



Iraq's Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	i
I. Introduction	1
II. A Jumble of Paramilitary Groups with Split Allegiances.....	3
III. The Hashd and Politics.....	6
A. Operating in a Legal Grey Zone	6
B. Gearing Up for the Elections	7
C. Penetrating State Institutions.....	9
D. Filling In for the State: Providing Services.....	10
E. A Tug of War with the Prime Minister	12
F. Iran’s Role	14
IV. The Hashd in an Evolving Security Landscape.....	16
A. An Auxiliary Force against ISIS.....	16
B. The Integration Debate.....	18
C. What Next for the Hashd?	19
V. Tackling the Problem at Its Roots	22
VI. Conclusion	24
APPENDICES	
A. Map of Iraq	25
B. National Security Council Decision-making Structure	26
C. List of Hashd Groups by Allegiance	27
D. About the International Crisis Group	29
E. Crisis Group Reports and Briefings on the Middle East and North Africa since 2015....	30
F. Crisis Group Board of Trustees	32

Principal Findings

What's new? Iraq's three-year battle against the Islamic State (ISIS) empowered an array of armed actors that operate autonomously from state security forces. As the country's focus on security decreases, these paramilitary groups – the Hashd – are moving into economic activities and politics; some of their leaders gained seats in the 12 May parliamentary elections.

Why does it matter? Praised for their auxiliary role in fighting ISIS, and partly legalised, the Hashd challenge the state's cohesion and monopoly on legitimate violence. Without a plan to integrate them into formal state institutions, they could undermine post-ISIS efforts to build a functioning state and prolong Iraq's four decades of instability.

What should be done? The Hashd are part of the challenge of rebuilding a state dismantled after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion. Iraq's next government should proceed incrementally: separate security actors from politics and economic activity; provide a short-term role in reconstruction; and strengthen security ministries to render them less dependent on semi-autonomous armed groups.

Executive Summary

At the end of 2017, when Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared victory over the Islamic State (ISIS), he thanked not just the state's armed forces but also an array of autonomous armed groups. The strongest among these, the Popular Mobilisation Units (or Forces, the Hashd al-Shaabi), are an umbrella organisation of some 50 paramilitary outfits. The Hashd are exploiting a legal grey zone to expand their reach in the security, political and economic spheres; their autonomy impedes efforts – which they claim to support – to build a functioning state. The question is what to do with them. With their full integration into the formal security sector politically impossible for now, the solution lies in resolving legal ambiguities that have prevented the separation of security actors from political and economic activity; providing work for unemployed former fighters in reconstruction; and continuing to strengthen formal security institutions to render them less reliant on paramilitary assistance.

After ISIS conquered large swathes of Iraqi territory from the retreating and collapsing army and federal police in June 2014, volunteers – responding to a call from the Shiites' paramount religious leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani – joined paramilitary groups in droves to defend Baghdad, Shiite holy sites and the country generally. The Hashd played a critical role in fighting and, after three years, defeating ISIS. In the meantime, they incorporated militias from Sunni Arab and minority populations to become a formidable security force separate from the federal army and police, enjoying broad popularity among Iraq's Shiite population in particular.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, who on paper is commander-in-chief of the armed forces, has been unable to bring the paramilitary groups under state control and restore the state's monopoly over the legitimate use of force. By law, the Hashd are part of the state's security apparatus, but they are recognised as an autonomous unit under the (civilian) National Security Council (NSC). Senior Iraqi political leaders and groups employ their own private guards, further undermining the state's monopoly over legitimate violence even as they accept that principle in their rhetoric.

Abadi has repeatedly announced his aspiration to fully integrate the paramilitary groups, but has yet to articulate, let alone implement, a coherent plan for doing so. It has become clear that the Hashd, capitalising on their well-earned fighting reputation and popularity, will not simply disband or merge into the defence and interior ministries in the short term. During popular protests over poor service delivery in July 2018, some paramilitary groups joined security forces in attempting to restore control and protect the post-2003 political order, as if to underline the continued need for their existence.

The problem derives from a much deeper pathology: the dismantling of Iraq's security architecture after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion and the resulting vacuum, which non-state armed groups arose to fill. Those events created a debilitating cycle. The Hashd's autonomy thrives on state weakness, yet it weakens state institutions further the more it expands. The proliferation of armed groups outside the two security ministries presents the most serious challenge to rebuilding the post-2003 Iraqi state. In the long term, therefore, security sector reform should not aim solely to integrate the Hashd fully into the security apparatus, but to build the capacities of

the defence and interior ministries to prevent other private individuals and groups from taking the Hashd's place.

To add to the challenge, the Hashd operate in politics as well as in the security domain. Hashd leaders formed an electoral bloc, the Fatah Alliance, which placed second in the 12 May parliamentary elections. Yet their participation in politics and possibly government remains controversial in Iraq, as well as in the region, where Hashd leaders are seen as proxies of Iran.

The Hashd have attained a profile in the economic sphere, too, competing with more traditional actors, such as the state, to provide reconstruction and services to citizens. They have done so particularly in areas retaken from ISIS, many of which suffered heavy destruction. While it makes good sense to employ demobilised fighters in reconstruction, it makes no sense to allow the Hashd to seize control of that economic sector without effective state oversight. In effect, the Hashd are setting up an array of institutions parallel to the state's.

The government that emerges from the May elections will need to gradually bring the Hashd fully into the state apparatus. A first step would be to resolve the legal ambiguities about the status of not just the Hashd but also the Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS), which, while closely linked to the army, also enjoys legal autonomy. Beyond that, the government should continue efforts to strengthen the defence and interior ministries by insulating them from politics and instituting recruitment policies based on merit rather than loyalty.

A bigger struggle looms. Iran views the Hashd as an insurance policy against the return of a strong, antagonistic Iraqi state on its border, supported by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, or one controlled by an enemy such as ISIS. For the Iraqi government to denounce the Hashd as incorrigible Iranian proxies is therefore likely to backfire. It is also unnecessary. The government has subtler tools at its disposal. A better way to curb the paramilitary phenomenon is to render the Hashd redundant by shifting power and capacity, in increments, to formal security institutions. This approach could harness the powerful Iraqi political currents already resisting Iran's infiltration of the state's security and intelligence institutions and pushing back against Iranian influence.

International actors can help Iraq recover from almost four decades of war and sanctions. First, they should develop a nuanced understanding of the Hashd and recognise the important role they played in defeating ISIS, and to some degree are continuing to play. Then, they should fund reconstruction, strengthen institutions that uphold the rule of law and support security sector reform.

The challenge posed by the Hashd will not be overcome easily; they are likely to remain a significant military, political and economic actor in the immediate post-ISIS phase. Yet the solution to the problem they pose for the state lies not primarily with them, but with the capacity and strength of the state itself, and whoever leads it.

Baghdad/Brussels, 30 July 2018

Iraq's Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State

I. Introduction

Iraq's turbulent decade after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion was capped by a maelstrom: in 2014, the Islamic State (ISIS) captured one third of the country's territory, including its second-largest city, Mosul. The sudden collapse of the army and other security forces before a mere few thousand Salafi jihadist fighters shocked the world and exposed the weakness of a state that had not yet recovered from the chaos in the invasion's wake. The cover of *Time* confidently proclaimed "the end of Iraq".¹ Within four years, however, the security forces had rebounded, winning back most of Iraq's territory and pushing ISIS back underground.

While ISIS's territorial defeat was an important psychological boost for the Iraqi state, it did not regain for the state a monopoly over legitimate violence. Formal state security forces were able to achieve their victory only with the aid of outside powers and domestic non-state actors.² Indeed, the war against ISIS saw not only the intervention of Iran, Turkey and a U.S.-led international coalition but also the re-emergence and proliferation of Iraqi paramilitary groups that simultaneously cooperated and competed with the state in their political and ideological vision for the post-conflict era. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi acknowledged this security fragmentation in his victory speech in December 2017: "I salute all the victorious: our valiant security, police and armed forces, the Popular Mobilisation Forces, our Counter-Terrorism Service, our air force and army aviation, the peshmerga and all the different formations of our armed forces".³

In this mix, the Popular Mobilisation Forces (or Units; the Arabic al-Hashd al-Shaabi, or "popular mobilisation", does not specify) – an umbrella organisation of some 50 paramilitary groups with 45,000-142,000 fighters, depending on the source, between them – have become the focus of a push for security sector reform. The Hashd attract this attention because they are increasing their power in not only the military but also the political and economic spheres, thereby threatening to create a sort of parallel state.

This challenge derives from the mobilisation of volunteer fighters in the face of the sudden, severe ISIS threat in June 2014 but harks back to the U.S.-generated security vacuum in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion. The breakdown of law and order facilitated the rise of armed groups, including the notorious Shiite Mahdi Army (Jaysh al-Mahdi) militia of Muqtada al-Sadr and the Sunni insurgent group al-Qaeda

¹ "The end of Iraq", *Time*, 19 June 2014.

² In Sinjar district, a non-Iraqi non-state actor also fought ISIS: the Syrian affiliate of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the People's Protection Units (YPG). See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°183, *Winning the Post-ISIS Battle for Iraq in Sinjar*, 20 February 2018.

³ "Victory speech", Iraq Prime Minister Media Office, 9 December 2017, a www.facebook.com/IraqPMMediaOffice/posts/805121279672569.

in Iraq (AQI). Some were opposed to the U.S. occupation of Iraq and the fledgling, U.S.-backed Iraqi government; others operated alongside or even inside the government's security forces. As the country slid into civil war in 2005, alliances shifted, so that some former government opponents became de facto backers.

Today's Hashd emerged following the collapse of Iraqi security forces in Mosul in June 2014, when Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki established a commission to assemble these militias under a single paramilitary umbrella. The Hashd were reinforced by a religious ruling (*fatwa*) from Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani that same month, in which he called on volunteers (*mutatawi'een*) to exercise their "duty to fight" (*wajib al-kifah*) and defend the country against ISIS. The Hashd were the first to protect Baghdad from the ISIS threat. Today, they continue to play a pivotal role in fighting the group's remnants.

Hashd leaders benefit from the state's weakness, undermining its legitimacy by acting in the security, political and economic spheres outside the chain of command and the formal security apparatus. They also profit from the state's fiscal strength, relative to other Iraqi power centres, in 2017 alone receiving \$1.63 billion in government funding for their operations and fighters' salaries as part of an earmarked budget allocation.⁴

Abadi, supported by international donors, has devoted a significant part of post-ISIS rebuilding to reforming the disjointed security sector, but he has yet to articulate a coherent vision for the Hashd's future in the overall security architecture. As a result, he has pursued contradictory policies: he has called for the Hashd's integration into the state security forces but has also defended their autonomous status. The state's enduring weakness and the prime minister's own ambivalent approach have allowed the Hashd to contest Baghdad's monopoly over the use of force and to refuse giving up their uniforms, flags and weapons.

This report highlights the challenge the Hashd pose to the Iraqi state and proposes ways for the state to regain the strength it needs to govern effectively as a single unit. It is based on numerous conversations with a range of Hashd representatives, party leaders and government officials in Baghdad, Kirkuk and Mosul in early 2018. It is part of a larger Crisis Group project that seeks to propose solutions to state-building dilemmas in post-ISIS Iraq, the first installment of which was a report on the Sinjar district in the disputed territories in February 2018.⁵

⁴ "The al-Abbas Combat Division model: Reducing Iranian influence in Iraq's security forces", Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 22 August 2017.

⁵ Crisis Group, *Winning the Post-ISIS Battle*, op. cit. Iraq's disputed territories, defined as such in the 2005 constitution, are a band of territory stretching from the Iranian to the Syrian border and dividing the Kurdish region from the rest of Iraq. The Kurdistan Regional Government lays claim to these lands.

II. A Jumble of Paramilitary Groups with Split Allegiances

One of the challenges in understanding the Hashd is their decentralised nature and the resulting mix of competing ideologies.⁶ They number about fifty but can be divided broadly into three groups, each defined by its Shiite “source of emulation”: Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Najaf-based Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani (acknowledged by most Shiites as the paramount religious authority) and the populist Iraqi cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.⁷ This classification is inexact, as individual Hashd members may follow more than one of these leaders, but it remains useful for understanding the organisation’s internal ideological debates, given the significant differences among these three Shiite jurists.

The most powerful groups in the Hashd – indeed, the de facto leadership – are those more closely affiliated with Ayatollah Khamenei. These units have strong relations with Iran and its security apparatus, especially the Qods force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The Hashd commission (*hay’at al-hashd al-shaabi*), and its de facto administrator Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, have particular clout, deciding which fighters to pay from its annual budget. The commission has tended to favour groups closer to Iran; Muhandis, though an Iraqi, is a Qods force officer.

Many of the groups in this first category emerged early in Iraq’s post-2003 security vacuum, assisting state security forces during the U.S. occupation; they gained a fresh impulse from the ISIS takeover of Mosul in June 2014, when Prime Minister Maliki and his allies established the Hashd commission and then used an emergency call by Ayatollah Sistani to enlist young men in these pre-existing units. They include the Badr Organisation (founded in Iran in 1982 as the armed wing of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution, SCIRI), Asaeb Ahl al-Haq (2006), Kataeb Hizbollah (2007), Kataeb Sayed al-Shuhada (2013) and Harakat Hizbollah al-Nujaba (2013). A related group, Kataeb Jund al-Imam, was formed during the uprising against Saddam Hussein’s regime in the southern marshes in 1991 and reactivated itself after Saddam fell.⁸

Reflecting Ayatollah Sistani’s priority for the Hashd – protection of Shiite shrines – the groups that pledge allegiance to him are named after imams or their burial places in Iraq: the Imam Ali Fighting Division (Firqat al-Imam Ali al-Qitaliya), the Sarayat al-Ataba al-Abbasiya, Sarayat al-Ataba al-Huseiniya, Sarayat al-Ataba al-

⁶ The uncertainty about the number of fighters or number of armed groups reveals the fragmented and dynamic nature of the Hashd. For an index of Hashd groups, see Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, “Hashd Brigade Numbers Index”, Pundicity, 31 October 2017, at www.aymennjawad.org/2017/10/hashd-brigade-numbers-index.

⁷ Shiite religious leaders are not elected (like the Catholic pope) or state-appointed (like the Sunni grand imam of al-Azhar) but gain stature through religious learning and the acclaim of followers. Individual Shiite Muslims follow one or more “sources of emulation” (*marja al-taqleed*) for advice on both spiritual and worldly matters.

⁸ On Kataeb Jund al-Imam, see “Administrative manager of Kataeb Jund al-Imam Nadhim al-Asadi: ‘we do not need international support and we will liberate our land by ourselves’”, *al-Sharq*, 19 May 2016.

Alawiya and Liwaa Ali al-Akbar.⁹ These groups, too, operate within the Hashd structure, but they have a testy relationship with its leadership. In his June 2014 fatwa, Ayatollah Sistani had called on volunteers to join the state security agencies, not paramilitary groups tied to Iran.¹⁰ But the latter's pull, strengthened by government and Iranian funds, arms and training, proved too great for many young Shiites to resist. To this day, Ayatollah Sistani's representatives do not use the term *al-hashd al-shaabi* in silent protest of the Hashd leadership, which they view as having hijacked Ayatollah Sistani's call.

Finally, the principal group pledging allegiance to Muqtada al-Sadr is Sarayat al-Salam (Peace Brigades), a reincarnation of the Mahdi Army that caused so much grief to U.S. and other Western forces a decade ago. Sadr demobilised the group in the face of the U.S. "surge" in 2008 and after Maliki drove it out of Basra as part of his Operation Charge of the Knights that same year. Today, the group comprises two Hashd brigades (Brigades 313 and 314); it is notably active around the Shiite shrine in Samarra.

Sadr and his followers strongly oppose the pro-Khamenei paramilitary leaders and groups, some of which they refer to as "impudent militias" (*milishiyyat waqiha*). Still, they remain part of the overall Hashd structure.

Sadrists complain that they do not receive their fair share of salary payments from the Hashd commission.¹¹ A senior Hashd commander justified the salary discrepancy by claiming that the Sadrists have only 5,200 Hashd fighters while keeping another 20,000 fighters outside the umbrella. The Sadrists retort that they cannot send more fighters to the Hashd because the commission refuses to pay all of them.¹² As a result, Sadr at times has been unable to pay all his fighters.

What most distinguishes the pro-Khamenei groups from their pro-Sadr and pro-Sistani rivals is the question of integration into the state apparatus. The pro-Khamenei groups resist it, because they want to use their status to advance their own agenda (including thwarting moves by the government that would harm Iran's interests), or because they want to keep the separate identity they had prior to 2014. Today, they argue that the disquiet in Iraq, with ISIS elements still at large, requires their continued presence. By contrast, the other groups avowedly back the enlistment of Hashd fighters in the defence and interior ministries. The government, they say, has yet to issue the requisite decree. The Sadrists indicate, however, that they strongly support the integration of all paramilitary groups into the state apparatus, and that the Sarayat al-Salam will not agree to be integrated without the others.¹³

⁹ Some of these groups (Sarayat al-Ataba al-Abbasiya, Sarayat al-Ataba al-Huseiniya, Sarayat al-Ataba al-Alawiya and Liwaa Ali al-Akbar) have names evoking the four shrines in Kadhimiya, Karbala and Najaf.

¹⁰ "Sistani's office explains the Friday sermon ('Defence is an apt duty')", Office of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, 14 June 2014.

¹¹ Renad Mansour and Faleh A. Jabar, "The Popular Mobilization Forces and Iraq's future", Carnegie Middle East Center, 28 April 2017.

¹² Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, February 2018.

¹³ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, February 2018. In Iraq, having an independent armed group has proven vital to maintaining political influence. If Sadr allows his fighters to be integrated into the state apparatus while his rivals maintain their own armed groups, he would be at a disadvantage.

There are other differences as well. The pro-Sadr and pro-Sistani groups oppose any political role for paramilitary groups, whereas some of the pro-Khamenei commanders traded in their fatigues for suits and stood as candidates in the May elections.

Differences extend to regional affairs, particularly Iran's role, both in Iraq and in Syria. The pro-Khamenei groups work closely with Qods force advisers on the front lines against ISIS and in the back offices of affiliated political groups. In general, the groups support Iran's regional policies, though not all to the same degree. For instance, Nujaba are fighting in Syria in support of the Bashar al-Assad regime; one of its leaders said that his group's top priorities were to block the U.S. in Iraq and Syria and, next, to prevent ISIS from spreading.¹⁴ Other pro-Khamenei groups, such as Badr, pursue an Iraq-focused policy to maintain political influence in Baghdad; Badr does not fight in Syria and, like other Iraqi political parties, meets with Western diplomats. The pro-Sadr and pro-Sistani groups view Iran's influence in post-2003 Iraq as an impediment to strengthening the state, which they deem imperative for Iraq's recovery. They have sent no fighters to Syria, either. In contrast to the pro-Khamenei groups, Sadr sympathised with the protest movement in Syria. Rather than supporting the Assad regime, and standing with its Iranian and Russian backers, he called for an end to authoritarian rule and denounced any form of external intervention in Syria.¹⁵ Ayatollah Sistani has similarly remained wary of intervention, an action the *marjaeeya* (the Shiite clerical establishment in Najaf) views as politically rather than religiously driven.¹⁶

¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, February 2018.

¹⁵ See Michael David Clark, "Understanding the contrasting policies of Hezbollah and Sadrist movement towards the Syrian civil war", HH Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammad al-Sabah Programme, Durham University (June 2018).

¹⁶ Suadad al-Salhy, "Syria war widens rift between Shi'ite clergy in Iraq, Iran", Reuters, 20 July 2013.

III. The Hashd and Politics

A. *Operating in a Legal Grey Zone*

The Hashd leadership has a mixed posture toward the state: they aspire to become a state-recognised actor, but they also wish to retain their own chain of command autonomous from the government. Stated differently, they would like to keep one foot in and one foot out.¹⁷ Their legal status, conferred on them by the Iraqi Council of Representatives in November 2016, enables this stance by establishing them as “an independent military formation as part of the Iraqi armed forces and linked to the Commander-in-Chief” (the prime minister).¹⁸ The law placed the Hashd under the National Security Council (NSC), turning them into a state institution even as they maintained their autonomy.

To protect and expand their autonomous space, increase their influence and hedge against attempts to bring them under state control, some of the Hashd have sought to enter politics. Here they face a constitutional hurdle: security personnel are not allowed to “interfere in political affairs”.¹⁹ Yet the Hashd are quite unlike the state’s traditional security agencies. They are a political institution, established and led by politicians, such as Maliki, former Transportation Minister Hadi al-Ameri and MP Ahmad al-Asadi, among others. As a Hashd official put it, in the dark days of 2014, these figures decided to take a leave from politics to devote their time to fighting ISIS. In his view, the Hashd leadership did not enter politics after the battle against ISIS ended in late 2017 but “returned to it”.²⁰ In Maliki’s words, “Hashd leaders are already politicians”.²¹

More to the point, they never really took a break from politics. Throughout the fight against ISIS, Hashd leaders readily offered their views on a range of political issues in frequent public speeches. Part of their goal was to gain popularity among wide strata of society as guardians of the (Shiite-led) state. To justify the Hashd’s growth and increasingly assertive role on both the security and political fronts, they invoked Ayatollah Sistani’s June 2014 fatwa as religious cover. This strategy earned the Hashd broad popular support.

Some Hashd leaders have been involved in politics and government for much longer. For example, Ameri’s Badr Organisation won 22 seats in the 2014 parliamentary elections and controls several provincial councils, such as in Diyala, where the governor, Muthanna al-Tamimi, is also a Badr member. In Baghdad and other major

¹⁷ Tellingly, the Hashd strongly reject being described as “militias”, which the Iraqi constitution specifically prohibits. Article 9B of the constitution states: “The formation of military militias outside the framework of the armed forces is prohibited”. Available in Arabic and English at <https://zaidalali.com/resources/constitution-of-iraq>.

¹⁸ “The Law of the Popular Mobilisation Units Commission Number 40 for the Year 2016”, Ministry of Justice, 5 January 2017.

¹⁹ Article 9A of the constitution states in part (in English translation): “The Iraqi armed forces and security services ... shall not ... interfere in political affairs and shall have no role in the transfer of authority”.

²⁰ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, February 2018.

²¹ Mansour and Jabar, *op. cit.*

cities, the various paramilitary groups maintain offices for outreach and recruitment into politics.

Wary of the Hashd's strength and political ambitions, Abadi made a feeble attempt to put the genie back in the bottle once the battle against ISIS drew to a close. If he had once allowed that the ISIS emergency necessitated leniency in the application of pertinent laws, such as the requirement to separate security from politics, in November 2017 he asked rhetorically: "How can a military outfit have a political opinion?" He proceeded to answer the question: "This does not happen in any part of the world. It is prohibited". And he pledged not to permit Hashd leaders to stand in the May 2018 elections.²² He was unable to impose his will, highlighting his, and indeed the state's, enduring weakness vis-à-vis the Hashd.

B. *Gearing Up for the Elections*

Hashd leaders had made it clear since 2016 – when they scored their first victories against ISIS – that they intended to stand in the next parliamentary and provincial elections.²³ In the lead-up to the 12 May 2018 parliamentary vote, the Hashd leadership established the Fatah Alliance.

Karim al-Nouri, a Badr official who speaks on behalf of the Hashd, defended the paramilitary groups' right to harbour political ambitions, given their defence of Iraq against ISIS. As he put it, "after the victory over ISIS, the Hashd's role will be to rebuild Iraq in all theatres".²⁴ To drive home the point, leaders called their electoral alliance Fatah, meaning "conquest" – in reference to their defeat of ISIS.²⁵

Their critics condemned them, claiming that the Hashd were taking advantage of a constitutional grey area. Article 9C of the constitution prohibits "Iraqi armed forces and their personnel, including military personnel working in the Ministry of Defence or any subordinate departments or organisations" from running in elections and participating in politics. Hashd leaders counter that their structure has both a civilian and a military wing – a common feature of many post-2003 parties – and that the civilian leaders should be allowed to participate in politics. Legal ambiguity made it impossible for Abadi to bar the Hashd's entry into politics, despite his publicly expressed objections. Muqtada al-Sadr warned that allowing Hashd participation in elections would be suicidal for the political system.²⁶

The paramilitary groups' participation in the 2018 elections was not a novelty. Hashd leaders themselves invoked the precedent set by Badr and Asaeb Ahl al-Haq, both of which sent candidates to the Council of Representatives in the 2014 elections,²⁷ adopting new names for their groups' political wings: the then Badr Corps put up can-

²² "Abadi: The Hashd al-Shaabi cannot participate in the elections", al-Taghyeer TV, 1 November 2017.

²³ "Sources: A political agreement between Maliki and the Popular Mobilisation Units to participate in a single electoral list", *Al-Journal*, 6 September 2016.

²⁴ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, February 2018.

²⁵ Followers displayed pictures of Hashd fighters killed in battle throughout Baghdad and areas under Hashd control to commemorate the fallen and remind voters that these fighters had sacrificed their lives to defend Iraq. Crisis Group observations, Iraq, 2018.

²⁶ "Sadr: The participation of the Hashd in the upcoming elections is suicide for the political process in Iraq", *Kitabat*, 27 August 2016.

²⁷ Asaeb Ahl al-Haq had one MP in the parliament elected in 2014, and Badr had 22.

didates under the name Badr Organisation, and Asaeb Ahl al-Haq used the name Sadiqoun. Likewise, in 2018, the Ansar Allah paramilitary group presented the Honesty and Loyalty Movement as an electoral list; the Imam Ali Brigades sprouted the Islamic Movement; Sayed al-Shuhada produced the Victorious Bloc (Muntasiroun); and the Khorasani Brigades used the Vanguard (*Tali'aa*) as their electoral representatives.

Hashd leaders stress that the Fatah Alliance is a wide-ranging electoral bloc that comprises Hashd and other political entities and that is not simply an assembly of paramilitary groups. As one said, "look at our list. It's not only the Hashd. We have independent candidates who are not affiliated with the Hashd but are former ministers or ministry employees". He pointed to Ibrahim Bahr al-Uloum, a candidate on the Fatah list as head of the Iraqi Future Gathering Party (Tajammu Iraq al-Mustaqbal), who is a U.S.-educated former oil minister (2005) with a PhD in petroleum engineering.²⁸ The Fatah Alliance also included the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), which is a political party, not an armed group,²⁹ and Sunni Arab politicians who ran in Sunni-majority governorates.³⁰

Fatah's political platform is little different from that of many other electoral blocs. Its main planks pledge to fight corruption, defend democracy, create employment and respect the constitution. Fatah also declared itself open to alliance with other groups. In January 2018, it briefly entered into an alliance with Abadi's Victory (Nasr) Coalition. Although that collaboration broke down within 24 hours,³¹ Hashd leaders said they remained interested in working with Abadi and others in post-election government formation.³²

Still, whatever their outward appearance or reassurances (for example, using the Fatah logo instead of the Hashd one), there is little question regarding Fatah's loyalties. Its officials primarily defend the Hashd; in a March 2018 parliamentary debate over the annual budget, for instance, Fatah leader Ahmad al-Asadi (who took a leave from the Council of Representatives to join the Hashd in fighting ISIS) criticised his fellow MPs for denying Hashd fighters the same salaries as those allocated to members of the armed forces.³³

Meanwhile, the Hashd are also active in the public sphere under the widely recognised names of their armed wings. In March 2018, the Hashd commission organ-

²⁸ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, February 2018.

²⁹ ISCI is the offspring of the aforementioned SCIRI, created in and by Iran in 1982. Its armed wing was the Badr Corps. A few years after returning to Iraq in 2003, the group renamed itself ISCI, with the Badr Organisation headed by Hadi al-Ameri as its armed wing. More recently, the ISCI leader, Ammar al-Hakim, broke off from both ISCI and the Badr Organisation to set up the National Wisdom Movement (Tayar al-Hikma al-Watani), oriented toward the quietist school of Shiism dominant in Najaf and away from Iran. ISCI continued under Humam al-Hamoudi, the Council of Representatives' deputy speaker, who is closer to the pro-Iran line.

³⁰ The Hashd were also represented by political formations outside the Fatah Alliance in the 2018 elections. For instance, its Christian paramilitary group, Kataeb Babiliyoun led by Ryan al-Kaldani, won two of the five seats allocated for Christians.

³¹ The alliance was reportedly fashioned by Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps commander Qasem Soleimani. Its collapse apparently resulted from a disagreement over post-election seat allocations and government positions.

³² Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, February 2018.

³³ "The Fatah Alliance holds both the cabinet and the parliament responsible for ignoring the rights of the sons of the Hashd", *al-Sumaria*, 3 March 2018.

ised a rally to protest the rumoured visit of Saudi Arabia's crown prince, Mohammad bin Salman.³⁴ The same month, the Hashd's Facebook page posted a sermon by Mohammad al-Haideri, a cleric from the al-Khilani mosque in Baghdad, stating that the Hashd, among many others, could participate in the elections as a way to prevent the return of the Baath party.³⁵

The Fatah Alliance's electoral gains, particularly in Shiite-majority governorates, many of which it won, suggest that its invocation of the struggle against ISIS was successful. The alliance won 47 seats in the 330-seat assembly, coming in second behind Sadr's winning Sairoun coalition, which garnered 54.³⁶ This outcome suggested that it would play a substantial role in a future government, also given its backing from Iran, which has been active in brokering a political accord. Yet making predictions in Iraq's fragmented political landscape is a fool's errand.

C. *Penetrating State Institutions*

For many years in the wake of the 2003 invasion, leaders and members of Shiite militias were able to penetrate state institutions via their membership in Shiite political parties, blurring the line between state and non-state actors. Ever since engaging in battle with ISIS, Hashd commanders have followed in their footsteps. A senior Fatah leader (and former Hashd commander) said, "over the last four years, the Hashd have entered all the ministries. You can find their people in every ministry, at every level".³⁷ Hashd leaders use this fact to convey a sense that their clout in state institutions is a normal, and legal, state of affairs. Some ministers make no secret of their proximity to the Hashd. Communications Minister Hassan al-Rashed, for example, repeatedly has highlighted the Hashd's role not only in providing security but also in defending Iraq's political system and rebuilding society.³⁸

Hashd leaders also have made special efforts to forge strong ties with the judiciary. When Abadi called for dramatic reform to secure judicial independence in 2015,³⁹ Badr leader Ameri and Hashd de facto administrator Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis met with Medhat al-Mahmoud, then head of Iraq's Supreme Judicial Council, the judiciary's principal administrative body. In the meeting, they expressed support for the judiciary and offered guarantees that the Hashd would act to prevent Abadi's reforms.⁴⁰ The judiciary had become politicised under Maliki, who appointed loyalists to the

³⁴ Twitter account of Methaq al-Fayyadh, 30 March 2018, at <https://twitter.com/MethaqAlFayyadh/status/979699968050069505>.

³⁵ Facebook account of the Hashd commission, March 2018, at www.facebook.com/AlhashedAlshabey/videos/217294222159733/.

³⁶ Within the alliance, Badr won 21 seats, Asaeb Ahl al-Haq fifteen, ISCI two and other smaller parties either two or one. As of the end of July, the final results had yet to be ratified by Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission; they could still change following a recount ordered by the Council of Representatives in June 2018.

³⁷ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, February 2018.

³⁸ Facebook account of Hassan al-Rashed, 8 November 2014, at www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=368653553302225&id=345019262332321.

³⁹ "Iraq reforms: Parliament backs PM Haider al-Abadi's plan", BBC, 11 August 2015.

⁴⁰ "Amiri and Muhandis meet Medhat al-Mahmoud and express their support for the judiciary", *Al-Sumaria*, 1 September 2015.

Supreme Judicial Council and the Federal Supreme Court to maintain his grip on power.⁴¹ Human Rights Watch reported that in 2015, before the Council of Representatives legalised the Hashd, the Supreme Judicial Council put up slogans such as “The Hashd are the back-up support for the intrepid Iraqi army”.⁴² Since then, the judiciary has remained friendly to the Hashd. For instance, in October 2017, when questioned on the Hashd’s participation in the elections, the Chief Justice Faiq Zaidan defended them as equal to the armed forces. He brushed aside ambiguity in their status, declaring them legal.⁴³

The Hashd likewise made use of their influence in the Council of Representatives in 2014-2018. Apart from Badr’s 22 MPs, the Hashd could count on the support of more than half of the largest parliamentary bloc, the State of Law, which won an outright majority in 2014 with 92 seats. While split into Abadi and Maliki loyalists, the stronger of the two camps was the latter, which sided with the Hashd. State of Law’s nearest competitor, Sadr’s Ahrar, held only 34 seats until May 2018.

Hashd influence in the Council of Representatives extended well beyond these friendly factions. They maintained warm ties with the council’s Sunni Arab speaker, Salim al-Jubouri; one explanation proffered by a Hashd leader is that at some point Jubouri had placed some 900 of his own fighters on the Hashd commission’s payroll.⁴⁴ The council’s deputy speaker, ISCI leader Humam al-Hamoudi, played a pivotal role in the Hashd’s evolution from their inception. He was present at multiple Hashd functions, such as fighter graduation ceremonies and commemorations for those who died in battle. Support in the council played a decisive role in helping it marshal the political will and gather the signatures needed to pass the November 2016 law that established the Hashd as a separate military force answerable directly to the prime minister.⁴⁵

D. *Filling In for the State: Providing Services*

The Hashd also increasingly have engaged in economic activities in both the formal and informal sectors. Following the war against ISIS, they have set their sights in particular on the lucrative reconstruction business. As the country recovers, and money pours in to help rebuild areas destroyed in the fighting, the Hashd are positioning themselves as key intermediaries. Being the middlemen allows them both to profit financially and to employ their demobilised fighters. As a Hashd leader put it, “having the Hashd on your résumé makes finding a job very simple these days”.⁴⁶ Hamoudi, the Council of Representatives’ deputy speaker, tweeted that the Hashd represent “Iraq’s pride of victory [and] its hope in construction and stability”.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Marisa Sullivan, “Maliki’s authoritarian regime”, Institute for the Study of War, 20 April 2013.

⁴² “Flawed Justice: Accountability for ISIS Crimes in Iraq”, Human Rights Watch, 5 December 2017.

⁴³ Crisis Group interview, London, October 2017.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, February 2018.

⁴⁵ As Hamoudi put it more recently, he considers that law to be “part of the debt to martyrs’ families”. Twitter account of Humam Hamoudi, 10 March 2018, at <https://twitter.com/SheikhDrHamoudi/status/972378292752875521>.

⁴⁶ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, February 2018.

⁴⁷ Twitter account of Humam Hamoudi, 12 March 2018: <https://twitter.com/SheikhDrHamoudi/status/973228492715327488>.

According to several other Hashd leaders, former fighters were willing and able to help rebuild the country. One of their spokespeople, Karim al-Nouri, said, “the Hashd’s role is to rebuild Iraq. We have 20,000 engineers [fighters with engineering degrees], 2,500 technicians and many others who can help rebuild the recently liberated areas”.⁴⁸ A Sunni Hashd leader from Salah al-Din mentioned similar numbers and added, “we were volunteers, we liberated these areas and now we should stay on to rebuild them”.⁴⁹ While such estimates are self-serving and likely inflated, they underscore the Hashd leadership’s determination to seize opportunities and play up their non-military credentials in post-ISIS Iraq.

The Hashd already have moved beyond reconstruction of areas destroyed in the fight against ISIS and proudly advertise their role in providing services and building critical infrastructure elsewhere in Iraq. Their website displays trucks bearing their logo that have begun repaving roads in Basra.⁵⁰ By contrast, websites of formal security institutions – the defence and interior ministries, and the elite Counter-Terrorism Service – exclusively feature military news: battle updates, training programs and procurement strategies.

In this sense, the Hashd fill both a vacuum and a need. The Iraqi state is sapped by corruption, a pattern that was set under the UN’s comprehensive economic sanctions in the 1990s, accelerated with the loose contract regulation and widespread cash distribution that came with the U.S. occupation, and compounded by governing institutions’ lack of technical capacity and excessive red tape. Provincial and municipal councils suffer from similar problems. The Hashd provide a ready and, in some respects, superior alternative. At times, they take over contracts from state companies unable to carry out the appointed task. In late 2017, the national waste management company stopped collecting garbage in Basra because the provincial council had failed to pay 15 billion dinars (\$12.6 million) in arrears.⁵¹ Several months later, Basra’s mayor announced that the Hashd had assumed the job (possibly without pay) and were supplying bulldozers, pulleys and chute trucks, while their members and supporters cleaned the city streets.⁵² Other examples abound, notably in the south.⁵³

In like manner, the Hashd fill in for the state by building critical infrastructure, such as roads. In Najaf, the Hashd were granted the contract to renovate Makiya

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, February 2018.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, February 2018.

⁵⁰ “Engineering efforts of the Hashd help clear the streets of Yaseen Khreibet in Basra”, *Al-Hashd*, 3 March 2018, at <http://al-hashed.net/2018/03/03/شوار-جاكساء-بياتر-للحشد-الهندسي-الجهد/>. Likewise, the Hashd website highlights the groups’ role in rebuilding a medical clinic in Baghdad. “In pictures: Hashd engineers cadres set up a medical rehabilitation center in Baghdad”, *Al-Hashd*, 4 March 2018, at <http://al-hashed.net/2018/03/04/الحشد-لطبابة-الهندسية-الكوادر-بالصور/>.

⁵¹ “The National Company: We stopped cleaning Basra because there is no money to continue our business”, *Al-Mirbad*, 12 March 2018.

⁵² Crisis Group interview, Suleimaniya, March 2018. “The municipality of Basra begins cleaning work one month after the National Company stopped”, *Al-Mirbad*, 2 March 2018. It is difficult to find the money trail for this job: the Hashd may have picked up the trash at their own expense as a means of currying favour with Basra residents.

⁵³ The Hashd also have poached contracts from foreign companies. In Babil governorate, for example, the Hashd took over a project to install roadside security cameras, which was originally granted to a Chinese company working with the Iraqi army and police. Tim Arango, “Iran dominates in Iraq after U.S. ‘handed the country over’”, *The New York Times*, 15 July 2017.

street, which connects the city's vast Wadi al-Salam cemetery to the Imam Ali shrine in the centre of town. The Hashd are thereby leaving their mark on Shiites' holiest areas, receiving praise from local government officials. Najaf's governor lauded them for going "from fighters against ISIS to builders of life, present in many areas".⁵⁴

Beyond the formal economy, the Hashd are active in black markets and smuggling. In much of Iraq, and particularly in areas retaken from ISIS, they man checkpoints, decorating the metal posts with portraits of their "martyrs" and leaders and levying fees on travellers. Some have taken control of parts of the oil and gas trade in areas ISIS once ruled, imposing tariffs on traders who, since the 1990s, when Iraq laboured under comprehensive international sanctions, have learned to smuggle oil and gas out of the country. Fresh entries in the political field, Hashd leaders are now also engaging in trade discussions with foreigners. For example, in March 2018, Asaeb Ahl al-Haq leader Qais al-Khazali, who holds no official position, met with China's ambassador in Baghdad, Chen Weiqing, to discuss economic ties. Khazali stated afterward:

After the historic victory, there is a real opportunity to build the country ... and the Iraqi economy needs international experience like that of China, which is more welcome in Iraq because it did not participate in the occupation and because there are historic ties between Iraq and China.⁵⁵

In a sense, providing gainful employment for former Hashd fighters could ease their transition into civilian life and therefore (arguably) help resolve the armed groups' post-conflict status. That said, their role as quasi-state entities and close links to powerful political actors inevitably gives the Hashd unfair advantages, enabling them to bend rules and crowd out the less well connected. The next government will need to find ways to promote employment of former Hashd fighters while ensuring respect for the law.

E. *A Tug of War with the Prime Minister*

Haider al-Abadi, technically the Hashd's leader by virtue of being the commander-in-chief, has stated that he wishes to see them integrated into the regular security forces. Using his enhanced stature as the man who oversaw ISIS's defeat, he has tried to curb their political ambitions. Hashd leaders recognise the threat Abadi poses and have repeatedly frustrated his efforts, capitalising on the weakness of state institutions.

That said, Hashd leaders also acknowledge they cannot go too far in confronting him or ignoring formal institutions and rules of the game. As one commander put it, "most of us don't like the prime minister, because he's weakening us. But we respect him. We *must* respect him".⁵⁶ The Hashd are well aware that Abadi enjoys Ayatollah

⁵⁴ Quoted in "The Popular Mobilisation Units clear the road for visitors from Wadi al-Salam to the Shrine of Imam Ali", *Al-Hashd*, 27 March 2018, at <http://al-hashed.net/2018/03/27/الشعبي-الحشد-الوادممن-للزائرين-طريقا-يشق>.

⁵⁵ Website of Asaeb Ahl al-Haq, 5 March 2018, at <http://ahluahq.com/index.php/permalink/6467.html>.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, February 2018.

Sistani's backing, and few Iraqi Shiites are prepared to openly defy the ayatollah's wishes, regardless of their personal allegiance.

Instead, Hashd leaders have sought to undermine Abadi in subtler ways, criticising him for individual decisions. In the June 2016 planning stages of the battle against ISIS, Ameri accused the prime minister of betrayal for sending armoured vehicles to liberate Mosul rather than following the Hashd battle plan to focus on Falluja and the Anbar province.⁵⁷ In October 2015, Muhandis, the Hashd's de facto administrator, sent Abadi a letter complaining that his refusal to pay the salaries of Hashd fighters was jeopardising the war against ISIS. After Muhandis published the letter,⁵⁸ Abadi agreed to pay the Hashd annually from the budget. More recently, in February 2018, after ISIS killed 27 Hashd fighters in Hawija, a local Hashd supporter accused Abadi of political designs in making his victory announcement a few months earlier. He asked, "why did Abadi rush to declare victory? It was to win the election. But the Hashd are still fighting and dying every day. Abadi's declaration made their work more difficult, because everyone thinks the war is over and is not paying attention to it anymore".⁵⁹

In issuing such pronouncements, Hashd leaders have put their nominal commander-in-chief in a tough spot. Abadi must contend with the Hashd's broad popularity, particularly among his own Shiite base, and thus faces limits in how far he can go in curtailing their role. In particular, he cannot confront them militarily, as his predecessor did with the Mahdi Army in Basra in 2008. They are too powerful and well respected, since many see them as acting in accordance with Ayatollah Sistani's 2014 fatwa, regardless of whether they are in fact doing so.

At times, the Hashd have proven politically more adept than Abadi. Their success in getting the Council of Representatives to pass a law regularising their status contrasts with the prime minister's repeated failures; in April 2016, he asked the council three times to approve his cabinet changes only to be rebuffed on each occasion.

Tensions between Abadi and the Hashd, the constraints on how far each can go in challenging the other, and in particular the prime minister's limited ability to affect the Hashd's evolution have resulted in a relationship that can appear schizophrenic, veering from cooperation to confrontation. At times, Abadi has confirmed the Hashd's legal standing as a separate entity, comparing it to the Counter-Terrorism Service, even before the November 2016 law formalised this arrangement.⁶⁰ Abadi likewise defended the Hashd in a conversation with then U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in late 2017, rejecting the latter's call to dissolve "Iranian-backed militias" and de-

⁵⁷ The Hashd wanted to go to Anbar before Mosul, in the Ninewa province, because the ISIS presence in Anbar was a greater, more imminent threat to their core interest: protecting political power in Baghdad and religious power in Shiite shrine cities in central Iraq. "A sharp attack from Ameri on the Falluja battle plans: Betrayal", *Shafaq News*, 6 June 2016.

⁵⁸ "The publishing of Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis' letter to Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi", *Baghdad Times*, 21 October 2015. Al-Muhandis said he was humiliated to have to beg, before every battle, for funding to support Hashd fighters who were risking their lives on the front line. At the time, Abadi's budget was limited, and he was focused on strengthening the Defence Ministry and Counter-Terrorism Service, but after the letter he was obliged to find funds to pay the Hashd as well.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, February 2018.

⁶⁰ "Abadi: The Popular Mobilisation Units are an independent military entity comparable to the Counter-Terrorism Service", *Shafaq News*, 26 July 2016.

scribing them instead as “a hope for the future of the country and the region”.⁶¹ More dramatically, Abadi was not only unable to block the Hashd's participation in the 2018 elections, but even entered into a short-lived alliance with its Fatah coalition in January.⁶²

At the same time, and paradoxically, the prime minister has pushed back hardest against the Hashd in the domain where they are most powerful: security. The war against ISIS helped him rebuild state security forces and the elite Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS). Beginning with the 2016 battle for Falluja, and with U.S. help, he worked to sideline the Hashd in the fight. In the subsequent battle for Mosul, the Hashd were permitted to participate but kept outside the city, with the CTS and armed forces fighting the decisive front-line battles.

The Hashd nevertheless acted as if they were the primary victors, in Mosul and elsewhere. They hoisted their flags and embellished their actions in the media. And, in some rural areas, they arguably played a more important role than the regular security forces, including during the October 2017 drive to regain control of the disputed territories from Kurdish forces. But Abadi's reassertion of state authority in the security sector, combined with the Hashd's diminished role as fighters in the post-ISIS era, has forced the Hashd to focus more on politics, which holds the promise of a new lease on life.

F. *Iran's Role*

Iran's primary interest in Iraq is to prevent the country from either breaking up (for fear of a domino effect in Iran itself) or becoming strong enough to once again pose a military threat. From Tehran's perspective, there have been two dangerous enemies in Iraq since 2003: the U.S., which withdrew its troops in 2011 under constant pressure from allied Iraqi Shiite militias, and ISIS. It saw ISIS as a new iteration of the Saddam regime, one intent on capturing Baghdad and overthrowing the post-2003 Shiite-led order that has proved friendly to Tehran.

By seizing over one third of Iraq's territory and reaching the Iranian border, ISIS posed an immediate threat not only to Tehran's Iraqi friends but also to Iran's own security. In response, Qasem Soleimani, the Qods force commander, mounted an aggressive effort to defeat ISIS, using Ayatollah Sistani's call to arms to coordinate the ensuing mobilisation.⁶³

In this effort, Tehran could count on the senior leadership of the Hashd's most powerful groups, whose experience in mobilising fighters since the early days of the Iran-Iraq war would prove useful. Among those is the Badr Organisation, which Iran established in 1982 as the armed wing of SCIRI to carry out operations against Saddam Hussein's army, recruiting among Iraqi exiles and war refugees.⁶⁴ The bonds forged at that time in the face of a common enemy have endured. Ameri, who now

⁶¹ “Abadi responds to Tillerson: The Popular Mobilisation Units fighters are a hope for Iraq and the region”, BBC, 24 October 2017.

⁶² “In documents: Muqtada al-Sadr comments on the alliance between Abadi and the Hashd”, NRT News, 14 January 2018.

⁶³ “Iranian general visits Baghdad to assist with defence of Iraq capital”, *The Guardian*, 13 June 2014.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group Middle East Report N°70, *Shiite Politics in Iraq: The Role of the Supreme Council*, 15 November 2007.

heads both the Badr Organisation and the Fatah Alliance, was a senior Badr commander in the 1980s, while Muhandis, the Hashd's de facto administrator, is an Iraqi member of the Qods force.

Qods force commander Soleimani appears to be applying in Iraq a lesson learned during the 1980s war: to distrust large state bureaucracies such as pre-revolutionary Iran's, which survived the Shah's overthrow and complicated the war effort. He prefers to rely on smaller and more efficient and adaptable proxy forces. The Hashd's agility made it a potent tool during the early days of the battle against ISIS, when the Iraqi army retreated and partly collapsed: they knew the terrain and the people. Later, Iran backed the Hashd's move into the disputed territories, thwarting Kurdish secessionism, and toward the Syrian border, carving out a potential supply corridor to Damascus.⁶⁵ Moreover, the Hashd are particularly strong in Diyala governorate, a key gateway for Iranian-Iraqi trade.⁶⁶ Hashd leaders speak of a debt to Tehran for its support in the fight against ISIS. In Muhandis's words,

Iran was the only country that supported Iraq from the beginning of the Daesh [ISIS] crisis It's like when you're in a hospital and you need blood. The Americans would be the ones who would show up with the transfusion when it was too late.⁶⁷

Kadhim al-Jabari, head of Sarayat Ansar al-Ashoura, similarly asserted that "if it hadn't been for Iran, Iraq wouldn't have won. [Instead today] ISIS would be ruling [even] in Basra".⁶⁸

These ties also reflect a shared vision and common interests. Both sides are traumatised by memories of Saddam's rule, are intent on preventing a reprise, and strongly oppose a U.S. military role in Iraq and its vicinity. As a Nujaba fighter put it, "our first duty is to remove the American presence in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere".⁶⁹

The Hashd leadership's close links with Iran also suggest that any attempt to change the Hashd's status could face opposition from Tehran. Many in Iraq say they fear the country's "Hizbollah-isation" via the Hashd. Unlike in Lebanon, however, powerful Iraqi Shiite currents have resisted Iranian infiltration of state institutions. Ayatollah Sistani and other clerics in Najaf, the prime minister himself, and Muqtada al-Sadr, with the support of the protest movement that has challenged government corruption and the lack of services over the past several years, all appear keen to push back against Iranian influence, some more openly than others. The Sadr list's victory in the May elections may give a boost to this camp, even if the Hashd's Fatah Alliance was close behind, and the two subsequently made a preliminary agreement to form a government, along with Abadi's Nasr list. The outcome of this tug of war is uncertain, but there is no doubt that a process to integrate the Hashd should be carefully planned and carried out, with the Hashd's buy-in.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°55, *Oil and Borders: How to Fix Iraq's Kurdish Crisis*, 17 October 2017.

⁶⁶ There are also reports of plans to build a pipeline from the Kirkuk oil fields to Iran through areas controlled by either the Hashd or Iran's Kurdish ally, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). "Oil seen as real prize of Iran's Kurdish adventure", Reuters, 14 November 2017.

⁶⁷ "Iraqi militia commander brushes off US call to disband", ABC News, 30 October 2017.

⁶⁸ "The final decision for the battle of Mosul is imminent", *Al-Haqaeq*, 20 March 2017.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, February 2018.

IV. The Hashd in an Evolving Security Landscape

A. *An Auxiliary Force against ISIS*

Following the near-collapse of the security apparatus in 2014, the government began the slow process of rebuilding its forces with U.S. and broader Western support and materiel. They gained experience from fighting ISIS, although the 2017 battle for Mosul saw a high casualty rate among the elite CTS and federal police. As a result, four years on, security forces lack the capacity to patrol the entire country (apart from the Kurdish region, which has its own forces), obliging them to rely on the Hashd for help.⁷⁰ As they continue mop-up operations against ISIS and hold territory where soldiers are few, such as in Sinjar, Hashd leaders openly criticise government forces for their shortcomings and offer their fighters' services. As Qais al-Khazali tweeted in April 2018:

We are now closely watching the security situation. If the issue returns once again to target the Iraqi people without the government performing its duty, we would have to resort to fighting again The fatwa [from Ayatollah Sistani] still exists.⁷¹

The fight against ISIS may be winding down, as the surviving jihadists melt into the civilian population, but the Hashd are seeking to carve out an enduring security role. Many areas retaken from ISIS remain unstable. According to security officials, since Abadi's victory declaration, ISIS has killed scores of soldiers.⁷² Most attacks, which include ambushes and kidnappings at fake checkpoints, occur in rural areas, especially in the disputed territories, where – due to competition among (and at times lack of coordination within) the central government, the Hashd, the Kurdish peshmerga and others – no single armed force enjoys full control.⁷³

The Hashd's intelligence services claim to have thwarted numerous ISIS-planned attacks along the Iraq-Syria border.⁷⁴ In the disputed territories, they frequently perform raids and inspections to track ISIS, and set up checkpoints to monitor the movement of people.⁷⁵ In south-western Kirkuk in March 2018, Hashd brigades reportedly discovered a cache containing a thousand German-manufactured mines left behind by ISIS.⁷⁶ That same month, Hashd brigades found and removed some 200 mortars and 25 rocket launchers, as well as wires for explosives, left behind by ISIS in Hawija.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ The government could not have retaken Kirkuk and other disputed territories in October 2017 without the Hashd's help.

⁷¹ Twitter account of Qais al-Khazali, 1 April 2018, at https://twitter.com/Qais_alkhazali/status/980390306582540288.

⁷² "Islamic State haunts northern Iraq months after its defeat", *Washington Post*, 28 March 2018.

⁷³ ISIS ambushed a Hashd group in Hawija in February 2018, killing 27 of its fighters. "ISIS claims attack on Shiite militia in Iraq; 27 dead", CNN, 20 February 2018.

⁷⁴ "Popular Mobilisation Units thwart a resurgent attack on the Iraqi-Syrian border", *Sawt al-Iraq*, 24 March 2018.

⁷⁵ For a graphic first-hand account, see Alissa J. Rubin, "In Iraq, I found checkpoints as endless as the whims of armed men", *The New York Times Magazine*, 2 April 2018.

⁷⁶ "Hashd detect German mines made in Kirkuk", *Al-Sumaria*, 27 March 2018.

⁷⁷ "Hashd find mines and missiles in the district of Hawija", *Ayn al-Iraq News*, 28 March 2018.

In this environment, the Hashd paramilitary groups have not only taken the security lead but are also making their weight felt in local politics and governance.⁷⁸ In Kirkuk, even as they continue fighting ISIS holdouts in the Hawija district, Hashd affiliates have – according to local officials – used threats to place their people in administrative positions.⁷⁹ In Diyala, the Badr Organisation, which controls the provincial council, is the main security actor. In Ninewa, former Governor Atheel al-Nujaifi employs his Ninewa Guards, which at times receive salaries from the Hashd commission. Although formed to fight ISIS, the guards serve more to provide Nujaifi with personal protection. Several Hashd units remain around Mosul, as well as in the governorate's west, near Baaj and the Syrian border.⁸⁰ In Ninewa's Sinjar district, the Hashd have deployed on the Iraq-Syria border, co-opted Yazidi tribal leaders, and appointed a new district director and directorate heads.⁸¹ They control strategic roads and recruit local Yazidis into their ranks. In Salah al-Din governorate, the Hashd's focus is Samarra and its Shiite shrines (the bombing of which by al-Qaeda in Iraq in February 2006 set off a cycle of sectarian bloodletting).⁸² In Anbar (which is not in the disputed territories), the Hashd have deployed in the Falluja, Ramadi and Hit areas,⁸³ while the small town of al-Nukhayb has become home to a number of Hashd groups,⁸⁴ mainly because it sits between the predominantly Sunni city of Ramadi and the predominantly Shiite holy city of Karbala. Shiite leaders have called at times for al-Nukhayb to be annexed to Karbala governorate.⁸⁵ Moreover, Nukhayb is the first Iraqi town on the highway from the Arar border crossing with Saudi Arabia and therefore a trading hub along the pilgrimage route to Mecca.

⁷⁸ The information about Hashd deployments in this paragraph is based on Crisis Group interviews, Baghdad, February and March 2018.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interviews with Kirkuk politicians, Baghdad, January 2018. Hashd affiliates in Kirkuk include Sarayat al-Khorasani, Asaab Ahl al-Haq, the Badr Organisation, the al-Abbas Combat Division and the Ali al-Akbar Brigade.

⁸⁰ Around Mosul, paramilitary groups include Asaab Ahl al-Haq, the al-Abbas Fighting Division and Kataeb Sayed al-Shuhada; in the governorate's south, Sarayat al-Salam maintains some fighters; and in the west, groups include Sarayat al-Jihad, Harakat Hizbollah al-Nujaba and the Ali al-Akbar Brigade.

⁸¹ See Crisis Group Report, *Winning the Post-ISIS Battle*, op. cit., p. 12.

⁸² They include Kataeb Asbal al-Sadr, Ansar al-Marjaeeya, the Badr Organisation, Sarayat al-Salam, Asaab Ahl al-Haq, Kataeb Jund al-Imam, Kataeb Hizbollah, Sarayat Ansar al-Aqeeda, Sarayat al-Mukhtar and the Waad Allah Forces.

⁸³ Sarayat al-Jihad is in Falluja; the Hizbollah Brigades, Kataeb Jund al-Imam and Sarayat Ansar al-Aqeeda are in the Ramadi and Hit areas.

⁸⁴ They include: al-Ataba al-Huseiniya, Qasem al-Jabain Brigades, Thaar al-Hussein Battalions, al-Iqbal Movement, Ali al-Akbar Brigades, al-Abbas Combat Division, Sarayat Ashoura, the Badr Organisation and Asaab Ahl al-Haq.

⁸⁵ Reidar Visser, "The Territorial Dimension of the Nukhayb Tragedy", Iraq and Gulf Analysis, 17 September 2011, at <https://gulfanalysis.wordpress.com/2011/09/17/the-territorial-dimension-of-the-nukhayb-tragedy>.

B. *The Integration Debate*

In March 2018, Abadi issued a decree to integrate the Hashd into the formal security sector.⁸⁶ It outlined concrete steps that brought them more closely under the state's remit and implicitly sought to limit the influence of the pro-Iranian groups among them. These steps include the requirement that fighters between the ages of eighteen and 25 must have graduated from either the Command College or the Defence Ministry's Staff College in order to enjoy the rank of lieutenant or above. This rule would force some 20 per cent of Hashd commanders to retire – notably members of pro-Khamenei Hashd who typically have stayed outside the formal security apparatus and rarely have received such training. The decree does not mention what should happen to demobilised fighters, but the government has looked into job creation schemes, an approach shared by Hashd leaders seeking a role for their fighters in reconstruction (see below).

The decree resulted from the ongoing debate between the prime minister (supported by Iraq's Western allies) and the Iran-backed Hashd leadership. It was not the first attempt to merge the militia into state institutions, and earlier instances sound cautionary notes. In 2005, for example, Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari began assimilating Badr Corps fighters into the Interior Ministry. The result, today, is that Badr dominates the federal police and other elements of the Interior Ministry. In other words, it was less a case of integration than of infiltration. Genuine integration will require former militia members not only to join an institution but also to pledge loyalty to it and play by its rules; those institutions, in turn, will need the capacity and autonomy to enforce this condition.

Since 2014, and more frequently after declaring victory over ISIS in December 2017, Abadi has offered various options to Hashd leaders. Prime among them is that fighters join security agencies under the interior and defence ministries' authority. According to an intelligence analyst, this plan entails the annual transfer of some 12,000 fighters between 2018 and 2022.⁸⁷ As an alternative, the prime minister has proposed establishing a reserve force of part-time fighters under the security ministries that would train twice a year and be called up only in emergencies. A third option he has floated is to transform the Hashd from a security into a civilian agency (*al-hashd al-madani*) to be deployed for reconstruction projects.⁸⁸ Hashd leaders have rejected all these proposals. Instead, they have pressed to turn the Hashd into an autonomous security body under the direct authority of the prime minister's office, as exercised via the NSC.

In so doing, the Hashd were seeking to mimic the status of a rival force, the CTS (also known as the Golden Division). The CTS has been trained by the U.S. in heavy weapons, including helicopters, and has an intelligence-sharing arrangement with U.S. counterparts. In April 2007, then Prime Minister Maliki removed the CTS from the Defence Ministry and placed it directly under his authority. Many criticised this

⁸⁶ "Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces Dr. Haider Al-Abadi issues regulations to condition the situation of Hashd fighters", Prime Minister's Office press release, 8 March 2018, at <http://pmo.iq/press2018/8-3-201803.htm>.

⁸⁷ Crisis Group interview, Suleimaniya, March 2018.

⁸⁸ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, February 2018.

move at the time, seeing it as part of Maliki's effort to hoard power. When Abadi became prime minister, he relinquished control of the CTS, and it then cooperated closely with the Defence Ministry, becoming one of the most effective forces in the anti-ISIS campaign.

Yet in August 2016, the Council of Representatives passed Law 35, the so-called CTS law, which granted this elite security force the status of a ministry. This measure gave the CTS autonomy in recruitment, procurement and other expenditures.⁸⁹ The decree is unclear, however, with regard to the service's powers. In effect, it created another blurry line in the security sector: the CTS falls under the state's aegis in theory but enjoys considerable autonomy by virtue of being outside its established security institutions. By emulating this model, and thus diluting the meaning of the term "armed forces" as laid out in the constitution, the Hashd have inhabited a similar legal grey zone.

C. *What Next for the Hashd?*

Now that the fight against ISIS is essentially over (apart from mopping-up operations, and the much harder work of preventing the group's resurgence), politics – and specifically government formation – will decide the Hashd's fate. The Hashd are under greater pressure to become fully integrated into the state, as their autonomous existence is becoming more difficult to justify absent an emergency. The Hashd face a dilemma. The form their integration takes matters: will it mean that political operators will lose control of affiliated Hashd groups and commanders of their fighters? Or will Hashd leaders find a way to preserve the integrity of Hashd units within the state apparatus, enabling them to push their political agenda and, should the need arise, peel off these paramilitary groups once again to play an autonomous military role?

The issue could become relevant depending on what government emerges from talks among the May election winners. But it may also become pressing because, lacking a *raison d'être*, the Hashd have started to suffer reputational damage. In areas retaken from ISIS, locals complain that the Hashd are growing lawless and blatantly partisan. In Mosul, for example, several residents claimed that, far from providing protection, the Hashd were reaping illicit profit, whether through extortion or looting.⁹⁰ Fighters have erected checkpoints throughout northern Iraq to levy tariffs on traders.

Such practices, which have also been reported in Baghdad,⁹¹ are tarnishing the Hashd's hitherto sparkling image. In fragile, multi-ethnic Kirkuk, the Hashd's role in fighting ISIS holdouts may be appreciated, but many residents and local politicians say that its control of the security file and interference in governance is generating

⁸⁹ The NSC serves as the mechanism for civilian oversight of the armed forces. Its members comprise not only representatives of the defence and interior ministries but also of the foreign affairs, justice and finance ministries, as well as the CTS and Hashd. Unlike the ministries, the NSC has neither by-laws regulating its operations nor a code of conduct nor, most important, a clear chain of command. See "Law of the Counter-Terrorism Service", Iraqi Council of Representatives, 13 August 2016, at <https://moj.gov.iq/uploaded/4420.pdf>.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group interview, Mosul, March 2018.

⁹¹ Crisis Group interviews, Baghdad, January 2018.

resentment, if not outright anger, and prompting calls for the state to reassert its authority.⁹²

Adding to the problem, the Hashd also have alienated the army in some areas they have jointly retaken from ISIS. Clashes between Hashd and regular security forces are frequent. In one example, Kataeb Sayed al-Shuhada fighters exchanged fire with soldiers of the army's 8th Regiment in western Mosul in February 2018 over a dispute at a checkpoint at the "fourth bridge" over the Tigris, the only one in the city that remained passable following the 2017 battle against ISIS; the Kataeb ended up briefly detaining four of the regiment's troops on questionable authority.⁹³ Both the army and Hashd claim primacy of victory over ISIS, but the Hashd view the army as necessary but inadequate, whereas the army regards the Hashd as perhaps necessary but illegitimate, and would rather see their backs.

The way forward is for the Hashd to resolve their ambiguous status. In the run-up to the elections, Abadi provided little clarity as to what he would like to see happen. His equivocation reflects his political weakness, and his need to hedge his bets and secure sufficient allies to renew his tenure.

One possibility being floated by Iraqi and international officials working on security sector reform, as well as by the Hashd leadership itself, is to turn the Hashd into a national guard whose primary task would be to police rural areas, especially in the disputed territories of Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din. As an official in the Prime Minister's Office said, "the Hashd fighters are driven; they will fight. But they are better deployed outside the cities; they are not trained for tough inner-city combat".⁹⁴ Because of a not-quite-suppressed ISIS presence in areas such as Tuz Khurmatu (Salah al-Din governorate),⁹⁵ the Hashd leadership has demanded that Abadi allow the Hashd to serve as a national guard in place of the regular security forces, which proved incapable of stabilising the area and anyway are needed, like any national army, to watch the borders. The reality on the ground complicates Hashd leaders' ambitions to transform their paramilitary groups into a national guard.⁹⁶ Although in the disputed territories the Hashd comprise a variety of religious and ethnic groups, the image the Hashd seek to project of being cross-ethnic/sectarian is misleading. In reality, they have formed separate homogeneous fighting units from among minority groups, keeping them tightly under their overall control: the Christian Kataeb Babil-youn, the Turkmen Brigade, the Sunni Arab Ninewa Guards, the Yezidi Lalish Regiment and the Al-Shabak Brigade, among others. Tensions among these groups are common and intra-Hashd competition is rife. In Ninewa, Sunni Hashd complain that Shiite Hashd receive more weapons and support.⁹⁷ A Hashd commission official

⁹² Crisis Group interviews, Kirkuk, May-June 2018. Kurdish politicians argued for the return of the peshmerga and the Asayesh (Kurdish security police) to restore security and to form a counter-balance to the Hashd.

⁹³ "Popular Mobilisation Units clash with the army", *Sawt al-Iraq*, 14 February 2018.

⁹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, February 2018.

⁹⁵ Tuz Khurmatu city has a population of Sunni Kurds and Shiite Turkmen; the larger district is also home to Sunni Arabs.

⁹⁶ Several Hashd leaders brought up the option of turning their paramilitary groups into a national guard. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, February 2018.

⁹⁷ Crisis Group interview, Mosul, March 2018. See also "Mosul and Tel Afar context analysis", Rise Foundation, December 2017.

claimed that Badr leader Hadi al-Ameri frequently bemoans the fact that he spends half his time sorting out internal disputes.⁹⁸ Tensions between the Hashd and local non-Shiite populations are greater still.

In short, the Hashd leadership has concluded that the best way to preserve the Hashd's relevance in a post-ISIS Iraq is to turn them into a national guard. The Hashd cannot serve inside cities (the domain of the police under the Interior Ministry) or guard the borders (the army's job under the Defence Ministry); the remaining area of utility is the disputed territories, and the label "national guard" would provide the legitimacy that the Hashd craves. Yet the idea has not evolved further, because some officials around Abadi, who support his state-building approach and reject the notion of separate command structures for the security forces, are wary of granting the Hashd too much power.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, February 2018.

⁹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Baghdad, February 2018.

V. Tackling the Problem at Its Roots

Senior Hashd leaders and their paramilitary groups were active long before ISIS arose and will continue to be long after its so-called caliphate's demise. Their presence at the intersection of security, politics and economics inevitably complicates the rebuilding of a state seeking to claim a monopoly of violence and to impose its will. Like other groups, the Hashd will continue to take advantage of the state's weakness to pursue their own – and Iran's – interests.

The state's weakness is due in part to the destruction of key institutions in the aftermath of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion; rebuilding will take a generation or more, even if a measure of peace and stability can be attained. But it also derives from the absence of a common vision of the security sector's future. Abadi's wobbly stance on the Hashd's fate helps perpetuate the legal grey zone that their leaders exploit. Moreover, any direct confrontation between the state and the Hashd would likely create a rally-round-the-flag effect, entrenching Hashd leaders intent on remaining autonomous and feeding their narrative of being an indispensable supplement to weak, corrupt state institutions unequal to Iraq's challenges today.

The most realistic way forward for Abadi (or whoever succeeds him as prime minister) would be to accept the Hashd's presence in the short and medium term while developing a clear sense of their role in a post-ISIS Iraq. With their full integration into the formal security sector presently off the table, the government should pursue their gradual institutionalisation, gaining control over their command structure bit by bit. The government should clarify in law the powers and standing of armed formations – both the Hashd and CTS – outside the ambit of the interior and defence ministries, building on Article 9B of the constitution, which outlaws non-state "military militias". Hashd leaders have said they want the same status as the CTS. But while the CTS may have a certain autonomy, it lacks the Hashd's current powers. To be equal to the CTS, the Hashd would have to turn over both strategic decision-making and financial control to the NSC.¹⁰⁰ These are two areas where a new government could start to assert its writ.

Ultimately, the goal ought to be to bring the Hashd under the command of the constitutionally defined "armed forces". Achieving this aim will require strengthening formal security institutions and placing armed groups squarely under the authority of the interior and defence ministries.¹⁰¹ These institutions, in turn, should fall under non-partisan civilian leadership and be encouraged to adopt merit-based recruitment policies. The explicit separation of the groups' political leaderships from their military commands is critical.¹⁰² To further the Hashd's professionalisation, the state should require their fighters to attend the military staff college, with an obligatory entrance exam, or be decommissioned; and it should create employment schemes

¹⁰⁰ Another key difference is that, unlike the CTS, the Hashd have a political arm. This problem goes back to the early post-2003 period, however, and is unlikely to be fixed soon.

¹⁰¹ One external actor that could help strengthen the defence and interior ministries vis-à-vis autonomous armed groups is the European Advisory Mission in support of Security Sector Reform in Iraq (EUAM Iraq), which the European Union founded in 2017 to supply advice and expertise to Iraqi security agencies in such domains as human resources and management standards.

¹⁰² Crisis Group interview, Austrian defence expert, Istanbul, May 2018.

for decommissioned fighters. Finally, brigade commanders should be rotated nationally on a regular basis.

A second blurry line also requires clarification: separating security forces from political activities. Rather than targeting the Hashd, Baghdad should address the problem at its root. An array of political parties rely on their own armed groups: Shiites have the Hashd (co-opting other groups, which are firmly under their control); Sunni Arabs have tribal militias; Kurds have the peshmerga; and minority communities also have set up small units under the protection of more powerful forces. Accusing the Hashd alone of overstepping their bounds is therefore disingenuous. Instead, the government should seek to enforce compliance across the board with the laws that govern the relationship between politics and security. In this respect, the government should initiate legislation that regulates the separation of those two realms.

Rather than tackling the challenge of Hashd integration head on, the next government should pursue a process of gradual integration, while rebuilding state institutions. Its focus should be on security sector reform, a field in which Iraq's international friends can provide valuable advice. Such an effort should strengthen institutions rather than build up individuals, such as the prime minister, who has become the West's favourite Iraqi leader. The best way to address the Hashd challenge would be for the next government to make them redundant as an autonomous force by slowly shifting power and capability toward the defence and interior ministries. Once the traditional security institutions gain strength, the government can seek to close the legal loopholes that the Hashd – and the Counter-Terrorism Service – have exploited. It would then be possible to integrate the Hashd into these ministries without hollowing out the ministries at the same time.

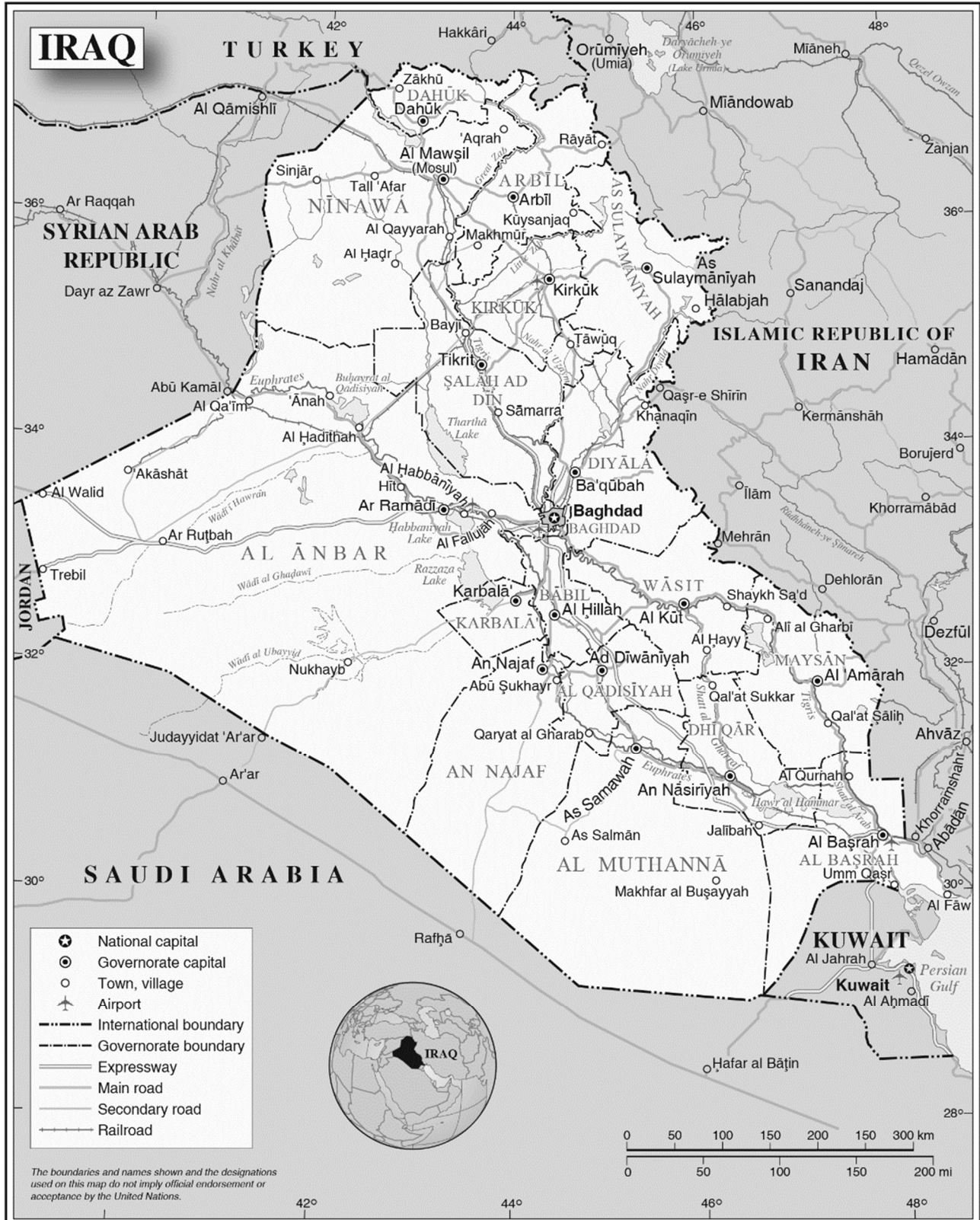
VI. Conclusion

If Hashd fighters are not effectively demobilised and integrated into formal security structures or given civilian jobs, the destructive pattern established under Prime Minister Maliki could easily continue. His sectarian politics and concentration of power, as well as the Sunni Arab insurgent response and the weakness of the army and other security forces, helped ISIS return to Iraq from Syria and rampage through the north. Stepping into the void, the Hashd became instant heroes. But, with the worst of the fight over, will they stand down or stay on, benefiting from the state's enduring weakness while further undermining it?

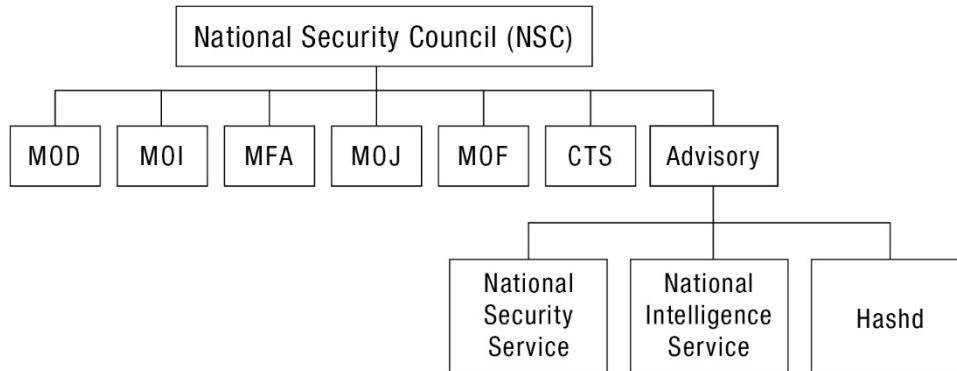
How demobilisation, reconciliation and reconstruction are handled by the next government will determine whether the Iraqi state will finally be able to rebound from almost four decades of unmitigated disaster. The cycle of state weakness must be broken by Iraqis working under the aegis, and with the full support, of state institutions. Anything less is a recipe for enduring resentment, instability and conflict, bringing back a past that most Iraqis would like to remain just that – the past.

Baghdad/Brussels, 30 July 2018

Appendix A: Map of Iraq



Appendix B: National Security Council Decision-making Structure



- MOD** Ministry of Defence
- MOI** Ministry of Interior
- MFA** Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- MOJ** Ministry of Justice
- MOF** Ministry of Finance
- CTS** Counter-Terrorism Service

Appendix C: List of Hashd Groups by Allegiance

Senior Pro-Khamenei Groups

Group	Leader
Badr Organisation	Hadi al-Ameri
Asaab Ahl al-Haq	Qais al-Khazali
Kataeb Hizbollah	N/A
Harakat Hizbollah al-Nujaba	Akram Abbas al-Kaabi
Kataeb Sayed al-Shuhada	Hashim Bonyan al-Walai
Sarayat al-Khorasani	Ali al-Yasiri
Kataeb Jund al-Imam	Ahmad al-Asadi
Kataeb al-Imam Ali	Shibal al-Zaydi

Smaller Pro-Khamenei Groups

Group	Leader
Sarayat al-Jihad	Hassan Radi al-Sari
Sarayat Ansar al-Aqeeda	Jamal al-Din al-Saghir
Kataeb al-Shaheed al-Awwal	Ahmad al-Asadi (acting)
Quwat al-Shaheed al-Sadr	Abdul Karim al-Ghazi
Hizbollah Revolutionaries	Rahman al-Jazairy
Kataeb al-Fatah al-Mubin	—
Ansar Allah al-Awfiyaa	Haider al-Gharawi
Liwaa al-Taff	Hashem Ahmad al-Tamimi
Kataeb Ansar al-Hujja	Ahmad al-Fariji
Kataeb al-Tayyar al-Risali	Adnan al-Shahmani
Harakat al-Abdal	Jafar al-Fartousi
Jaysh al-Muammal	Saad Sawar
Kataeb Asbal al-Sadr	Mohammad Hussein al-Sadr
Quwat al-Shaheed al-Sadr al-Awwal	—

Pro-Sistani Groups

Group	Leader
Al-Abbas Fighting Division	Maitham al-Zaidi
Liwaa Ali al-Akbar	Ali al-Hamdani
Liwaa Ansar al-Marjaeeya	Hamid al-Yasari
Sarayat Ansar al-Ashoura	Kadhim al-Jabari
Imam Ali Fighting Division	Karim al-Khakani
Liwaa al-Muntadhar	Dagher al-Musawi
Liwaa al-Tafouf	Qasim Muslih
Sarayat al-Ataba al-Abbasiya	Maitham al-Zaidi
Sarayat al-Ataba al-Huseiniya	"
Sarayat al-Ataba al-Alawiya	"

Pro-Sadr Groups

Group	Leader
Sarayat al-Salam	Hussein al-Issawi
Tashkeel al-Hussein al-Thaer	Abd-al-Zahra al-Sweidi
Quwat Waad Allah	Abu Akbar al-Khalidi

Minority Groups

Group	Leader	Affiliation
The Turkmen Brigade (Turkmen)		Khamenei
Quwat Sahl Ninewa (Liwa al-Shabak)	Safaa Elias Jajo	"
The Lalish Regiment (Yazidi)	Ali al-Hakal	"
Kataeb Babiliyoun (Chaldean Christian)	Rayan al-Kaldani	"
Liwaa Salah al-Din	Baywar Mustafa	"
Fawj Amerli (Turkmen)	Mahdi Taqi al-Amerli	"
Liwaa al-Hussein	Mukhtar al-Musawi	"
Liwaa Hashd Shuhada Kirkuk	Hussein Ali Najm	"
Quwat Ahrar al-Iraq (Sunni)	Mahdi al-Sumaidae	"
The Martyr's Regiment (Sunni)	Wanas al-Jabara	"
Fursan al-Jabour (Sunni)	Ahmad al-Jabour	"
Nawader Shammar (Sunni)	Abdul Raheem al-Shammari	Sunni Hashd
Liwaa 110 (Fayli Kurds)	Abu Karrar al-Haidari	Khamenei
Haras Ninewa	Atheel al-Nujaifi	N/A

Appendix D: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Robert Malley, took up the post on 1 January 2018. Malley was formerly Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa Program Director and most recently was a Special Assistant to former U.S. President Barack Obama as well as Senior Adviser to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region. Previously, he served as President Bill Clinton's Special Assistant for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Algiers, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Mexico City, New Delhi, Rabat, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

Crisis Group receives financial support from a wide range of governments, foundations, and private sources. Currently Crisis Group holds relationships with the following governmental departments and agencies: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrian Development Agency, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, European Commission, Directorate General for Neighbourhood Enlargement Negotiations, Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, French Development Agency, French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Irish Aid, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Principality of Liechtenstein, Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

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July 2018

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