



IRAQ'S TWO RIVERS

W WARSAW
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— SPECIAL REPORT —

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Executive Summary

- To those with tenacity to remain hopeful of a peaceful and stable political-operational situation in Iraq, taking seriously the cold and brutal geopolitical realities could benefit from some creative thinking. Incomplete information is a given in policymaking decisions. Fortunately, the solutions need not be perfect – just good enough.
- Recalling Hashd's inception with as-Sistani's non-sectarian fatwa, in the backdrop of ISIL infamously storming Mosul, and al-Maliki's Decree 301. Hashd, with the help of Soleimani, incorporated existing Shia paramilitary groups, namely Badr Organisation, Kata'ib Hezbollah, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq, and Saraya as-Salam, as well as thousands of individual cross-sectarian volunteers and smaller Sunni, Christian, Yazidi, Assyrian, and other militia groups.
- Both the US and Iran were tacitly contemplating what comes after the fight against ISIL before even starting it, and accordingly sought to influence political and operational directions in this. To this end, the IRGC IO and MOIS, at times at odds with one another, had in the meantime swayed former CIA informants, and cultivated close relationships with Cabinet members or those close to Cabinet members, as well as those paramilitary groups within Hashd.
- Hashd's composition and political place among agencies began to change as it was operating alongside the ISF and Peshmerga on the front lines against ISIL, especially in Mosul. Some earlier thoughts of what it ought to be were expressed in the unpassed National Guard Law. Then, namely Executive Order 91 of 2016 and the Popular Mobilisation Commission Law formally incorporated Hashd as an ISF agency, and therein making subject to the same regulations, including demand for depoliticisation.
- Voting in both the Kurdish Referendum as well as Parliamentary Elections soon affirmed that bridging the gap between reform and implementation is not simple. Though Executive Order 85 of 2018 made the most comprehensive restructuring thus far, parties in Tahlaf al-Fatah as political wings of the more pro-IRGC Hashd subunits managed to secure considerable numbers of MPs in the Majlis, second only to as-Sadr's Sairoon bloc that undertook a 'king-maker' role. However, the votes did also reveal shifting moods among the public and inner political circles away from sectarianism, a tad closer to secularism, but mostly, being pro-Iraqi.

- Setting up incremental steps was most clearly needed, especially after Masjedi and al-Muhandis encouraged Hashd subunits in Nineveh Governorate to ignore direct orders from the PM for a subsequent time. Following on from this, Executive Orders 237, 328, and 331 of 2019, were the most rigorous set of reforms, including replacing Hashd subunit names for 'Brigades', linkage to the JOC, and an array of feats bringing command directly accountable to the PM. In the meantime, however, al-Muhandis had been centralising decision-making in Hashd to himself and Kata'ib Hezbollah, but also by means of coercion and blocking others who were intended to have more to say.
- The fallout of building tensions within Hashd were seemed to flare upon the onset of mass protests from late 2019, namely with the tensely built up fault lines between Saraya as-Salam and Asa'ib, as well as al-Muhandis and al-Fayyadh, which peaked with the drone strike on convoy carrying Soleimani and al-Muhandis. Relative de-escalation followed shuttling from Switzerland and a non-binding Resolution in the Majlis that urged an expulsion of foreign troops that was almost entirely abstained by Sunni and Kurdish MPs, but contradicting pressure from Shia groups and the US made the situation remain tense.
- Turning points began slowly in this backdrop with the Atabat's refusal of a 'Muhandis Core' appointee, a surprise visit of Ghaani after which these groups doubled down on implementing that Majlis Resolution, and one of Mahdi's outgoing orders which brought the Atabat directly under the PM. With al-Kadhimi's first reforms, including the release of unjustly held protesters, reinstating the CTS head, as well as some of al-Fayyadh's administrative reforms in Hashd, these turning points then quickly began to unravel with arrest warrants of those violent against protesters, a recent raid on a Kata'ib Hezbollah compound, and a continuing series of security incidents around the US Embassy in Baghdad, which are causing a tense stand-off that has revealed as much as it did invoke questions.
- Iraq's multifaceted conundrums seem to maintain a duality about them. There are few places where local conflict reflects changing tendencies so acutely not just in the MENA region, but dynamics on the world stage. It is up to us to do our part where we can to ensure these dynamics see that the worst in humanity can be overcome with the best in humanity.

Introduction

Albeit noticeable in most conflict or post-conflict areas, the operational developments “in the field” that influence the political situation and vice versa seem to be persistently acute in Iraq. In some ways this link would seem highly sensitive and responsive, particularly where it directly affects both the US and Iran, and in others, there seems to be a time delay or even detachment, obscuring the picture.

The degrees to which the various paramilitary groups, namely from the Popular Mobilisation Forces, or ‘*Hashd ash-Shaabi*’, have been merged with or maintain autonomy within the **Iraqi Security Forces** (ISF) has a direct relation to the de facto political situation in the Iraqi parliament, known as the ‘Council of Representatives’, or ‘*Majlis an-Nuwab*’. Hashd has never been a monolithic structure¹. Dynamics between the Hashd subgroups have changed over time, as have their links to political factions in the Majlis. This is pertinent particularly to the question of the extent of US and NATO forces remaining stationed in Iraq in the backdrop of rhetoric from the Majlis, as it does regarding the ties of political blocs and Hashd groups with Iran.

Most recently, increasing proportions of Hashd’s operationality had been centralised in the **Kata’ib Hezbollah** unit² by late 2019. Now in the absence of then-IRGC Quds Force General **Qassim Soleimani** and the Hashd’s Deputy Commander **Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis**, Hashd is likely undergoing an internal power struggle to fill in the

spot. Anticipating how will be key in figuring out potential security-sector reform (SSR), for which the timing is advantageous, including by restructuring and making power-sharing agreements. For disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programmes, however, the timing is not yet advantageous³, and, as an extraordinary primer from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy elaborates, it might be wise for Hashd to be “*honoured and contained*” in this context⁴.

The situation in Iraq is ready for these kinds outside the box but realistic approaches. Not least because as recently as on 07.05.2020 that the newest PM of Iraq, **Mustafa al-Kadhimi**, was sworn in⁵, but as a hopeful piece in Foreign Affairs suggests, because the situations within Iran and the US are also more convenient now⁶ than they have been in a while. Iraq is increasingly tired of being the central chessboard of confrontation, exploitation, and espionage between the US and Iran, which the eye-opening, anonymously provided trove of intelligence reports published by the Intercept and NYT shed some light onto their unscrupulous extent⁷.

What is different now is that it seems to be clearer that Iraq will not put up with it indefinitely⁸. Such a notion gives hope that other international partners, such as Poland, or the EU, can play a more savvy and precision-orientated role, but most importantly, a positive and constructive role.

1. Renad Mansour, The Popular Mobilization Forces and Iraq’s Future, Carnegie Middle East Center, 28.04.2017

2. Michael Knights, Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 03.03.2020, page vii

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Rudaw, Mustafa al-Kadhimi sworn in as prime minister of Iraq, Rudaw, 07.05.2020

6. Hamdi Malik, Iraq Can Now Wrest Its Sovereignty From Iran, Foreign Affairs, 25.05.2020

7. James Risen et al., The Iran Cables, 1. A Spy Complex Revealed, The Intercept, NYT, 18.11.2019

8. Hadi Fathallah, Iraq’s Governance Crisis and Food Insecurity, Carnegie Endowment, Sada, 04.06.2020

Recap

For those which could use a little recap; Iraq's grappling with de facto independence of a sovereign state is entangled with its political instability, and this is unfortunately the norm rather than the exception.

There could be one pivotal political-operational moment from which it is worth revisiting in particular. On 04.06.2014, with the momentum its abhorrent brutality that shocked the world, ISIL launched an offensive onto Mosul. Despite the ISF being in a defending position, better equipped, and with larger numbers, the terror and misinformation from ISIL's onslaught caused the ISF to infamously withdraw, leaving behind a considerable civilian population in Iraq's second largest city and US military equipment. By 10.06.2014, Mosul had fallen to ISIL, and as ISIL was also seizing Tikrit, and attacking other cities, then-Iraqi PM **Nuri al-Maliki**, or Abu Isra as he is known by those close to him⁹, announced the already obvious emergency status with **Cabinet Decree 301** on 11.06.2014, the next day¹⁰. It enabled him to "*organise the volunteers and to provide them with necessary logistic and financial support*"¹¹, building from the pre-existing ideas, such as the 'Sons of Iraq' and 'Saraya ad-Difa ash-Shaabi, based on existing sectarian orientated militia.

On 13.06.2014, as al-Kadhimi wrote in Al Monitor, the '*righteous jihad fatwa*' was issued¹² by Grand Ayatollah **Ali as-Sistani**, Iraq's leading Shia cleric. It encouraged physically capable Iraqis to volunteer and to join the ISF to defend

"*their country and their people and their holy places*"¹³. The fatwa addressed all Iraqis in a refreshingly non-sectarian but national voice for Sunnis, Shias, and Christians alike, though more Shia Iraqis responded. Not coincidentally, Soleimani was in Baghdad at this time.

On 15.06.2014, Obama authorised US forces in the MENA region to remobilise to Iraq in the fight against ISIL, as well as in a train and advise capacity. That same day, however, the al-Hashd ash-Shaabi were also formally announced by National Security Advisor **Falih al-Fayyad**¹⁴, at the direction of al-Maliki. Its formation's administrative body would be the **Popular Mobilisation Committee**, which the National Security Advisor would head.

To uphold this non-sectarian angle, as-Sistani deliberately maintained some distance between himself and Hashd, and referred to their members as "*volunteers*" in his dialogue. Upon its formation, in addition to the tens of thousands of volunteers, Hashd constituted of some already existing militia groups, many of which had been 'Special Groups', directly established by the IRGC Quds Force. Soleimani's supporting or instructing generally modelled after the IRGC's own Basij forces, and basing from Hezbollah and pro-Assad militia in Syria hitherto.

The largest subgroup of Hashd in numbers was and remains the 'Badr Organisation', or **Munathama Badr**, which is both a political party as well as an armed militia. It was established back in 1982 as the armed wing of **Supreme**

9. Ali Khedery, Why we stuck with Maliki — and lost Iraq, Washington Post, 03.07.2014

10. Michael Knights, Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 03.03.2020, page 3

11. Ibid.

12. Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, Will Sistani be able to control popular mobilization forces?, Al-Monitor, 12.03.2015

13. Ibid.

14. **ني عوط طه الم ق ف د ت م ي ظ ن ت ل ي ب ع ش ل د ش ح ل ا ي ر ي د م ل ي ك ش ت ب ر م ا ي ك ل ا م ا ل : ي ن ط و ل ا م ا ل ر ا ش ت س م , ز و ي ن ة ي ر م و س ل**, Al Sumaria TV, 15.06.2014

Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), based in Iran during the Iran-Iraq War and fought against Saddam's forces. Though Badr and SCIRI separated in 2003, or more effectually in 2009, they maintain some links by remaining in the same coalition in the Majlis. Many Badr members joined Iraq's **Ministry of Interior's** more brutal units controlled by SCIRI, such as the Wolf Brigades. Badr's Secretary General, **Hadi al-Amiri**, serves as a Majlis MP and was Minister for Transport at the time. Badr always maintained a special interest in the Diyala and Salah ad-Din regions¹⁵.

The most lethal subgroup, however, is the 'League of the Righteous', or **Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq**. It was founded by its Secretary General, **Qais Khazali**, with the help of the IRGC Quds Force¹⁶. After he was removed from the Mahdi Army in 2004, Khazali's partial goal in setting up Asa'ib was also to undermine the movement led by **Muqtada as-Sadr**¹⁷. Asa'ib orchestrated relentless attacks during the sectarian violence, including the coordinated attack on 03.10.2007 that injured Poland's then-Ambassador to Iraq, General broni **Edward Pietrzyk**. However, upon being part of Hashd's formation in 2014, Asa'ib set up a political wing, the **as-Sadiqoun Bloc**, intending to run in the Parliamentary Elections.

Furthermore, the 'Party of God Brigades', or **Kata'ib Hezbollah**, seemed to have a role that resembled other branches of Hezbollah elsewhere, particularly in Lebanon, but adjusted for Iraq's situation. Kata'ib Hezbollah is a designated terrorist organisation by Japan, the UAE, and the US. With the onset of the US invasion in 2003, Kata'ib Hezbollah was founded and led by Jamal al-Ibrahimi, also referred to as Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. A dual national of Iraq and Iran, al-Muhandis was not coincidentally the Deputy Chair of the entire Hashd structure that also closely cooperated with Soleimani.

During Hashd's formation, Kata'ib Hezbollah's numbers reached about half of those of Badr, but Kata'ib Hezbollah's leading figures had disproportionately more influence in decision-making in Hashd.

The Mahdi Army's successor was remobilised as the 'Peace Brigades' or **Saraya as-Salam**, which was an interesting choice by as-Sadr. Notably, Saraya as-Salam retains a Sadrist-orientated mindset of Iraqi nationalism. Having amiable relations with Iran was okay, but it came with assertion of Iraq's sovereignty always maintained priority, even though as-Sadr himself spent years in Iran. From the get-go, as-Sadr found himself at odds with many of the other subgroup leaders, noting that as-Sadr fell out with namely Khazali as he criticised Iran's excessive influence in Iraq. However, as-Sadr's popularity increased in the chaotic immediate post-2003 aftermath, providing public services to the poor, as well as the Mahdi Army's ferocity in fighting against US forces.

Other founding subgroups – the 'Martyr Brigades' or **Kata'ib Sayyid ash-Shuhada**, the 'Hezbollah Movement Nobles' or **Harakat Hezbollah an-Nujaba**, the 'Brigades of Imam Ali' or **Kata'ib al-Imam Ali**, and 'Army of Imam Brigades' or **Kata'ib Jund al-Imam** – each had their varying degrees of autonomy, mixes in the composition of its members, operational intensity across the border in Syria, if at all, reliance on Iran, and relationships with one another.

As the war intensified, prospects of ISIL marching on Ramadi and eventually Baghdad became more worrying. Northwards, the **Peshmerga** in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) were mobilising alongside with smaller Assyrian or Christian groups. Other already existing militia groups, however, namely Sunni extremist groups that fought against the Shia groups that became part of Hashd, were threatened, as many Sunnis

15. CEDOCA, Country of Origin Information Report Iraq Targeting of Individuals, EAOS, March 2019, page 189

16. Mapping Militant Organizations. "Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq." Stanford University. Last modified July 2018.

17. Ian Black, Qassem Suleimani: commander of Quds force, puppeteer of the Middle East, Guardian, 16.06.2014

also joined Hashd, namely from Salah ad-Din, including the al-Jabour tribe members. Around this time, about 150 000 fighters were included in Hashd, although clear distinction of a Hashd member has been difficult to pinpoint. Neverthe-

less, there was a noticeably larger portion of Shia members, but moreover, a reluctance to arm and fund its Sunni members, allowing the distrust to persist.

Having contemplated what comes after before even starting

On 26.06.2014, the ISF finally began its first counterattacks. Albeit unsuccessfully, these started with Tikrit, hoping to reclaim territory lost from ISIL for the first time¹⁸, namely Tikrit University and surrounding areas. Besides organisational assistance, the IRGC directly intervened in Iraq as well, and by the end of June 2014, had already assumed their presence in some bases in Baghdad. To be sure, it is in Iran's interest to eliminate ISIL, most of all in Iraq, as well as to ensure sectarian clashes do not rip Iraq apart. But it is no exaggeration to say it was always a higher priority to ensure factions loyal to Iran remain in leading or at least influential positions in Iraq.

a local Iraqi asset that was known as “Donnie Brasco” to the US swiftly became “Source 134992” to Iran

In contrast to the more brutal application of violence the IRGC Quds Force resorted to, **Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS)** was more pragmatic and calculative¹⁹. It kept in mind the end of the war against ISIL from its

onset²⁰, though is often overruled by the **IRGC Intelligence Organisation (IO)**, as it is more ideologically aligned to the core in Tehran. Nevertheless, MOIS and IRGC IO operated in parallel. As the US withdrew in 2011, many CIA informants were cast aside, and they feared what would become of them. A described example includes **a local Iraqi asset that was known as “Donnie Brasco” to the US swiftly became “Source 134992” to Iran**²¹. Like him, many switched sides and began informing MOIS or the IRGC IO, and with them, know-how and experience of what it is being like an informant for the CIA in Iraq, sensitive documents, information regarding safehouses, designated meeting places and hotels, other informants, and training manuals²².

Meanwhile, President **Fuad Masum** made appeals for the US to return and increase operability in Iraq against ISIL. However, the Obama Administration did not see al-Maliki's policies favourably, creating a rift between a considerable part of the Iraqi government. In essence, US support without replacing al-Maliki, who is closer to Iran, was unlikely.

Anticipating the change of PM to likely be to **Hadi al-Abadi**, the then-Ambassador of Iran to Iraq **Hassan Danaiefar** called a meeting with his staff. Although, Abadi would be more favoura-

18. Sherlock Ruth, Hague urges unity as Iraq launches first counter-attack, The Telegraph, 26.06.2014

19. Murtaza Hussain, The Iran Cables, 2. Iran's Shadow War on ISIS, The Intercept, NYT, 18.11.2019

20. Ibid.

21. James Risen et al., The Iran Cables, 1. A Spy Complex Revealed, The Intercept, NYT, 18.11.2019

22. Ibid.

ble to the US, the meeting brought comfort to the staff as they went over which Iraqi Ministers were still much closer to Iran²³ or than to Sadrists, including **Ibrahim al-Jafari** or **Adil Abdul Mahdi**, as well as Bayan Jabr Solagh, also referred to as **Baqir Jabr az-Zubeidi**, who would soon take on the Ministry of Transport after al-Amiri.

Elsewhere, Iran saw themselves as being able to count on the support of various lower level and some Sunni Iraqi officials, or alternatively, those who are close to Iraqi officials that meet with US officials. As then-US Ambassador to Iraq **Stuart Jones** met frequently with **Salim al-Jabouri**, the Sunni Majlis Speaker's top political advisor, likely unbeknownst to him, was also 'Source 134832', and alongside his reporting he also encouraged Iran to foster closer relations with Jabouri to prevent him from getting closer to the US, as at times he would make hasty decisions²⁴.

The pressure both the US and Iran placed on Iraqi officials, through the various direct and indirect methods, was often irreconcilable with one another, causing difficult situations. With hindsight, it would seem that several decisions taken at the start of the counter-offensives against ISIL in some way foreshadow what come after, because that is what they were based on. As ISIL seized Makhmour²⁵ by 07.08.2014, support from MOIS in the form of intelligence support and ammunition had already been present²⁶.

The next day, on 08.08.2014, the US began air-strikes on ISIL targets in Iraq, initially to halt the ISIL advance towards Erbil from the west. With these, Peshmerga's first victory against ISIL started on 10.08.2014, led by Kurdish commander Staff Colonel **Srud Salih**, at the **Black Tiger military base** by Makhmour, and supported by PKK fighters²⁷; the first instance in which both the US and Iran helped in different ways, making huge differences on the battlefield.

Masum finally appointed Abadi to become Iraqi PM on 11.08.2014, and the Majlis approved it a month later. Nevertheless, a cable dated 25.09.2014 indicates that Soleimani went to az-Zubeidi's office²⁸, asking a favour to allow Iran to use Iraqi airspace to access Syria, to which he agreed, even though the US pressured Iraqi officials repeatedly to halt this. Nevertheless, on 17.10.2014, establishing the **Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve** (CJTF-OIR) formalised "ongoing military actions" against ISIL. Later, on 03.12.2014, Global Coalition to Counter ISIL was styled in Brussels. Abadi inherited a challenging situation of overcoming sectarianism in the war, whilst balancing the militaries of both Iran and the US in Iraq. The increased presence and surveillance activity of the US and Iran were seen by each other as threatening.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Zmnako Ismael, In Pictures: The Kurdish frontline in Iraq, Al Jazeera, 13.08.2014

26. Murtaza Hussain, The Iran Cables, 2. Iran's Shadow War on ISIS, The Intercept, NYT, 18.11.2019

27. Zmnako Ismael, In Pictures: The Kurdish frontline in Iraq, Al Jazeera, 13.08.2014

28. Ibid.



SOURCE: TASNIM NEWS AGENCY

Hashd's changing place among agencies

First and foremost for Iraq, the need to figure out Hashd's place both in legal and political terms became evident. Early attempts include the proposal for a **National Guard Law** was being drafted, and it on 27.01.2015 it was submitted to cabinet. On 03.02.2015, it was approved as a legislative proposal, and a month later, on 02.03.2015, it was presented to the Majlis²⁹, the same day that the second offensive into Tikrit began³⁰. It put forward ideas on how the Hashd might fit as an entity outside the pre-existing security ministries, as the ISF and Hashd were fighting in Tikrit and elsewhere, but still were reliant on CJTF-OIR airstrikes before advancing. The ideas included guides on provincial-level recruitment,

directorates, and limiting the force capabilities to that of a light infantry brigade, the National Guard Law was not passed. Whilst Sunni groups favoured the structure being more local, namely on the provincial level, Shia groups favoured increased centralisation and direct command of the Iraqi PM. This, as well as other unpassed legislation pieces or unfulfilled reform attempts, are worth highlighting for hints of what some of the thinking or attitudes look like and evolve over time.

Meanwhile, on 07.04.2015, Abadi publicly asserted that the Hashd units are to be formally placed under the direct command of the PM of Iraq³¹. A noticeable effect was that this indicated

29. Michael Knights, Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 03.03.2020, page 5

30. Al Jazeera, Iraq launches offensive to take back Tikrit from ISIS, Al Jazeera, 02.03.2015

31. Rod Nordland, After Victory Over ISIS in Tikrit, Next Battle Requires a New Template, New York Times, 07.04.2015

intent for those units to be legitimised³². It put into question their exact status in relation to the ISF, though it was likely already assumed for it not to be on the same level. Another effect was that Abadi would transfer the command to him and the position of PM over al-Amiri and the position of National Security Advisor and the Ministry of Interior of Iraq. Implementation, attaining sufficient agreement, or actual restructuring of the chain of command, however, was another matter.

Moreover, as with any multifaced organisations, the underlying internal disputes in Hashd that existed from its inception were a can that was kicked down the road if there was little sense in resolving them immediately. Indeed, one of the earlier factors that affected all of these groups were signs that Fayyad, still as the Chair and thus overarching leader of Hashd, was at times at odds with al-Muhandis³³. Furthermore, signs that al-Muhandis began impeding efforts that would give decision-making abilities to others began to show, where, for instance, on 17.02.2016, Abadi appointed a second Deputy Chair of Hashd, retired Lieutenant General **Mohsen Kaabi**, who withdrew a few weeks later in dubious circumstances, primarily from intimidation³⁴.

As the siege of Fallujah was underway, it was soon to be followed by preparations to retake Hit and other cities, building from experiences in Tikrit. However, operations in Tikrit, Salah ad-Din, and others included Hashd members as the local population was mixed Sunni and Shia. Even then, accounts of human rights abuses and looting by Shia members against Sunni communities was noted, with the regions around Jurf

ash-Sakhar being a notorious example³⁵. This turned the sweetness of advances against ISIL into bitterness. MOIS was angered by Soleimani's social media promotion of the IRGC Quds Force violent activities that caused resentment among Sunni communities³⁶, fearing it would squander progress made and drive them to look to the US or even Israel for support.

Abadi decided to not let this slide unnoticed. On 24.02.2016, Abadi issued **Executive Order 91 of 2016**, formally strove *“to restructure and reorganise the Popular Mobilisation Commission and the forces subordinate to it”*, as an attempt to make Hashd compatible with Iraq's Constitution, where Article 9 prohibits militias outside of the ISF. Hence, Article 1 of Executive Order 91 explicitly states that Hashd is an element of the IAF, Articles 4 and 5 reassure that accordingly Hashd would be subject to the same regulations and obligations, for the first time³⁷. In this, **Article 6 of Executive Order 91 of 2016 noted that Hashd and its subgroups ought to be depoliticised**, and that links to political groups or parties are to be cut³⁸.

Article 6 of Executive Order 91 of 2016 noted that Hashd and its subgroups ought to be depoliticised

Sensing the general public was still dissatisfied with the lacking progress on this and other reforms, including on employment, public services, replacing corrupt politicians,

32. Ibid.

33. Mustafa Saadoun, Disagreements among PMU leaders stir up conflict between factions, Al Monitor, 23.12.2019

34. [YouTube], Haider al-Abadi, **مجاهدي يدافعون عن العراق**, interview, 03.05.2018, link: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=XbhR87J47m8>

35. Amnesty International, Iraq: Turning a Blind Eye – The Arming of the Popular Mobilization Units, Amnesty International, 2017

36. James Risen et al., The Iran Cables, 1. A Spy Complex Revealed, The Intercept, NYT, 18.11.2019

37. Michael Knights, Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 03.03.2020, page 7

38. Ibid., page 8

on 30.04.2016, as-Sadr organised mass peaceful demonstrations, making it the subsequent time in a couple months. Meanwhile, as Abadi grappled with the reforms, on 07.06.2016, al-Kadhimi became Director of the Iraqi **National Intelligence Service** (NIS), as part of Abadi making attempts at reigning in control over operability. The move was timely for planning, as on 16.10.2016, the operation to retake Mosul began dubbed ‘*We are coming, Nineveh*’, or ‘*Qadimun Ya Naynawa*’³⁹, led by Staff Lieutenant General **Abdul Amir Yarallah**. The Peshmerga moved in from a north-eastern angle, and the ISF from elsewhere.

Hashd’s military presence⁴⁰ in such an important Sunni city in a fight against Sunni extremists was a headache for everyone. Hashd maintains a local **Hashd Commission Office** for each governorate of Iraq, except Anbar and Nineveh⁴¹. This made the approach of **Hashd Operations Command** in these governorates towards local militias that were mobilised, motivated to take back their lost homeland or protect their rights, a bit different. Some groups joined Hashd, whilst others operated in tandem with Hashd units, the ISF, or Peshmerga, or the coalition in general, which made it less clear exactly which was which.

Some Assyrian groups, namely the **Nineveh Plain Protection Units**⁴², joined Hashd directly, not to be confused with the more Syriac **Nineveh Plain Forces** that formed separately, as did some Christian groups, such as **Dwekh Nawsha**. Interestingly, the phenomenon of ‘Tribal Mobilisation Militia’, or **Hashd al-Asha’iri**, began emerging separately from Hashd ash-Shaabi, which was

supported by the US via the Ministry of Defence of Iraq. These included local Sunni militias from the Sunni Shammar Tribe⁴³. Elsewhere, some Yazidi groups, such as **Sinjar Resistance Units** and **Êzîdxan Women’s Units**, coordinated with the Peshmerga and wider coalition⁴⁴. Local Shia groups, however, had the closest ties to Hashd, and some underwent immediate integration, such as the Shabak Militia, known better as **Quwwat Sahl Ninawa**, which emerged with the help of Badr.

A month in and noting the dynamics between these groups and who they listen to, on 26.11.2016, the **Popular Mobilisation Commission Law**, as no. 40 of 2016, was put forward in the Majlis. Masum signed it, colloquially referred to as the ‘Hashd Law’, on 18.12.2016 making it a swift follow up⁴⁵ on Executive Order 91, and it entered into force on 26.12.2016. It has an interesting feature that backdates to Decree 301 of 11.06.2014, making it legally-binding from that date⁴⁶. However, overall, the Popular Mobilisation Commission Law carrying pretty much the same elements as Executive Order 91 makes it a reinforcement, also mentioning the need of standardisation of pay among Hashd members to match those in the ISF. Inter alia, standardising pay in the ‘Hashd Law’ soon became a **contention point between al-Muhandis and al-Fayyadh as it would impede preferential treatment of certain Hashd subunits over others**, namely financially, and this began to noticeably further increase tensions.

It is worth noting that the presence of the militias of Turkey, which has and continues to conduct

39. Al Sumaria, «أيوني اي نو م داق»، *أي م س ت أيوني ري رح ت تاي لم ع ل ع ق ل ط ي د ا ب ع ل ا*, Al Sumaria, 17.10.2016

40. L’Observer, Bataille de Mossoul : qui participe à la reconquête ?, L’Observer, 17.10.2016

41. Michael Knights, Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 03.03.2020, page 39

42. Syriac International News Agency, NPF declaring their participation to Mosul offensive, Syriac International News Agency, 18.10.2016

43. Erica Gaston, Sunni Tribal Forces, Global Public Policy Institute, 30.08.2017

44. The Independent, All-female Yazidi militia launches operation for revenge on Isis in northern Iraq, The Independent, 14.11.2016

45. Paul Antonopoulos, Law passes making the PMU a part of Iraq’s national forces, Al Masdar News, 19.12.2016

46. Michael Knights, Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 03.03.2020, page 8



SOURCE: COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG

air raids against PKK fighters in the KRI, as well as the militaries of Iran and the US are all in overlapping proximity to one another⁴⁷. Even so, as the fighting in the Battle of Mosul continued, on 07.06.2017, Barzani met with PUK and KDP leaders as well as with other KRI parties. The meeting confirmed an upcoming independence referendum for KRI, which was met with worry from Abadi and other Cabinet members.

On 10.07.2017, ISF forces captured Mosul, although some smaller level fighting continued in the outskirts. Still, at this point, it would seem that although Hashd is recognised by the state, although coordination was possible, its subgroups decision to operate are with autonomy. Their ideological affiliations seemed to be, at their simplest, describable as either more aligned towards either the IRGC, Sadrists, or as-Sistani.

What was changing was that the additional groups that began forming in the meantime even during the battle, joining Hashd or co-opting on a more local level amidst the restructuring. Abadi made official strides, namely on 15.07.2017, to bring the new additions to Hashd local to the Nineveh Plains, and namely the Quwwat Sahl Ninawa, under control of Iraqi Government, would supposedly extend to the Tribal Mobilisation Militia as well. Given that this was after the fight, supposedly as not to interfere in operational swiftness, the thoughts of the leaders of these groups on this could vary, and there were no drastic immediate changes. Each was figuring out the hierarchy, their relations and where they fit with the other groups, where they do not, as well as tightness with the centralised command.

47. Nabil Mohammed Salim, Foreign Military Presence in Iraq, Making Policies, 11.07.2018

Voting amidst not-depoliticised armed factions

The KRI hoped for greater appreciation for sacrifices in the campaign against ISIL in the form of increased autonomy and recognition, which in their view was not fulfilled. Not long after the ISF and Peshmerga shared victories, tensions began mounting. Despite Abadi's urges to refrain, the Independence Referendum was held on 25.09.2017, with an overwhelming 92.7% of those voting being in favour. Whilst its characterisation was non-binding, the tone was that intent was to make it binding.

As tensions mounted, and having ignored a deadline to withdraw, on 15.10.2017, the ISF and Hashd together attacked the Peshmerga in the Kirkuk region. Makhmour had been lost again, but this time, to the ISF, which was supported by Iran that had previously helped the Peshmerga to reclaim their first victory from ISIL. The ISF with Hashd continued to seize about 30% of territory from the KRI. To resolve the brief Iraqi-Kurdish conflict, the KRI reluctantly accepted the decision of annulling the referendum's binding claim.

The international approach via the EU had been planning and finally ensued a new angle. The EU Advisory Mission in support of security sector reform in Iraq, or as referred to its shorthand, the EUAM Iraq. It was established on 17.10.2017, and formally began on 22.11.2017 its operationality in Baghdad⁴⁸, seemingly in a timely manner. Being orbital around SSR initiatives, it is characteristic of a more post-conflict mission, recognising that the war against ISIL draws down, the need for reforms to help ease tensions in the aftermath of the post-referendum clashes is imperative.

Having observed with worry the post-ISIL tensions, as-Sistani made an appeal to disarm and join political process that was positively received. Coming into the new year, the 2018 Parliamentary Elections were already widely anticipated by this time. It was clear the opportunities for realignments to reflect shifting moods also underlined what is at stake with the political decisions.

Having previously led the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), a rebrand of the SICRI, the departure of Ammar al-Hakim due to it being too pro-Iranian sent signals to others still on the fence on this. The remaining ISCI members however sought to get closer to the newly formed 'Conquest Alliance' instead, or Tahlaf al-Fatah, led by al-Amiri. With the old guard of the ISCI, Tahlaf al-Fatah also includes Asa'ib's As-Sadiqoun Bloc, Badr, and 2 smaller parties. It is no exaggeration to say that Tahlaf al-Fatah is therefore in essence the political wing of the more pro-Iranian Hashd Brigades, including Kata'ib Hezbollah and Kata'ib al-Imam Ali.

The first main split occurred on 15.01.2018 with Tahlaf al-Fatah separating from the 'Victory Coalition' or Tahlaf an-Nasr, due to incompatibility of approaches, about a day after attempting to run together⁴⁹. It may have been a means to dip the toe into the water and check its temperature, which as-Sadr and others criticised immediately⁵⁰. Tahlaf an-Nasr interestingly includes Abadi's Islamic Dawa Party, which of course is also al-Maliki's party, who ran against his successor, but also the newly established Ataa Movement led by al-Fayyadh, as both Chairman of the Hashd and National Security Advisor.

48. EUAM Iraq, EUAM starts work in Baghdad, EEAS, 23.11.2017

49. The New Arab, Iraqi militias and PM Abadi to contest general election separately, The New Arab, 15.01.2018

50. Institute for the Study of War, 2018 Iraqi Election Updates, Institute for the Study of War, 12.02.2018

As-Sadr sought to mobilise his following, and on 25.01.2018, the Sairoon bloc was formed⁵¹, which set up an alliance with the Iraqi Communist Party⁵². This was based largely on their pre-existing ties in organising mass demonstrations against insufficient addresses regarding socio-economic problems. Iran criticised as-Sadr's choice as a shift towards secularism. As-Sadr himself would not be eligible to run for office, and as such, his role would be that of kingmaker.

In the second main split, on 29.01.2018, al-Hakim announces National Wisdom Trend, or Tayar al-Hikma al-Watani, separated from from Tahlaf an-Nasr. More so than the first split, al-Hakim establishing Hikma more suggests Abadi was increasingly struggling to favourably balance the various groupings. The 6 other parties soon followed and joined Hikma also wished to appeal to the younger generation over the older, and importantly, towards a more secular and nationalist approach for Iraq.

The way different factions approached the KRI with regard to reconciliation was key, as the PUK and KDP traditionally have had enough votes to sway the direction, but not enough of course to choose it. Most of the volatile shifts was done between Shia parties and groups, where Kurdish and Sunni groups remained rather stable and observant, hoping to read the Shia group dynamics before making a stance into the coalition forming.

Meanwhile, ISF operations to clean up ISIL resurgent 'White Flags' presence often used Hashd factions to secure interests. With this, Hashd factions with political wings sought to promote their successes against ISIL as a means

of legitimisation, and Hashd's political counterparts sought to exploit their fight against ISIL to garner support. For instance, on 24.02.2018, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated outside Asa'ib headquarters. Camera footage shows him as the only casualty, but Asa'ib claimed 3 of their members had been killed⁵³, suggesting claims of their sacrifices could be exaggerated to this end.

On 01.03.2018, considerable parts of the Majlis reiterated demands for withdrawal of foreign troops, and requested a timeline⁵⁴. However, other MPs, namely from Kurdish and Sunni governorates, indicated they would like US and UN protection during the ballot casting for vulnerable regions. On 03.03.2018, the Majlis was debating the annual budget whilst considering the debt, but refuted to give the KRI's traditional allocation. The same day, however, the Majlis passed a provincial election reform to include the Kirkuk region⁵⁵.

In this backdrop, on 08.03.2018, Abadi issued Executive Order 85 of 2018, which was probably the most comprehensive Hashd reform undertaking since, though it too is only 3 pages in length⁵⁶. Most notably, it brings back the notion of having a second Deputy Chair. Moreover, it reiterates in Article 1 the need for a unique rank system that can be somewhat comparable to the remainder of ISF units, namely that a "*fighter*" would be the equivalent of a lieutenant or above, and that a "*volunteer*" refers to the more starting ranks⁵⁷. Yet, in this way, Hashd also remains a unit unique from the others. However, Article 2 seems to be key. Besides mentioning insignia and uniform, it adds a detailed definition of Hashd's structure, as well as obligatory criteria for Hashd

51. *قائمة الحركات السياسية في العراق*, Iraqi Communist Party, 26.01.2018

52. It might be worth noting that the word "communist" there may not have the exact same connotations as it does elsewhere, especially here in Poland

53. The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, Spotlight on Global Jihad (February 22-28, 2018), 01.03.2018

54. Reuters, Iraqi parliament demands timeline for foreign troop withdrawal, Reuters, 01.03.2018

55. Musings on Iraq [Blog], Iraq's Provincial Elections Set For Dec 2018, Includes Kirkuk, 06.03.2018

56. Michael Knights, Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 03.03.2020, page 9

57. Ibid., page 10



SOURCE: FARS NEWS AGENCY

members, that makes it consistent with those for other ISF members, including an exemption detail to not exclude those who contributed prior to this order being passed⁵⁸. Moreover, as a re-affirmation that Hashd's Commission, led by a Chair, only has those given to him by the PM, is asserted in Article 5.

Notwithstanding, the campaigning for the Parliamentary Elections continued. The White Flags saw opportunities to increase frequency of attacks against Majlis MPs, intensifying their targeting not coincidentally in the Kirkuk region. They were not the only ones to mobilise their armed fighters to intimidate or silence others. Around 30.04.2018, Hashd's finance director Qassim Dahif az-Zubaidi was assassinated in Baghdad⁵⁹, who was doing a Hashd audit on Abadi's behalf. Abadi had not enforced equal pay and conditions for Hashd fighters as those in the ISF, and the context makes suspicions grow all around. Also, just before heading to the polls, something impossible to ignore, was that

on 08.05.2018, the US announced its withdrawal from the JCPOA. The need for special waivers and impending sanction re-imposition and intensification, would surely be discussed among constituents and political groups alike, fearing in what newer ways Iraq would get caught up in this spat.

Finally, as on 12.05.2018 the Parliamentary Elections were held. Sairoon led with 54 seats, Tahlaf al-Fatah with 48 seats, and Tahlaf an-Nasr with 42 seats. Al-Maliki's State of Law got 25, as did the KDP, Iraq's Vice President Ayad Allawi's coalition, al-Wataniya, got 21 seats. Unfortunately, in general there was a lower turnout percentage than in 2014. However, this also meant that as-Sadr's bloc, having mobilised his base, made his wins proportionally increase into many more seats.

Immediate demands for recounting and court cases regarding electoral fraud highlighted the structural problems of the system. On 15.07.2018

58. Ibid., page 11

59. Integrity UK, Iraq Intelligence Report 3rd May 2018, Integrity UK, 03.05.2018,

mass protests erupted in central and southern Iraq, targeting the pro-Iranian political faction buildings. The areas surrounding Basra and southern Iraq were a bit different, where a porous border and affiliations of families are even more directly to the tribe. Iran has built madrasas, and supports some of the major political parties, but paradoxically, southern Iraq is one of the key places where Iran has struggled to win popular support.

On 02.08.2018, Abadi signed Executive Order 1388, which was a direct order for Hashd units to exit Mosul and Nineveh Plains. It was also another follow up of the previous orders, that new additions into the Hashd are not exempt, and need to conform to ISF control operationally and administratively, in this case, namely the ISF Nineveh Operations Command.

The formation of Government was delayed as well as exceptionally messy. Although initially leaning towards Tahlaf al-Fatah, as-Sadr began to shift after meetings with Abadi. Sairoon, Wataniya, and Hikma sought to stick together with Tahlaf an-Nasr, where Tahlaf al-Fatah had been trying with State of Law to claim majority unsuccessfully. Eventually, on 09.08.2018, one was formed with a shift towards more non-party affiliated or independent Ministers. Then Barham Salih became new President of Iraq on 02.10.2018, and Mahdi, having left ISCI and become independent, was tapped for the premiership by Salih the same day, assuming the new position on 25.10.2018.

Setting up incremental steps

On 01.04.2019, Mahdi reiterated Executive Order 1388 and demanded that Hashd militias in the Nineveh Plains finally leave Mosul, eying Quwat Sahl Nineveh and **Kata'ib Babil-youn**, run by **Rayan al-Kaldani**, a Chaldean Christian. Promptly, Kata'ib Babil-youn's leaders reached out to **Iraj Masjedi**, the Ambassador of Iran to Iraq, who is an IRGC officer, not from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran. Masjedi told Kata'ib Babil-youn's leaders to disregard Mahdi's order, and al-Muhandis sent additional tanks to add to their arsenal. **The PM's direct orders to exit Mosul were indeed ignored again by Quwat Sahl Nineveh and Kata'ib Babil-youn at**

the instruction of al-Muhandis and Masjedi.

In this backdrop, Mahdi explored new ways of communicating. On 18.06.2019, Mahdi made a written statement⁶⁰, where he asserted that any non-Iraqi force can only act with permission from the Iraqi government. This is something that is already a given under international law⁶¹, but the need to reiterate it is a signal of displeasure to Iran, the US, as well as others. In the context of Hashd, it also suggests that there is still lack of control over it, citing units operating within and beyond framework of ISF, and this was another means to rein it in to the Commander-in-Chief. Around this time, Iran had to intervene also to

60. Michael Knights, Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 03.03.2020, page 12

61. Laura Visser, May the Force Be with You: The Legal Classification of Intervention by Invitation, Netherlands International Law Review, 04.04.2019

The PM's direct orders to exit Mosul were indeed ignored again by Quwat Sahl Nineveh and Kata'ib Babiliyoun at the instruction of al-Muhandis and Masjedi.

prevent an internal Hashd conflict⁶², namely between al-Muhandis and al-Fayyadh again. The dispute was not so much over who ran Hashd officially, but rather whose voice effectually represents it⁶³.

In swift follow-up to cement the written statement, on 01.07.2019, Mahdi issued **Executive Order 237 of 2019**, which also added elements which expanded the means for reform⁶⁴ of Hashd to new extents. As core to immersion into the ISF, the names of units were to be removed, replacing them with already existing military terms, namely 'Brigades'. Next, unauthorised organisational infrastructure, including checkpoints, military bases, or others, are to be disbanded, explicitly stating that running these outside of Iraqi Government consent and knowledge is prohibited⁶⁵.

Notably, on 10.07.2019, **Alaa al-Musawi**, as head of the Shia Waqf appointed by as-Sistani, saw his home invaded by Asa'ib members, and had to be evacuated to a safehouse. That the more aggressive Hashd subunits, now Brigades, used intimidation and harassment to get their way was nothing new. However, targeting highly regarded religious figures was.

Executive Order 237 specified that 31.07.2019, about a month after its issuing, was the deadline for the full implementation of its instruction⁶⁶. It also may have been an expression to address the subtly growing disapproval from the Iraqi public regarding the not so inconspicuous illicit Hashd activities. Yet, on 29.07.2019, just 2 days before the deadline, al-Fayyadh dispatched a letter asking for an extension to implement Executive Order 237 by another 2 months, arguing that steps taken to fulfil its requirements are already well under way, including restructuring plans and addressing lacking representation from Sunni provinces.

The disagreements spilling onto the public sphere were also uncommon. Instances as on 21.08.2019, where al-Muhandis accused the US of using access to Iraqi airspace to invite the Israeli air strikes against Hashd positions in Iraq⁶⁷, to which al-Fayyadh insisted the statement does not reflect the entirety or official position of Hashd, may have been unprecedented.

On 12.09.2019, the **Statement on Behalf of Grand Ayatollah Ali as-Sistani** was issued by Hamid al-Khafaf, director of as-Sistani's office in Lebanon, which criticised the Iraqi Government for lacking follow-through on the reforms regarding Hashd. In response, on 14.09.2019, **Executive Order 328 of 2019** was put into force by Mahdi, which made Iraq's Joint Operations Command (JOC) directly reporting to the PM, and made the Hashd a direct part of the JOC, as 1 of the 11 total security agencies within it. Only the PM or alternative, in this case Yarallah, could exercise authority over the JOC.

62. Mustafa Saadoun, Disagreements among PMU leaders stir up conflict between factions, Al Monitor, 23.12.2019

63. Ibid.

64. Michael Knights, Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 03.03.2020, page 13

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid., page 14

67. Rudaw, 21.08.2019, يب عشل دش حل تارقم فصقل قارعلال الی الی یل یئارسا قریسم تارئاط لاخل داب الی رمأ مهتی سدنهم ل، Rudaw, 21.08.2019

However, just 3 days after Executive Order 328 was enacted, on 17.09.2019, **Executive Order 331 of 2019** entered force, which was the first from all preceding reforms that in a more complex manner rigorously addresses hierarchy in Hashd⁶⁸. This includes changing the Committee's head from Chair to President, and with it, a Secretary General accountable to the President, and a Chief of Staff⁶⁹, that had been empty since 2017, which would oversee 8 operation commands, and 23 brigades. Considering that there are some 60 or more brigades⁷⁰, and de facto up to 100 or so⁷¹, this may suggest an intent to restructure or fuse these in some way. The Chief of Staff would require approval from both the Majlis as well as the JOC. Its implementation is likely a long road ahead, but much is said about its intent.

As a Century Foundation account underlines, al-Muhandis had paradoxically also been a unifying figure, at least for some in Iraq, in his pursuit to dominate Hashd⁷². Despite being staunchly pro-Iranian, he had indeed made cross-sectarian outreach to individual

Sunni Tribe members as well as Sunni paramilitary and militia groups. From more local foundations, al-Muhandis shrewdly used the diversity of Hashd as "*good optics and good politics*" to attain loyalty that transcends sectarianism⁷³, especially in the more sensitive Anbar Governorate, supplemented by simple transactional motivations as well.

Hence, the need to repeatedly reassert in new ways the control of Hashd lay with the PM, and now changing the Chair, may have been because the then-Deputy Chair, al-Muhandis, had been increasingly accumulating de facto decision-making abilities. Hashd's independence from the PM's instructions stemming from this specifically has also been reflected in the field in the form of acting without instruction, refusing or disregarding instruction from the PM, or even more audaciously, persuading other groups to ignore instruction from the PM.

68. Michael Knights, Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 03.03.2020, page 15

69. Michael Knights, Helping Iraq Take Charge of Its Command-and-Control Structure, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 30.09.2019

70. Michael Knights, Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 03.03.2020, page 16

71. Seth Frantzman, Iraq's New Prime Minister Needs to Take Control of His Security Forces, Foreign Policy, 16.06.2020

72. Inna Rudolf, The Sunnis of Iraq's "Shia" Paramilitary Powerhouse, The Century Foundation, 13.02.2020

73. Ibid.

Fallout

Amid the swelling tensions between the US and Iran and the protests that broke out on 01.10.2019, dynamics between Sadrist and pro-Iranian Hashd Brigades underwent a dramatic shift. On 25.10.2019, in the midst of nationwide protests, fighting broke out between Saraya as-Salam and Asa'ib members in the Maysan Governorate⁷⁴, and angry protesters killed some Asa'ib members close to Khazali. The protesters went on to burn the Consulate of Iran in Karbala. Mahdi announced his intention to resign on 29.11.2019, and the Majlis approved it 01.12.2019 without too much hesitation, though he would temporarily continue as caretaker. Even so, clashes between Saraya as-Salam and Kata'ib Hezbollah were reported⁷⁵ on 06.12.2019, despite attempts to retract the message some days later to preserve idea of unity between Hashd Brigades.

in the midst of nationwide protests, fighting broke out between Saraya as-Salam and Asa'ib members in the Maysan Governorate

On 24.12.2019, the Majlis approved a series of new reformative legislations on Iraq's election processes⁷⁶, with 3 key changes, namely: firstly, enabling independent politicians to win a seat in the Majlis; secondly, restructuring the divisions of Iraq's governorates into several electoral districts, where one MP is elected per 100 000

people; and thirdly, no longer allowing parties from running on unified lists. These changes are considerable because the proportional representation system, and specifically the Webster / Sainte-Laguë method, has been replaced by the district-based system, and the next elections will be the first to test out if this works better.

Whilst the inner circles were furthering reform attempts to address the protests, in the field, tensions between the US and Iran were being played out in Iraq unscrupulously. The world took notice of the escalation and was led to worry of its consequences. On 27.12.2019, the K1 Air Base, which hosts Iraqi and US personnel, was attacked, killing a US contractor. This appeared to be a red-line for the Trump Administration, and on 29.12.2019, the US retaliated. On 31.12.2019, the US Embassy in Baghdad was confronted with protests and attacks, which interestingly had a mark reading "*the uncle was here*" left on it. The same day, Pompeo named individuals and Hashd leaders who he believed responsible for inciting or helping organise the attack on the US Embassy or were there personally, which included al-Muhandis, Khazali, and al-Amiri, but also al-Fayyadh.

As is well known, on 03.01.2020, Soleimani arrived in Baghdad to meet Mahdi. As he was just leaving the airport, the US launched a drone strike that struck the vehicle carrying both Soleimani and al-Muhandis. Just hours later, the Ambassador of Switzerland to Iran **Markus Leitner** personally delivered an encrypted fax message from the White House reading "*do not escalate*" to Zarif in the Ministry of Foreign

74. Al Hurra, *قارعة البونجل في نينوى تفضي لعمليات كابتشا دع*, Al Hurra, 26.10.2019

75. Nas News, *! فارتعالي ناي ب دع براضت وى ضوف.. بي عशल دشال كبرت كنسل قرزج*, Nas News, 09.12.2019

76. Ahmed Rasheed, *Iraq passes electoral reforms but deadlock remains*, Reuters, 24.12.2019



MEHR NEWSAGENCY

Photo.

SOURCE: MEHR NEWS AGENCY



SOURCE: FARS NEWS AGENCY

Affairs of Iran⁷⁷. The Swiss Embassy in Tehran shuttled several follow up messages, which were more concrete and well-tempered, contrasting to public inflammatory remarks⁷⁸.

The thought that struck observers was that it meant someone passed the information to the US on Soleimani's exact planned whereabouts. One wonders to what degree, if at all, this is related to the leak of intelligence documents to The Intercept earlier, or whether it was done separately but perhaps inspired by the audacity of the previous action.

Regardless of whether some Cabinet members or Majlis MPs were opposed to those individu-

als, bilateral US-Iraq relations *were* strained as a result of the escalation⁷⁹, namely due to the unilateral manner of the action. In the de-escalation phases, some were trying to figure out what to make of it, but others sought to capitalise on it. On 05.01.2020, a Resolution was sent from the PM to the Majlis, which then passed⁸⁰ by 170 MPs that sought to expel US forces. However, a Resolution from the Majlis is non-binding. It does not have the authority to revoke such a treaty, even though the language was "obligatory" in tone⁸¹, and thence the Resolution returns to the PM, who at this time, is in a caretaker government that enjoys less authority in enacting drastic changes.

77. Drew Hinshaw, Swiss Back Channel Helped Defuse U.S.-Iran Crisis, Wall Street Journal, 12.01.2020

78. Alexander Wielgos, Iran Nuclear Deal: the JCPOA on Geopolitical Chessboards, New Direction, 13.03.2020

79. Emma Sky, The Death of the U.S.-Iraqi Relationship, Foreign Affairs, 03.01.2020

80. France 24, Iraq parliament passes resolution to expel US-led coalition troops from country, France 24, 06.01.2020

81. EPC, Impact of Soleimani killing on US-Iran conflict in Iraq, EPC, 26.01.2020

Further, the decision is vague enough not to specifically address the US and NATO forces⁸², but foreign forces. Finally, the Constitution of Iraq does not have a mechanism to rebuke or formally end international treaties⁸³, which would require agreement of both the US and Iraq before such a thing could be considered.

The voting was mainly by Tahlaf al-Fatah affiliated MPs, as well as those affiliated with Hikma, State of Law, and Sairoon, sharing anger expressed by as-Sadr at the breach of sovereignty, who also backed the notion. However, KDP and PUK leaders decided it would be best for *all* Kurdish MPs to remain decidedly neutral on this and not vote, and most Wataniya and Sunni MPs and more secular Shia MPs also abstained⁸⁴.

Furthermore, cases of threats and intimidation against MPs who may have reservations about an anti-US stance increased⁸⁵. Nevertheless, the US noted it would have to suspend operations due to the intensity of attacks on its bases by some Brigades from Hashd. Then, Trump noted potential sanctioning if follow up on the vote was expected, and those Hashd Brigades made threats if it was not⁸⁶. Worth noting, subtly the next day, on 06.01.2020, Mahdi received the Chinese Ambassador to Iraq, during which, the Ambassador expressed readiness for military support⁸⁷.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.

84. Rend Ar-Rahim, Consequences of Iraq's vote to end Coalition troop presence, Atlantic Council, 16.01.2020

85. Bobby Allyn, In A Day Of Turmoil, Repercussions Of Soleimani Killing Grow More Widespread, NPR, 05.01.2020

86. Al Hurra, "دَارِكُ الْأَوْدِيَّةِ لِرَبِّ الدَّهْرِ يِقَارِعُ الْهَلَالَ بِزَحْ.. "نَايَخُ وَيَزْخُ وَرَدْع", Al Hurra, 05.01.2020

87. [Twitter], @RudawEnglish, #BREAKING: Iraq's Prime Minister Adil Abdul al-Mahdi receives China's ambassador to Iraq, Zhang Tao conveyed Beijing's readiness to provide military assistance., Rudaw English, 06.01.2020

Turning points slowly, and then quickly

In seeking to select the next Deputy Chair of Hashd, the most inner circles from within Hashd convened: **Abu Ali al-Basri** and **Abu Muntadher al-Husseini** from Badr, **Abu Iman al-Bahali** from Kata'ib Hezbollah, **Abu Ala al-Walai** from Kat'aib Sayyid ash-Shuhada, **Laith al-Khazali** from Asa'ib, as well as **Ahmed al-Asadi** from Kata'ib Jund al-Imam⁸⁸. These Hashd groups, at times colloquially referred to as 'the Muhandis core', put forward **Abdulaziz al-Muhammadawi**, or 'Abu Fadak' and 'al-Khal', or 'the uncle', as is also known, who is a Kata'ib Hezbollah commander⁸⁹ to the Popular Mobilisation Commission, announcing it unilaterally. Al-Muhammadawi, previously in Badr and then involved in internal disagreements within Kata'ib Hezbollah, eventually returned to Kata'ib Hezbollah from Soleimani's direct instruction upon the onset of the protests⁹⁰. Furthermore, with this pronouncement, Kata'ib Hezbollah asserted their view was that Hashd should remain separate from the ISF⁹¹.

It would seem that Atabat's outright rejection of a nominee from the 'Muhandis core' reflects in different ways some 'attitudes in the ongoing protests

To their surprise, on 20.02.2020, his nomination was refuted by **Firqat al-Imam Ali al-Qitaliyah**, or Brigade 2, **Liwa Ali al-Akbar**, or Brigade 11, the **al-Abbas Combat Division** that became Brigade 26, as well as **Liwa Ansar al-Marjaiya**, or Brigade 44,⁹². These 4 Hashd groups constitute the 'shrine foundation', and are referred to as the **Atabat**⁹³, who are aligned with as-Sistani and ideologically favour Najaf in Iraq over Qoms in Iran. The Atabat asserted they were not consulted prior to this decision, and made their stance known directly to the President and PM⁹⁴. **It would seem that Atabat's outright rejection of a nominee from the 'Muhandis core' reflects in different ways some 'attitudes in the ongoing protests** to considerable degrees. Also noticeable, Badr seems to be less vocal or distancing itself from these kinds of incidents or disagreements, and even al-Khazali has limited his social media presence gradually.

At some point in mid-March 2020, newer armed groups were formed, namely 'League of the Revolutionaries', or **Asbat as-Saerin**, which claimed attacks on US bases on Camp Taji⁹⁵, as well as **Ashab al-Kahf**, boasting some unpleasant looking weaponry. Both are clearly more radical and willing to be aggressive. It is likely Asbat as-Saerin was established by Kata'ib Hezbollah, and gives a new dynamic to the choice of actions by those Hashd groups. On 30.03.2020,

88. Michael Knights, Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 03.03.2020, page 23

89. Nazli Tarzi, Hierarchical rifts split Iraq's PMF, Arab Weekly, 01.03.2020

90. Ismaeel Naar, Meet 'the uncle' Abu Fadak, the new head of Iran-backed PMU militias in Iraq, Al Arabiya, 22.02.2020

91. Crispin Smith, Iraqi Militias Split Over New Iran-Backed Head, Reflecting Wider Divisions, Just Security, 04.03.2020

92. MECRA, Who is Abu Fadak, Abdul-Aziz al-Muhammadawi, the man who will replace Muhandis?, MECRA, 22.02.2020

93. Michael Knights, Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 03.03.2020, page 23

94. Nazli Tarzi, Hierarchical rifts split Iraq's PMF, Arab Weekly, 01.03.2020

95. ISW News, Video: The operator of the rocket attacks to Americans in Iraq was identified!, ISW News, 16.03.2020



SOURCE: THE MEDIA OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER OF IRAQ

the new IRGC Quds Force Commander, Brigadier General **Esmail Ghaani**, visited Baghdad unannounced. He met with some Hashd subunit leaders. However, to his dismay, as-Sadr reportedly refused to meet him. Shortly after, on 04.04.2020, a **Joint Communiqué** was released that condemned US forces being stationed in Iraq, and demanded their withdrawal. The Communiqué by 8 Hashd subunits, including namely most from the ‘Muhandis Core’, as well as a Hashd founding subunit, Harakat Jund al-Imam, but interestingly without Badr. It also was signed by some others around since the earliest days, including **Saraya al-Khorasani**, **Saraya Ashura** and **Harakat Ansar Allah al-Awfiya**. All of these are the most aligned to IRGC in the Hashd architecture.

(Unrelated note: on 07.04.2020, the EU Council extended the mandate of EUTM Iraq until at least 30.04.2022, subject to further renewals.)

On 22.04.2020, before his departure, Mahdi conveyed a **formal decision** in a short, less than

one page letter for the Atabat, naming Brigades 2, 11, 26, and 44 specifically, to be “*operationally and administratively linked*” to the PM⁹⁶. It mentioned that to this end details would be later established⁹⁷. In effect, with this, the Atabat separated from the Hashd command, but the letter is likely purposely ambiguous in whether the Atabat are to remain as Hashd Brigades. By making them directly accountable to the PM, it is a move directly in line with the aforementioned reforms and passed legislation. One would wonder then what this together the more assertive attempts of Atabat to take decision-making capabilities away from the ‘Muhandis Core’ signals to the ISF and the Cabinet, to the Majlis MPs, as well as to other Brigades within Hashd who are wondering how they fit into the political and security apparatuses; especially considering that the Atabat are prohibited from liaising with the IRGC.

Options pertaining to Hashd seem to be becoming, at their vaguest, choosing clever combinations of integration, containment, or suppression, where

96. Shafaq News, Abdul-Mahdi Disengages Shrines Forces From the PMF, Shafaq News, 22.04.2020

97. Ibid.

the wrong choices unfortunately have disproportionately negative effects. As the incremental reforms hitherto have gone in the direction of transferring authority to the Commander-in-Chief, the importance of choosing the next PM is difficult to overstate. First, **Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi** unsuccessfully made a bid to succeed Mahdi, and then **Adnan az-Zurfi** also could not manage to garner enough support, but Iran's preferred choices, **Abdul Hussein Abtan** and **Qasim al-Araji**, hardly had a chance.

It was a relief for some, therefore, on 06.05.2020, when al-Kadhimi was confirmed, and sworn in on 07.05.2020 the next day. Others, namely leaders of Kata'ib Hezbollah, had made threatening remarks if al-Kadhimi was selected. As a piece on Foreign Policy suggests, it has been noticed by Western observers and analysts, again like his predecessors, that al-Kadhimi, is capable of balancing between the US and Iran, as well as finding some understanding between most political factions – but it is mainly the political system's dysfunctionality which prevented his predecessors from making sufficiently recognisable progress⁹⁸. Absent enough change, this scenario may likely therefore risk to befall the new incumbent. It had been a pattern.

However, al-Kadhimi thus far seems to not be oblivious to this, and may be even giving those same observers some hope. From the 22 ministerial candidates initially put forward for the Cabinet, 15 were accepted by the Majlis⁹⁹. Key rhetoric addressing the ongoing demonstrations included accountability for those who unjustly applied violence and lethal force against demonstrators, as well as holding early Parliamentary Elections.

On 09.05.2020, al-Kadhimi convened a Cabinet meeting, made clear intent to release unjustly detained protesters, unless of course they were linked to violence, and look into also who was doing the detaining. Separately, meetings with the relatively newer US Ambassador to Iraq **Matthew Tueller** as well as Masjedi were also held. Next, on 10.05.2020, al-Kadhimi reinstated Lieutenant General **Abdul-Wahab as-Saadi** as Commander of the **Counter Terrorism Service (CTS)**, whose arrest was a factor in widespread anger, and the **Supreme Judiciary Council** confirmed the release of those unjustly detained protesters¹⁰⁰. A later piece on Foreign Policy drew attention to these first reforms suggest the intentions of al-Kadhimi in mending the complex divides that still hold Iraqi politics hostage are more than just cosmetic¹⁰¹. In this, it may be wise to approach it at least to some extents from a Governorate level¹⁰², but that bringing Hashd under control is as necessary as it is complicated.

On 16.05.2020, as al-Kadhimi was visiting the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Interior, the CTS, and other ISF buildings, he stopped by the Hashd headquarters for what may not have been the easiest meeting from the lot¹⁰³. He arrived with Atabat members, and was greeted by al-Fayyadh, who was accompanied by Kata'ib Hezbollah leaders **Al-Muhammadawi** and **Hussein Falah al-Lami**, or Abu Zainab, who are critical of his premiership¹⁰⁴. In the meeting, al-Kadhimi praised Hashd's role specifically in the fight against ISIL, but his view on subunits exceeding their mandate is well-known. As such, it is not entirely clear if the Atabat's earlier reaction did indeed impede al-Muhammadawi's appointment as Deputy Chair. Nevertheless,

98. Steven Cook, Nobody Can Help Iraq Anymore, Foreign Policy, 24.04.2020

99. Khrush Najari, Mustafa al-Kadhimi voted in as Iraq's prime minister, Kurdistan 24, 07.07.2020

100. Al Jazeera, New Iraq PM releases protesters; promotes respected general, Al Jazeera, 10.05.2020

101. Seth Frantzman, Iraq's New Prime Minister Needs to Take Control of His Security Forces, Foreign Policy, 16.06.2020

102. Ibid.

103. Michael Knights, Kadhimi as Commander-in-Chief: First Steps in Iraqi Security Sector Reform, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 19.05.2020

104. Ibid.

on 19.05.2020, some rockets hit close to Embassies in the Green Zone, which, if related to this meeting, could have been done in an another display of reach.

A regular blog, *Musings on Iraq*, elaborates that ISIL attacks and security incidents in Iraq have in the meantime been resurging¹⁰⁵, but after a re-intensification of ISF operations since 21.05.2020 they had decreased again¹⁰⁶. It may or may not be correlated with the CTS Commander's reinstatement, meaning that the cleaning up operations against White Flags cannot be ignored in the meantime.

On 03.06.2020, while Ghaani made another visit to Baghdad, al-Fayyadh announced in a new SSR-related **Memorandum** for Hashd¹⁰⁷ in a short, page-long document. It makes reference to both the Popular Mobilisation Commission Law of 2016 as well as Executive Order 237 of 2019. Besides reiterating the need for depoliticisation and using 'Brigades' terms and structure, **Hashd Administrative Decree 2155**, which is not publicly accessible, would allegedly have overseen the Tribal Mobilisation Militia formally integrated into Hashd by 03.07.2020, with two other such documents pertain to legal status of Hashd members, their pay, as well as shutting down some Hashd offices or bases outside their mandate¹⁰⁸. Al-Fayyadh may wish to better his relations with al-Kadhimi, or make changes before al-Kadhimi does¹⁰⁹. Unlike the previous Memos, it was not instructed by the PM, and inaccessibility of the texts it refers to raises arguments that these may potentially be more obscuring than clarifying in character.

On 09.06.2020, further arrest warrants were issued, including Lieutenant General **Jamil ash-Shammari**, who was responsible for the deaths of around 20 protesters. In this time, Kata'ib Hezbollah began an intensification of attacks against US bases or bases with US personnel. Meanwhile, one of the more recent situation reports from the Institute of the Study of War has noted that the Majlis MPs of Tahlaf al-Fatah closer to the 'Muhandis Core', namely MP **Saad as-Saadi**, are seeking to solidify the Regulation to expel US forces into binding legislation¹¹⁰, including by means of attempting to garner support for a motion of no-confidence against al-Kadhimi if it is not implemented. One could therefore unfortunately expect increasing acts of intimidation or threats against certain MPs or Government officials or other individuals. Meanwhile, on 11.06.2020, the Strategic Dialogue between Iraq and the US began, the first session. It would even seem that in this backdrop, US presence in Iraq enjoys more support than Iran, for the first time, perhaps ever.

On 25.06.2020, al-Kadhimi authorised a Iraqi CTS **Special Operations Forces** operation into a Kata'ib Hezbollah building in the Dora area of southern Baghdad¹¹¹, arresting 14 members and seizing rockets planned for subsequent attacks on US personnel in Iraq. Iraq's JOC affirms that it was a CTS operation only, and was consulted with the US prior¹¹². This was the first raid the Iraqi Government conducted successfully on the basis of pre-emptive intelligence gathering.

In response, coming in from various bases in southern Iraq, Kata'ib Hezbollah swiftly

105. Joel Wing, *Islamic State Offensive In Iraq Takes Off In May*, *Musings on Iraq*, 03.06.2020

106. Joel Wing, *Security In Iraq Jun 15-21, 2020*, *Musings on Iraq*, 23.06.2020

107. Katherine Lawlor, *Iraq Situation Report: June 3-9, 2020*, *Institute for the Study of War*, 12.06.2020

108. Michael Knights, *Hashd Reforms in Iraq Conceal More Than They Reveal*, *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 09.06.2020

109. Ibid.

110. Katherine Lawlor, *Iraq Situation Report: June 3-9, 2020*, *Institute for the Study of War*, 12.06.2020

111. Ali Mamouri, *Iraqi security forces raid militia headquarters*, *Al Monitor*, 26.06.2020

112. [Twitter] @arwaib, Bold move appears to hv been agreed btw @MAKadhimi pro-US administration & Washington after 33 attacks targeted US interests in Iraq over past 8 months - six which took place during past 2 weeks alone. Move also coincides with launch of #US-Iraq strategic dialogue on June 11., *Arwa Ibrahim*, 26.06.2020

mobilised dozens of armed vehicles and though the figures vary among different sources, perhaps around 600 members¹¹³, – other sources cite about 150 only – towards the PM's residence in Baghdad, with demands of the release of those detained, and threatened legal action¹¹⁴ against the PM. Those arrested had been handed over to the **Hashd Security Directorate** that is run by Hussein Falah al-Lami, as would be supposedly in line with the procedure of ISF military discipline protocol, but likely to be also politically calculated gesture.

It would seem that Atabat's outright rejection of a nominee from the 'Muhandis core' reflects in different ways some 'attitudes in the ongoing protests

The tense standoff has not seemed to escalate uncontrollably since then, and it is more than likely that discussions, not necessarily calm ones, are or have been taking place. However, there are worrying flashpoints that signal a trend. Shortly after, on 04.07.2020, Ashab al-Khalf responded to reports that the US is testing C-RAM air defence systems for the US Embassy in Baghdad with rather threatening rhetoric¹¹⁵. Some more rocket attacks followed suit on 05.07.2020, one being blocked by those same air defence systems, and another detonating close to the airport.

Then, on 06.07.2020, a revered security strategist, **Hashim al-Hashimi**, was assassinated outside his home in Baghdad, condemned by the Embassies of both Iran and the US. The culprit is unconfirmed, though al-Hashimi sought advice from colleagues on how to deal with death threats specifically from Kata'ib Hezbollah. The assertion of presence on the Baghdad streets would seem to be a continuation from the intimidation tactics employed previously.

On 19.07.2020 putting the air defence systems to the test again was Asbat as-Saerin, which claimed responsibility for firing rockets at the US Embassy in Baghdad and boasted the intent prior. It is not explicitly clear if these were successfully intercepted, or whether they were launched outside of their range but within the Green Zone. It may be unrelated to Zarif's visit to Baghdad the same day that discussed the al-Munthiriya border crossing¹¹⁶ that is now under CTS jurisdiction, not Hashd. Although Hashd is in the IRGC portfolio, not the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran, the planned visit of al-Kadhimi to Riyadh the following day was not a coincidental message on relations with Gulf states¹¹⁷, even though it was cancelled from Salman's health concerns. Most recently, on 26.07.2020, as-Saqr base by Baghdad saw a huge explosion in its Federal Police warehouse, which may have been from an Israeli or US air strike, as Hashd and nearby witnesses suggest, or high temperatures as claimed otherwise, likely intended to prevent a moral obligation to escalate or rebuke diplomatically. Such practises, after all, are not unheard of, and indeed may be comparable to the series of Israeli airstrikes a year earlier. Similar incidents

113. [Twitter] @thestevennabil, Military sources confirmed to me that nearly 600 Armed group members (Militias) arrived in Baghdad coming from the southern provinces., Steven Nabil, 26.06.2020

114. [Twitter] @AliBakeer, #Iraq's #Hezbollah wants to sue the Prime Minister for arresting 14 of its members as suspects of planning for attacks in the green area. Iraqis going the Lebanese model when it comes to its #IRGC-created militias and this is very bad for Iraq as a state. Check #lebanon, Dr. Ali Bakeer, 29.06.2020

115. [Twitter] @IntelTweet, In response to reports that an air defense system is being tested to protect the U.S. embassy in Baghdad, armed Iraqi Shiite faction Ashab al-Kahf has threatened, "if it did not help them at Ain Al-Assad [Air Base], then it won't protect them at the embassy either.", Evan Kohlmann, 04.07.2020

116. Linah Alsaafin, Zarif's Baghdad visit won't address PMF-Iraq gov't power dynamic, Al Jazeera, 19.07.2020

117. Ibid.

seem to be occurring with increasing frequency with likewise mismatching reports, including on 26.07.2020 with rocket landing spots edging closer to Speicher camp by Tikrit, on 27.07.2020 Taji base, and on 28.07.2020 with unclear information of whether or not rockets landed close to Baghdad International Airport. Nevertheless, in the wider context, the signals are of a worrying

trend. **The situation does remain tense; it would be a disservice to misidentify its relative quiet as inconsequential.** These events do rather indicate it is potentially volatile enough for additional flashpoints, and the cause-and-effect developments of these incidents give a lot to think about for policy-makers and observers.

Iraq's Two Rivers

☛ The country between the two rivers¹¹⁸, or ‘*al-balad bayna an-nahrayin*’, seems to have a constant duality across several of its complex and multifaceted political-operational conundrums, at least from an outside perspective. As much as Iraq is subject to dynamics between US and Iran, it would seem that Iraq’s ability to leverage its position as middle ground between both of them has been thus far limited¹¹⁹.

However, considering the long turn of events, the dramatic shifts within Hashd itself since its inception, this seems to be changing, and the change has had a long build-up with changing dynamics, as well as to some considerable degree those dynamics being authentically powered by the public protests.

Ahead of the next round of US-Iraq Strategic Dialogue expected to take place at some point this month (July 2020), it is worth attempting to anticipate the plausible calculus of each of these states, Hashd subunits, Cabinet members,

Majlis groups or MPs, and others, as well as their susceptibility to react. Yet, reviewing the sequence of developments in its entirety but also in-depth quickly reveals that figuring out how best to go about this, in the pursuit of peace and stability, is anything but simple.

If anything, however, this is the time for creative approaches¹²⁰, simply because not changing anything leaves no chance of any positive developments. Of course, creative is not and should not be synonymous with detached from reality, and the **Warsaw Institute** cordially invites you to share your thoughts in its **MENA Monitor** programme.

So what might such ideas look like? What do you think should be done, by whom, and in what way?

118. Joshua Mark, Mesopotamia, Ancient History Encyclopedia, 14.03.2018

119. WIR Events, *Poland in the Geopolitics of the Middle East and North Africa*, The Warsaw Institute Review, 09.03.2020

120. Kathlee McInnis, *Strategists Have Forgotten the Power of Stories*, Foreign Policy, 19.05.2020

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