actors (Donais 2009; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2016, 224–28). However, as Mac Ginty and Richmond point out, hybridity is a long and "constant process of negotiation" between various social actors, that cannot simply be imposed from a blueprint. This is especially true when done by foreign actors that lack local knowledge (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2016, 220).

Certain forms of these hybrid structures in fact heavily rely on armed groups. What in traditional, Weberian policy might have been considered a nuisance or threat, in hybridity theory is considered a legitimate expression of local, traditional, and/or decentralized authority structures. As Ahram argues, "the international community must learn to live with militias rather than trying in vain to displace them" (Ahram 2011, 5). He describes the different roles of militias between the two types of states as a 'U-form and an M-form military'. A U-form military consists of distinct sectors organized by specialization (army, navy, special forces, etc.), which all report back to a centralized authority through a hierarchical system. Conversely, an M-form military consists of local, autonomous elites that operate small militia cells, which are tied to the central state through traditional patronage and power networks. The sections of the military are therefore not separated by specialization, but by locality, ethnicity, etcetera. Most units are tactically redundant (Ahram 2011, 13–14). Such a structure is close to 'heterarchy'. In a heterarchical system, there is no clear pecking order. Instead, overlapping and competing hierarchies of authority interrelate, creating varying and fluid authority rankings which are highly dependent on context. In such structures, there is no monopoly, but an 'oligopoly of violence', with many actors vying for dominance, without any decisively achieving it. The term originally hails from anthropology, referring to societies in their entirety. A democratic system of checks and

balances is in fact an example of a heterarchical political order, where no one entity truly dominates all others at any given time (Crumley 1995, 3). However, as will be argued in chapter three, it might also be applied to an organization such as the PMF, both internally, and in its interactions within the Iraqi state.

Practices of state- and peacebuilding have gone through related, but not always similar developments in response to the realities of liberal interventionism. Alternatives to the pursuit of monopolies of violence and the creation of liberal democratic state systems emerged. Some authors decided to 'lower expectations', while maintaining a similar normative outlook. 'Good-enough governance', for example, advises state-builders that "rather than hold out for a coherent and capable government, governance involving non-state armed actors is viewed as the next best thing." In this context, a hybridization of the security sector needs to be accepted (Wehrey 2018). Additionally, the pursuit of democracy in certain areas is overly optimistic. It could in fact drive a society into conflict or authoritarianism through the politicization of social fissures. Good enough governance advises policy makers to guard the core values of 'good governance' and democracy. Inefficiencies and marginal autocratic tendencies should be allowed to remain in order to protect the greater good, at least for the time being (Krasner 2013). This approach can also be referred to as 'institutionalization before liberalization (IBL)'. Strengthen institutions first, then worry about details of democracy and human rights (Paris 2004).

Another cluster of literature focuses on the societal legitimacy of a political order, rather than its institutional strength. Themnér and Ohlson propagate the usage of 'legitimate peace', as a medium term aim in CR. They argue that minimalist conceptualizations of peace ignore human suffering and lingering grievances that could retrigger conflict. In these theories, peace is the absence of war. This is often measured by a threshold of deaths per year (For example: Sundberg, Eck, and Kreutz 2012). On the other hand, maximalist conceptualizations of peace that pursue complete social and economic justice, and an end to all forms of violence in society (for example the concept of "quality peace": Wallensteen 2015; Joshi and Wallensteen 2018), are unattainable, not to mention hard to operationalize and measure (Themnér and Ohlson 2014, 62). Instead, citing Holsti's theory on vertical and horizontal legitimacy, they introduce 'legitimate peace'. This aims to "strengthen the '[. . .] loyalty to the idea(s) of the state' (vertical legitimacy) and improve '[. . .] the attitudes and practices of individuals and groups within the state toward each other' (horizontal legitimacy)" (Themnér and Ohlson 2014, 63).

Other authors argue that focusing on legitimacy (be it electoral, international, or societal) can distract from de facto power structures. This diminishes chances of success in the state-building process (Mansour and Salisbury 2019, 4; Ahram 2011, 138–39). According to these authors, focusing exclusively on either grassroots, local initiatives, or strengthening and legitimizing macro-level favored actors in governments misses the point. Peace-building must engage the real power-brokers in society that provide day-to-day security and other services (Mansour and Salisbury 2019, 7–8). These may not enjoy legal-rational, international, or even traditional or charismatic legitimacy. However, their possession of utilitarian legitimacy makes them an undeniable fact on the ground (Mansour and Salisbury 2019, 10–31). Ignoring them is likely to cause inefficient service provision and even conflict, as these local forces compete to maintain or enhance their positions (Mansour and Salisbury 2019, 43–45). With these and similar considerations in mind, many authors propose not just tolerating, but actively engaging armed groups into the post-conflict state system (Podder 2013; Wehrey 2018; Schievels and Colley 2020, 3). They might even be used in humanitarian engagements during or after conflicts (Hofmann 2006; Hofmann and Schneckener 2011). Of course, not all armed groups are considered constructive candidates for this process. This means that careful consideration must be made as to who to engage and who to exclude. As Wehrey warns: "community-level notions of legitimacy are often quite contested and the so-called "organic" origins of local security actors are often fictitious and constructed" (Wehrey 2018).

As will be argued at the end of this thesis, the Hashd is at the center of contestation of Iraqi state authority in what amounts to its unstable hybrid statehood. The Hashd is situated at the intersection between 'non-state' and 'state' in ways that emphasize the futility of this distinction and the need to consider all armed actors part of the same spectrum of armed contestation. Furthermore, as the typology outlined below makes explicit, both structuralist and rationalist (agency-based) drivers must be considered to fully explain the behavior of the different armed groups that make up the PMF. Scholars must answer the questions 'what are a group's options?' and 'what does a group want to achieve (with those options)?' In the case of the PMF as a whole, clear coup-proofing and other PGM dynamics are present. However, foreign sponsor dynamics intersect with these, as the Iran-backed elements within the Hashd in many ways act as PGMs for Iran, rather than Iraq. Foreign sponsors and governments employing PGMs actually display similar tactics and aims. This is made possible by the non-Weberian, hybrid nature of the Iraqi state. In it the Hashd operates on a broad spectrum of roles that appeal to a wide array of types of legitimacy. Whether the PMF and Iraq's hybridity have a positive or negative effect depends on which actors' perspective is chosen. However, it is clear that the PMF's roles are ultimately symptoms of the unstable, contested hybrid orders that make up the Iraqi state.

Typology

This following section will briefly introduce the theoretical underpinnings of the typology that chapter three will apply to the different elements of the Hashd. The PMF is composed of myriad coercive organizations, grouped in loose alliances of varying levels of centralized organization. These groups form a subset of coercive organizations within the multi-faceted 'coercive organization' of the Hashd. Understanding and explaining these groups is therefore central to understanding the PMF's inner workings, as well as its outward behavior – particularly towards the Iraqi state. The typology introduced here aims to capture the essence of the PMF's coercive groups, and simplify them into distinct categories along two axes. This will then serve as a framework for the analysis of the Hashd's interactions with the state.

The two axes of the typology represent a combination of structural and agency-based drivers of group behavior. Each of these groups relies on resources to maintain their structural and military capabilities. The sources from which they gather these resources are therefore key to their existence. These pose the structural confines to these groups' respective capabilities, limitations, and to an extent aims. Furthermore, in their interaction with the Iraqi central state these groups' behavior is partially dependent on their attitudes towards the idea of the Iraqi state. Moreover, political considerations such as towards the goals and ideology of the Iraqi government, and particularly the influential office of the Prime-Minister are vital too. Those attitudes are in part determined by the structural limitations captured by the first axis, but actors' convictions, preferences, and ideology are key agency-driven determinants. These two axes – support or resource bases, and alignment towards the government – are therefore fundamental to understanding the behavior of the individual coercive organizations within the Hashd. In turn, the heterarchical relations and power structures between these groups define the PMF's power, attitudes, and behavior overall.

The First Axis: Support/Resource Bases

The first, structuralist axis of this typology borrows its terminology from   Sukanya Podder. In her 2013 article, Podder argues that the inclusion of particular types of armed groups in peace agreements, as well as in post-conflict state-building, is beneficial to a lasting peace. She proposes a hybrid type of peacebuilding. Her argument is that actors with local socio-political legitimacy can be key to success. Particularly rebel groups that have developed ideological, social, and political structures that can be considered 'proto-state' "signal rebel commitment to state building that is a necessary precondition for their transition into effective and legitimate governments" (Podder 2013, 18). However, for foreign actors aiming to intervene positively in a conflict situation, determining what actors can be constructive forces in state-building, and which might act as

spoilers or other types of threat can be difficult. For this purpose, Podder introduces a framework that identifies the types of resources a group uses, and their support base(s). These determine their relations with civilians and their domestic and external support. All of these factors taken together are key to predicting whether their role in state-building will be positive, or negative (Podder 2013, 16).

Podder's typology, summarized in figure 1, focuses on a group's core support base, and its resource base. A group's core support base is key to understanding its transnational linkages and external support, as well as its ties to local communities. Local support bases, those surrounding ethnic or tribal, or ideological or religious linkages, are likely to create firm bonds with local communities, while minimizing external linkages. Conversely, groups relying on the support of external diaspora, or regional or international backers enjoy broad transnational linkages, but have few ties to local communities (Podder 2013, 26–27). Podder builds the resource bases and their effects on a rebel group's capabilities and behavior partially on Wennmann. Wennmann argued that a group's ability to mobilize and continue warfare is largely determined by the effectiveness of their conflict financing. 'High-value revenue streams' that are easy to access, such as certain natural resources or foreign support, increase a group's war-making ability. This ability determines the level of resistance and conflict that it is likely to display (Wennmann 2009, 273–74). Podder adapts this argument and matches the type of resource (either community-based or capitalist) to types of behavior. Examples of community-based resources are donations and (religious) taxes, but also shelter, food, and manpower. These require the population's acquiescence, or even support. Therefore, they are associated with protective or cooperative interactions with citizens. Capitalist forms of revenue are often internationally sourced, such as weapons, intelligence, training, or direct funding. They increase the likelihood of abusive behavior from the rebel group towards local populations (Podder 2013, 26–27). Lastly, using Wennmann, Podder expects easily exploitable resources such as high value natural resources (diamonds, drugs) and external sponsors to facilitate centralized control and large revenues. This leads to strong, cohesive organizations. Conversely, 'ad hoc' resource supplies (taxation, criminal extortion and theft, religious contributions) are less reliable and less lucrative, causing organizations to focus on low-intensity conflict.

Figure 1: rebel groups' core support bases, resource bases, and the responding civilian relations, domestic and international support, and their state-building potential (Podder 2013, 28)

Core Support Base	Resource Base	Relations with Civilians	Domestic Support	International Support	State-building Potential
Ethnic/ Tribal	Community Taxation/ Natural Resources	Protective/ Cooperative	High	Low	High
Ideological/ Religious	Community Taxation/ Natural Resources	Protective/ Cooperative	High	Low	High
Diaspora/ Displaced	Remittances/ Weapons/ Bases/Communications/ Capital-Based Exchange Systems	Abusive/ Conflicting	Low	High	Low
Regional/ International	Cash/Weapons/Bases/ Intelligence/ Capital-Based Exchange Systems	Abusive/ Conflicting	Low	High	Low
Majority Population (Local as well as diaspora)	Mix of Community-Based and Capital Exchange Systems	Cooperative	High	High	High

The metrics that are key for our purposes are a group's core support base, resource base, and their resulting relations with civilians. As this thesis does not focus on the inclusion of rebel groups into state-building efforts, but rather the dynamics that explain their behavior in general, Podder's other variables are less relevant. Furthermore, the Iraqi context does not feature coercive groups with significant diaspora or displaced support bases, meaning that this category will not appear in the analysis. Another peculiarity to this thesis' application of Podder's model, is that it deals not with rebel groups, but rather with an organization that is at least institutionally tied to the central state. Because of this, another form of resource base is available to groups with this 'institutional' support base, namely state funds, or domestic (as opposed to foreign) rents. As a last note, both in Podder's context and that of this thesis, these categories are ideal types and do not represent mutually exclusive real-life situations. In fact, in practice combinations of these types are the rule rather than the exception. This means that the expected behaviors are nearly always part of overlapping and competing identities within the same organizations.

The Second Axis: Attitude Towards the Government

The second axis is based on Staniland's work on armed orders, as well as Van Veen & Fliervoet's conceptualization of armed groups in varying levels of alignment with formal government. As explained above, Staniland's categories are limited to 'hostilities', 'limited cooperation', and 'alliance' (Staniland 2017, 460), as are those of other applications of this concept (Otto, Scharpf, and Gohdes 2017, 4). Here, the focus is still mainly on armed groups that are essentially separate from the state. Van Veen & Fliervoet, however, take the notion of armed orders further, and introduce a five-step scale. This scale ranks differing potential alignments with, but also levels of integration into, the state (see figure 2). Van Veen & Fliervoet's paper in fact primarily concerns itself with actors that are right in the middle of their typology. These 'hybrid coercive organizations' are on the border of the pro- and anti-government, or the state and non-state. Their paper focuses on the particular challenges that this type of actor poses, and how they might be dealt with by central governments (van Veen and Fliervoet 2018).

In the case of the Hashd, most organizations would fall within this hybrid category, although the more pro-governmental groups might be classified as quasi-governmental coercive organizations. This is because PMF groups share the central institutional links that tie all Hashd groups to the state. Institutionally, these links are similar (although practical capabilities to resist state power do vary). Because of this, this thesis alters Van Veen & Fliervoet's focus on structural linkages between an armed group and the state. Instead, it uses their typology's vocabulary and theoretical background, but focuses primarily on the ideological attitudes PMF groups have towards the government. As the third chapter illustrates, PMF groups with similar positions on the support/resource base axis act very differently in the Iraqi social and political sphere. These differences can be explained by their political attitudes towards the government. This focus on the variations in attitude and the consequences they have on interactions between governments and armed groups underlines the importance of political agency in armed group behavior.

Figure 2: Van Veen & Fliervoet's typology of coercive organizations (van Veen & Fliervoet 2018, 16)

Type of coercive organisation	Examples	Nature	Purpose
1. Governmental coercive organisations	Organisations that are nationally and internationally recognised as official security forces – *Syrian Arab Army, Iraqi Security Forces*	Part of the state's coercive apparatus	Execute and enforce public authority; under direct command and control of the government of the day
2. Quasi-governmental coercive organisations	Paramilitaries, government-sponsored militias and regime-linked armed groups – *Shabiha (Syria), Basij militia (Iran)*	Extension of the state's coercive apparatus	Support governmental coercive organisations and/or advance governmental interests with plausible deniability; under (in)direct command and control of the government
3. Hybrid coercive organisations	Popular militias and armed wings of political parties – *Badr Corps or Saraya al-Salam (Iraq), Hezbollah (Lebanon)*	Both autonomous of, and linked with, the government and (quasi-) governmental coercive organisations	Cooperate and compete with the government depending on overlap of interests between these organisations, their broader political platforms (if any) and the government
4. Anti-regime coercive organisations	Rebel groups – *PKK (Turkey), Brigades of the Martyrs Al-Nasser Mohiuddin (Iran)*	Armed actors operating in opposition to the government, but recognising the state (in full or part)	Overthrow of the government and/or establishment of their own autonomous sphere (territorial or otherwise)
5. Anti-state coercive organisations	Radical groups that do not recognise the state as entity – *Islamic State, Al Qaeda*	Transnational groups with an ideology that transcends state boundaries	Dissolve one or several states to replace them with a more universal project and ideological identity

Chapter 3: the Hashd's Opposition to Reform

With the theoretical framework established, the thesis now moves on to its empirical part. This chapter considers the first of the three issues driving the Iraqi government's lack of success in increasing its control over the Hashd. Key parts of the Hashd are opposed to government control over it, meaning they will not cooperate without resistance. This chapter substantiates this argument by first applying the typology introduced in chapter two on the different constituent parts of the Hashd. It will give a brief introduction of each group and then analyze its support and resource bases, as well as its alignment towards the government. The chapter then considers the power dynamics within the heterarchy of the PMF. It argues that certain groups are receptive towards the government's efforts. However, those groups most opposed to government control are situated in an institutional and military position of power within the PMF. This allows them to sabotage the government's efforts.

Before continuing to the typology and main argument of this chapter a few caveats are in order. First of all, the core assumption of this chapter is that the Hashd cannot be seen as a unitary actor in any meaningful way. While this is very commonly understood in Hashd literature, policy makers have at times oversimplified the PMF. Generally, this boiled down to only considering the Iran-aligned coercive organizations within the Hashd. In these instances, it is presented as a Shiʿa actor used by Iran to further its aims in Iraq and the region. By extension the Hashd is a threat to Iraqi stability and American interests. This thesis argues that this narrative belies the complexity and diversity of the Hashd's make-up (Haddad 2018, 2). Moreover, the 'groups' identified here as distinct units within the Hashd do not necessarily identify as such. Nor do these groups necessarily coordinate their policies proactively (although several key ones certainly do). Secondly, this chapter considers the alignment and ideological persuasions of different Hashd units. However, it should be understood that this macro-level political and ideological orientation is not necessarily representative for the rank and file of Hashd fighters. In fact, Parry and Burlinghaus found that 'greed based' motivators of economic hardship and unemployment were the most pressing motivating factors for PMF fighters in Basra (Parry and Burlinghaus 2019, 8–9). This fact illustrates a key feature of Iraqi politics. Sectarian and ideological competition dominate the political arena and international actors' strategic considerations concerning Iraq. However, economic hardship and the government's ineffective provision of services are the daily concerns of average Iraqis. Engagement with parliamentary politics in Iraq is dismally low, with voter turnout in 2018 at only 44.5% (Mansour 2019a, 6). Economic issues and an aversion to any foreign involvement in Iraq are key motivators for the protest movement(s) that have gripped Iraq since 2018, and especially since the summer of 2019 (Cooke and Mansour 2020).

A last caveat concerns the issue of illicit sources of income. In my typology, criminal activities are taken as a separate category of income with specific implications for a coercive group's behavior. However, in the Iraqi context there are essentially all security operators engage in some form of criminal activity. The concept of 'ghost soldiers'[2] is a common form of corruption that pervades the Iraqi army as well as the Hashd (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 56–57). Road blocks aiming to extract 'taxes' from motorists on the highway are common and operated by a wide range of coercive actors. This includes PMF groups of different alignments, the army, and the Ministry of Interior (MoI)'s federal police forces (Eaton et al. 2019, 45). Furthermore, even accusations of war crimes and economic exploitation of wartime successes (e.g. looting, but also preventing the return of refugees to expropriate their houses) are common (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 89–90). This was so pervasive that al-Sistani felt obligated to issue a decree against these

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[2] This refers to the practice where soldiers are registered with the state, but do not actually ever show up to training or military duty. These soldiers' salaries are then split between the group commander and the 'soldier'.

practices in 2015 (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 186–87). As these activities are so common in the Iraqi context, this chapter does not make special mention of them for every actor discussed. Rather, it focuses on the groups where these 'greed' motivations were exceptionally large scale, or had a significant influence on their decision-making.

Which Hashd? A Typology of the Hashd's Component Groups

Table 1: Typology of the resource/support bases and alignment of the different groupings within the PMF

Group Name	*Resource/Support Bases*	*Alignment*
Walaʾi Hashd	Regional; Institutional	Hybrid/Anti-governmental
Shrine Hashd	Institutional; Religious	Quasi-governmental
Sadrist Hashd	Institutional; Ideological	Quasi-governmental/Hybrid
Tribal Hashd	International; Institutional; Tribal	Hybrid/Quasi-governmental
Minority Hashd	Institutional; Ethnic/Tribal	Dependent

The Walaʾi Hashd

History

The largest and militarily and institutionally most powerful group within the Hashd is a collective of coercive organizations that are ideologically aligned with and directly coordinate strategically with Iran. Within Iraq, this group is known as al-Hashd al-Walaʾi, in reference to their walaʾ (loyalty, or allegiance) to Iran (Gulmohamad 2020, 263). Another name is the Fasaʾil (short for fasaʾil al-muqawamma, meaning resistance formations). This is in reference to their allegiance to the Iran-led 'Resistance Axis' against the US, Israel and their allies in the Middle East (Haddad 2020, 32). It consists of a dozen groups, the core of which are the seven organizations that were part of al-Maliki's January 2014 'Popular Defense Committees', organized to defend Baghdad against IS' rapid conquest of north-western Iraqi territory (al-Khoei 2019, 101). These groups are the Badr Organization, Asaʾib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), Kataʾib Hezbollah (KH), Kataʾib Sayyid al-Shuhada, Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba, Kataʾib al-Imam ʿAli and Kataʾib Jund al-Imam (Haddad 2020, 37). As such, the core organizations in this group existed before the rise of IS. Most were founded after the US invasion, although Badr was founded in 1982 in exile in Iran (Gulmohamad 2020, 267). A number of groups within the Walaʾi Hashd were founded by Iran, and enthusiastically profess their allegiance to Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei. An example of this are the Saraya al-Khorasani, who were founded by an Iranian, and named after Khamenei's alias (al-Khorasani). These even use the same logo as the IRGC. This group allegedly handles all training and logistical aid that comes in from Iran (Derzsi-Horváth, Gaston, and Saleh 2017). The larger, more politically established groups (such as AAH and Badr) are locally entrenched (Mansour and Jabar 2017, 13). KH and AAH and AAH's affiliated organization Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba were placed on the US' list of foreign terrorist organizations (US Congress 2018). This was due to their alleged attacks on US targets in Iraq and violence against civilians (particularly in the period of American occupation), and to their coordination with the IRGC-QF, which was itself determined a terrorist organization in 2019 (The White House 2019). In general, the Walaʾi groups openly reject the US' presence in Iraq, and some have called for attacks on US personnel (*Reuters* 2015a) A few particular organizations warrant some extra attention. The Badr Organization was founded in Tehran during the Iran-Iraq War, initially meant as a corps of Shiʿa defectors and POWs from the Iraqi army. It functioned as the armed wing of what is now called the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), although ties between that political organization and Badr were severed in 2012, when Badr split off to form its own political presence in the Iraqi parliament (Gulmohamad 2020, 267–

68). Badr has reconfirmed its ties to Iran after its departure from the ISCI. Generally, it presents itself as a right-winged Iraqi nationalist party. It has extensive ties to the Iraqi MoI and army as its members integrated into the state apparatus after militias were outlawed in 2004 (Cambanis et al. 2019, 25–26). Its long history as an armed group and extensive Iranian support have made Badr the most formidable and largest group within the Hashd (Gulmohamad 2020, 269–71). AAH split off from Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army (see below) in 2006, as it disagreed with its decision to end violence against US troops. In its role as a political party, AAH presents itself as Iraqi nationalist. Nonetheless, it does officially swear allegiance to Iran's Islamic resistance. It also operates social services such as schools, in a manner reminiscent of Lebanese Hezbollah (Gulmohamad 2020, 273–74). Kataʾib Hezbollah is a well-equipped, elite force within the Hashd, not to mention that it dominates the higher echelons of the PMC. It was founded in 2007, by Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis who had been part of the Badr Organization in the 1980s. KH has been designated a terrorist organization by the US since 2009 for its attacks on US personnel (Gulmohamad 2020, 276–77). Al-Muhandis was in fact assassinated by the US in January 2020 (*BBC News* 2020a). Together with AAH, the US alleges that KH is behind the periodic missile strikes on the US embassy in Baghdad. Furthermore, both are alleged to fight in the Syrian conflict in support of president Assad (Gulmohamad 2020, 275–78). KH even founded a daughter organization in Syria in 2013 called Harakat al-Nujaba (Derzsi-Horváth, Gaston, and Saleh 2017).

Support/Resource Axis
The pro-Iranian Hashd's support and resource bases are somewhat atypical for the PMF because of their reliance on substantial Iranian support. The extent of such support is hard to ascertain exactly because of its covert nature. However, it is clear that Walaʾi Hashd groups receive (heavy) weaponry (Shaikh 2019, 1–2; Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 49) and intelligence from Iran, not to mention ample opportunities for smuggling through their control of border crossings on the Iranian border (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 112–16). A second key resource base for this group is institutional, namely funding from the Iraqi state. This funding is delivered as a lump sum to be distributed at the discretion of the PMC, which is dominated by pro-Iranian Hashd forces and led by its vice-chair, who has always been a KH member (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 62). This means that in contradiction to what might be expected, this institutional resource base does not make the Walaʾi Hashd more dependent on the state. In fact, it has provided it with a powerful influence over the funding of other groups.

A third column that this group might be suspected to be supported by is religious Shiʿa loyalties within Iraq. There are certainly ideological reasons to believe so. Iran's official message is one pan-Islamic resistance and revolution. However, it frequently boils down to support for Shiʿa groups due to the dynamics of Iran's hegemonic competition with Saudi Arabia, which positions itself as the paragon of Sunni Islam in the region (International Crisis Group 2017, 4). However, despite their public allegiance to Khamenei, Walaʾi Hashd groups are careful to avoid overly sectarian narratives which are sure to lead to a public backlash. This can be seen in the Hashd's official media channels, whose messaging is dominated by pro-Iranian Hashd factions (Garrison 2017, 6–7). These avoid using explicitly Shiʿa symbolism, or flaunting the influences of the Axis of Resistance within the Hashd. Instead, they emphasize the cross-sectarian nature of the Hashd and Shiʿa militia's protection of Sunnis in the fight against IS (Garrison 2017, 13–15). In general, this anti-sectarian narrative has also meant that the organizations in this group have not mobilized Shiʿa constituencies for support in significant ways.

From these two support columns (external and institutional) this group is highly dependent on capitalist (i.e. not community-based) resources. The Walaʾi Hashd is therefore expected to have an abusive relationship with the civilian population. It is also likely to possess large and consistent funds, while remaining independent from the government's influences. These expectations are confirmed by these groups' activities.

Using their position of power, pro-Iranian organizations dominate smuggling activity (Rasheed, Dehghanpisheh, and Georgy 2018) and mafia-like criminal activities (protection rackets, gambling, drugs, extortion) abound in this group (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 112–16). These activities are not unimportant to the Walaʾi Hashd. They violently and publicly resist attempts at holding them accountable for their criminal activities, as is chronicled in chapter five. This indicates that these 'greed driven' motivations are important enough to incur public outrage and government aggression. These criminal activities are in fact another independent resource base for this group. This renders it even more unresponsive to government enticements or cuts in funding (Day 2020, 13). Furthermore, the Walaʾi Hashd are infamous for their public kidnappings and executions of political and social opponents, which go largely unpunished (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 91–92).

Alignment Axis
The Iran Hashd's relationship with the government and, most importantly, the Prime-Minister's office is hybrid or even anti-governmental. Official and publicized alignment with the government is contrasted with extensive and at times blatant opposition. As the primary institutional power holder in the Hashd, the Walaʾi Hashd are primarily responsible for the PMF's failure to comply with the past three PMs' attempts at expanding their control over the PMF's finances and operations. These groupings often express themselves negatively towards the PM's policies. They cite the army's ineffectiveness and severely criticize the government's continued cooperation with the Americans in Iraq (*Reuters* 2015a; Ibrahim 2020). As chapter five extensively chronicles, there are also several prominent examples of these organizations directly flaunting their independence from the government. They have even threatened and intimidated government agencies when attempts have been made to hold them accountable for criminal acts.

It should be noted that these groups never officially attack the legitimacy or authority of the state. Their association with the state provide it with much needed legal-rational legitimacy. PMF groupings are very eager to be considered an official and legitimate state institution. This is also why they avoid the term 'militia', which is associated with rogue, extralegal actors and the sectarian violence after the American invasion. Furthermore, militias are explicitly prohibited by the Iraqi constitution (Comparative Constitutions Project n.d.). Survey data indicates that Iraqis find (electoral) legitimacy to be the most important feature of ruling parties (Mansour and Salisbury 2019, 11). As the Iranian Hashd seeks electoral success to entrench their influence further in the executive offices of the state, it is sensitive to its image and appreciation with voters. The Hashd's media narrative therefore focuses on its legitimacy as a state actor and on its integrity and effectiveness in the face of IS' onslaught, particularly when compared to the army (Garrison 2017, 7–12). In fact, the Hashd presents itself as the saviors of the state from IS. Lastly, if the Walaʾi Hashd groups would declare a rhetorical war on the state, it might be feared that al-Sistani and the Shrine Hashd (see below) would openly condemn them as rogue actors. This would be a severe blow, as the association with al-Sistani's fatwa also bestows them with traditional legitimacy due to his immense popularity and status (Haddad 2018, 9).

Considering the Walaʾi Hashd's extensive reliance on Iran, it is useful to consider Iran's foreign policy goals in Iraq here. Knights, Malik & Al-Tamimi identify Iran's activities in Iraq as being focused on two things. Iran uses Iraqi organizations as troops in the war against their regional enemies, for example in Syria. Additionally, they target their international enemies, primarily the United States. As expected from the theoretical literature, Iran uses its allies in Iraq to launch attacks on US targets with plausible deniability, responding to US hostility or sanctions with relative impunity (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 151). Additionally, Iran is fearful of the overthrow of the current Shiʿa-dominated Iraqi regime, in which it enjoys extensive influence. After the decades of animosity against Saddam Hussein, Iran wants to avoid this prospect, and hopes to use the (Iranian) Hashd as a fifth column coup-proofing method (Mansour and Jabar 2017, 17). In this sense it is not unlike the role of the Revolutionary Guards in Iran. In fact, much has been written about

Iranian attempts to use the Hashd as an Iraqi IRGC (Rotmann 2019; Wehrey et al. 2009). However, other authors have pointed out that this is an unlikely scenario due to the Hashd's diversity, as well as the ethno-sectarian fissures and polarization in Iraq. These make a dominant Shiʿa force to similar extents as the IRGC an unlikely scenario to be successful (Haddad 2018, 4; Ezzedine, Sulz, and van Veen 2019, 19). The protests aimed at both US and Iranian influences in Iraq certainly appear to indicate that this route would meet extensive popular resistance (Browne 2020).

Far from seeing the Walaʾi Hashd as a simple Iranian proxy other authors have pointed out that it retains independence from Iran. Its interests, particularly preventing an anti-Shiʿa takeover of the Iraqi regime, align with Iran's, not to mention its ideology (Ollivant and Gaston 2019). However, plenty of examples exist of apparent disregard for Iranian wishes or orders (Abdul-Zahra and Kullab 2020b; Nadimi and Malik 2020; Ollivant and Gaston 2019). This is particularly so after the death of Qassem Soleimani, whose personal relations with these groups was a key part of Iran's relationship with them (Alemzadeh 2020; Badawi 2020). Lastly, the Walaʾi Hashd's licit and illicit economic activities in Iraq create their own, greed-driven interests and logics of dependence, which are independent of Iran (Felbab-Brown 2019, 5; Haddad 2020, 52). These, too, would be imperiled by extensive government control, oversight, and accountability in the Hashd. They therefore incentivize the Hashd to maintain the status-quo.

The Shrine Hashd

History

Another fundamental group within the PMF is the so-called 'Shrine Hashd'. This group is also referred to as al-Hashd al-Marjiʿi (a marjiʿ is a Shiʿa religious leader, referring to the role of al-Sistani). Another name is Hashd al-Dawla (the state Hashd), and the Hashd al-Fatwa (the fatwa Hashd, referring to al-Sistani's foundational fatwa in 2014) (Haddad 2020, 41). This group consists of a smaller number of armed groups which were founded after al-Sistani's fatwa calling Iraqis to arms against IS in 2014. The core of these are the four shrine or 'ʿatabat' groups. These groups primarily protect four holy Shiʿa shrines in Iraq (also known as the ʿatabat). The largest and most well equipped group, however, is the Furqat al-ʿAbbaas al-Qitaliya (FAQ), who number in the thousands and operate equipment such as drones (Gulmohamad 2020, 287). Additionally, the ISCI's new combat divisions (founded after the split with Badr) have sworn allegiance to al-Sistani's guidance, rather than Khamenei's (Soage 2020, 115). However, ISCI keeps warm relations with Sadr, the Shrine Hashd, and the Iranian Hashd (also on parliamentary front). They are essentially independent, so they cannot really be ascribed to this (or any other) group from an institutional perspective (Mansour and Jabar 2017, 14; Gulmohamad 2020, 286). Lastly, the Shrine Hashd also employ large amounts of Sunnis (up to 20% in some groups) (Derzsi-Horváth, Gaston, and Saleh 2017).

In April 2020, the Shrine Hashd announced the momentous decision that they would be leaving the PMF's framework and submit themselves directly to the PM's office. They announced that they would be willing to join any other Hashd units that left the PMF's framework (Malik 2020a). This split is the culmination of long-standing indignation in the Shrine Hashd at the Walaʾi Hashd's actions. The Shrine Hashd has long opposed the Walaʾi Hashd's activities and alignment in the Iraqi political arena. Al-Sistani has issued a decree denouncing war crimes (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 186–87) and expressed frustration with unequal distribution of the Hashd's funds (Mansour and Jabar 2017, 20). He has also rejected the violence committed in the competition between the US and Iran on Iraqi soil. He particularly expressed his support for the Iraqi protests since 2018, and condemned the violence committed against them (Georgy 2019; Amnesty International 2019).

Support/Resource Axis
The Shrine Hashd and al-Sistani are highly dedicated to the letter of the law and adherence to the government. Because of this, their resource bases are primarily institutional PMC funding, alongside religious contributions from the funds of the shrines. Concerning the former, the Walaʾi Hashd's domination of the PMC, as well as the MoI, which, along with the Ministry of Defense (MoD) is part of the funding process, has made acquiring adequate funds difficult. Shrine Hashd commanders claim that at times only a third of their requested fighter salaries would be approved (Mansour and Jabar 2017, 20). However, the Shrine Hashd's importance in providing traditional legitimacy to the PMF as a whole has worked as effective leverage against the pro-Iranian Hashd's reluctance (Malik 2020a). The shortages the Shrine Hashd faces because of this are partially absorbed through the funds of the shrines themselves. These rely on religious donations from the many Shiʿa that follow al-Sistani's religious guidance, as well as the millions of pilgrims that visit Iraq's holy sites each year (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 60–61). Especially due to this latter support column, the Shrine Hashd's relationship with Iraqi civilians is very amicable. Criminal elements appear to be at a minimal level. This is reflected in the popularity of the Shrine Hashd, as well as al-Sistani himself (Felbab-Brown 2019, 6; Haddad 2018, 4).

Alignment Axis
 The Shrine Hashd follow al-Sistani's highly apolitical, Iraqi nationalist line, and can be classified as quasi-governmental in alignment. This is particularly true after al-Sistani's decision to withdraw from the Hashd mechanism and attach the Shrine Hashd directly to the PM's office. The Shrine Hashd has always heeded the laws prohibiting Hashd members from joining political parties (مهدي 2017). Al-Sistani in fact advocated for other Hashd groupings to do the same and publically supported government campaigns to bring the Hashd in line (El-Ghobashy and Salim 2017; Malik 2020b). His alignment is ultimately with the Iraqi people, rather than its government, however. Despite being a Shiʿa cleric, he is firmly anti-sectarian. In 2011 he broke off communications with al-Maliki's government for its corruption and sectarian, anti-Sunni policies. It only reengaged with the state in 2014 to face IS (Sayej 2019, 23–24). While al-Sistani tended to encourage voting, in 2018 he expressed his disappointment with Iraq's ineffective and corrupt system and declared it a personal choice whether or not to vote (Dodge 2018, 42). In July of 2018, among widespread popular protests, he even explicitly criticized Iraq's leaders and urged the new government to heed the protesters' demands (Alkadiri 2018).

Ultimately, al-Sistani is an Iraqi nationalist, explicitly rejecting Iranian, or any foreign influences in the country on many occasions (Sayej 2019, 25; *Reuters* 2019). The Shrine Hashd's commanders therefore always follow official channels and refuse to meet with Iranian officials unless there were Iraqi government officials present. In this manner, they actively thwarted Iran's efforts to avoid government oversight (Gulmohamad 2020, 288). In military operations, the Shrine Hashd always coordinated closely with the Iraqi army (Derzsi-Horváth, Gaston, and Saleh 2017). In general, the Shrine Hashd avoided Iranian courtship, emphasizing Iraqi sovereignty and its independence from Iran (Mamouri 2016). After the death of al-Muhandis, the Shrine Hashd protested the new leader assigned by a committee dominated by Walaʾi Hashd members, as he was once again a KH member (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 23).

Even initially, al-Sistani never meant for his fatwa to lead to the creation of a separate, hybrid security institution. His fatwa's wording calls for people to "join the security forces" (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 3). Afterwards, he never referred to the Hashd by its name, instead calling its fighters 'volunteers', in reference to his call to volunteer (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 3–4). Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the Shrine Hashd did generally not support the disbandment of the Hashd. They preferred to remain free from the tainted reputation of the army, and military culture differences would have made

integration tricky (Felbab-Brown 2019, 4). Lastly, the decision to finally give up on the PMF framework and directly attach the Shrine Hashd to the PM's office indicate its supreme loyalty to the government.

The Sadrist Hashd

History

The Sadrist Hashd consists of essentially only one group: Saraya al-Salam (the Peace Brigades), and is centered politically around one man: Muqtada al-Sadr. The 'Sadrists' have existed since the Saddam years, when Muqtada's father led the movement which represented repressed and poor Shiʿa. After his death in 1999, Muqtada inherited his position (Mansour and Clark 2014). Sadr strongly focuses on his role as a hero of poor Shiʿa. He aligns himself politically with leftists in parliament, where his Saʾiroun Bloc became the largest party in 2018 (Ezzedine, Sulz, and van Veen 2019, 12). The fact that the Sadrists were active in Iraq before the American invasion is also a point of pride, often used in comparison to the Walaʾi Hashd's history as exiles in Iran. Sadr's former armed group was called Jaysh al-Mahdi (the Mahdi Army, in reference to the Mahdi, a descendent of the prophet said to return in the Shiʿa version of the day of judgment). It frequently attacked US troops during the American occupation, and was infamous for its sectarian violence against Sunnis during the Iraqi civil war in 2006-2008 (Gulmohamad 2020, 283). PM al-Maliki (2006-2014) cracked down hard on the Mahdi Army and forced it to disband in 2008. Afterwards it maintained only a minor force under the name of Liwaʾ al-Youm al-Mawuʿd (the Promised Day Brigades) (Gulmohamad 2020, 283). As mentioned above, AAH split off from the Sadrist movement. Today, Sadr blames most of the violence of the Mahdi Army on AAH units (Mansour and Clark 2014). In 2014, he created the Peace Brigades in response to IS' rise. They have been a formidable, but underfunded, force on the battlefield (Gulmohamad 2020, 284).

Support/Resource Axis

While Sadr enjoys a firm support base in Iraq's poor Shiʿa, the Peace Brigades are generally underfunded due to their reliance on institutional funding. The Sadrist movement is popular. It used to be a highly sectarian actor in the civil war, and of course Sadr himself is a Shiʿa cleric. However, it is currently focused on its ideologically leftist socio-economic ideology and Iraqi nationalism (Haddad 2020, 41). Sadr is able to mobilize his supporters in protests against his Iranian-backed rivals and American influences in Iraq (Mamouri 2016; *BBC News* 2020a). Furthermore, a Baghdad Shiʿa slum with some 2 million residents is known as 'Sadr City' because of the Sadrist effective control over the area (Roe 2016). As for its resource bases, however, Sadrists have struggled. Saraya al-Salam claim to have over 100,000 recruits, but are able to field only a fraction of that because of scarcity of funds (Gulmohamad 2020, 284). They allege that of the 20,000 recruits for which they sought funding from the PMC, only 3,000 were accepted (Mansour and Jabar 2017, 20). This strong ideological support base, combined with an unfriendly institutional resource base, leaves the Sadrists a powerful socio-political actor, that struggles to fulfill its military potential.

Alignment

Despite their historical extremism and opposition to the state, the Sadrist Hashd today is a quasi-governmental organization. Sadr is a proponent of Iraqi nationalism and vocally supports strengthening Iraqi state institutions. He has called for the integration of the Hashd into the Iraqi security forces because of the way in which the Iranian-backed Hashd has dominated institutions (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 150). He is not openly hostile to Iran as an actor, but does demand it respects Iraqi sovereignty. As one of his spokesmen said: "Muqtada al-Sadr has repeatedly said that we are with Iran, as a neighboring country that we respect, but we categorically reject any Iranian interference in the Iraqi internal affairs" (Mamouri 2016). His opposition to Iranian influences also extends to parliament, where he is a vocal opponent of the pro-Iranian political alliance (Fatah) (Ezzedine, Sulz, and van Veen 2019, 12). It is present as well on the battlefield, where

Saraya al-Salam at times clashes with Badr, KH, and AAH forces (Derzsi-Horváth, Gaston, and Saleh 2017; Gulmohamad 2020, 285). Many of Sadr's personal opponents are aligned with Iran, such as Sadrist dissidents AAH, and former PM al-Maliki, who successfully fought Sadr's influence in Iraq during his tenure. It is therefore likely that his support for a strong Iraqi state is dependent on the alignment of the PM. If, for example, al-Maliki were to make a return to the Prime-Minister's office, Sadr is likely to return to his anti-governmental position (Mansour and Clark 2014). This fluidity once again underlines the inherently political actions of these armed groups. Seeing them as static spoilers that are fundamentally opposed to the state does not leave room for such changes in attitude. Instead, they should be seen as one of many types of actor that vies for influence in the Iraq's hybrid security and political arenas.

The Tribal Hashd

History

The Tribal Hashd (or Hashd al-Ashaʾir in Arabic) is really a collection of Sunni tribal forces. Most of them are part of a US initiative to involve Sunni forces in the fight against IS. This is part of an effort to use the dynamics of PGMs to strengthen the ties of these marginal populations to the central government. Based on the success of the similar Sunni Awakening (or Sahwa) movement launched in 2008 against al-Qaeda (Gaston 2017b), these Tribal Mobilization Forces (TMF) generally operate in their own communities (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 130). They are driven by a desire to defend these communities against IS, in part because they distrust the central, Shiʿa dominated government. The forces are divided into small, independent units of some 100-300 men. Essentially they function similar to neighborhood watches or local police in function. In general, they coordinate with the security forces and local authorities (Gaston 2017b). The other Tribal Hashd units are often attached to larger Shiʿa PMF groups and may operate alongside them outside their own areas (Derzsi-Horváth, Gaston, and Saleh 2017). A separate force within the Tribal Hashd of some 3,000 men is referred to as the Nineveh Guard Force, or previously al-Hashd al-Watani (Patriotic Hashd). This was founded by the Nineveh governorate's former governor Ateel Nujaifi in 2014 in response to IS. He founded a separate force as he considered the TMF to be too restrictive in terms of unit size. When the PMF was officially deemed equal to the Iraqi army in 2016, he begrudgingly joined the organization (Gaston 2017b).

Support/Resource Axis

The Tribal Hashd is a textbook example of an organization with a tribal support base. On the other hand, its resource bases are primarily external, as well as institutional. In its function as small, locally-sourced neighborhood watch groups, the TMF are a classic example of a hybrid security force. Their relations with civilians reflect their community support base. On the other hand, the forces that were involved in liberating IS-occupied areas were reported to engage in war crimes against tribal rivals and groups accused of aiding IS (Gaston 2017b). For resources, the Tribal Hashd actually rely more on external support. The TMF receive US training, funding, and equipment. The Nineveh Guard Force receives covert Turkish support, although it denies this (Gaston 2017b). On the other hand, the PMF maintains an institutional influence over these forces. As PMF forces, the Tribal Hashd receive PMC-distributed funds. Additionally, American support has to go through the Iraqi MoD. In fact, in 2019 the PMC forbade the US from communicating and coordinating with the TMF directly (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 39).

Alignment Axis

The Tribal Hashd's alignment towards the government can be considered quasi-governmental, although it also has elements of a hybrid alignment. In essence, the Tribal Hashd are locally focused forces with local priorities. As with most of Iraqi Sunni, they have not felt very represented by the post-2003 Iraqi state throughout most of its existence. Their attitude towards it can be described as lukewarm at best. The Tribal

Hashd are not very politically active. This is in no small part due to the US and al-Maliki government's conscious decision to keep TMF units small and local. It therefore might be seen as a coup-proofing strategy. It prevents them from becoming a united, armed, anti-state actor in the Iraqi political context (Gaston 2017b). The allegiance that many of the Tribal Hashd's groups owe to the PMC for funding, as well as to specific (often Walaʾi Hashd) groups, does make them part of the Iran Hashd's power against the government.

The Minority Hashd

The last group to consider here is the diverse group of fighting units that consist of smaller Iraqi religious or ethnic minorities. These include small religious sects, such as the Shabak and Christians, as well as ethnic minorities, such as Turkmens, Kurds[3], and Yazidis. This is by far the least coherent or independent cluster. Most of these groups operate as somewhat autonomous brigades tied to larger, more powerful groups, such as Badr, AAH, or KH, in a similar dynamic as some of the Tribal Hashd's units (Derzsi-Horváth, Gaston, and Saleh 2017). Often, these groups operate in a local capacity, in areas they are familiar with (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 130). Some scholars interpret the efforts of the three major groups (Walaʾi, Shrine, and Sadr) to include non-Shiʿa fighters in the PMF as an attempt to increase the PMF's legitimacy by giving it a cross-sectarian face, hiding its inherently Shiʿa nature (Haddad 2018, 10; Gulmohamad 2020, 280). Whether or not one subscribes to this interpretation, the Minority Hashd certainly lacks the size, independence, and influence of the three major Shiʿa groupings within the PMF.

Because of this groups' small unit strength and sizes, as well as their scattered and dependent position within the Hashd, an in-depth analysis of their support and resource bases, and their alignment would not be meaningful. Their mobilization efforts are certainly supported through tribal and ethnic support bases. Nonetheless, their institutional ties to the larger Hashd groups (particularly the Walaʾi Hashd) prevent them from operating independent policies vis-à-vis the government.

Whose Hashd? Power Dynamics and Influence Within the PMF

Having established a typology of the groups within the Hashd and their institutional attitudes towards the government, we must now turn to the power dynamics within the PMF that guide its behavior as a whole. It may be surprising to find that the government's attempts at reining in the PMF have failed, when so many of its groupings are not fundamentally opposed to them. Heterarchical power structures determine the relations between these groups and their ability to cooperate with the government, or frustrate its efforts. As shall be argued below, these work out in favor to the Walaʾi Hashd, which is able to leverage its position against the Prime-Ministers that have challenged the PMF.

Firstly, the Hashd's power structure is fundamentally heterarchical. The PMF does have a de jure central hierarchy through the structure of the PMC. However, the individual groups that make up the Hashd maintain de facto tactical and political independence. Perhaps ironically, this lack of explicit hierarchy and opaque power structure is mainly propagated by the very group that dominates the PMC, the Walaʾi Hashd. All of this is not to say that there are no power structures present between the actors that make up the Hashd. There are extensive networks of influence between the groups. While the Walaʾi Hashd is dominant in certain key fields, it would be a mistake to think that it is unchallenged, or that it reigns supreme in every domain. To borrow Krause's terms, the PMF has three 'significant groups', with the Walaʾi Hashd acting as a 'leader', while the Shrine and Sadrist Hashds fulfill the role of 'challengers', and the Tribal and Minority

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[3] The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is autonomous from Baghdad and fields its own armed forces. In areas of the Kurdistan regional government's control, therefore, the PMF framework is not used. The Kurds represented in the PMF are generally those that live outside the KRI's de facto territory.

Hashd function as 'subordinates' (P. Krause 2017, 21). The challengers make frequent efforts to undermine the Walaʾi Hashd. This happens politically, through their efforts to block Iranian favorites for Prime-Minister; rhetorically, attacking Iranian influences in Iraq, as well as the criminal activities of pro-Iranian groups and their defiance of the PM's authority; and even militarily, as particularly the Sadrists have clashed with Walaʾi forces in the field.

These efforts are not without success. The Iranian Hashd's behavior betrays the importance it attaches to legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Association with both the Shrine Hashd and the notion of the Iraqi state are key to this perception. The Iraqi public's insistence on state-approved, legal-rational legitimate security forces drives the Walaʾi Hashd to continue its association with the government. Its (social) media campaigns focus on their legitimacy as an Iraqi nationalist actor. They portray the PMF as the champion of the Iraqi people, and savior of the Iraqi state. Hashd leaders even concur with calls to remove PMF troops from urban centers, out of concerns for their rampant criminal activity and the damage it does to their reputation (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 155). Furthermore, the Iranian Hashd appear to be concerned with al-Sistani's immense popularity and legitimacy with the Iraqi people. According to some estimates, some 80% of Shiʿa worldwide follow al-Sistani's religious guidance (Khalaji 2006, 7). Furthermore, his fatwa has made him the face of the popular mobilization against IS. After Mosul's liberation in 2017, he was thanked in nearly all victory speeches by Iraqi leaders, as well as in popular outbursts of praise (Al-Qarawee 2014, 491). The presence of the Shrine Hashd in the PMF and their cooperation with the Walaʾi groups in the fight against IS confers some of that traditional legitimacy onto these groups by association. After al-Sistani announced the ʿatabat's withdrawal from the PMF, Badr leader al-ʿAmiri reportedly visited his representatives and offered them a better position in the PMC, and a greater care for al-Sistani's preferences in general (Malik 2020a). While this move can therefore be seen as a blow to the Walaʾi Hashd's legitimacy, it does not appear as yet to have moderated their behavior in any significant way.

Ultimately the Walaʾi Hashd are the most powerful force within the PMF in several key aspects. Firstly and most importantly, the institutional design of the PMC grants significant control over all of the PMF to those parties that dominate it. Making the PMC largely independent apart from its official allegiance to the PM's office was part of a conscious effort by the al-Maliki government to create a counterbalance to the army, as well as to his Sadrist rivals. In fact, during the initial recruitment drive for the Hashd, al-Maliki and his allies ran a smear campaign against the Iraqi army to favor conscription rates to the initial seven Walaʾi armed groups that had been part of the Popular Defense Committees (Mansour and Jabar 2017, 5–9). The Walaʾi Hashd's PMC power is complemented by Badr's permeation of the MoI. This ministry not only controls other security forces, such as the federal police, but is also part of the PMF funding procedures (Mansour and Jabar 2017, 19). Additionally, many Badr units integrated into the Iraqi army starting in 2004. Because of this Knights, Malik and Al-Tamimi conclude that, while the non-PMF Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) have the military edge over the PMF in terms of skilled personnel, this advantage switches if Badr units inside the ISF are counted as pro-PMF (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 135).

Control of the PMC offers the pro-Iranian Hashd many avenues of control and advantage. A minor example of this is that they are able to dominate the official PMF media channels and through it the type of popular narrative that surrounds the PMF (Garrison 2017, 6–7). Most importantly, however, is the control of PMF funds. Those groups favored by Iran and al-Muhandis, and therefore the PMC, enjoy higher salaries and better equipment. Other groups find alternative means to supplement their incomplete salaries, and/or suffer scarcity and lower wages (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 62). As per Saraya al-Salam's claims, this dynamic may even prevent full mobilization of a non-Walaʾi group's military potential (Gulmohamad 2020, 284). Through this process, the Walaʾi Hashd essentially gained control over the Tribal and Minority Hashds, who must align with them to access equipment and funds (Haddad 2018, 10). Furthermore, the

PMC has used internal security forces to crack down on dissenting groups. In these instances, al-Muhandis has closed 'fake' PMF offices, or offices alleged of engaging in illegal activities. Mansour interprets these closures and arrests as a purge, ridding the PMF of groups and commanders critical of Iran, such as the prominent Aws al-Khafaji in 2019 (Mansour 2019b).

The second key avenue to the power of this group is military strength. Iranian support means that the Walaʾi forces enjoy significant material advantages over their peers. This takes the form of missiles, tanks, heavy weaponry, etcetera (Shaikh 2019, 2; Amnesty International 2017, 27–30). Furthermore, the Walaʾi groups, particularly Badr, but also KH and AAH, tend to be the oldest and most experienced. The Shrine Hashd were founded in 2014, and the Sadrists did not maintain a major military presence between 2008 and 2014. Badr is by far the largest group in the PMF, with extensive materiel and experience from its participation in the Iran-Iraq War. Because of Badr's domination of heavy weaponry in the Hashd, the PMF's artillery and tank battalions initially bore its name (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 32). In this sense, Badr forms the PMF's military "spinal column" (Haddad 2018, 6).

Of course, all out conflict between the PMF and the other Iraqi security forces is not a realistic prospect (although instances of intimidation and flexing of muscles have certainly taken place, as is argued in chapter five). This does not mean, however, that military power does not feature into the heterarchy of the PMF. As mentioned above, Saraya al-Salam has clashed with Walaʾi forces in the past over tactical differences. Additionally, if the Shrine Hashd formed the bulk of the PMF's military prowess, its withdrawal from the organization would carry much more weight. This military strength therefore further compounds the Walaʾi Hashd's de facto power over the PMF as an institution.

Chapter 4: Political Reluctance to Hashd Reform

The PMF's dominant group's opposition to the government is only one part of the puzzle of its resistance to reform as a whole. The efforts of Iraqi nationalists and the Prime-Minister's office are further undermined by political opposition to the PMF's integration. Iraq's PMs are far from able to form a united front with Iraq's political establishment. Instead, they must contend with forces within the executive and legislative branches of government that refuse to cooperate with its efforts and even actively frustrate them. This chapter explores the political actors in Iraq and the ways in which they relate to Iran and the idea of the PMF. It argues that the key causes of this political reluctance are parliamentary dynamics of competition, ideological alignment, and even coup-proofing, and the difficulties inherent in opposing the PMF's independence. These factors combine with the institutional power of pro-Iranian groups in the executive. This primarily takes the form of Badr's presence in the MoI and army. Altogether these make the Hashd highly resilient to the PM's intentions.

The Hashd Blocs

The first element of Iraq's political resistance to reforming the Hashd is found in the Shiʿa political establishment. This is far from unified behind the idea of a strong, centralized Iraqi state. Nor behind opposition to Iranian influence in it. Parts of this establishment support the Walaʾi Hashd's ideology, policies, and practices. Marred by the traumatic experience of decades of repression at the hands of the Sunni Baʿath regime, a significant part of Shiʿa politicians in Iraq remain suspicious of ideas of Sunni resurgence. The tenure of former PM al-Maliki (2006-2014) was explicitly informed by a sectarian view of the Middle East. In it, no cooperation is possible between the Sunni and Shiʿa axes (Bednarz and Brinkbäumer 2014). As the US steadily withdrew after 2008, his government thwarted rising Sunni political and military strength. It installed Shiʿa military commanders throughout Sunni territories, and refused to allow the commanders of the 2008 Sunni Sahwa the political and institutional power that they had been promised. In fact, he 'disbanded' the Sahwa by simply stopping payment of its salaries (Gaston 2017b). During the rise of IS, he remained skeptical of engaging Sunni tribal forces in an 'Iraqi National Guard'. This idea had been proposed by the US. They would potentially be trained by Sunni states such as Jordan and the Gulf states (Wehrey and Ahram 2015, 8–9). When he did approve the formation of the TMF, it was under stringent conditions which made it a small and fragmented force. It depended on Baghdad for its supplies of materiel and funding furnished by the US (Gaston 2017b). The marginalization of Sunnis under al-Maliki is in fact often cited by academic authors (Mansour 2016a; Al-Qarawee 2014; Patel 2015), Iraqi Sunni leaders (Boghani 2014), and Sunni citizens (in surveys) (NDI 2014, 24) as one of the causes for the rise of IS, or at least the acquiescence to it by part of Sunni Iraq. PMs al-ʿAbadi, ʿAbdul-Mahdi, and al-Kadhimi have not engaged in sectarian policies to this extent. However, al-Maliki and many others who share his sectarian worldview maintain prominence in the Iraqi parliament and government. Iran gained the allegiance of many of these politicians (Felbab-Brown 2019, 4).

Within Iraq's parliament, which has 329 seats, there are two main groups that support the Walaʾi Hashd's aims. These are the Fatah Alliance, with 48 seats, comprised of Badr, AAH, and other PMF groups. The other is the State of Law (Dawlat al-Qaanoun) group, with 25 seats. This is comprised of al-Maliki's Daʿwa Party and its allies. The largest list in the parliament is Saʾiroun (Forward), with 54 seats, which is led by Sadrists. This group is among Fatah and State of Law's staunchest opponents, as is explained in chapter three. Other lists include former PM al-ʿAbadi's Victory Alliance, the Wisdom Movement, which split off from ISCI, as well as Kurdish and Sunni parties (al-Shadeedi and van Veen 2020, 44–46). Officially, members of any armed forces are not allowed to be part of a political organization, with punishment of up to five years' imprisonment. However, some PMF groups have used the opaque membership structures of the organization

to claim nominal independence from their respective organizations when entering parliament. For example, Badr leader al-Amiri is a member of parliament, but still heads the Badr Organization. In fact, Badr's Facebook pages openly support Amiri and Fatah's campaigns (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 85–87). This indicates that PMF groups feel the need to hide their ties to their political wings and engage in 'covert-direct' participation in elections (Matanock and Staniland 2018, 713–17). However, the Iraqi state's strength in countering transgressions against electoral laws is apparently perceived to be very low. PMF groups feel comfortable flaunting their illegal political wings.

What these groups' aims amount to are attempts at coup-proofing the Shiʿa regime through the PMF. The PMF is used as a separate security actor in Iraq, and kept dependent on Iranian and Shiʿa approval and support. It therefore can be trusted to protect Shiʿa cadres of the parliament against coup attempts from Sunni actors or the Iraqi Army. The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) are eyed suspiciously by many of these politicians. Not only did the army collapse in the face of IS in 2014 (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 139). The army, as well as other government security forces such as the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service (ICS) (Witty 2015, 6–21), are multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian. Moreover, they were trained by the United States, whose alliances with Israel and the Gulf states, and its animosity towards Iran, are viewed with great suspicion (Mansour and Jabar 2017, 23; Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 16–17; 151–52). Coup-proofing tactics are used throughout the Hashd. Already at the time of the PMF's establishment, al-Maliki tied the PMF to his office directly. This boosted the power of the office, which is constitutionally reserved for Shiʿa (not to mention at the time: al-Maliki himself) (Mansour and Jabar 2017, 9). There is extensive redundancy between the ISF and the PMF from a functional perspective, forming an M-form military structure in Ahram's terms (Ahram 2011, 13). Furthermore, there is widespread overlap in the areas of operations of the army and the PMF (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 40–43).

Aside from sectarian considerations, there are economic and nationalist reasons to align with Iran. Firstly, Iran is a major trading partner for Iraq (*Reuters* 2020a). Iran's 80 million inhabitants make it a major market and producer for Iraqi business. Imports from Iran in 2019 reportedly amounted to $10 billion, out of a total of $40 billion (*Financial Tribune* 2019). Furthermore, in recent years the two countries have made deals to increase ties between them. This included a historic visit by Iranian president Rouhani to Iraq in 2019 (Rasheed 2019a). Even actors that are critical of Iranian influences in the Iraqi security sector tend to support open trade between the two. Al-Sistani applauded the strengthening of relations between the countries. At the same time he emphasized the need for "respect for the sovereignty of the countries and no interference in domestic affairs" (*Reuters* 2019). PM al-Kadhimi's government has combined crackdowns on the Walaʾi Hashd with attempts at expanding economic ties to Iran (Badawi 2020). Iraq also imports large amounts of energy (primarily natural gas) from Iran in order to compensate its failing national energy infrastructure, which suffers from massive blackouts during summer months. For this purpose, the US provides Iraq with waivers for the sanctions it imposed on energy imports from Iran (Pamuk 2020). Lastly, extensive tourist and religious travel exists between Iran and Iraq, both of which host some of Shiʿa Islam's holiest shrines. The annual pilgrimage of Arbaʿeen alone attracts millions of Iranians to Iraq each year (*France 24* 2020). The US is increasingly disinterested and is pivoting away from engagement in the Middle East (*BBC News* 2020b; Clinton 2011). Furthermore, it has a fraught history in Iraq – to use a severe understatement. Iran is therefore not an illogical alternative. Of course, disliking the US, or acknowledging Iran's religious and economic importance to Iraq is not the same as accepting its meddling in Iraqi security affairs, as the positions of al-Sistani and Sadr exemplify. Aside from sectarian logics and economic policy, domestic political competition is also a motivation to engage Iran and its proxies in the Iraqi context. Al-Maliki attempted to strengthen the Iraqi state during the early years of his tenure. He combatted the power of Jaysh al-Mahdi, and attempted to reduce Badr's influence in the MoI (Mansour and Jabar 2017, 5–6). However, a series of

electoral defeats and his intense competition with Muqtada al-Sadr drove him to reach out to Iran (Mansour and Jabar 2017, 8). His political aims do not primarily concern the Iraqi state as an idea, but are dependent on inter-Iraqi power competition. In a way, he acts similarly to Sadr, albeit in the opposite direction. As Mansour and Jabar explain, "[Maliki] is only willing to bolster state institutions if he or his allies are in power— as long as Iraq is ruled by alternative leaders, this group will not seek to strengthen the state" (Mansour and Jabar 2017, 24). Al-Maliki is but one prominent example of this dynamic. Many political leaders in Iraq have realized that Iranian support can be a key to power in the Iraqi system, and aligned themselves with the Walaʾi Hashd to benefit from that fact (Felbab-Brown 2019, 4).

The Popularity of the Popular Mobilization Forces

Secondly, opposing the PMF's independence is risky in more ways than one. The political opposition against the Walaʾi Hashd's policies is divided and weakened. The Shrine Hashd are generally risk averse, not to mention essentially apolitical. Because of this, al-Sistani's reprimands of the Walaʾi Hashd have been limited to affirming his dedication to the rule of law and the Prime-Minister, and calls for others to follow that example. Sadr, on the other hand, has a fraught political history, and his behavior in the Iraqi political sphere is frequently extreme and polarizing. Kurdish and Sunni parties in parliament that might have formed useful allies in opposing Iran are fragmented, and at times coopted by the Iranian camp (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 150; Mansour 2019a, 13–15). This is compounded by the fact that Iranian backed PMF groups have been known to intimidate political opponents, and even engage in violence against them (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 91–92; 104).

Another issue for opponents of the PMF's independence is the popularity of the PMF with the Iraqi public. The PMF's successes in driving back IS, especially in the face of the army's weakness, has created a powerful narrative. This makes a policy of disbanding it in its entirety politically untenable. The PMF's Walaʾi dominated media channels actively cultivate and reaffirm this image (Garrison 2017, 7–12). These also attempt to appeal to some utilitarian legitimacy. They display the image of the Hashd as a positive force in Iraqi society: aiding refugees (Garrison 2017, 7–12); providing security by arresting smugglers and shutting down casinos (Cambanis et al. 2019, 34); as well as giving emergency assistance during flooding (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 138); establishing educational and medical facilities (Felbab-Brown 2019, 13); and even jumping in to collect garbage when the Basra governorate failed to do so itself in 2017 (Parry and Burlinghaus 2019, 7). In the realm of foreign affairs, these media channels propagate narratives of the US and the Gulf states as sponsors of Sunni extremism. They are accused of aiming to (re)assert control over Iraq, or even of being puppet masters behind IS itself (Garrison 2017, 18–20). This last theory is popular in Iraq and the Arab world in general (Sly 2015). The US' designation of AAH, KH, and even the IRGC as terrorist organizations underlines the idea that the Walaʾi Hashd are fighting a good fight against American interference. The image of as al-Muhandis and Soleimani as heroic martyrs add to Walaʾi charismatic legitimacy. Conversely, the combination of these two narratives combine to implicate opponents of the PMF as US stooges, or even traitors to the causes of Iraqi sovereignty and the fight against extremism (Felbab-Brown 2019, 8).

Public opinion surveys throughout Iraq appear to confirm the Hashd's popularity, although they point to key caveats as well. In a 2017 poll, 74% of Iraqis had a favorable opinion of the PMF, with Baghdad and southern Iraqis polling at 90% and 100% approval, respectively (NDI 2017, 16). In 2019, 81% of Iraqis

outside of Kurdistan[4] favored the PMF playing a role in border defense. Roughly 75% approved of them keeping order in communities, and countering terrorism. Baghdadis and southern Iraqis were once again more enthusiastic than respondents from the Sunni west (NDI 2019, 42). Haddad points out a key caveat to such findings, however: "buying into the narrative of the [PMF] and opposing a particular formation within it are not mutually exclusive" (Haddad 2018, 6). The idea of the Hashd in the national, jingoistic narrative of victory over IS is undoubtedly popular. The PMF as a daily reality might not be. A question that is obvious within Iraq, but perhaps not asked enough among Western observers, is "which Hashd?" (Haddad 2018, 4). When asked in a 2019 poll to select groups that are a threat in their day-to-day security, Iraqis mentioned PMF units from their own governorate only in 2% of cases. PMF units from outside their governorate were mentioned by 15% of respondents (NDI 2019, 43). This indicates two things. Firstly, PMF units appear to predate less on the populations in their areas of origin. Secondly, Iraqis discern between different units, rather than only having one blanket opinion on 'the PMF' as a concept.

Furthermore, the PMF's narratives are not one-sidedly successful with every constituency in Iraq. As mentioned above, Shiʿa areas tend to have more positive opinions of the PMF than Sunni or Kurdish areas. This is especially true for the south, where many PMF recruits hail from (and where the Fatah Alliance has its largest electoral successes). For example, when asked to indicate the two actors most vital to IS' defeat, the PMF was mentioned by only 4% of Kurdistanis, 40% of western Iraqis, 79% of Baghdadis, and 93% of southern Iraqis (NDI 2017, 12). Interestingly, after the army's initial failures, public opinion has come around in spite of the PMF's media narratives. In that same poll, 92% of western Iraqis, 91% of Baghdadis and 78% of southern Iraqis mentioned the army (NDI 2017, 12). Furthermore, 88% of western Iraqis, along with 95% of Baghdadis and southern Iraqis had an overall favorable opinion of the army (NDI 2017, 11). In that same 2017 survey, only 16% of Iraqis favored disbanding the PMF after IS' defeat. However, 40% believed it should be dissolved and integrated into the army (NDI 2017, 22). This indicates that the Walaʾi Hashd's aims were not necessarily broadly supported by the Iraqi public.

More recently, the PMF has become more controversial. They have not been able to avoid being targeted by the popular protests that have shaken Iraq in the summers of 2018 and 2019, continuing into 2020. In 2017, a survey found that Iraqis were split almost fifty-fifty on the question if the PMF should become involved in the 2018 elections, with southern Iraq the most approving at 61% (NDI 2017, 23). By 2019, approval for the PMF playing a role in politics had shrunk to 33% outside of Kurdistan, with the south's relatively high approval falling to 40% (NDI 2019, 42). In 2018, 45% of Iraqis were somewhat or very concerned about PMF members committing violence. The number for the Iraqi army was also 45% (NDI 2018, 31). According to Felbab-Brown, while reverence for the PMF remains high, especially in the south, even there the mafia-like practices of some PMF groups are leading to resentment. This is particularly the case in the southern city of Basra (Felbab-Brown 2019, 7). While Basra is a mainstay of PMF recruits and support, it is also a poor region, where government-provided services are often lacking and public resentment is high.

The PMF's popularity is further brought into doubt by the protests movements of recent years. When protests broke out in 2018, they were initially concentrated in the PMF's mainstay region of the Shiʿa south. In fact, PMF offices were among government buildings targeted by protesters (Ezzedine, Sulz, and van Veen 2019, 13–14). This indicates that perhaps, despite their best efforts, the Hashd is starting to be considered

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[4] The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is autonomous and fields its own armed forces. Because of the separation between the political and security environments of the KRI and the rest of Iraq, large differences at times exist between the two. In general, for reasons that go beyond the scope of this thesis, KRI citizens highly approve of their regional security actors and disapprove of central Iraqi security forces or political actors.

part of the Baghdadi establishment, and therefore part of the problem. PMF groups certainly did not join the protests in support. A KH leader threatened that his troops might be forced to attack the protestors. Sadr's followers called for a boycott, indicating that protestors' criticism of al-Sistani had gone too far (Browne 2020). Throughout the protests there have been alleged attacks on protestors by the PMF. This ranges from Sadr supporters storming encampments (*Reuters* 2020b) to supposed Walaʾi Hashd units employing live sniper fire against unarmed citizens (Georgy 2019; Amnesty International 2020). The protests remain popular, with 76% of Iraqis supporting them in 2018 (NDI 2018, 24), and even close to 90% (outside of Kurdistan) by 2019 (Cooke and Mansour 2020). While unemployment and the provision of services count as the main grievances under the Iraqi population, corruption and the absence of its prosecution remain key policy issues (NDI 2018, 13; 2019, 14; Cooke and Mansour 2020). This should not be surprising, as Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index has consistently ranked Iraq as one of the most corrupt countries in the world for years (Transparency International 2019). All of this indicates that the PMF is popular as an idea in the nationalist narrative of the victory over IS. However, its popular support should not be taken for granted as it increasingly becomes part of Iraqis' daily problems, and becomes seen as just another aspect of the corrupt elites that Iraqi citizens reject.

Chapter 5: Reform Attempts and Resistance

The previous chapters established the Hashd's opposition to government attempts at increased control and integration over it, as well as the political and popular circumstances that accommodate it. This chapter now continues to establish an overview of the government's attempts at reforming the PMF, and the ways in which the Walaʾi Hashd have leveraged their influence and allies to thwart those attempts. It identifies the types of leverage this group has, and what their practical implications are in the cold war against the government. These types of leverage are the independence from the government these coercive organizations enjoy concerning their resource bases; their institutional power both within and without the PMC; their ability to use violence and go unpunished; and the political power they and their patron Iran hold over Iraqi internal affairs. Of course, these forms of power do not operate independently from one another. In most instances, they complement and strengthen each other. Lastly, the chapter considers the Walaʾi Hashd and the PMF's standing in the field of public opinion. Here, they appear to be losing leverage, which has had public and political consequences for them.

Operational Independence

Firstly, the Walaʾi Hashd are highly independent from the government in terms of resource base, and enjoy significant military power, because of their supplies from Iran. This has allowed them to maintain significant tactical autonomy, despite active government efforts to redeploy and reform the PMF. Furthermore, Walaʾi Hashd groups have used their tactical independence to run what is effectively a separate foreign policy that often runs counter to the preferences and needs of the Iraqi government.   Examples of this 'Hashd foreign policy' regularly appear in the media. Every month or so, news emerges of missiles hitting the American embassy compound in Baghdad (Badawi 2020; Rasheed and Abdul Khalek 2020; *BBC News* 2020a), or even military camps that host US soldiers (*BBC News* 2019b). The US generally blames KH and AAH for these attacks, although they tend to deny their involvement (Gulmohamad 2020, 276). At times organizations seen as fronts for these two groupings such as Asbat al-Saʾerin (Nadimi and Malik 2020) and Ashab al-Kahf (Abdul-Zahra and Kullab 2020b) claim responsibility. Interestingly, in October of 2020, despite their official non-involvement, a KH spokesman speaking on behalf of an unspecified 'Iraqi Resistance Coordination Commission' (Davison 2020), announced they were halting attacks against US targets. Their condition for doing so was the withdrawal of US coalition troops from Iraq in their entirety (Abdul-Zahra and Kullab 2020a). The Iraqi parliament had adopted a resolution to that effect after the assassination of al-Muhandis and Soleimani in January of 2020 (Ibrahim 2020). This in turn had been the result of a tit-for-tat that started with alleged Walaʾi Hashd attacks on US military bases (*BBC News* 2019b; *BBC News* 2020a). Walaʾi groups (along with Sadr) have long opposed the US' military presence in Iraq. They openly threatened to attack American troops if they were deployed in the fight against IS, although such attacks did not materialize at that time (*Reuters* 2015b).

Evidence for Iran's direct involvement in these attacks abounds. As a policy, the US under the Trump administration officially considers attacks by 'Iranian proxies', such as AAH and KH, as attacks from Iran itself (Shaikh 2019, 2). Periods of tension between Iran and the US often coincide with intensified attacks on US targets in Iraqi territory. After Biden's electoral victory in 2020, IRGC-QF commander Qaani met with Walaʾi Hashd leaders, as well as pro-Iranian Iraqi politicians. He instructed them to avoid confrontations with the US in those last months of Trump's tenure. Iran hoped to avoid allowing him to create an escalatory tit-for-tat dynamic once again (Abdul-Zahra and Kullab 2020b). Another example of Walaʾi Hashd groups following what appears to be Iran's tactical instructions are its attacks on Saudi targets. In 2019, a drone strike claimed by Yemeni Houthi rebels shut down 20% of Saudi oil production. US intelligence indicated that the missiles in fact came from the north – Iraq – avoiding Saudi missile defense installations, which had been

aimed at the south – Yemen (Coles and Nissenbaum 2019; Dehghanpisheh and Stewart 2019). Iraqi groups have also threatened the Gulf kingdoms and Israel on numerous occasions (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 108–9). Israel in turn has attacked Walaʾi Hashd missile depots housing Iranian missiles at least seven times. This is similar to its policy of targeting Iranian and Iran-backed targets in the Syrian conflict (Shaikh 2019, 2–4). Walaʾi Hashd groups have in fact often been active in the Syrian conflict as well, supporting president Assad (Dehghanpisheh and Stewart 2019; Gulmohamad 2020, 277–78). The PMF's opaque membership systems meanwhile allowed PMF groups to employ their fighters in Syria while receiving Iraqi government salaries and even benefits for those wounded or killed in action (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 110–12). Al-Muhandis has also confirmed political ties to the Yemeni Houthis and the presence of Lebanese Hezbollah operatives in Iraq for training purposes. The Walaʾi Hashd are, in short, firmly established within Iran's regional network of the 'Axis of Resistance'.

The Iraqi government struggles to deal with the consequences of PMF groups' insubordination. When possible, PMs will deny any Iraqi involvement (Coles and Nissenbaum 2019). However, the US has frequently threatened to close its embassies if Baghdad could not guarantee the safety of its personnel (Badrani and Sultan 2020). Washington did in fact close its consulate in Basra after attacks there in 2018 (Shaikh 2019, 3). Current Iraqi PM al-Kadhimi has frequently reasserted his dedication to protect foreign embassies (Badrani and Sultan 2020; Salim and Loveluck 2020b). One of his government's stated priorities is that "Iraq will not allow any country to violate its sovereignty, and will not permit its territories to be used to launch attacks on any of its neighbours or be used as an arena to settle regional or international scores" (Government of Iraq 2020). The US is a key Iraqi ally, despite their differences, and an embassy closure would be a painful step for Baghdad. The Walaʾi Hashd's actions on this front are there not without consequences for Iraq's foreign policy. Incursions into regional conflicts furthermore undermine the government's aims to remain neutrality (Government of Iraq 2020). It is also at risk of getting caught up in the potential escalatory dynamics that Israeli and US strikes on Iraqi soil – regardless of their targets – could start (Shaikh 2019, 4).

In the domestic arena, the Iranian-backed Hashd groups have also undermined the central government's aims and direct orders. PMF units have ignored orders from the PM during anti-IS offensives (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 103), as well as afterwards, concerning their redeployment. Both ʿAbadi and ʿAbdul-Mahdi commanded PMF units to leave Mosul and the Nineveh Plains, in 2018 and 2019, respectively. Not only have these orders not been carried out in 2020, these forces have been reinforced with tank units (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 105–6). In 2017, the Kurdish regional government held a referendum on their independence, despite Baghdad's objections. In this delicate political moment, the PMF marched on Kirkuk, which had been under Kurdish control since 2014, without receiving any orders to do so (Mansour and Salisbury 2019, 22). After al-ʿAbadi realized the PMF was ignoring his orders, he quickly changed his position to match reality (Cambanis et al. 2019, 34). In 2020, a PMF brigade tied to the Badr organization ignored government orders to withdraw at least five kilometers from Kurdish Peshmerga forces after clashes had occurred between them (*Asharq Al-Awsat* 2020). In fact, after the 2018 parliamentary elections, al-Muhandis appeared to use redeployment of PMF forces for Fatah's political gains. In negotiations with Sunni and Kurdish parties, al-Muhandis ordered PMF troops to withdraw from northern and western cities, and redeploy to their outskirts. While PM al-ʿAbadi rescinded this order, an agreement between certain Sunni groups and Fatah did emerge in this context (Al-Khafaji 2018).

Institutional Independence

Secondly, the Walaʾi Hashd and its allies have used their institutionally strong position to avoid the PM's office's attempts at strengthening its administrative control over the PMC. Serious attempts at formalizing the PMF's institutional structures started in earnest under PM al-ʿAbadi. In February 2016, a year and a half after the PMF's creation, he signed Executive Order 91. This order stipulated that the PMF would be independent within the armed forces, led by its own command structure which answered directly to the PM. This order also decreed that they would be subject to all existing military regulations. This includes the adoption of military ranks and salaries to increase the professionalization and institutionalization of the, at this time, somewhat ramshackle PMF. Furthermore, article six stipulates that "any connection between personnel of the Popular Mobilization Commission and any political, partisan, or social organization shall be severed, and no political activity shall be permitted within its ranks" (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 184). This decree was formalized in the Popular Mobilization Commission Law, which came into force on December 26, 2016. It repeated Executive Order 91 verbatim, adding two key clauses. The first of these emphasizes that "The Popular Mobilization force will be made up of the components of the Iraqi people in a manner that conforms to article (9) of the constitution" (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 185). This article of the constitution amongst other things enforces the representativeness of the armed forces, and forbids discrimination or exclusion within them (Comparative Constitutions Project n.d., 6). This article is clearly intended to change the image that the PMF was merely an organized Shiʿa praetorian guard, rather than a representative government force. A second addition to Executive Order 91 is a provision that "the redeployment and redistribution of forces among the provinces shall be the sole prerogative of the [PM]" (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 185). As the fight against IS was being won at that time, this was an attempt to increase the PM's control over the PMF's deployment in peacetime. However, as explained above, this effort failed.

In March of 2018, a few months before parliamentary elections, al-ʿAbadi issued Executive Order 85, which attempted to formalize the PMF's military structures, equalizing them with the army's. Specifically, the order stipulated vetting conditions for Hashd members (such as age, Iraqi nationality, and absence of criminal behavior) and specified how Hashd fighters' ranks would be aligned with those of the army. It also ordered that all Hashd personnel must wear insignia of their affiliation and rank on their uniforms (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 188–90). This provision aimed to reduce the phenomenon of Hashd units at times extorting civilians in unmarked uniforms, making their identification and therefore accountability essentially impossible.   In the summer of 2019, US-Iranian tensions were high and there were multiple incidents targeting foreign targets in Iraq. PM ʿAbdul-Mahdi issued a number of statements and decrees addressing the Hashd's independence and perceived misbehavior. In a statement in June 2019, ʿAbdul-Mahdi addressed that Iraq has gone through many disruptive episodes of foreign interference and occupation, as well as violence at the hand of terrorist organizations. Intending to leave these experiences behind "after the process of liberation and great victory achieved on [IS]", he reiterates that no foreign forces can operate on Iraqi soil, or through Iraqi forces, without the PM's permission (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 192–93). In July, this was followed by Executive Order 237, which attempted to once again reform the PMF into a regular armed force. It stipulates that the commander of the PMF shall be appointed by the PM, and that any existing group names will be abandoned in exchange for military names such as brigade or division. Once again, all political ties of the groups within the Hashd must be severed. Lastly, all PMF bases must be made known to the PM's office or shut down. Bases that bear the name of a PMF group, rather than the PMF as an institution, are also prohibited (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 194–95). In September, ʿAbdul-Mahdi issued several more orders and communiqués aimed at specifying and centralizing the Hashd's administrative hierarchies. These once again emphasized their ties to the PM's office and the general military

hierarchy of Iraq (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 200–203).

In practice, many of these Prime-Ministerial orders were ignored or implemented selectively, minimizing their intended effects. This is also why certain themes keep returning in these executive orders over the years. The introduction of military ranks and payment through Executive Order 91 were in fact introduced on al-Muhandis' insistence. He wanted to increase the PMF's budget and legitimacy, while avoiding the formalization and oversight al-ʿAbadi hoped to include (Cambanis et al. 2019, 29). For example, the introduction of a military hierarchy and nomenclature in the Hashd has in fact occurred, but the different brigades are still clearly identifiable as parts of e.g. Badr, KH, or Saraya al-Salam. In fact, military insignia are still often absent, and the different groupings frequently appear alongside the flags and names of the organizations that are officially supposed to have been replaced with their brigade numbers (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 10). Similarly, the PMC formed an internal commission when its vice-president al-Muhandis was assassinated, rather than the PM assigning a new commander (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 23). Officially, all ranks and payment were made equal to the other Iraqi security forces. But as explained in chapter three, in practice the PMC determines how many fighters units are paid for, regardless of their actual membership numbers. Multiple attempts were made, starting in 2017, to introduce biometric registration systems of PMF fighters, and to pay them directly, rather than through the PMC. This would minimize corruption through the concept of 'ghost soldiers', and would remove the PMC's leverage over other fighting units. Slowly, this process has progressed, and a significant part of fighters is now registered with the state. However, the PMC still has the power to deregister fighters, or to cancel the payment of their wages (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 58–60).

The Hashd was able to ignore most, if not all of these decrees, laws, and orders, because it does not suffer any consequences from doing so. The dissolution of the PMF wholesale is not a tenable position in Iraqi society or its political arena. This assures that a Hashd budget is approved each year. Since the PMC controls this budget freely, Hashd units only need to adhere to the provisions of the PMC, not those of the PM's office that is technically in charge. Therefore, barring the possibility of a major outright confrontation, the Walaʾi Hashd effectively control the types of administrative reforms they choose to accept or reject.

Unpunished Violence

The third realm of Walaʾi leverage emerges in the realm of apparently unpunishable (threats of) violence. This combines the previous types of leverage. It relies on their ability to operate as a violent actor independently from the government, and their ability to avoid institutional prosecution or oversight due to their control over internal accountability mechanisms. The Walaʾi Hashd have employed their ability to operate violently outside of law enforcement to intimidate, kidnap, and execute economic, societal, and political opponents, up to the level of the PM himself. For example, several prominent civil society activists and researchers have been kidnapped, disappeared, or assassinated during the protests movements that have swept Iraq in the past years. While no Walaʾi Hashd groups publicly claim responsibility for such acts, the identity of perpetrators is often a public secret in Iraqi society. Furthermore, victims sometimes receive threats from, for example, AAH or KH before disappearing, as in the case of prominent expert al-Hashimi (Aboulenein 2020; Salim and Loveluck 2020b; Alshamary 2020; Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 104). State agents are not immune to such intimidation or violence either. In November 2019, a Major General of the army appointed to a prominent position in the MoI was kidnapped for reasons that are not entirely clear, allegedly by AAH and the PMF's intelligence unit (Haddad 2020, 44). After al-Sistani announced the withdrawal of the ʿatabat units from the PMF because of the Walaʾi Hashd's continued misconduct, several high-ranking commanders received death threats or other forms of intimidation (Malik 2020a).

The PM's reform attempts, or intended accountability for criminal acts are also frequently directly opposed through violent means. In an attempt to audit the Hashd's lists of fighters in 2016, al-ʿAbadi

appointed a co-deputy chair alongside al-Muhandis for. This co-deputy, Mohsen Kaʿabi, resigned instantly after he was intimidated by KH. In 2018, a finance director appointed for a similar task was murdered during his preparations for an audit (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 58). In July 2018, KH members were confronted by Iraqi police for stealing five cars. Rather than surrender, the situation resulted in a shootout and a standoff, which could not be resolved even by the head of the MoI, who was a senior Badr member. Eventually, only one of the KH members and one of the cars were surrendered. However they were handed over to the PMF's KH-headed internal security directorate (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 92). The Walaʾi Hashd's resistance to accountability can at times be very direct and explicit. In June 2020, al-Kadhimi had the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Force (CTS) arrest 14 KH members for planning rocket attacks on Baghdad airport and the US embassy. Not only did the PMF attack the PM for this decision on television and its other media outlets, it also engaged in another direct military confrontation (Badawi 2020). KH dispatched a force of some 150 men spread over 30 trucks to Baghdad's governmental Green Zone. These essentially besieged CTS headquarters, as well as the PM's residence. The situation was once again resolved by handing over the KH prisoners to the PMF's internal discipline branch (Al Jazeera English 2020). KH at all times maintains a military presence of some 2000 men in the Green Zone, near buildings that are key to the PM's function. Knights sees this as an attempt to remind the PM of their power and intimidate him into compliance (Knights 2020b). As Knights, Malik and Al-Tamimi quote a security officer: "the Hashd's track record of refusing orders is partially visible and partially invisible because the Iraqi prime minister knows better than to issue orders that senior Hashd commanders will not follow" (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 103).

Controlling the Prime-Minister

The fourth leverage that the Iranian camp in Iraq employs to prevent meddling with the PMF is found in the political realm. There is a general understanding in Iraq that any PM candidate must be chosen with the consent of both the US and Iran. In recent years, with an increasingly withdrawn US, this unofficial veto has shifted more and more to Iran. As Mansour and Salisbury quote a senior Iraqi politician: "to be successful in politics in Iraq, you must be friendly with Iran" (Mansour and Salisbury 2019, 17). In the past, a fairly united Shiʿa bloc was endorsed by both the US and Iran. By 2018 this had changed and the Iraqi political scene contained new fissures that crossed through sectarian lines. In 2018, the US preferred a continuation of PM al-ʿAbadi's tenure, while Iran preferred Badr leader al-Amiri (Mansour 2019a, 15). Al-ʿAbadi had had a poor election season, however. His party came third and his political bloc suffered many internal fissures and disruptions. Furthermore, according to Iraqi members of parliament, he sealed his fate by publicly endorsing US sanctions placed on Iran by the Trump administration. He was therefore seen as weak by the Sadrists, and a strategic risk by Fatah (Mansour 2019a, 17–18). ʿAbdul-Mahdi eventually appeared as an independent, fairly neutral, and importantly: politically weak candidate. He was therefore acceptable to all sides (Haddad 2020, 46). As expected, ʿAbdul-Mahdi's tenure was characterized by a weak stance towards the Walaʾi Hashd, avoiding serious confrontations (Salim and Loveluck 2020b).

Significantly, the next negotiations for the position of PM were an exception to this rule of Iranian vetoes and influence. ʿAbdul-Mahdi announced his resignation in late November 2019. This followed a sermon from al-Sistani calling for the formation of a new government to address the protesters' demands and end government violence against them (*BBC News* 2019a). Alongside economic pressures, external interference in Iraqi affairs was a key issue of the protests (*BBC News* 2019a). The momentous assassination of Soleimani and al-Muhandis reinvigorated that aspect of the movement (Hassan, Hubbard, and Rubin 2020; Kullab and Abdul-Zahra 2020). Iran specifically had become a target for public disapproval. According to survey data, only 47% of Iraqi Shiʿa viewed Iran favorably in late 2018, compared to 88% in 2015. Meanwhile 51% held unfavorable views, compared to 6% in 2015 (al-Dagher 2018). When pro-Iranian parliamentary forces proposed Basra governor al-Edani for the office of Prime-Minister, president Salih threatened to resign.

He has no constitutional power to refuse PM candidates, but believed this candidate would not satisfy protestors' calls for a non-partisan, reform PM. He was therefore prepared to resign instead (Rasheed 2019b). After Mohammad ʿAllawi proved unable to pass a vote of confidence by parliament, Salih appointed Adnan al-Zurfi as a candidate without consulting parliament (*Al Jazeera* 2020a). Zurfi was seen as a pro-American, anti-Iranian politician (Nadimi and Malik 2020). The IRGC-QF's new commander Qaani visited Baghdad to unify the Walaʾi Hashd against al-Zurfi as a candidate. Eventually, this succeeded in preventing his rise to the office of the PM. Iran's preferred candidates did not make the cut either (Nadimi and Malik 2020). Al-Kadhimi was similarly seen as an anti-Iranian candidate, and Iran would normally likely have rejected his candidacy (Knights 2020a). However, having rejected two candidates and going five months without a PM during continued mass protests and the newly spreading coronavirus, al-Kadhimi was finally accepted in May 2020 (Rasheed and Davison 2020).   This appointment has not been without consequences. Al-Kadhimi has made "developing and reforming security institutions" one of the top priorities for his government in crisis (Government of Iraq 2020). He has appointed a committee to investigate internal corruption under the purview of the CTS (Trejo 2020), as well as a committee to effect justice for the hundreds of killed protestors (Alshamary 2020). Al-Kadhimi has sought to reduce the amount of Iran-backed personnel in the top echelons of Iraq's security agencies (Badawi 2020). He has also cracked down on the Hashd's criminal accountability, as outlined above, and has enforced the expulsion of PMF administrative offices from undesired locations (*Middle East Monitor (MEMO)* 2020). Additionally, he has attempted to reduce Walaʾi smuggling by assigning border crossings with Iran to other security forces (Badawi 2020). Of course, these efforts have not been unopposed, and the PMF is far from free of its independence or rejection of government initiatives. Assassination of societal enemies has continued, as has violence against protestors. Al-Kadhimi's removal of Walaʾi groups from border crossings does not affect their unofficial crossings, which were established especially to avoid government oversight (Badawi 2020). Furthermore, al-Kadhimi's efforts to hold Walaʾi Hashd members criminally accountable have caused some of his greatest humiliations. After the siege of the CTS headquarters in June 2020, KH-linked TV-stations showed footage of their fighters burning American and Israeli flags, and stamping on photographs of al-Kadhimi's face (Al Jazeera English 2020). Furthermore, al-Kadhimi allegedly meekly apologized to KH, blaming CTS commanders for the arrests (Alshamary 2020).

These episodes prove Iran's power to affect Iraqi politics from behind the scenes, but also its vulnerabilities. Under usual circumstances, the Iranian bloc has a significant influence over the occupant of the office of the PM in Iraq. In the case of ʿAbdul-Mahdi, it managed to install a weak commander in chief. He did not prove a major impediment to the PMF and PMC's power or Iran's other interests in Iraq. On the other hand, Iran's power is by no means limitless. At the best of times, it is forced to compromise with the electoral realities of the day. When protests shook the country, and even al-Sistani withdrew his confidence in the government, the Iranian camp was eventually forced to accept a candidate that they would never have under normal circumstances. Al-Kadhimi's appointment indicates the difficulties that the government can cause for the Walaʾi Hashd. Of course, al-Kadhimi's position is by no means guaranteed beyond the early elections planned for June 2021 (*Al Jazeera* 2020b). His efforts have also not been one-sidedly successful. However, this shows that there are political forces, such as the generally apolitical al-Sistani, present in Iraq that are willing and able to oppose Iranian influences under the right circumstances. Furthermore, despite the many faults in Iraqi democracy, public outrage can still achieve political shifts.

Chapter 6: Entrenched Hybridity

This thesis was driven by a seemingly simple puzzle in Iraqi politics, namely the inability of the government to enforce its power and control over a semi-autonomous part of its armed forces. While this is at heart a policy issue, it of course touches upon far deeper questions of state power, armed groups' power, sovereignty, and even the question of what defines a state at all. This chapter serves two main purposes. The first is to summarize the workings and findings of the other chapters. The second is to return to the theoretical realm and outline the manner in which this case study contributes to these theoretical debates.

Which Hashd? Whose Hashd?

The puzzle that this thesis addresses is the question why Iraq's al-Hashd al-Shaʿbi has been able to avoid the government's, and particularly the Prime-Minister's office's, efforts at incorporating them into the regular security forces. Why has the government been unable to enforce the de jure control over the PMF that the country's legal structures provide it with? For practical reasons, and because attempts to address the PMF's peculiar position in the Iraqi arena from a theoretical perspective are scarce, the thesis addresses this issue from a heuristic perspective. It aims to find causal and theoretical mechanisms that can explain the phenomenon at hand. In doing so, it introduces a new typology, which serves to identify the support and resource bases on which an armed group depends, as well as its alignment vis-à-vis the government that it interacts with.

The causal mechanisms this thesis has identified are essentially three-pronged. The first factor is addressed in chapter three: the key grouping in the PMF is fundamentally opposed to granting the government more control over it, and will use the leverage that it has against that effort. To get to this conclusion, the chapter first identifies the five unofficial groupings within the Hashd and their dependencies and interests using an original typology. These groups are the Iranian-backed and aligned Walaʾi Hashd; the Shrine Hashd, tied to Iraq's Shiʿa shrine cities and the highest Shiʿa clergyman in the country: al-Sistani; the Sadrist Hashd, tied to the leftist Iraqi nationalist movement led by Muqtada al-Sadr; the Tribal Hashd, which consists of generally small Sunni tribal defense forces, some of which are part of a US-funded mechanism called the Tribal Mobilization Forces; and lastly the Minority Hashd, which is composed of a number of marginal groupings composed of Iraq's ethnic and religious 'micro-minorities', often tied to larger Hashd organizations.

The chapter uses two axes to form a typology of these groupings. The first axis focuses on structural factors. These are the groups' support and resource bases, which determine to some extent their abilities, their loyalties, and their behavior. For example, a group that counts on ethnic or tribal allegiances for support is more likely to behave protectively towards the civilian population and to be sensitive to the whims of public opinion. A group that is reliant on external support, on the other hand, is likely to politically align with its patron, and is liable to act predatorily towards the domestic population. The second axis is their alignment towards the government. This agency-focused axis identifies a group's ideological or political outlook towards the concept of the Iraqi central government. This can be highly anti-government, or even opposed to the state itself. On the other extreme, however, this can be entirely pro-government, to the extent that classical definitions of the state would hardly identify the grouping to be separate from the government at all.

Both of these axes are fundamental to explaining the behavior of the PMF's five subgroupings. The Shrine Hashd, for example, rely on the religious and traditional legitimacy of the Shiʿa clergy that leads them. They therefore attempt to act apolitically, aligning with the Iraqi government and the ideals of Iraqi nationalism. They are some of the least exploitative of the PMF's troops, and even left the PMF's framework in 2020 to tie themselves directly to the PM's office in frustration with the Iranian influences in the PMF and its opposition to government control. On the other hand, the Sadrist Hashd primarily rely on institutional resources (government funds), and ideological support from its support base of poor Shiʿa. Its ideological

dedication to Iraqi independence and political quarrels with a number of Iran-backed politicians make it a strong proponent of the PM's institutional strength. The key grouping in the puzzle, however, is the pro-Iranian Walaʾi Hashd. This group's reliance on Iranian support, as well as its institutional control over the government-provided funding, make it highly independent of government oversight. Its alignment with Iranian interests furthermore make it a staunch opponent to increased government control so long as the Prime-Minister is not a decidedly pro-Iranian candidate. However, it refrains from openly positioning as an anti-governmental actor because of the nationalist and institutional legitimacy that its ties to the government lend it.

After establishing the five groups' identities and behavior, the chapter explores the heterarchical dynamics that guide these groups' interactions to determine which groups exert the key pressures that render the PMF as a whole (as far as one can speak of it as a coherent whole) opposed to government oversight. It finds that the Walaʾi Hashd are militarily and institutionally the most powerful groupings within the PMF. Their control over the PMF's general staff, the PMC, allow it to control the allocation of government funds. Simultaneously, their extensive Iranian support and general military strength and experience allow it to dominate the Hashd's internal struggles. This institutional power in fact gave the Walaʾi Hashd considerable leverage over the other Hashd groupings, which rely on Walaʾi goodwill for adequate funding. Particularly the Tribal and Minority Hashd have become functionally subservient to Walaʾi groupings because of this. The Sadrist Hashd, meanwhile, suffers chronically insufficient resources because it refuses to submit to this. This does not give the Walaʾi Hashd total control over the many-faceted PMF, and signs of resistance to its domination abound. However, it does allow it to block institutional challenges to its independence, and to shape the PMF's relationship with the government overall.

The fourth chapter focuses on the political and governmental dynamics outside of the PMF itself which work against any PM's intentions to constrain the Hashd's independence. It identifies two major issues. Firstly and foremost, there are many political actors in Iraq which are generally aligned with Iran's intentions with the Hashd. Part of these are directly tied to PMF armed groups (despite the illegality of such ties). Another part pursue political gain through Iranian backing. Others are simply sympathetic to Iran's ideological position, or seek economic cooperation with it. In most cases a combination of those factors plays a role. What this ideological position amounts to is, firstly, an effort to coup proof the current Shiʿa-dominated political system in Iraq against its opponents (potentially aligned with Western forces) that may try to overthrow it. Secondly, it aims to realign Iraq with Iran in the region's political rivalries. Aside from Iraq's parliament, these sympathies are also found in many of Iraq's executive institutions. The Ministry of the Interior (MoI), which is dominated by the Walaʾi Hashd's Badr Organization, is a prime example among these.

 The second challenge to the government's attempts is the difficulties in opposing this political bloc. Pro-governmental political factions are divided and ineffective, with radical and polarizing Sadrists, apolitical Shiʿa clergy, and internally divided and partially co-opted Sunni and Kurdish blocs. Furthermore, the idea of the PMF is highly popular within the Iraqi jingoist national narrative of victory over IS, which is actively propagated and supported by the PMF's media channels. However, survey data and the recent popular protest movements in Iraq indicate that this popularity is not to be taken for granted. Many Iraqi citizens oppose all foreign influences in their country, including Iranian. Furthermore, the Iraqi citizenry appears to differentiate between the PMF as an idea, and specific PMF groupings. They often hold negative opinions of groups that fall under these foreign influences or exploit the populations they interact with in mafia-like criminal systems.

Chapter five addresses the third and last piece of the puzzle: the manners in which the (Walaʾi) Hashd uses the different types of leverage that it has over the central government and the Prime-Minister.

The first of these is its independence from the government in terms of resources. This allows it to ignore tactical orders and efforts at redeployment, which the Walaʾi Hashd use to their political advantage. It has also expressed itself in what amounts to an independent 'foreign policy', which interacts violently with regional actors and rivalries, often to the detriment of the Iraqi central government. Secondly, Walaʾi domination of the PMC and other forms of institutional power are used to maintain administrative independence. Different PMs have entered a wide range of legislation and reform efforts aimed at introducing government control over the PMC's allocation of resources and the exact membership of the Hashd itself. However, the PMC was always able to resist this through administrative and even violent means. This violence expressed itself in the intimidation and even murder of civilian and political opponents, as well as officials appointed by the PM to audit the PMC. Political as well as criminal transgressions committed by the Walaʾi Hashd almost always go unpunished because of their military power, and their domination of the PMF's internal justice systems. As Knights, Maliki and Al-Tamimi argue: "The Hashd have developed a parallel self-policing security division that is run by the very militias (…) who are most intimately involved in criminal activities. [Walaʾi Hashd groupings] are entirely above the law—even military law" (Knights, Malik, and Al-Tamimi 2020, 93).

Lastly, the PMF is able to leverage Iran's unofficial control over the Iraqi political process to its advantage. This is particularly true for the appointment of the Prime-Minister, which in Iraq is generally understood to require the approval of both the US and Iran. Iran has used its power to avoid the emergence of strong, anti-Iranian PMs that might thwart its influence. Nonetheless, recent popular unrest, partially in response to this Iranian influence in the Iraqi political process, have undermined this unofficial power. The government response to these protests has frequently been violent, and the PMF have often played roles in this extrajudicial violence. Nonetheless, pressure from protestors led to the fall of PM ʿAbdul-Mahdi and his eventual replacement with al-Kadhimi. Iran did assent to this candidate in the end, but would normally have considered him to be too pro-US and anti-Iran. Al-Kadhimi has made reducing armed groups' illegal activities and powers one of his government's main focuses. Nonetheless, results of his efforts have been mixed, with several severe humiliations at the hands of Walaʾi Hashd groups he attempted to take on as painful reminders of their continued power. The PMF has therefore apparently become part of the much disliked political establishment in the eyes of Iraqi protestors, and this has not been without consequences. However, in the Iraqi political scene trust in government and other public institutions has been low throughout the post-2003 political order. The question remains whether popularity, or even public approval, is a prerequisite for survival.

Contesting Statehood in a Hybrid Order

As exemplified by this thesis' lengthy theoretical chapter, the Hashd case is connected to many theoretical fields and considerations. This section will attempt to circle back to the discussions highlighted in that chapter to determine where the Hashd as a case study can best be understood. Furthermore, it will outline the theoretical contributions of this thesis.

One of the first points made about 'non-state armed groups' in this thesis is the invalidity of that term itself, and the Hashd case should make that clear. While much of the existing literature works with this term, distinguishing between 'state' and 'non-state' actors is more often than not an artificial exercise. The PMF is a highly integrated, legal part of the Iraqi state security forces, and receives the salaries and ranks to match. Nevertheless, identifying it as merely a part of the unitary 'state' belies the complex independence and idiosyncrasies that its actions reveal. This thesis uses Van Veen and Fliervoet's definition of 'coercive organizations' to capture this complexity. Their and my definitions do not conceptually distinguish between actors such as IS, Kataʾib Hezbollah, or the Iraqi Army. Rather, these are all armed actors that exercise differing levels of independence vis-à-vis a government that is part of an internationally recognized state. While Western, Weberian states often lack actors that fall ambiguously on this spectrum of alignment between pro-

and anti-state, hybrid states in which these sorts of 'hybrid actors' abound require this conceptualization of armed actors. As it is generally these contexts that the literature surrounding 'NSAGs' focuses on, the acknowledgement of this spectrum is of fundamental importance to the coherence of such literature.

In general, the types of contestations that exist between 'state' and 'non-state' actors are too often presumed to be either competitive, or non-existent. This thesis' conceptualization of armed groups actively undermines that idea. If the Iraqi Army, the Shrine Hashd, and the Walaʾi Hashd are all taken to be armed actors, it becomes clear that no two armed actors have exactly the same alignment with the state. These alignments are not rigid ideological points aimed at the idea of 'the state'. Nor do armed groups necessarily predate on or oppose 'the state'. Rather, this depends on the political reality. Armed groups in hybrid societies are one type of many different actors vying for control and power. The position of the PM is an important point of contestation. Who holds it determines which groups oppose it, and which do not. In Iraq, the appearance of a highly pro-Iranian PM would fundamentally change the alignments outlined in this thesis. Recognizing the political identities and allegiances of armed groups is therefore paramount to understanding their behavior.

As for what drives these identities and allegiances, any theory that focuses exclusively on a structural or agency-based explanation for armed groups' behavior misses the point form a theoretical and practical point of view. As this thesis' typology makes explicit: coercive actor behavior is determined by both of these dynamics. To understand the behavior of the Walaʾi Hashd it is necessary to answer two questions (in no particular order). A researcher needs to ask 'what are a group's options?' This addresses the structuralist side of the debate and is represented by the first (support/resource base) axis of my typology. It can therefore be taken broadly to mean not only an actor's power in attaining its goals, but also the origins of their resources, which determine their dependencies and limitations, as well as their potential strength. The other question is equally important: 'what does a group want to achieve (using those options)?' In the specific context of the PMF, this is represented through the second axis: alignment towards the Iraqi government. In cases where armed group-state relations are ambiguous and fluid, as they almost always are, both angles are necessary to fully explain armed groups' behavior. This thesis' typology is an actualization of this theoretical framework that can be reproduced and applied to other case studies.

Here, the debate enters the realm of statehood and sovereignty. The case of Iraq clearly underlines post-Weberian notions of the state. Power relations are heterarchical rather than hierarchical, and the state lacks a highly rigid centralized power structure which would allow it to ban other actors from employing violence. As flawed as the terminology might be, Iraq is therefore a hybrid state. In it, 'traditional' and 'modern', Western forms of authority intersect and vie for control in a contested political arena. Speaking academically, this is not meant to imply normative or political judgment. From an analytical point of view, the PMF's role in Iraq's hybrid order is at times positive, and at times negative for Iraqi stability and the welfare of its people. It strengthened Iraqi stability by helping defend against IS where the Iraqi Army had failed. Socially, it created a strong rally-around-the-flag effect and mobilized the Iraqi populace to a level and breadth that the Iraqi state security forces were unable to. Furthermore, its semi-independent structures were able to introduce positive state authority into otherwise marginal communities, through for example the Tribal Hashd's local policing efforts.

Nonetheless, the PMF has certainly had negative influences as well. Here it serves to ask the question of 'hybridity for whom?' From the perspective of Iran's regional aspirations, the Walaʾi Hashd is an invaluable tool of influence over the Iraqi state, and a launching pad for anonymized attacks on its strategic rivals. From the perspective of Iraqi nationalism or democracy, however, it is unelected, externally motivated interference in the Iraqi polity. One that actively undermines Iraq's legal system and at times violates the human rights of its citizens at that. The perspective of the Shiʿa elites that employ the (Walaʾi) Hashd as a coup-proofing tool add another dimension to this. It indicates the unequal ways in which hybridity may serve the different sections

of the state. In this case, the Hashd provides legitimacy and authority for the few. It coup-proofs not an entire regime, but rather a subsection of it, even at the expense of its nominal executive head: the Prime-Minister. The Hashd as a hybrid actor is therefore far from a stable, well-established element of Iraqi culture or society. The actors within the PMF are ultimately only a few of those that vie for power and influence in Iraq's hybrid order, in which the 'official' state is only one of the venues for contestation.

The Future of Armed Order in Iraq

The PMF is a relatively new phenomenon, as evidenced by the scarcity of theoretic engagement with it. This thesis will therefore be far from the last word said on this topic, even if only because of its continuing evolution. Further research is needed on the complex ways in which the PMF's internal power heterarchy interacts with its many roles in the Iraqi state. Specifically designed surveys and interviews with relevant actors could reveal how competition as well as cooperation between the different Hashd groups identified in this thesis have driven the development of the Hashd. While this thesis has explained key dynamics that feature into this, the explicitly separate but united nature of the PMF merits in-depth engagement, as it can reveal much about the inner workings of armed groups in general, which are of course never entirely unitary actors. Furthermore, Iran's role in the Hashd is key to its current relationship with the state, as is argued above. This dynamic between foreign patron and domestic armed group is relevant not only to Iraq's case, but to many contemporary conflicts in the region and beyond. For example, a crucial topic for further research could be the dynamics that occur when a fundamentally important foreign sponsor such as Iran in this case withdraws its support for an armed group. Analysis from a comparative politics perspective on this issue could provide key insights into Iraq's potential future avenues.

At its core, the PMF is a symptom of a heavily contested hybrid order. The PMF is in flux. Flare-ups in the rivalry between Iran and its regional opponents use the PMF and Iraq as a battlefield. Internal political rivalries and competition are fought out through and within the Hashd. Meanwhile, popular unrest and resistance to Iraq's socio-political orders now target these groups in recognition of their political roles. All of these processes continuously change the PMF's nature and place in Iraq's armed order. Al-Kadhimi's efforts at reining in Hashd power, and the Shrine Hashd's momentous decision to leave the PMF framework in its entirety are merely the most recent manifestations of the change that the PMF is subject to. Ultimately, this change is an indication of the instability currently present in the Iraqi hybrid order. The early elections projected to be held in 2021 are sure to prove a next chapter in its contestation. The PMF is unlikely to fully disappear anytime soon because of its extensive political, military, popular, and foreign power and utility. Even if it would, however, this would hardly turn Iraq into a textbook Weberian state. The Hashd is not simply the cause of Iraq's hybridity or of foreign meddling in its affairs. It is equally a symptom of these very Iraqi dynamics. As long as the central Iraqi government is not considered a secure representative for all key Iraqi social groups and actors, different forms of contestation and resistance to its authority will continue to emerge and be sustained. At the heart of the actions of the many actors that make up the PMF are the dynamics that govern competition within Iraq's hybrid state. If no sustainable balance of authority and legitimacy is achieved there, the Hashd's disruption of the government's power and its role as a hybrid actor will continue.

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