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IRAQ'S POPULAR MOBILISATION FORCES

THE POSSIBILITIES
FOR DISARMAMENT,
DEMOBILISATION &
REINTEGRATION



HAYDER AL-KHAFAJI

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Cover Image

A fighter from Saraya al-Salam, part of the Popular Mobilisation Forces, stands guard next to the Tigris river, June 2019.

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Iraq's Popular Mobilisation Forces: The Possibilities for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration

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Abstract

This paper examines the divergence in the applicability of the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) process to Iraq as compared to the more traditional experiences of Nepal, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. Iraq's experience is defined by the heterogeneous identity of the Hashd (Hashd al-Shaabi, or Popular Mobilisation Forces) combatants, in terms of their different allegiances (to both state and non-state players) and their legitimatisation by both the religious and political establishments. In contrast, the conflicting parties in Nepal, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan have more homogeneous identities and these better resemble classic internecine civil wars.

Iraq can only go through a stripped-down version of the DDR process because the majority of the Hashd are not willing to be disarmed, either because they believe the war is not over, or because they have transmuted into Iraq's defence and security apparatus and, in some instances, have entered the political arena. Iraq can only manage partial demobilisation, reinsertion and reintegration of its native Hashd combatants because of the lack of political will and leadership, the absence of state and civil society mechanisms and because elements of the Hashd believe themselves already part of the state's institutions.

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Introduction

Iraq's war against Da'esh (otherwise known as ISIS) was unique.¹ It involved both an external foe and a civil war and the belligerents were heterogeneous,² including Iraqis (particularly former Ba'athists), Moroccans, Russians, Saudis, Syrians, Tunisians, Turks, British, Chechens and Australians, amongst others, fighting for Da'esh,³ and the defence forces ranged against them.

As will become evident, Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) is not strictly applicable, in its traditional form, to post-conflict Iraq. The official United Nations definition of DDR is as follows:

Disarmament: The collection, documentation, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population. Disarmament also includes the development of responsible arms management programmes.

Demobilisation: The formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups.

Reintegration: The process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance.⁴

Essentially, DDR lays the groundwork for safeguarding and sustaining the communities to which the combatants return, while building capacity for long-term peace, security and development. In situations where it is too early or not possible to carry out DDR, the UN supports Community Violence Reduction programmes that lead to the right conditions for political processes to progress and armed groups to disband.⁵

Da'esh comprised both foreign and home-grown combatants, terrorists and ideologues, jihadists and mercenaries: men and women, as well as children. The force that confronted

¹ 'EIP Explainer: Understanding Daesh/ISIS', *European Institute of Peace*, n.d. Available at <http://www.eip.org/en/news-events/eip-explainer-understanding-daeshisis> (accessed 15 October 2019).

² Ashley Kirk, 'Iraq and Syria: How many foreign fighters are fighting for Isil?', *The Telegraph*; 24 March 2016. Available at <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/03/29/iraq-and-syria-how-many-foreign-fighters-are-fighting-for-isil/> (accessed 15 October 2019).

³ AFP, 'Daesh fighters from 70 countries, leaks show', *Gulf News*; 20 April 2016. Available at <https://gulfnews.com/world/mena/daesh-fighters-from-70-countries-leaks-show-1.1717333> (accessed 15 October 2019).

⁴ Taies Nezam & Alexandre Marc, 'Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration', *World Bank Social Development Department*, No. 119, February 2009. Available at <https://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXT-SOCIALDEVELOPMENT/Resources/244362-1164107274725/DDRFinal3-print.pdf> (accessed 15 October 2019).

⁵ 'Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration', *United Nations Peacekeeping*, n.d. Available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration> (accessed 15 October 2019).

them and eventually brought them down: the Hashd (a domestic, paramilitary Iraqi organisation with a central command operating alongside the Iraqi Security Forces),⁶ is a conglomerate of Iraqis of all backgrounds and denominational affiliations. Though primarily Shi'a Arab, the groups number among their members different sects and minorities. For the purposes of this paper, and due to the unique nature of the conflict, only certain components of the DDR process, particularly as they relate to demobilisation, reinsertion (the transitional period between demobilisation and long-term reintegration) and reintegration of the Hashd, have been discussed in greater detail.

DDR Actors in Iraq

A difficulty of fitting Iraq's experience into the DDR paradigm is that the relevant protagonists are those who together confronted Da'esh. The first of these is the Government of Iraq (GoI), represented by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Ministry of Interior (MoI), who respectively command the armed forces and the intelligence services (collectively known as the Iraqi Security Forces or ISF). The second are the groups of volunteers and paramilitary organisations that formed the backbone of the Hashd. A number of the more prominent paramilitary organisations subsequently formed political blocs or alliances and contested the 2018 general election.⁷

Following the *wajib al-kifai* fatwa,⁸ which was delivered in June 2014 by Grand Ayatollah Sistani's most senior clerical representative, Abdul Mehdi el-Karbalai, engaging in jihad against Da'esh was made obligatory and a collective responsibility of all eligible male adults, but only to the extent that if sufficient numbers answered the call, the remainder would not need to enlist. Rather than encouraging the formation of the series of militias that would become the Hashd, the fatwa specifically called on all eligible men to volunteer for the ISF, following the fall of Iraq's second largest city, Mosul, to Da'esh on 10 June 2014. This event was quickly followed over the next 48 hours by the massacre at the Speicher base and the fall of Tikrit and other areas which brought Da'esh to the outskirts of Baghdad. Within days of the fatwa, thousands of men had volunteered to join the ISF.

With the collapse of the government's security apparatus in 2014, regular ISF units were unable to absorb the sheer number of volunteers, and as such many opted to join paramilitary groups, which together were to form the Hashd al-Shaabi. Amongst the most prominent and powerful paramilitary groups that joined the Hashd in 2014 were the Badr Organisation, Asaib Ahl al-Haq (an Iranian-controlled splinter group formerly affiliated

⁶ c.f. FARC in Columbia. See William J. Palomino, 'Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of FARC: A Challenge for Colombia and a Step Toward Andean Regional Stability', Master's Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey CA, December 2014, p. 2. Available at <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/full-text/u2/a620845.pdf> (accessed 15 October 2019).

⁷ 'Iraq parliamentary elections 2018' [in Arabic], *Al-Jazeera*, 16 January 2018. Available at <https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/events/2018/1/16/الانتخابات-البرلمانية-بالساحة-العراقية> (accessed 14 October 2019).

⁸ The *wajib al-kifai* fatwa, which was delivered to the nation by Grand Ayatollah Sistani's most senior clerical representative, Abdul Mehdi el-Karbalai, in Karbala on 13 June 2014. The original speech in Arabic available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7by5almGhA> (accessed 27 September 2019).

with the Iraqi populist cleric Muqtada al-Sadr), Saraya al-Salam (led by Muqtada al-Sadr); Kataib Hezbollah, Liwa al-Imam Ali, Liwa Ali al-Akbar, Liwa Abul Fadhl al-Abbas and Kataib Sayid al-Shuhada.

Of the estimated 120,000 members, whose allegiance was sub-divided into some 50 groups,⁹ almost half belonged to the main groups listed above, as well as a few other lesser known Shi'a paramilitary groups. Another 20,000¹⁰ were nationalist or religious volunteers drawn from Baghdad and southern Iraq, who organised themselves under different banners. These were affiliated with certain religious shrines or endowments and had some formal relations with the MoD or MoI. The remainder were Sunni tribesmen (over 15,000 but budgeted to reach 40,000),¹¹ Assyrian, Turkmen, Kurdish and Shabak groups that formed to defend their villages, and non-aligned volunteers who supplemented the ranks of the ISF. Some of the volunteers were seconded from their formal jobs and retained their salaries; while others received little or no remuneration at all, but fought out of national, ethnic or religious devotion.

An official body, the Hashd Commission, was created to absorb the volunteers and groups into one entity. Alongside this, several pre-existing paramilitary groups announced their mobilisation as part of the Hashd and moved their cadres to the frontlines. Those who were already involved in fighting in Syria were redeployed to Iraq, under the command of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' 'Quds Force' (IRGC-QF). Major General Qasem Soleimani of the IRGC-QF entered Iraq on 11 June 2014 to help reorganise the defences against Da'esh. It is notable that Iran was the first country to provide military aid to Iraq,¹² some two months before the international coalition, thereby allowing it to play a crucial role in the war against Da'esh and to expand its influence in the country.

Ayatollah Sistani's stated aim¹³ was to resupply the ISF with recruits and stir patriotic vigour to defend the country against the threat of Da'esh, with his fatwa seeking to keep Iraq united against any form of foreign interference, to stabilise the country and to see it transition toward a pluralistic democracy. During Friday prayer sermons and written communications, which included advice and guidance to fighters on the front lines, Sistani never used the term 'Hashd al-Shaabi', only ever calling them volunteers, which is notable as he did not wish to be seen as legitimising the various paramilitary groups whose separate agendas could undermine the state.

⁹ Renad Mansour & Faleh Jabar, 'The Popular Mobilization Forces and Iraq's Future', *Carnegie Middle East Center Paper*, 28 April 2017. Available at <https://carnegie-mec.org/2017/04/28/popular-mobilization-forces-and-iraq-s-future-pub-68810> (accessed 27 September 2019).

¹⁰ Numbers sourced from author's interview with Hashd administrative staff, Baghdad, Summer 2018.

¹¹ Another 10,000 were added at a later stage bringing the total to 50,000 Sunnis. See Mustafa Saadoun, 'It's official: Sunnis joining Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units', *Al-Monitor*, 14 January 2016. Available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/01/iraq-sunnis-join-shiite-popular-mobilization-forces.html> (accessed 27 September 2019).

¹² Martin Chulov, 'Iran sends troops into Iraq to aid fight against Isis militants', *The Guardian*, 14 June 2014. Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/14/iran-iraq-isis-fight-militants-nour-maliki> (accessed 27 September 2019).

¹³ Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Text of Friday Sermon [in Arabic], 11 July 2014. Available at <https://www.sistani.org/arabic/archive/24925/> (accessed 27 September 2019).

DDR Re-integration Examples

In the early 1990s, we saw a dramatic decrease in the number of ongoing armed conflicts around the world, and at the same time a remarkable increase in the number of DDR programmes. Clearly, over the past two decades or so, DDR has become an integral part of both peace initiatives and peacekeeping operations.

Despite the plethora of applied research on the subject and the numerous examples on the ground, it remains unclear to what extent the existing research into DDR can be generalised or applied to the Hashd in Iraq. This notwithstanding, we have taken some examples of DDR from countries that have undergone the process, namely Nepal, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka.

1. Nepal

The war in Nepal between the state and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) lasted from 1996 to 2006. It claimed almost 14,000 lives and was characterised by brutality on both sides.¹⁴ This was a civil war waged by citizens, who wanted to change the socio-political order, against their own government.

Interviews conducted by Tone Bleie and Ramesh Shrestha revealed mixed expectations for the re-integration of ex-combatants into their communities. The critical rehabilitation factors were:

- communities' war-time experiences;
- combatants' own history of grievances and war crimes;
- combatants' and the community's wish for reconciliation or vengeance;
- rehabilitation and retirements package sizes should not create new grievances;
- non-political rehabilitation committees;
- degree of political awareness translated into social practices;
- conflict level between political parties;
- situation of already-integrated ex-combatants;
- situation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and their grievances;
- role of armed groups in the area;
- access to health care services; and
- prospect for upward economic mobility.¹⁵

A key finding of the study¹⁶ was that five years after the armed conflict had ended, the

¹⁴ Randeep Ramesh, 'Nepal rejoices as peace deal ends civil war', *The Guardian*, 23 November 2006. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/nov/23/nepal> (accessed 15 October 2019).

¹⁵ Tone Bleie & Ramesh Shrestha, 'DDR in Nepal: Stakeholder Politics and the Implications for Reintegration as a Process of Disengagement', *Centre for Peace Studies Report*, University of Tromsø, January 2012, p. 38. Available at https://uit.no/Content/307292/Nepal_Report_Final.pdf (accessed 15 October 2019).

¹⁶ Tone Bleie & Ramesh Shrestha, 'DDR in Nepal: Stakeholder Politics and the Implications for Reintegration as a Process of Disengagement', *Centre for Peace Studies Brief*, University of Tromsø. Available at https://uit.no/Content/307293/Nepal_Brief_Final.pdf (accessed 27 September 2019).

deeper societal causes for joining up or engagement with the militant Maoist movement, namely Nepal's volatile and deteriorating political, social and economic situation, endured and remained unaddressed.

DDR initiatives in general are likely to be most effective when they work alongside and augment indigenous social processes that contribute to reintegration.¹⁷

2. Afghanistan

The nature of the civil war in Afghanistan meant that the DDR process, initiated in 2003, involved a multi-agency and multi-national approach and highly complex financing and financial incentive mechanisms.¹⁸

At a total cost of approximately \$141 million,¹⁹ with international donors meeting the costs; the Afghan New Beginnings Programme (ANBP) was initiated by the United Nations Development Programme. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan managed and implemented the Programme with the help of the International Security Assistance Force. The Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission, instituted by the Afghan government, coordinated the process.

By 2011, when the ANBP was eventually wound down, some 83,000 armed fighters had been identified as meeting the eligibility criteria and between 60,000 to 70,000 ex-combatants had been integrated into civilian life.²⁰ However, these results were marred by two main issues: the dissatisfaction of ex-combatants with finding sufficiently well-paid civilian jobs to compete with the pay provided to fighters; and the fact that fighters gravitated back towards the warlords or commanders to whom they remained loyal and eventually joined the ranks of the Taliban or other rebel groups.

3. Sri Lanka

In 2009, Sri Lanka's government²¹ (composed of the country's Buddhist Sinhalese majority) launched a DDR process to deal with the aftermath of its military defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a rebel force founded in 1976 and ostensibly representing the country's Hindu Tamil minority, whose aim was to establish an independent Tamil country in the north and east of the island.

¹⁷ Kari Karamé, 'Reintegration and the Relevance of Social Relations: The case of Lebanon', *Journal of Conflict, Security & Development* Vol. 9, Issue 4, (2009): p. 495. Available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14678800903345796> (accessed 27 September 2019).

¹⁸ 'Case study: DDR Afghanistan', *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, n.d. Available at <http://warpp.info/en/m2/articles/case-study-ddr-afghanistan> (accessed 27 September 2019).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ BBC, 'Sri Lanka country profile', *BBC News*, 25 April 2019. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11999611> (accessed 27 September 2019).

It is estimated that the 26 year civil war claimed the lives of 100,000 civilians²² with more than a million people displaced. Gross human rights abuses and atrocities were committed by both sides.²³ During the last stages of the war,²⁴ between ten and eleven thousand LTTE combatants surrendered to government forces. The manner in which the war ended meant that Sri Lanka did not need to undergo formal disarmament and demobilisation of combatants, but instead could move straight into rehabilitation and reintegration.

The government of Sri Lanka initiated the rehabilitation and reintegration programme²⁵ with the assistance of several UN and other international humanitarian agencies, including the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the HALO Trust (to help with landmine clearance). It created the Bureau of the Commissioner-General of Rehabilitation to carry out the rehabilitation of 11,664 ex-LTTE combatants in six rehabilitation centres in the Northern Province. The programme consisted of six modules: (i) educational (including re-education and reorientation), (ii) vocational (state banks helped with the provision of soft loans to finance qualifying self-employment projects), (iii) psychological and creative therapies, (iv) social cultural and family (v) spiritual and religious and (vi) recreational and community rehabilitation.

A key finding of the study into Sri Lanka's DDR experience²⁶ was that successful re-integration into civilian life could not be achieved without the rehabilitated ex-combatants getting rid of the stigma of their past as rebels and gaining social acceptance, which in turn made finding employment a very difficult proposition.

What DDR could mean for Iraq

What DDR, within a wider process of political and economic reform, ultimately needs to deliver for Iraq is peace, stability, safety and security, socio-economic recovery and development, wealth and job-creation at both local and national levels, political reforms, constitutional guarantees of human rights and freedoms, non-discrimination and fair and equitable treatment of all eligible Hashd members, tailor-made and flexible local and nationwide reintegration initiatives, transparent mechanisms for the independent monitoring, oversight and evaluation of all operations and financing mechanisms, public information and community sensitisation. These are the main ingredients of the DDR

²² Zafar Iqbal, 'Post-war Sri Lanka: The challenges of reconciliation, reintegration and rehabilitation', *Transconflict*, 24 October 2012. Available at <http://www.transconflict.com/2012/10/post-war-sri-lanka-the-challenges-of-reconciliation-reintegration-and-rehabilitation-240/> (accessed 27 September 2019).

²³ Kallie Szczepanski, 'The Sri Lankan Civil War', *ThoughtCo*, 22 August 2019. Available at <https://www.thoughtco.com/the-sri-lankan-civil-war-195086> (accessed 27 September 2019).

²⁴ Osantha N. Thalpapwila, 'Rehabilitation and Reintegration as a Key Activity of Post- War Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka', *International Journal of Scientific Research and Innovative Technology* Vol. 2 No. 12 (December 2015). Available at http://www.ijrsit.com/uploaded_all_files/1898033422_m2.pdf (accessed 27 September 2019).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

components which need to be deployed in Iraq to incentivise demobilised fighters to reinsert and eventually reintegrate into a lawfully structured life.

However, DDR is not the panacea for the Iraqi government's post-war conflict resolution of its complex relationship with the Hashd. The Hashd's role has been legitimised (including through the Law of the Hashd Commission of 26 November 2016, which brought the Hashd into the state's security apparatus, with the groups reporting directly to the prime minister; and Haider al-Abadi's Prime Ministerial Decree of 8 March 2018,²⁷ formalising the inclusion of the paramilitary groups in the security forces). Despite this, a number of these same groups remain armed and maintain their pre-existing command structures. In reality, they operate outside the state's authority, despite being warned during al-Abadi's tenure that such actions would result in them being treated like Da'esh.²⁸

Applying DDR in Iraq

Disarmament

The notion of disarmament is by now inapplicable to the Hashd as the majority of their forces that would qualify have either already been integrated into the state's military and intelligence apparatus or are in the process of doing so. Furthermore, those groups which maintained a degree of autonomy following the declaration of victory against Da'esh have reconstituted themselves into political entities, whilst maintaining military readiness.

The Hashd were, for the most part, a lightly trained paramilitary force that often shared resources and bases with the ISF, with access to medium and heavy weaponry but no air power. They showed excellent morale and willingness to engage Da'esh in intense battles but lacked some of the professionalism, skills and technical capacity that would have allowed them to operate completely independently of the ISF. Haider al-Abadi appointed a new deputy head for administrative affairs of the Hashd Commission in order to identify excess staff, improve efficiency and tackle corruption. The existing deputy head of the Hashd Commission and chief of operations, Jamal Jaafar Ibrahim (known as Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis), had called for the Iraqi government and parliament to approve funding for a total force strength of 120,000 in 2016, as the Hashd had been underfunded in 2015.²⁹ However, not all of these were frontline troops and only half of them were deployed to active areas while the rest maintained bases, checkpoints and provided logistical support. While this state of affairs continues, the prospect of the majority of the Hashd being disarmed is negligible.

²⁷ 'Iraq's Shi'ite militias formally inducted into security forces: Baghdad', *Reuters*; 9 March 2018. Available at <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-iraq-militias/iraqs-shiite-militias-formally-inducted-into-security-forces-idUKKCN1GK351> (accessed 15 October 2019).

²⁸ 'Abadi warns against using Hashd's fighters for political purposes' [in Arabic], *Sumaria News*, 20 February 2016. Available at <https://www.alsumaria.tv/news/160292/> (accessed 15 October 2019).

²⁹ Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis stated that Hashd numbers were higher than expected in 2015, leading to not all members being paid at the end of 2015. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FN5creLb6X4> (accessed 27 September 2019).

Demobilisation, Reinsertion and Reintegration

Leading from the failure to disarm the Hashd, demobilisation and eventual reintegration into civilian life has also not been possible. During the war against Da'esh, the GoI had initiated a series of legal and political steps to embrace the more moderate *Hashd*, in large numbers, into the ranks of the military and intelligence apparatus.

Demobilising the Hashd is also antithetical to the aims of pro-Iran groups who see the possibility of an IRCG model being implemented in Iraq, thereby offering a parallel military force to that controlled by the civilian government. The rationale behind such a model is the long-term protection it would offer the Iraqi state from the dangers of Da'esh and Sunni terrorism, as this force would supposedly be ideologically driven and incentivised to fight in a manner that the ISF is not. This would require additional legislation authorising these activities; significant increases in funding and operational capacity; the ability to build and maintain infrastructure such as bases, depots and hospitals; the authority to purchase weapons and sign contracts; and the ongoing process of recruiting and training new members.

In essence, this would mean the Hashd becoming an independent force alongside or parallel to the ISF and retaining very similar capabilities. Of course, such a proposition makes policymakers in Baghdad and Western observers extremely nervous and it is unlikely it will ever be seriously considered, no matter what amount of pressure may come from the Hashd leadership. The sooner the Hashd is demobilised and disbanded (and thus the various groups delegitimised) the less likely the raising of such a proposition before Parliament. In one sense, it is a race against time for the ISF to prove it has the ability to secure all of Iraq and that no other 'parallel' armed force is needed.

The office of new Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi, the MoD and the MoI can take quick and practical steps to improve the prospects of the long-term reintegration of the Hashd and better prepare for its integration within the ISF. Among these steps, we suggest the following:

- Deploying more than one group of the Hashd in any mobilisation, and not allowing the 'resistance' factions (as the broadly pro-Iran groupings are known) to be the sole force in any single operation. This will decrease the risk of sectarian violations and, with increased Sunni participation in the Hashd, will limit the resonance of any sectarian narrative linked to operations. It is important to understand that the perception of the Hashd as 'Shi'a militias' is not easy to overcome and should not be dismissed without effective actions to change such perceptions.
- Identifying criminal elements and holding individual groups accountable for any violations. Isolating any sectarian or unruly components of the Hashd is necessary, as is subjecting them to the law in a similar manner to how the proliferation of militias was tackled in 2008. The government must send out a clear signal that it will not tolerate or cooperate with any sectarian or criminal gang regardless of their affiliation or their importance on the battlefield. This requires a full review of all cadres and monitoring the conduct of fighters on and off the battlefield. Precursory reorientation and vetting

procedures are not only necessary before re-insertion into the ISF but also a legitimate means to reduce numbers.

This also requires that the authority of the Hashd is limited so that individual groups do not have the ability to bypass checkpoints and openly operate in civilian areas. The right approach is essential here: too hardline and the potential for conflict is high; too soft and individual groups will be further emboldened.

- Before re-insertion into the ISF, embedding ISF officers in Hashd operations so as to improve the professionalism of the Hashd, reduce their losses, improve communication and accurately assess their performance and conduct. This will see ISF officers nominating militia members for recruitment into the ISF and better coordinating resources of the Hashd, including air support, medical care, weapons and ammunition, and resupplying. This would also allow Iraqi officers to play a more active role in the Hashd, rather than having cadres rely on Iranian advisors.

Certain Hashd factions have become acutely aware of the public's fatigue with military groups and redefined themselves in order to survive and retain their influence. One group which is likely to maintain its position and strength even if the Hashd is disbanded is the Badr Organisation. It has a long paramilitary history and in 2012 split from its political parent, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), to form a political party that went on to win 22 seats in the 2014 parliamentary elections. Until recently, Badr was the only group in the Hashd that had played a significant role in politics, but following the 2018 elections Asaib Ahl al-Haqq, which previously had a very small political footprint, gained 13 seats and increased its influence within the Fatah Alliance. Badr, also part of the Fatah Alliance, failed to make any electoral gains and kept its 22 seats. However, its influence remains considerable as it is seen as the most pragmatic of the pro-Iran groups and the US has a longstanding relationship with its leader, Hadi al-Ameri.

The previous Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi developed a relationship with Badr and in doing so he split the Hashd leadership into a pro-government camp and a self-styled 'resistance' camp. Despite the threat which some people see Badr posing as part of the Iraqi state apparatus, it is likely that a push into politics and away from militarisation will encourage other Hashd groups to follow suit. Engaging with these groups – certainly during the transitional reinsertion phase – on the political level is a policy borne out by other DDR experiences, and Badr has shown it is willing to lay down its arms and join civilian politics (perhaps with the confidence that if it was needed to meet a new threat from Da'esh, it could recruit quickly and raise arms once again). The 2018 national elections demonstrated the concurrent military and political roles of more than 20 factions of the *Hashd*, who fought under one election list, the Fatah Alliance, relying on their popularity to make inroads against established parties.

The political wings of the Hashd factions have succeeded in participating in the current Iraqi government. The Hashd leadership's pre-election move to hand control of their militias to central government allowed them to participate 'cleanly and legitimately' in the elections, while maintaining influence among their own militias.

Strategies for the Future Reintegration of the Hashd al-Shaabi

In the years following the June 2014 incursions into Iraq, the Hashd led key battles to retake territory from Da'esh in different parts of the country. They received praise from the public for doing so, especially for preventing Baghdad, Karbala and Samarra from being overrun. They also worked with local Sunnis to defeat Da'esh and return local control to the police and provincial governments. In some areas the Hashd have acted as arbiters and peacemakers between tribes who have had members join or be killed by Da'esh. They have also played an important role in ensuring the safe return of IDPs to their homes. This has come at a high cost, with over 30,000 killed and wounded, leaving their families dependent on compensation, which some have struggled to receive.

These initiatives bode well for the Hashd's community-based reintegration prospects. But who is responsible for building on these positive aspects: the GoI, the Hashd Commission, civil society or a combination of all three? Raising public awareness of the strategies being deployed to reintegrate the Hashd, for instance through social media campaigns, is an important component in improving community relations, rehabilitating the reputation of the Hashd and gaining them wider acceptance amongst the different communities, whilst the slow process of reinsertion takes place and new jobs are found for the returning combatants.

As part of the long-term policy to demobilise the Hashd, several short- and medium-term strategies have been drawn up and applied.

The first is defunding excess units and tackling corrupt elements, absorbing the required numbers into the ISF, and returning veterans to civilian life. For 2016, funding was initially³⁰ slated for 60,000 men but this was subsequently increased to 80,000 with the proviso that 40,000 of those recruits must come from Sunni areas. This left a significant shortfall from the requested funding and represented an effort by al-Abadi to reduce Hashd numbers and fund only critical frontline fighters. The 120,000 figure has been viewed with scepticism and an inspector general appointed by al-Abadi to investigate the matter failed to make any headway on this. It is likely that there are around 90,000 actual members of the Hashd, and the rest are either 'ghost' members, men belonging to individual groups who do not contribute to the Hashd effort, or those killed in action/wounded and still on the payroll.

The government needs to identify excess units that are not critical to the frontline operations and find the means for improving efficiency and eliminating waste, and to report any form of corruption. Limiting the Hashd in terms of finances and total numbers, and improving transparency and administration is the first step in these short-term initiatives.

³⁰ If the 120,000 figure is accepted then total Hashd numbers would have been expected to reach 150,000 by end of 2016, but this is highly unlikely and a cap of 80,000 for payroll will probably be implemented even if membership is higher. See 'Abadi Guarantees Wages for 40,000 Hashd fighters and Monthly Salaries for the Displaced' [in Arabic], *Al-Mada Press*, 20 December 2015. Available at <http://www.almadapress.com/ar/NewsDetails.aspx?NewsID=61631> (accessed 27 September 2019).

The second is integrating the required numbers into the ISF, as per the operational requirements of the MoD and MoI. This will redeploy around 50,000 fighters from the Hashd into the MoD/MoI over the next three years, which, combined with the previous initiatives, will seriously reduce the size of the organisation. Some elements of the Hashd have already adopted the ideal model of working closely with the MoD and MoI and are in a good position to be incorporated into the ISF.

Firgat al-Abbas al-Qitaliyah (the Abbas Combat Division), which was formed under the direction of the Abbas Shrine in Karbala, developed close ties with the Iraqi Army and essentially acts as an auxiliary and supporting force.³¹ They receive training, equipment and orders from the Iraqi Army, and this relationship has been very positive for the MoD showing the utility of the volunteering effort. This provides a precedent which the US-led coalition can use to improve its relations with the Hashd, by providing training (including on ethics and professionalism) and support for elements considered suitable candidates for integration into the ISF. Supporting moderate groups who are on the same side in the war against Da'esh seems logical. Such pragmatic policies are necessary to undo the propaganda and mistrust that permeates the Iraqi arena, and to quash the theory that the US provides backing to Da'esh and anti-Shi'a groups.

The third strategy will see the return of Hashd members who are no longer needed to their original jobs or to civilian life. The 'Victory Sermon'³² delivered by Karbalai on 15 December 2017 was tantamount to a declaration that the *wajib al-kifai* fatwa had been satisfied and that it was time for the volunteers, from across the spectrum, to resume old responsibilities or to assume new roles.

Providing better care for the families of those killed or injured, showing respect and gratitude for their sacrifices, and honouring their effort during a time of danger for the Iraqi state will go a long way towards ameliorating the less palatable aspects of rehabilitation of the Hashd. This is perhaps the most urgent and probably the easiest step to carry out, because much of the Hashd feel their efforts have not been acknowledged or that their families have not received the necessary gratitude or assistance. The Iraqi government could institute a Hashd veterans' programme that includes compensation, medical care, physiotherapy, counselling and mental health care support, and support with finding jobs and further education for those who are able to. This is an essential part of the effort to return volunteers to civilian life and prepare them for its demands.

A combination of existing legislative instruments and religious authorities instructing the Hashd to essentially disband should pave the way for the non-aligned fighters to retire in a dignified and orderly manner and to re-integrate into civilian life.

³¹ 'The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces', *Al-Bayan Centre for Planning and Studies*, 3 September 2016. Available at <http://www.bayancenter.org/en/2016/03/650/> (accessed 27 September 2019).

³² Abdul Mehdi el-Karbalai, 'Victory Sermon from Karbala' [in Arabic]. Available at <https://www.sistani.org/arabic/statement/25875/> (accessed 27 September 2019).

One issue which needs attention is whether the ‘resistance’ groups, especially those operating before 2014 and thus before the Hashd was created, will cease to be active if the Hashd is demobilised. It is thus envisaged that a combination of the three aforementioned initiatives will see Hashd numbers capped at 80,000, with around 50,000 inducted into the ISF, and the remaining 30,000 ordered to demobilise.

Policy Recommendations

The GoI has not partnered with a UN agency to implement the DDR process nor has it secured any other form of international assistance for this purpose. The path it has followed has been dictated mostly by pragmatic, domestic political and military necessities. In this study, the traditional DDR process has been used to identify certain elements of Iraq’s demilitarisation of its Hashd citizens with recognised UN-sponsored protocols. Iraq’s ad hoc approach appears to have been no less successful than the more planned experiences of such countries as Sri Lanka, Nepal and Afghanistan.

In order to proceed towards a consensual outcome, we offer the following recommendations:

1. Canvass the opinions and views of the Hashd leadership regarding the appropriate mechanisms for the disarmament and reintegration of their forces (including the creation of a Demobilisation and Re-integration Commission).
2. Identify the most important obstacles and the potential causes for future conflict against the Iraqi state.
3. Classify the different elements or factions of the Hashd and religious authorities that back them, conduct dialogue over time with the competent leaders of the various factions, identify the potential causes of the failure for the cohesion of the different groups, and identify the principal actors and decision makers who will be tasked with designing a model, with an emphasis placed on transparency and anti-nepotism guarantees, to reduce or merge the forces of the Hashd within a predefined legal mandate.
4. Draw up a road map with the plan’s advantages and disadvantages laid out, and submit it to the key players for consideration.
5. Set a date for a joint meeting of the elected representatives of these factions, with the participation of the National Reconciliation Commission in the Office of the Prime Minister, the Parliamentary Reconciliation Committee, a UN representative, a representative from the International Alliance, and a representative from the religious authorities. Subsequently, place the agreed recommendations before parliament for debate.

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