Iraqi Militias, State Management, and Security

By

Alyssa Kathryn Morrissey

Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the

Graduate School of Vanderbilt University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

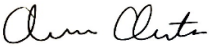
In

Political Science

August 13, 2021

Nashville, Tennessee

Approved:

Adviser, Ph.D.: 

Amanda Clayton

Second Reader, Ph.D.: 

Katherine Blue Carroll

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

1 Introduction

After serving as president of Iraq from 1979-2003, Saddam Hussein was ousted from the executive office under a US-led invasion in hopes of bringing democracy to the country. The Coalition Provisional Authority was established under the auspices of Paul Bremer to form the transitional government tasked with writing a new constitution and setting up the first democratic elections. The democratization process was not completely successful as competing sectarian divides fractionalized the political elites and masses. Sunnis and Shiites alike splintered as they competed for power and the prevailing ideology. The militias were disbanded with the US invasion but have since rebranded and become integral members of the Iraqi government. Militias have emerged as influential third-party armed groups using hard and soft tactics to gain political leverage. Some militias emerged during the Hussein-era, while some formed after his fall in order to compete for political power. Militias have grown increasingly more connected to political elites as means to advance desired political agendas or prioritize select demographic groups. Militias have had a tumultuous status in Iraq, with more than 50 organizations, some recognized, others not, and some having splintering ideologies and agendas.

The purpose of this paper is to explore how select Iraqi militias influence the functioning of Iraq. I thus propose the following question: How do the militias' ties to the central government affect the type of activity that the militias undertake? I will argue that two factors influence the militias' activity. First, militias that have strong ties to the government, measured as the number of shared personnel, are less likely to engage in informal activities. Informal activities are any degree of actions taken by a militia that is not pro-government or sponsored by the government, such as assassinations, kidnappings, or mass violent attacks (Carey, Mitchell, Lowe 2012). Second, militias that are recognized as semi-official are also less likely to engage in informal activities. The scope of this paper is the 2005-2019 period. I chose to begin in 2005 since this was when the first democratic elections were held following the interim government. I intentionally disregard the period in which the Iraqi government was not yet operating independently of the US. The period of choice reflects moments of relative peace and stability, intense sectarian violence, and a joint effort to fight radical Islamism.

Using a case study approach, I contend that only the combination of ties to the government and semi-official recognition [by the government] will ensure that a militia does not undertake informal activity, represented by the Badr Organization. Only having either ties or recognition increases the likelihood of informal, and often more violent, activities, seen with the Mahdi Army. Having neither ties nor recognition will increase the likelihood of informal activities, as with the Sons of Iraq. The causal factor that determines the likelihood of informal activity based on ties to the government and semi-official recognition is the presence [or lack thereof] of an incentive to maintain or commit to upholding ties and its group's recognition. An in-depth analysis on three major militias is necessary for two main reasons. First, it is imperative that scholars and the general public situated outside of the region have a basic understanding of the country's politics. Connected, elected officials need to understand the internal dynamics of the country, which include major non-state actors, in order to develop efficient and effective policy positions. The paper proceeds as follows: a brief literature review assessing the current state of the scholarship on the state of militias in Iraq, a brief introduction on the context of Iraq, a discussion of my contribution and theory to the literature, a qualitative analysis, and concluding remarks.

2 Literature Review

There are three main trends that are exhibited throughout the literature: descriptions on the emergence of militias, analyses on their sustainability as they interact within the political and social environments, and ways to manage these militias, most often involving their termination. Schwarz (2007) identifies three options in addressing the militias: disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. Staniland (2015), takes a different approach by proposing four separate strategies for states to undertake depending on the government's commitment to termination: suppression, incorporation, containment, and collusion. From Staniland's perspective, militias can be beneficial collaborators whether as official militiamen or as reintegrated individuals. Schwarz sees the complete stripping of the militias as the only viable option. Rached and Bali (2019) propose that there are five militia types (quasi-official, state-sponsored, paramilitary, warlords, and pro-government) that prevent the state from demobilizing the militias, but rather encourage strategic fusion. This paper will dissect three militias' characteristics as it relates to their interactions with their surrounding political and social environments and their outcomes as a militia, including reintegration or elimination. I will argue that incorporation as a form of demobilization is the most frequent strategy, but effectiveness varies.

Scholars look to understand how and why the Iraqi government has incorporated more than 40 militias, known as the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), into the state apparatus since 2014 without significant demobilization. It is recognized as a legitimate security-keeping political entity. Levy (2019) believes that while the PMF is able to provide holistic political order, diverging preferences regarding types of political order have destabilized the legitimacy of the institution. This raises the question of if the militias contribute to the stability of the country and to whom they benefit. While the scope of this paper won't explore the country-level effect of militia characteristics and activity, it is important to acknowledge how militia behavior, an outcome of their characteristics, has a larger scale impact. Clayton and Thomson (2016) argue that militias that are informally linked to the state increase government violence, while groups that are semi-officially linked to the state do not affect violence. Clayton's and Thomson's dependent variable is the number of civilian fatalities as a product of state-militia interaction. However, they do not address the types of activities that the militias are undertaking and those that albeit, are illegal, do not lead to civilian casualties. Incorporation serves as a method of curbing non-compliant militia activity through political incentivization.

Part of this idea of state-militia connection is the discussion of what it means to be legitimate. Habech (2018) acknowledges the different types of legitimacy, popular and domestic political legitimacy, affect public attitudes and militia interactions with them. The former focuses on the militia's relationship with the civilian population and how representative the group is of the population. The latter looks at the connection with the political entities. Popular legitimacy would decrease if the militia acted against national interests. Since some of the militias, such as the Badr Organization in the PMF are tied to political elites, both legitimacies aid the militias. The demobilization of these militias would then destabilize the political system and popular support. For the purpose of this paper, political legitimacy is important for dissecting how and why certain militias earn political recognition and maintain their ties to the government. Political legitimacy thus translates to how the elites trust the militias to conform to, at least some, of the state's laws and norms, and therefore reward the militias with political recognition.

The current studies on Iraq militias focus on two main events: the US invasion and subsequent sectarian violence as a result of US puppetry and the unified response to ISIS. What is missing is the activities of these militias outside these two moments of crisis. During times of relative peace, which falls in between the 2006-2009 sectarian violence and the rise of ISIS in early 2014, what does militia activity look like when the connection to the government is not dictated by crisis, but by strategic political alliances? The literature seeks to understand the decisions that the Iraqi leadership makes in deciding if and the extent to which the militias are welcomed into the legitimate political structure of the country and the role that they should play. They use a country-level unit of analysis with some characteristics of the militias affecting some part of the state of Iraq. This study will be of militia-level to determine how some characteristics of the militias affect their own behaviors. An emphasis will be placed on first, this five-year period of relative stability from 2009-2014, and second, the response by select militias to ISIS.

Carey, Mitchell, and Lowe (CML, 2012) assembled the Pro-Government Militia Database (PGMD) of 332 PGMS from 1981-2007. They define a PGM as a group that "is pro-government or sponsored by the government, is identified as not being part of the regular security forces, is armed, and has some level of organization" (Carey, Mitchell, Lowe 5). The purpose of the dataset is to identify the degree in which, and to whom, the PGMs are linked to the government, membership characteristics, activities, and types of targets. While a quantitative analysis won't be performed, their dataset is useful in identifying key variables that are associated with militias. None of the militias selected for these case studies are presented in their dataset, requiring me to determine where each fall in terms of semi-official recognition and ties to the government. Although the dataset includes the Awakening groups/Sahwa, which later turned into the Sons of Iraq with the aid of the US, their documentation ends in 2005. I focus on post-2005 after the fall of Hussein, the completion of the transition to democracy, and the backing down of the US in the country overall. After democratization and the withdrawal of the US, the Sons of Iraq became opposition to the Iraqi government, stripping itself of legal recognition.

This paper will fill the gap between militia type and government's strategy for interaction by creating a two-by-two matrix that encompasses both militia type and militia connection to the government to forecast their illicit activities. The independent variables are ties to the government and semi-official recognition. The dependent variable is the presence of informal activity. While the government's response won't be analyzed, I hypothesize that militias that are tied to the government and legitimately recognized will reduce their number of informal activities so they can maintain their current position. Their current position is equivalent to the number of ties to the government, either through the sustainment or advancement of that number, as well as the continued recognition of the militia. The 2 independent and one dependent variable will lay the foundation for an in-depth case study of three militias to understand how militia-level characteristics affect a militia-level outcome. To reiterate, the purpose of the PGMD is solely to provide conceptualization of the terms I employ in my hypotheses. There is no quantitative analysis, rather case studies to provide an in-depth examination of three militias. Using CML's conceptual framework provides the foundation for the argument that ties to the government and political/legal recognition affect militia activity.

3 Operationalization of Terms and Application to Iraq

Using the CML (2012) data set, the first independent variable is government link. According to CML (2012), government link specifies four channels in which the PGM is linked to government authority: person/prime minister, political party, state/military institution, sub-national government. Three obvious limitations exist with this variable. First, the authors are not explicit on what a link is. It is unclear if a link is if one person has a personal relationship with someone in the government or if a number of militiamen are tied to someone(s) in the government via financial or political rewards. Second, the variable does not differentiate between the type of government links. Government link is dichotomous, taking a value of 1 if a link, no matter which type exists, and 0 if otherwise. Related to this point, the variable does not indicate how many links exist, whether between x number of militiamen to several political parties or one militiaman to a number of institutions, for example. Despite these pitfalls, the IV is important for this case-study because it lays the groundwork for identifying the specific channels in which militias are tied to the government and can compare which link carries more weight in funneling their influence. At face value, having a link to the government is more important than not, not just for survival purposes, but also for safeguarding their interests without significant oversight. In terms of application to Iraq, government link, political linkage, or ties to the government represent any number of shared personnel with the central government. For example, the Badr Organization appoints a member to serve as the Minister of the Interior. Increased linkage raises the stakes for both sides as to not threaten the power structure.

The second independent variable is semi-official recognition. According to CML (2012), semi-official PGM is grouped under the category government relation to determine the "degree of formality of the link." A semi-official PGM "has formally and/or legally acknowledged status… is separate from the regular police and security forces...is more formal and institutionalized…" (Carey, Mitchell, Lowe, 14). For the purpose of this paper, any militia that is a member of the PMF is labeled as a semi-official militia because of their group membership in an officially recognized entity with political influence. Again, this variable is dichotomous: 1 representing a semi-official militia, 0 if otherwise. While their dataset does not include the militias included in this paper, the operationalization of these variables can help to categorize the militias to understand how internal qualities affect external behaviors. Iraqi militias that are legally granted a certain status are incentivized to adhere to or at least negotiate with the central government so that their certain status as a group is not jeopardized. For example, the central government is not concerned with incorporating or dissolving the Badr Organization because of the mutual agreement made recognizing each's status, skills, and agendas.

The dependent variable of choice is informal activity. Semi-official activity codes as 1 for each observation where activity of at least one semi-official PGM was present (CML, 2012). Informal activity, as stated previously, is thus any action, whether violent or non-violent, large-scale, or small-scale, that is taken by a militia that is not pro-government or sponsored by the government, also known as semi-official. One glaring problem in their definition is that they do not differentiate between those semi-official militias that have activity, so long as one group does something. Activities can also range from routine training exercises to acts of violence. Using these three variables as guidance, I will show how increased links to the government, through various channels, and semi-official recognition by the government will determine the extent, if any, a group engages in semi-official activity.

Informal activity should become negligible the more a militia is linked to a government, because as linkage increases, a militia's political stake increases, and therefore any activity out of

line with the state's interests will jeopardize their privileges. Increased linkage increases incentives to withdraw from militia activity. In the case of Iraq, informal activity is a broad term, encompassing all behaviors that are unaligned with the state. This grey area allows for both the militia, like the Mahdi Army, and the central government, to engage in targeted kidnappings because neither side is invested in the other through shared personnel or legal acknowledgement.

4 Iraq's Political Landscape 2005-2014

Iraq is a predominantly Shia country, with about 65% of the population Shia (CIA Factbook, 2021). Official political party militias were disbanded following the 1991 Gulf War (Brill 2016). The US-led CPA disbanded the Iraqi army, giving the opportunity for militias to fill the space of de facto security forces (Boduszyński 2016). Resolution No. 91 "legalized armed militias affiliated with the former opposition parties and integrated them into the new Iraqi armed forces" (Hamdani 2010). As part of the new state structure, the US and interim government divided power amongst the Sunnis, Shias, and Kurds. The Shia controlled the military and intelligence wings, consequentially pressing Sunnis to the periphery as they assumed blame for Hussein's regime. Due to the power vacuum created by the fall of the regime, disbanding the security forces, and lack of action taken by the US against Shia militias, intense sectarian violence existed from 2005-2007. During the 2003-2011 period of US occupation, the US recruited Sunnis to sequester the violence against civilians. The few years after the US's departure were not entirely peaceful, as militias constantly splintered and disbanded in an attempt to gain any upper hand in the political or societal arena. The official state military force not only lacked funds, weaponry, and manpower, but also professionalism, discipline, and organization.

One of the programs started under US-guidance was the Sons of Iraq. Originally formed as a voluntary security force, the Sons of Iraq (SoI), also called the Awakening from 2006-2008, were established in 2007 as a part of the transitional period orchestrated by the US (Ahmed 2008). The SoI are predominantly Sunni, while the Iraqi government is Shia-dominated. The volunteers collaborated with the US-Iraqi Coalition Forces in response to intense sectarian violence. In October 2008, the Iraqi government assumed full responsibility over SOI (Kuehl 2010). Despite the strong ties to local leaders and various tribesmen, SOI began to distance themselves from the central government by establishing security forces outside of the state (Keuhl 2010). Once the government assumed control over the SOI, they pushed to incorporate its members into the state forces to prevent another violent Sunni uprising. The movement has since been dissolved by the government due to the continued Sunni-Shia distrust.

Nouri al-Maliki, elected prime minister in 2005 and serving until 2014, undertook sectarian politics, only exacerbating the previous civilian sectarian violence. Maliki's centralization of power and subtle alienation of the Sunnis from the political arena further jeopardized the internal security structure and activity because of the marginalization of Sunnis. His policies would soon come to backfire for two reasons. One, ISIS would emerge at the end of his term, and two, his alienation from his own political party, forced him not to seek reelection, as an extreme Sunni insurgency seeking retribution.

5 Iraq's Militia Landscape 2014-2019

The Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) formed in 2014 under al-Maliki by assembling the major Shia militias after ISIS's capture of Mosul. The politicization and aggregation of various, mainly Shia militias, seemed to be in direct contradiction to his earlier policy of eliminating unwarranted armed activity. The 2016 Law of the Popular Mobilization Authority required that armed militias must be regulated alongside Iraq's security apparatus so that the prime minister would be in direct control of the PMF (CIA Factbook, 2021). The PMF is reported to have around 120,000 members, consisting of about 40 militias (Levy 2019). The agendas of these militias range from "assisting the military in restoring the government's full control over Iraqi territory and even incorporating into the military and police. Others receive support from Iran and openly proclaim loyalty to its supreme leader" (Levy 123). Mansour and Jabar (2017) identify three main factions within the PMF: those that are pro- Iranian Ayatollah Khameini, pro- Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, and pro- Muqtada al-Sadr, who formed the Mahdi Army in 2003 to target political elites and Sunnis. After years of mutual targeting and horrific violence, the PMF, alongside US and Iraqi forces, helped eliminate the majority of the extremists, with the Iraqi government declaring victory in 2017.

Since its inception, the Mahdi Army has been known as one of the most violent nationalist militias in the country. Their tactics and targets were indiscriminate, using advanced weaponry on Sunnis. Tensions between Sadr and Maliki peaked in 2008 when the Iraqi Security Forces attacked the Mahdi Army in Basra, effectively paralyzing them (CISAC 2020). In 2008, Sadr and Maliki reached a ceasefire, with Mahdi shifting tactics from offensive attacks to a hearts and minds approach. However, he reinvigorated the group in 2010, turning to the political arena, calling for his followers to now support his Sadrist political movement. In reality, Sadr held all of the power, as he easily transferred Mahdi militants to the Iraqi National Alliance party to politically oppose Maliki. With the appearance of ISIS, Sadr rebranded, changing the name to the Peace Companies, with the goal of demonstrating a more positive connotation to the public. The group focuses on social services and prides themselves in their advanced training tactics.

Maliki's successor was Haidar al-Abadi (2014-2018). Abadi attempted to reconcile the relationship with the militias by incorporating them further into the security apparatus (Cigar 2016). Al-Abadi's term was rather lackluster. Even though he helped minimize the threat of ISIS, corruption was still rampant, and he did little to improve governmental functionality. A more important figure in Iraq was Qasem Soleimani. Soleimani was the de facto leader of the PMF. On January 3, 2020, a US drone strike killed Commander Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, leaving the PMF without a leader or a successor. Meanwhile, the PMF has been recognized as a legitimate defense force, as they now receive salaries matching the Iraqi army (Smyth 2019). Smyth (2019) similarly observes, "...the militias are simply formalizing their role as a unified national organization by cleaning house… taking action against fraud. The PMF have also attempted to demonstrate their utility and protect their brand…" While the future of the PMF remains unknown, the individual militias such as the Badr Organization and Mahdi Army/Peace Companies, continue to adapt their strategies to maintain a more favorable reputation despite still hiding behind corrupt and violent activities.

6 Linkage and Recognition as Motivators for Good Behavior

I conjecture that militias are both reactionary and proactive in their interactions with the Iraqi government. Interactions include supporting or protesting select policies depending on who

they benefit, targeting key officials, or remaining silent as a response to government action. In terms of their reactive tendencies, militias are in part at the mercy of the Iraqi government: the extent of their monitoring, what they legalize, and what they sanction. Militias may have somewhat limited power in determining their own actions. In some cases, they have to respond publicly through either decrees, press announcements, or physical action as a means of reacting to the policies and tendencies of the central government. Actions taken by the militias may be dependent on the government's policies and implementation of such policies that pressure them to either further align or even distance themselves from the government. Conversely, militias may choose a more proactive approach in order to pressure the government to alter their policies or enforcement mechanisms that favor the militias. If a government-sponsored militia desires a select policy stance or even a personal agenda item, they might pursue that avenue through mechanisms such as corruption, bribery, or violence, forcing the government to either coerce the militia or acquiesce to them. This teeter-tottering challenges both the militias and the government to be prescient, so that both sides want the militias to tie themselves to the government, thereby potentially gaining political or legal recognition and, in turn, reducing their informal activities. A clear example of this bartering is the 2010 parliamentary elections when al-Sadr, the leader of the Mahdi Army, politically mobilized a large population to gain electoral seats. Al-Sadr altered his tactics from violence to electorally motivating his supporters to legally protest the government's relationship with the US.

I combine the logic of Rached and Bali (2019) and Staniland (2015) to argue that the state's official recognition of the militias and their strategies to handle militias highly determine the types of activities that militias will pursue. Staniland's (2015) four state strategies to handle the militias is synonymous with the extent that the militias have ties to the government. Applying Staniland's (2015) terminology, incorporation, suppression, containment, and collusion are tactics that increase or decrease ties to the government. The purpose of these strategies is to assess the costs and benefits of the militias' existence as it is related to either jeopardizing or promoting Iraq's national interests. The goal of incorporation is to reduce or eliminate the essence of the militia, whether its ideology or manpower by blending it with the state and adapting the militias to new or existing state roles. Collusion still allows for the existence of the militia but does so from a policy standpoint, by adapting militia activities to state policies. Suppression strictly seeks to eliminate the militia, mainly through violence. Finally, containment creates a specific space in which the militias are allowed to operate.

Collusion represents the collaboration between the state and militias as seen through the extent that the militia has ties to the government. Despite the government determining a large part of the future potential of a militia, the militia characteristics, such as ideology, do, in part, influence the government's approach. Colluding with the militiamen is a way to both create policies that are less harmful to the militia and incentivize them to align themselves with the state. Collusion is thus the result of a government strategy and a militia strategy. While these militias are either pro-government or government-sponsored, they are still independent entities, separate from the government apparatus. The purpose of collusion for the militias is to promote the militia's agenda or ideology in the political sphere. For example, the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq received allegations of collusion, in the form of death squads, between Iraqi police and special forces while partaking in human rights violations (UNAMI 2006). These acts were primarily targeted at Sunnis. Suppression and containment are focused on reducing the influence and sheer presence of the militia. If the state perceives that the militia will not compromise its agenda or acquiesce to the state, the state has no reason to attempt to bridge the gap. All ties will

be cut and the allowance of the militias to operate will either be eliminated or subdued depending on the extent of the unalignment between the two.

Ties to the government, which will be measured as the number of shared personnel between the militia(s) and the state, affect the type of militia activity because the more the state allows the militias to collude, the more incentivized the militias become to cooperate or acquiesce to the state. Shared personnel creates shared interests to pursue mutual goals. Damage to the government could jeopardize the status of the militias, while damage to the militias, specifically caused by the state, could result in retaliation. Strategies of collusion voluntarily coerce militias to increase their ties to the state and, out of fear of state betrayal, behave within the desired limits of the state, while incorporation is involuntary.

The second prerequisite that will determine militia's activity is the degree of state recognition. Coined the umbrella term "semi-official", this refers to the formal recognition of a militia by the state (CML 2012). Militias that are not recognized by the state will not be incorporated or colluded with because of the conflicting agendas, ideology, and/or interests. Unrecognized militias, in some manner, threaten the state and therefore will have little to no ties. The state will most likely try to eliminate or subdue the militia. There is a chance, however, that unrecognized militias might have shared ties with the government either through corruption or patronage. Corruption and patronage would be either, one, an attempt by the government to "convert" the militias to their side, or two, an attempt by the militia to disrupt the government by inserting militiamen into government posts, such as the Interior Minister, to promote the interests of the militias that are not favored or prioritized by the government. However, these strategies will only be small-scale, specifically geared towards selected individuals. I therefore assume that militias that are not at least semi-officially recognized cannot have ties to the government. Trivial is what comes first, recognition or ties. As will be explored below, in some instances, ties to the government earn the militia semi-official recognition after successful political performance. On the other hand, a militia can be semi-official because of a historical alliance or aligned ideologies, for example, and are then granted government posts. Semi-official to formal or institutionalized recognition takes place through legal documents (CML 2012).

Based on the theory proposed above, informal militia activity will be pursued by the Sons of Iraq and the Mahdi Army. The Sons of Iraq have negligible sustained ties to the state and are seemingly not semi-officially recognized, so their activities will be completely independent of the state and will threaten the state. The Mahdi Army, while having some ties to the Iraqi government, as seen through representation in the PMF, are not semi-officially recognized. The reason that I do not consider the Mahdi Army to be semi-officially recognized is because the Iraqi government recognizes the PMF, the umbrella organization, as a legal entity. The state does not recognize the Mahdi Army when it operates outside of the PMF's command. This fuzziness in their exact role in terms of ideological concordance and operational utilization forced the Mahdi Army to pursue outside actions. The case studies below will explore a deeper analysis into these three militias. Condensing this logic, the following hypotheses are derived:

Hypothesis 1: The lack of ties to the Iraqi government and a lack of semi-official recognition will increase the informal activity of the militia, including attacks and protests, because of the lack of linkage and incentive to aid or conform to the government's agenda in order to earn political status.

Hypothesis 2: The presence of ties to the Iraqi government and semi-official recognition will decrease the informal activity of the militia because of the presence of linkage and incentive to aid or conform to the government's agenda in order to maintain their status.

Hypothesis 3: The presence of ties to the Iraqi government and lack of semi-official recognition will increase the informal activity of the militia as political linkage will allow for corrupt practices in order to earn semi-official recognition.

Figure 1 outlines the theoretical framework discussed above to predict the type of activity militias will pursue. As stated previously, informal activity includes all activities pursued by those militias that are not sponsored by or pro-government. Activities include actions such as military demonstrations or attacks, public protests, and public proclamations or decrees denouncing the government. Figure 2 condenses the theory and Figure 1 to present the hypothesized presence of informal activity for each selected militia based on the presence of ties to the government and semi-official recognition.

Figure 1: Determinants of Militia Activity		TIES TO IRAQI GOVERNMENT	
		yes	no
SEMI-OFFICIAL MILITIA	yes	Badr Org	
	no	Mahdi Army	Sons of Iraq

Figure 2: Determinants of Informal Activity		TIES + RECOGNITION	NO TIES + NO RECOGNITION	TIES + NO RECOGNITION	NO TIES + RECOGNITION
INFORMAL ACTIVITY	yes		Sons of Iraq	Mahdi Army	
	no	Badr Organization			

7 Case Studies

7.1 *Overview*

The focus of this study is three in-depth case studies on prominent militias in the past 15 years: Sons of Iraq, Mahdi Army/Peace Companies, and the Badr Corps/Organization. There are over 40 active militias currently operating in Iraq, as over the years groups have emerged, rebranded, disbanded, and splintered. The selection of the following three groups depended on

two main factors: time of establishment and data availability. First, the group needed to have been an established and operating organization since at least 2005. The emergence of militias after this period simply provides less time for a militia to establish its manpower and doctrines. More recent militia establishments also raise the likelihood that they formed in direct response to a government action, specific government officials, or ISIS. While these instances would potentially demonstrate that these militias' creations, as a response in favor or against the government, support the hypotheses, it is more difficult to establish the causal relationships given time constraints and unclear agenda by the militias. For example, Liwa Assad Allah al-Ghalib fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham and Lika Abu al-Fadhal al-Abbas formed in the early 2010s in response to other militia activity and the fight against ISIS across Iraq and Syria. Second, albeit a more practical reason, data availability was a large driver in case selection. Given that selected militias needed a relatively lengthy existence, they similarly needed accessible information on them, whether through government or militia documents, interviews, media sources, etc.

Finally, defining what a militia is is essential in assessing how a group relates to the government. According to Merriam-Webster (2021), a militia is, "a private group of armed individuals that operates as a paramilitary force and is typically motivated by a political or religious ideology." This definition is synonymous with CML's definition, mentioned previously, of a PGM, with the exception of the pro-government attribute. The Sons of Iraq were not a part of the traditional federally institutionalized security forces. They formed from volunteers, originally to work in collaboration with the state forces. They were organized, primarily at the local level. In alignment with Clayton and Thomson (2014), the SOI represents a specific form of militia, a civilian defense force, that recruits and operates locally. As the sectarian violence progressed in the early 2000s, the original Sunni Awakening movement became consolidated into the SOI. In 2007, the conglomeration of "awakened" tribes upgraded to a semi-official civilian militia called the "Concerned Local Citizens" (Clayton and Thomson 2014). Not long after did the militia evolve into the SOI as means of institutionalization. Combining these three definitions, SOI represents a militia because it was a group of individuals operating outside of the traditional state forces on the local level with the intention of defending and protecting the Sunni population.

The Sons of Iraq was selected because they represented an organization that contested Maliki as he sought their disbandment. The outcome of this militia, suppression and containment, provide one outcome of how the lack of political linkage and recognition affect the fate of an anti-state group. Their desire to protect the Sunni population represents the group's goal of challenging the Shia government, which was markedly biased against Sunnis. I will demonstrate that the Shia government's prevention of granting ties or recognition to the SOI increased their informal activity because both the central government and SoI were no longer incentivized to establish linkage or earn special status. Informal activity cannot be treated as the independent variable because the actions of a group are the result of another action. The SOI failed to gain recognition and ties, resulting in increased informal activity, rather than informal activity preventing ties or recognition.

The Mahdi Army was selected because they served as an example of a group that modified their tactics in order to maintain a presence as well as political or social influence. As their ties to the government became challenged due to the extremity of their informal activities, the militia rebranded [to the Peace Companies] to earn their status. The self-evaluation of the group presents a strong case in which ties to the government and political recognition heavily

influenced a militia's behaviors. The lack of recognition mattered more for the Mahdi Army in determining their activities, as they rebranded in order to increase their ties and earn recognition.

The Badr Organization was selected because of their transformation from a potential menace for the government to an institutionalized political party and leader for an umbrella organization of militias. They chose to increase their ties to the government as a means to gain political leverage, whether through increased representation or power measured as manpower or legislative power. One common theme across each group is the government's intention to incorporate them into the state's security forces as means to dissolve the group or pressure conformity. In each case, the militia was forced to respond and either subdue or alter their behaviors to avoid dissolution or straying from their mission.

7.2 *Sons of Iraq*

The short-term goal of the group, from about 2007-2009, was to reduce violence across the country, while the central government's long-term goal of national security would potentially exclude the SoI. Its more subtle political movement involved gaining more political power for Sunni tribal and civilian leaders (Kuehl 2010). At first, the relationship between the government and SoI was relatively smooth. Al-Qaeda was declining, and the US had not yet overstepped their boundary. One SoI member remarked, "we did that with the support of the coalition forces... After missions, the coalition forces used to issue letters of appreciation for us and gave us a reward. And that was good. I got $700 from the coalition forces: $300 for salary and a $400 reward for a total of $700 in one month—U.S. dollars" (Wilbanks and Karsh 2010).

The Iraqi government had to balance parsing authority to the SoI to prevent them from becoming a political threat or failing to give them enough stake in the game. The initial problem the Iraqi government faced was the fact that SoI was a US-controlled initiative. As violence subsided around 2009, the Iraqi government assumed full responsibility over the SOI and officially acquiesced US plans to transfer the members into alternate employment sectors, whether in the state security forces or as low to mid-level bureaucrats (Harari 2010). "In a press conference [2008], Minister of Defense Abd al-Qadir claimed the SoI for the government as "our sons, our citizens", but he also provided a warning that all Iraqis came under the law and that while assuming control of the SoI, the government might arrest or detain some of its members. In reality, the transfer to full Iraqi control was not completed until April 2009, but the government did move forward to eliminate political threats that might emanate from the movement through active targeting of SoI leadership. The government also dragged its feet in incorporating the SoI into the ISF with just 13 percent brought in by August 2009 and only 10 percent transitioned to either public sector or government jobs" (Kuehl 19).

There is no doubt that SoI was instrumental in aiding the fight against al-Qaeda and quelling the sectarian violence as their responsibility was to secure their local neighborhoods. After the Iraqi government felt secure enough, they chose to diminish the role of SoI due to two main obstacles. First, a wedge between the civilians awarded special governmental privileges and government-targeted insurgents increases localized conflict (Clayton and Thomson 2014). The central government did not have the institutional capacity to effectively integrate the large number of SOIs. The second major obstacle was the basic problem of trust. "Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's government has long distrusted the SoIs, fearing they would threaten government authority. Many SoIs were denied approval on the basis of their tribal affiliation… have been arrested… and payments from the government are stalled" (Harari 2-3). The distrust

is further evident in the exile and detention of two key leaders in March 2009 (Kuehl 2010). As mentioned previously, the purpose of incorporation was to erase the identity of a group by forcing adaptation to the state. The SOI's evolution into a civilian defense militia, justified as a volunteer-based localized military force parallel to the state, threatened the central government's institutional capacity and political and ideological agenda (Sunnis vs Shia). The state prevented the SOI from developing ties, exhibited through incorporation. Additionally, the state refused to recognize the SOI as anything other than temporary Sunni civilian volunteers, festering localized conflict.

The US was deliberate about their abandonment of the group. In later September 2008, the US passed authority over the group to the Iraqi government. Captain Parsana Deoki remained apprehensive about this transition, noting that "the big issue that concerns us is what happens if the government drops the ball and stops paying these guys. You'd have up to 400 SOI without jobs, without an income. That presents a problem. They have military training and access to weapons- unemployed, with weapons, young men with an established chain of command. You can fill in the blanks" (Londono 2008). As soon as the US determined that there was a successful transition to democracy, they operated as a more hands-off occupier. The SOI were disposable to the US, leaving them to their own recourse. The feelings of vulnerability were mutual. "They [the Iraqi government] will kill us. One by one," noted a SOI fighter (Londono 2008). The Iraqi government, in addition to political action, used more informal methods to prevent collusion or incorporation of SOI. In a series of 2007-2008 leaked documents, the government is known to be detaining SOI members in response to SOI attacks on civilians. "The detainment of [REDACTED] will have detrimental effects on the transition of SOI to GIO [government of Iraq] control. The detainment of Abu Ali last month, which was the number 2 SOI in Buhritz, caused major disruptions as the SOI began to lose faith in their CF partners… This arest of the number one SOI in Burhitz will likely cause disillusionment amongst the SOI with more individuals losing faith that they will have a fair opportunity to transition and participate in the upcoming elections" (Carlstrom 2010). The government reports on SOI's civilian attacks and disobedience with their uniforms are two instances of informal activity, as they are not sanctioned or supported by the state.

The Shiite government quickly rejected any idea of collusion, rather simply the suppression of the SOI. Abadi, from Maliki's own party, publicly addressed the government's intention to disband the group. "The ones in Baghdad and Diyala province just changed their t-shirts. There are large numbers who were really Qaeda. We have to really look hard for those elements without blood on their hands" (Parker 2008). By the late 2000s, the SOI had no allies, no resources, and no gameplan. They were unwilling to politically recognize or welcome any established and organized Sunni group, especially after the over twenty-year reign of Saddam Hussein. The central government was not incentivized to increase ties or reward recognition as they believed that if the SOI were to gain these two elements, they [SOI] would only be a greater threat.

In the end, the Sons of Iraq were, as they had planned to be all along, but a temporary coalition between Shias and Sunnis, that was ultimately dissolved by al-Maliki. Phil Dermer, a retired US Colonel, penned an article regarding his experiences with the SOI. "The Sahwa (SOI) from 2007-2009 is no more. And yes, the Sunni are now doing what it takes for their own political interests, so things have come full circle because ISIS is the new al-Qaeda- the vanguard" (Dermer 2014). The SOI were unable to maintain a Sunni stronghold politically or militarily and internally decombusted. Dermer draws the parallel between the three Sunni

jihadist groups in effort to show how the continued distrust between the Shia government and Sunni population further instigate Sunnis to take actions beyond political means. The denial of political rights by the Shia have forced the Sunnis to employ, what is considered by the Shia government, informal and illegal extremist activities.

In November 2009, General Abud Kanbar Hasem Kyayun al-Maliki noted, "... in short, the Sons of Iraq was an experimental plan to implement laws and enforce the rule of law [whose time has come and passed]" (Wilbanks and Karsh 2010). The minimal integration of SoI, arrests, and exiles represented the disregard of the connection between the government and SoI. By the end of 2010, 41.9% of SoI had been transitioned to government ministries and the security forces (SIGIR 17). The absorption of a few SoI members is an attempt at Staniland's (2015) incorporation because al-Maliki wanted to eradicate the remnants of the CDF to prevent a coup, political uprising, or increased local conflict between tribes. Maliki was not willing to collude with SoI because of these fears, determining that the only solution was incorporation. Suppression and containment were not viable because the SoI was not founded as an ideologically or politically motivated violent group, but a government-guided civilian force. The pure distrust of the SoI is evident in the fact that SoI were not allowed to carry their own weapons initially and were never allowed to conduct independent offensive operations (Ahmed 2008). By incorporating SoI into the state security forces or arresting key leaders, Maliki aimed to erase the existence of this organization. While the SOI had initially earned recognition, the Shiite government's goal of incorporation meant that they would not continue to recognize the group. Similarly, while tribal leaders who served as the local leaders for the SOI had individual connections to the government, incorporation erased the identity of SoI. Following my assumption, the unrecognition of SoI diminished the importance of any direct ties between SoI members and the military institution because the SoI identity no longer existed upon entry into the military institution, with their identity as a militiaman being completely absorbed and expunged.

The SOI were not an official state force, nor were they a paramilitary force because their structure and organization did not strongly resemble the state military organization. The SOI, once publicly acknowledged as the SOI, was a civilian defense militia. They were an organized and armed local group protecting targeted neighborhoods but were independent of the state forces. They were a supplemental force aiding the government and were therefore relatively subject to the state's decrees. Contrary to the hypothesis that both the lack of sustained recognition and ties to the government would increase the informal activity of the militias, SoI never independently owned weaponry and the immediate absorption of its members prevented any informal activities or distancing from the state. Informal activity was negligible in the case of SoI because of the lack of resources (weapons and popular support) and immediate complete denial of existence by the government following the taming of Al-Qaeda, only partially supporting Hypothesis 1.

7.3 *Mahdi Army*

The Mahdi Army was founded by Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr in 2003 in response to the US-invasion and the subsequent state-building process of Iraq, advocating for the protection of Shia areas. Sadr comes from a line of Shia clerics that were heavily persecuted under Hussein (Al Jazeera 2008). Sadr exclaimed that he "established the most important constituent of a state and that is the establishment of an Islamic Army… for the creation of a constitution and a

council of governors with the aim of forming a state" (Taha 1). Membership reached an estimated 60,000 participants (Guidere 2021). Its composition is primarily volunteers. Its tactics consist of a hearts and minds approach, but only geared towards fellow Shiites. "This is an army of volunteers… They are clerics at night and heroes during the day...This army is helping society. They clean streets, protect our schools, and distribute fuel and gas," commented Abu Bakr, a resident of Sadr City, a Baghdadi district (Al Jazeera 2008).

However, this strategy only benefited the army where they already had a stronghold of supporters. They were vehemently anti-US and attacked the Iraqi Security Forces Coalition, including SoI. The Mahdi Army is notorious for its violence, civilian attacks, and large massacres as it instigated much of the sectarian violence in 2006. The militia was even successful in electing one of its own to two ministry posts in the first democratic parliamentary elections in 2005. To counterbalance their violence, the militia frequently provided social services, such as security, schools, and health programs to the public (Taha 2019). The violence never subdued. The Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point reported that, "Iran had supplied armor-piercing explosively formed projectile to Shiite (Sadrist) militiamen...they were allegedly involved in the January 2007 killing of five US forces in Karbala" (Katzman 2009). The group's reputation began to decline, as Sadr and Maliki became political enemies and the militia's attacks became increasingly indiscriminate, jeopardizing its hopes at a political alliance or freedom to operate independent of the state.

Much of the composition of the militia was ex-combatants who served as members of the official state security forces, in child organizations formed solely during this transition period, or previously active militiamen as the majority of these individuals were now unemployed following the country's democratic elections. The state prioritized incorporating these members into the security forces, but similar to the obstacles faced with the SoI, incorporation was fruitless especially as al-Maliki was hostile with al-Sadr. In 2008, Sadr called for the army to be disbanded after their neutralization by the US-ISF alliance and the declining public support (Rahimi 2010). In August 2008, al-Sadr called for the Mahdi Army to shift to more "peaceful activities" (Katzman 2009). However, Sadr still had every intention for the Mahdi Army to be a politically competitive and legitimate institution. In the March 2010 elections, Sadrist political parties won 40 seats in the 325-seat parliament (Rahimi 2010). Compromise was necessary as Prime Minister al-Maliki and al-Sadr were on and off political and ideological allies. The relationship originally took a turn for the worse in 2008 when the state forces and militia endured on and off fighting. Negotiations led to the release of several militiamen from prison and a coalition with the ruling parties. In addition to the ill relations with the Iraqi government, the militia itself faced internal divisions as Asaib Ahl al-Haq broke away in 2006 (Habech 2019). Much of the group's activity continues to be of violent nature, targeting Sunnis in Baghdad, as well as Sunni minorities in Shia areas. Their stronghold is Baghdad, and they refuse to retract. One Iraqi officer commented in April 2008, "we did not expect the fight to be this intense" (The Independent 2008). However, Maliki issued wavering attacks, without a consistent plan or objective to either collude, incorporate, or suppress, as the renewed ceasefire was broken with a spontaneous assault. Vague ties existed through Mahdi members' presence in the Sadrist parties. However, similar to the SOI, the lack of recognition carried more weight in determining the militia's activity. The lack of political recognition as a legal entity resulted in heightened political conflict between the head of the government and the head of the militia, as this bittered one-on-one battle jeopardized any chance of political approval.

Most recently, in 2014, the Mahdi Army rebranded as the Peace Companies following the rise of ISIS in order to defend Shia holy sites and territory. Mehdi Hassan, a Mahdi army combatant, participated in a June 2014 parade following the capture of Mosul and Basra, emphasizing that, "the goal here is to terrify the enemy and to show them that we are still here. The [Iraqi] army is weak, but we can support them" (Shashank 2018). A conglomerate of volunteer Shia militias united under an umbrella organization, the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), assembled following the attacks on Mosul and Basra by ISIS. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi then passed a law that made the PMF under the state's control (Gurbuz 2017). Despite the newly rebranded Peace Companies now part of a state-sponsored organization, they still received ill-favored treatment, not receiving funding and weaponry due to Sadr's anti-Maliki attitude. The most recent elections in 2017 earned the Peace Companies 34 seats in parliament (Gurbuz 2017). Sadr's movement continues to gain noticeable support as 55% of respondents in a January 2016 nationwide poll Iraqi adults viewed it as favorable (Gurbuz 2017).

The Mahdi Army clearly had ties to the government, through elected representation. However, before rebranding in 2014, the militia, while institutionalized, was not legally recognized. Members were arrested, detained, and tortured by the Iraqi government. Maliki took every attempt to demobilize and disarm them because of their intense indiscriminate violence and ties to Iran. Upon rebranding, the Peace Companies were able to garner further political power in parliament. Joining the PMF, the Peace Companies now became part of a larger state-controlled organization, although the extent in which the state exercised control over the group is disputed. Two points are of interest here. First, both the Mahdi Army and Peace Companies had ties to the Iraqi government through elected representation. Second, the Mahdi Army was not recognized as semi-official because of their persistent violent instigations and personal tensions between Maliki and Sadr. The Peace Companies, part of a state-sponsored organization, earned themselves a status that the Mahdi Army was never able to achieve state acceptance. Acceptance did not equate to recognition, rather the acknowledgement of their operation, not approval. Although the shift in branding did not alter the ideology of the group, their practices transformed to be less sectarian-targeted, but rather towards overall anti-extremism. The types of activities thus shifted from less random intense violence to oriented at defeating ISIS.

Despite the bitter political battle between now, Abadi and Sadr, both understood that ISIS jeopardized the Iraqi government and the Peace Companies. Following the defeat of ISIS, Sadr reentered the political sphere, denouncing Abadi for his corrupt alliance with the PMF, directing his frustration primarily at the Badr Organization (Salhy 2018). Sadr said, "I condole with my people… due to the abhorrent political agreements...which pave the way for the return of the corrupt again… We were offered to join them (Abadi's alliance) and we totally refused this…" (Salhy 2018). A senior Sadrist leader expressed similar sentiments, "This (allying with the PMU) struck the (Al-Sadr and Abadi's) project… All those (leaders of the PMU) are thieves and killers… How do we call to establish a civil state while it is led by armed factions?" (Salhy 2018). The Mahdi Army/Peace Companies had ties to the government, not because of their collective or individual campaigning, but rather because of Sadr as an influential individual. However, as soon as Maliki or Abadi did something that didn't sit right with him, Sadr swore off the Iraqi leadership, resorting to his own actions to avenge his followers, while the Iraqi government would never fully recognize the group's status.

The Mahdi Army was more likely to increase their informal activity because of their lack of support by the state, despite having a stake in the political leadership. Their lack of political

recognition negatively outweighed their electoral representation when assessing how to executive their activities. The Peace Companies, as the Peace Companies, maintained ties to the government, and obtained backing from the state but did not reduce their degree of informal activity. The government's strategy was collusion, as the only reason that informal activity did not decrease was because of the mutual threat of ISIS. The militia rebranded as a result of ISIS and allied with other Shia militias to eliminate the extremists. While it is difficult to assume what would have happened if ISIS had not emerged, one can assume that the Mahdi Army would have self-disintegrated due to internal splinterings and unsuccessful military missions. The self-reinvention of the group allows for partial support for Hypothesis 3 because the original Mahdis were unofficial yet connected to the government, exercising informal activity; the fresh Peace Companies became connected and tied, exercising some formal activity but all directed at a joint effort against ISIS.

7.4 Badr Organization

Founded as anti-secular, the Badr Organization became tied to the Shia Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and Iranian ayatollahs. They were direct enemies of the Mahdi Army, yet both are Shia. The Badr Corps emerged during Hussein's reign in 1983, but previously operated in Iran. Combined with their violent nature, their ties to Iran threatened the trajectory of democratic Iraq as their founding mission was to create a separate Shiite region in Iraq. (CISAC 2019). After the quelling of the sectarian violence in 2009, again, Maliki aimed to finish the incorporation process of the group into the state forces. Adnan Ali al-Kadhimi, an aid to Maliki, said the approach to handle each militia was based on their historical legacies and connection to Iran. "You always get some infiltration from these militias. You also get some corruption. It's in many institutions, many ministries. We need the government to be in charge of security and nobody else. We need them to integrate and to disarm everybody" (Hernandez 2006). The Badr Organization, for example, was thought to be relatively easy to integrate because of their uniforms, record-keeping, and leadership hierarchy. However, the group would not go silently, being accused of kidnapping and corrupting the police, as well as maintaining strong ties to major political parties.

Concerns over the integration of Shia forces into mixed demographic areas added to the obstacles facing all militias' incorporation. In April 2006, Maliki prepared Law No. 91, laying out the steps for militia integration. "Law No. 91 will take care of integrating militias into the armed forces according to rules that don't downplay the rights of those who struggled against the dictatorship… Our approach… calls for keeping weapons only under the control of the government because it is the only party that protects Iraqis and faces up to those who break the law… This would not belittle their role in resisting the dictatorship, but it is a reward for them and a solution to a problem that would persist if weapons do not remain under the control of the government" (Ridolfo 2006). One point of debate over this plan was if the integration process was going to strip or reward the militias with power. Integration would legitimate the preexisting political alliances or status as a political party for them but would prevent any behaviors that would be seen as out of line with the ISF.

The Badr Corps broke away from SCIRI due to ideological differences. Upon this separation, the Badr Organization realigned themselves with al-Maliki while the leader of the group, al-Amiri, became the Minister of Transportation in 2010 and second-in-charge Mohammed Ghabban became the Interior Minister in 2014; seats in the parliament also reached

22 in 2014 (CISAC 2019). The position of the Interior Minister is reserved for a member of the Badr Organization due to arrangements made during the transitional period (CISAC 2019). The organization also has a separate military since, operating since 2003, called the Martyr Sadr Forces, which is kept separate from the state authorities (Steinberg 2017). Efforts towards incorporation were made by Maliki to curb the militia's actions and moderate their ideology. For example, the Badr Organization switched uniforms to that of the federal police (Mansour 2018). Just before Maiki's resignation in 2014, he made Amiri the unofficial military governor of Diyala (Steinberg 2017). However, the same obstacles in incorporation emerged, as the group eventually took over the Interior Ministry. The position controls the militias that the government supports with money and weapons (Steinbergy 2017). This connection means that a top leader within the Badr Organization has direct access to state funds and resources to support non-state groups. The important takeaway here is that both the government and the militia were willing to compromise, whether through allowing political representation or moderating their ideology, in order to make their arrangement mutually beneficial. If both sides conceded or benefited on certain issues, neither would be incentivized to jeopardize their arrangement through illegal or undesired activity.

The Badr Organization is currently the largest militia in the PMF and is connected to the Fatah Party, which held 48 seats in parliament as of 2019 (Atallah 2019). The group's most recent violent actions have been in collaboration with the PMF and the state's army to fight ISIS. The group was instrumental in combating ISIS and its downfall beginning in 2016. The organization, however, maintained a conflicting persona. In June 2016, it used its connection with the state police to coordinate attacks against ISIS, originally facilitated by the Interior Minister. Conversely, the group was also accused of killing civilians and politicians during these operations (CISAC 2019). Abadi, fully aware of these conflicting behaviors, kept a watchful eye on the group, always keeping the group at an arms' distance from the security forces and dense Sunnis areas. Despite the emergence of ISIS, Iraqi politics was still susceptible to sectarian politics. The group earned sole control over the Interior Minister post, with Mueen al-Kadhimy, a Badr Organization lawmaker, defending the group's egalitarian and unbiased position. "We cannot discount the Sunnis, nor can the Sunnis discount the Shia. Treat the Sunnis not as your brothers but as yourselves" (Kirkpatrick 2014). Kadhimy justified his opinion by emphasizing the group's nomination of Mohammed al-Ghabban for the Interior Minister position, given his 15 years of exile by Hussein and 10 years of education in England. The Badr leadership were focused on portraying themselves as collaborative and compromising allies so that their status is not stripped or challenged. Additionally, given their political tactics were not radical, the Iraqi government did not impede, dissuading the group from resorting to undesirable or extreme action. They were incentivized to conform or aid to the project of the government, in this case, combat ISIS, to maintain their special status.

The Badr Organization is an institutionalized political party, represented in official ministries, yet also absorbed into the security forces. Haidar al-Abadi issued a decree, Executive Order 91, permitting select members of the PMF to be granted legal status and inclusion into the state forces. These groups would also be given equivalent salaries to the military (Financial Tribune 2018). Abadi praised his decision, publicly affirming that the merger with the army "preserves the identity of the security forces" (Financial Tribune 2018). The goal of incorporating the desired militias demonstrates Abadi's intention of keeping a check on select militias to ensure that their behaviors aren't too conflicting with the state's agenda. However, the PMF rejected Abadi's decree as they wanted to become an officially independent security

body reporting to the Prime Minister rather than the Defense or Interior Ministries (Mansour 2018). Incorporation was not desired by the umbrella organization. Badr leader Hadi al-Amiri commented, he would "personally take up arms to defend Iraq from any danger regardless of any political position he may hold" (CounterExtremism Project). As a form of compromise, the Law of the PMF Commission recognized the PMF as "an independent military formation as part of the Iraqi armed forces and linked to the Commander-in-Chief", earning itself a seat on the National Security Council (Mansour 2018).

The Badr Organization most obviously has ties to the government, through popular elections and the reservation of a top post for a Badr member. Less obvious connections exist in the group's illicit subunits, such as the assassination squads. One interview with an ex-combatant witht the Badr Organization, Adil Hussain, commented, "the chief of the assassination squads Qais Al-Najar, is the brother of the official leader of Badr in Tuz Khurmato- Atef al-Najjar. He is married to the daughter of the Badr Organization leader Mohammed Mahdi al-Bayati, who was Minister of Human Rights in the cabinet of former prime minister al-Abadi" (MECRA 2019). The assassination units, present an interesting dichotomy in that the unit itself is highly illicit and would not be a publicly state-sanctioned entity; conversely, the unit was unconcerned about their presence because of their ties to the central government. Fortunately, "as of February 2019, there have been no major recent military or political actions" (CISAC 2019).

Despite recent challenges to the PMF's status as a legitimate military entity, the state legally recognizes the PMF, which includes the Badr Corps as at least a semi-official militia. The organization thus meets both requirements to result in a reduction of informal activity. The violence targeting Sunnis or local Iraqi bureaucrats in the late 2000s-early 2010s is justified by the fighting of ISIS in an attempt to mask their illegal activities. As ISIS gradually became quelled, Badr could not get away with the extent of their indiscriminate violence as their activities became more visible and thus subject to increased accountability. As demonstrated, over time, the level of informal activity by the organization has declined as the threat of ISIS diminishes and the group does not want to jeopardize its special status. While the group remains hesitant about incorporating into the state forces out of fear of losing their identity and compromising on their ideology, they have not returned to indiscriminate and frequent attacks. Ties to the government and official recognition has motivated the Badr Organization to reduce their informal activity so they do not jeopardize their political status or compromise on their priorities, supporting Hypothesis 2.

8 Conclusion

Militia-level characteristics are formed not only by the group itself but also influenced by external actors and the surrounding environment. The goal of this paper was to present an argument that influences, and statuses predetermined by the government affect how militias react in order to maintain or grow their influence. I presented a 2x2 diagram that shows how ties to the government, measured through the presence of shared personnel in any government institution and their official recognition by the states, determines the types of activities militias will pursue. Providing qualitative evidence and secondary research, I show that both the lack of ties to the government and recognition increases militia's informal activity because of the lack of sustained accountability mechanisms and incentives to cooperate, seen through the Sons of Iraq. The Mahdi Army, meanwhile, had ties to the government, but lacked semi-official recognition as

a group, therefore increasing their informal activity because the ties to the government only benefit those in power. Finally, the Badr Organization, having ties to the government and official recognition as part of the PMF, gradually reduced their informal activity so as not to sacrifice their status, despite existing disputes on their specific role.

This paper would be strengthened with a supplemental quantitative analysis using data on legislation sponsored by specific militias to uncover their priorities, information on the extent and types of militia activity, and how the shared personnel behave as members of the government and militia. I also do not address the assassination of Qasem Soleimani , the commander of the Quds Forces, a splinter militia from the IRGC as he was the de facto leader of the Shiite militias. The paper also focuses solely on militias as the unit of analysis. A multilevel model could be included to see how militia activity affects violence on the national level. How do militia-level characteristics affect state-level dynamics or characteristics? The relationship between militias and the Iraqi government is ever so fickle as the struggle for power occurs not only within these institutions but also across these institutions.

More broadly speaking, this paper speaks directly to future policy implications. Understanding the relationship between various non-state and state actors helps address two important points. First, the US and other Western countries are able to develop policy recommendations in regard to advancing democracy in the region by targeting specific groups and actors. US leaders are able to understand the internal dynamics of the state in order to promote their interests, such as democratization or oil reserves. Second, looking at the militia-state relationship specifically reveals key information for policymakers and military leaders to take advantage of to develop tactics and strategies to combat terrorism. Uncovering the domestic dynamics of a complex and conflict-prone country is imperative in order to formulate an effective and efficient approach to handle the country. This paper provides insight into the major actors in Iraqi politics and society, what's at stake for each actor, and how their behaviors evolve and adapt to their environment.

References

Ahmed, Farook. 2008. “Sons of Iraq and Awakening Forces.” *Institute for the Study of War* Backgrounder 23 Sons of Iraq and Awakening Forces.pdf (understandingwar.org)

Al-Hamadni, Raid. September 30, 2010. “Aspects of Disintegration: The reality of the New Iraqi Military, Its Forces and Institutions and Prospects for Reform.” *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 2 (1): 134-142.

Al-Salhy, Suadad. January 15, 2018. “Al-Sadr Withdraws Support from Abadi and His Alliance.” *Arab News* Al-Sadr withdraws support from Abadi and his alliance (arabnews.com)

Al Jazeera. April 20, 2008. “Profile: The Mahdi Army.” Profile: The Mahdi Army | News | Al Jazeera

Atallah, Phillippe. “The Future of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces.” *Foreign Policy Research Institute* APril 19, 2019. The Future of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces - Foreign Policy Research Institute (fpri.org)

Boduszynki, Mieczyslaq. 2016. “Iraq’s Year of Rage.” *Journal of Democracy* 27(4): 110-124.

Brill, Michael. 2016.“Allah, al-watan, and al-qa’id: A Preliminary Study of Regime Militias in Iraq, 1991-2003.” MA Thesis. Georgetown University ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Carey, Sabine, Neil Mitchell, and Will Lowe. 2012. “States, the Security Sector, and the Monopoly of Violence: a New Database on Pro-Gov’t Militias.” *The Journal of Peace Research* 50 (2): 249-258. Carlstrom, Gregg. October 24, 2010. “The Role of Awakening Councils.” *Al Jazeera* The role of Awakening councils | Investigative News | Al Jazeera

Carlstrom, Gregg. October 24, 2010. “The Role of Awakening Councils.” *Al Jazeera* The role of Awakening councils | Investigative News | Al Jazeera

Center for International Security and Cooperation. 2019. “The Badr Organization of Reconstruction and Development.” FSI | CISAC | MAPPINGMILITANTS CISAC - MMP: Badr Organization of Reconstruction and Development (stanford.edu)

Center for International and Security and Cooperation. 2020. “Kata’ib Hezbollah.” FSI | CISAC | MAPPINGMILITANTS CISAC - MMP: Kata’ib Hezbollah (stanford.edu)

Cigar, Norman Dr. 2015. "Iraq’s Shia Warlords and Their Militias: Political and Security Challenges and Options" Monographs, Books, and Publications. 450. https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/450

Clayton, Govinda and Andrew Thomson. 2014. “The Enemy of My Enemy is My Friend… The Dynamics of Self-Defense Forces in Irregular War: the Case of the Sons of Iraq.” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 37(11): 920-935.

Clayton, Govinda and Andrew Thomson. 2016. “Civilianizing Civil Conflict: Civilian Defense Militias and the Logic of Violence in Intrastate Conflict.” *International Studies Quarterly* 60 (3): 499-510.

CounterExtremism Project. “Badr Organization.” Badr Organization (counterextremism.com)

Dermer, Philip. July 2014. “The ‘Sons of Iraq’, Abandoned by their American Allies.” Wall Street Journal Europe.

Financial Tribune. “Iraq’s PMF Inducted into Security Forces.” March 10, 2018. Iraq’s PMF Inducted Into Security Forces | Financial Tribune

Gurbuz, Mustafa. 2017. “The Popular Mobilization Forces and Iraq’s Next Elections.” *Arab Center Washington DC* 1-7.

Habech, Mohamad. 2018. “Foreign-Backed Clients and legitimacy: the Political Development of Iraq’s Shiite Militias 2005-2018.” MA Thesis *Naval Postgraduate School* *Final Draft thesis 3 (dtic.mil)*

Harari, Michael. 2010. "Uncertain Future for the Sons of Iraq." *Institute for the Study of War* Backgrounder_SonsofIraq_0.pdf (understandingwar.org)
Heras, Nicholas. 2017. "Iraq's Fifth Column." *Middle East Institute Counterterrorism Series* PP2_Heras_IraqCT_0.pdf (mei.edu)
Hernandez, Nelson. June 10, 2006. "Iraqi Leader Charts Nation's Priorities: Rebuilding, Reconciliation Top List, but Analysts Warn of Political Deadlock." *The Washington Post.*
Katzman, Kenneth. June 4, 2009. "Iran's Activities and Influence in Iraq." *Congressional Research Service* ADA501453.pdf (dtic.mil)
Kirkpatrick, David. December 6, 2014. "Sunnis Fear Permanent Displacement From Iraqi Town." *New York Times* *Sunnis Fear Permanent Displacement From Iraqi Town - The New York Times (nytimes.com)*
Kuehl, Dale. 2010. "Unfinished Business: The Sons of Iraq and Political Reconciliation." Strategy Research Project. US Army War College. ADA521771.pdf (dtic.mil)
Levy, Ido. "Shia Militias and Exclusionary Politics in Iraq." 2019 Washington: Wiley Subscription Services, Inc, Middle East Policy. 26 (3): 123-133.
Londono, Ernesto. September 30, 2008. "For US and Sunni Allies, a Turning Point; Sons of Iraq Despair at Imminent Takeover Shiite Government." *The Washington Post.*
Loveday, Morris. 2016. "He Once Fought US Troops, Now Moqtada al-Sadr is Battling Iraq's Political System." *The Washington Post.*
Loveday, Morris. April 20, 2015. "Militiamen Hand Over Body Suspected to be that of Top Saddam Hussein Aide." *The Washington Post.*
Mansour, Renad. "More than Militias: Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces Are Here to Stay." *War on the Rocks* April 3, 2018. More Than Militias: Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces Are Here to Stay - War on the Rocks
Mansour, Renad and Faleh Jabar. 2017. "The Popular Mobilization Forces and Iraq's Future." *Carnegies Middle East Center* 1-42.
Middle East Center Reporting and Analysis. December 11, 2019. "A Defector From the Badr Organization in Iraq Details its Operations and His Story. A defector from the Badr Organization in Iraq details its operations and his story (midwest center.org)
"Militia." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary,* Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/militia. Accessed 5 Jul. 2021.
Mowle, Thomas. 2006. "Iraq's Militia Problem." *Global Politics and Strategy* 48(3): 41-58.
Najjar, Farah. November 15, 2017. "Iraq's Second Army: Who Are They, What Do They Want?" *Al Jazeera* Iraq's second army: Who are they, what do they want? | ISIL/ISIS News | Al Jazeera
News Agencies. July 29, 2003. "Saddam Mourns Sons' Deaths in New Tape." Al Jazeera Saddam mourns sons' deaths in new tape | News | Al Jazeera
Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction. "Sons of Iraq Program: Results are Uncertain and Financial Controls Were Weak." January 28, 2011. Sons of Iraq Program: Results Are Uncertain and Financial Controls Were Weak (fdlp.gov)
Parker, Ned. August 24, 2008. "Iraqi Government Seeks to Disband Sunni Fighters: Sons of Iraq under Arrest, Sent into Hiding." *Chicago Tribune.*
Parker, Ned and Saif Hameed. April 3, 2009. "The World: Sunni Paramilitary Leader Released from Jail. Charges are Dismissed Against a Sons of Iraq Figure Arrested as Part of an Apparent Move Against the Group." *Los Angeles Times.*
Parker, Nee and Usama Redha. March 2009. "Sons of Iraq Paramilitary Leader Arrested in Baghdad." *Los Angeles Times.*

Parker, Ned. November 10, 2008. “The Conflict in Iraq: A Weakened Mahdi Army, Iraqi Militia Struggles for Relevance, Cleric Muqtada Sadr’s Once Fearsome Mahdi Army is On the Run.” *Los Angeles Times.*

Peter, Tom. August 11, 2008. “After Setbacks, Sadr Redirects Mahdi Army.” *The Christian Science Monitor.*

Rached, Kardo and Ahmed Omar Bali. 2019. “Shia Armed Groups and the Future of Iraq.” *International Studies* 23 (1): 217-233.

Rahimi, Babak. 2010. “The Return of Muqtada al-Sadr and the Revival of the Mahdi Army.” *CTC Sentinel* 3(6): 8-10. CTCSentinel-Vol3Iss6-art3.pdf (usma.edu)

Ridolfo, Kathleen. “May 5, 2006. “Iraq: Initiatives on Armed Groups Raise Concerns.” *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty* Iraq: Initiatives On Armed Groups Raise Concerns (rferl.org)

Schwarz, Anthony. 2007. “Iraq’s Militias: the true threat to coalition success in Iraq.” 37 (1): 55. US Army War College.

Shashank, Bengali. “The World; Shiite Fighters Parade in Iraq; The Mahdi Army, which battled US Forces Amid Civil War, Reemerges in a Call to Counter ISIS Militants.” *Los Angeles Times* June 22, 2014.

Smyth, Phillip. “The Shita Militia Mapping Project.” *Washington Institute.* May 20, 2019. The Shia Militia Mapping Project | The Washington Institute

Smyth, Phillip. “Making Sense of Iraq’s PMF Arrests. *The Washington Institute* April 26, 2019. Making Sense of Iraq's PMF Arrests | The Washington Institute

Stanford University. November 26, 2017.“Mapping Militant Organizations: Mahdi Army.” Mahdi Army | Mapping Militant Organizations (stanford.edu)

Staniland, Paul. 2015. “Militias, Ideology, and the State.” Journal of Conflict Resolution 59(5): 770-793. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002715576749.

Steinberg, Guido. July 2017. “The Badr Organization: Iran’s Most Important Instrument in Iraq.” *German Institute for International and Security Affairs* Die Badr-Organisation - Iran’s Most Important Instrument in Iraq (swp-berlin.org)

Taha, Amir. 2019. “Turning Ex-Combatants into Sadris: Explaining the Emergence of the Mahdi Army.” *Middle Eastern Studies* 55(3): 357-373.

The Independent. “Police Refuse to Support Iraq PM’s Attacks on Mahdi Army.” *Independent Digital News and Media Limited* March 29, 2008.

UN Assistance Mission for Iraq. “Human Rights Report: January 1- February 2006.” Microsoft Word - HR Report Jan Feb 06 EN.doc (globalsecurity.org)

Wilbanks, Mark and Efraim Karsh. 2010. “How the Sons of Iraq Stabilized Iraq.” *Middle East Quarterly* 17(4):57-70.

Wright, Robin and Peter Baker. December 5, 2006. “Iraqi Shiite Leader Speaks Bluntly in Washington; Head of Key Parliamentary Bloc Calls US Anti-Insurgent Strikes ‘Not Hard Enough.” *The Washington Post.*