

The Hashd's Popular Gambit: Demystifying PMU Integration in Post-IS Iraq

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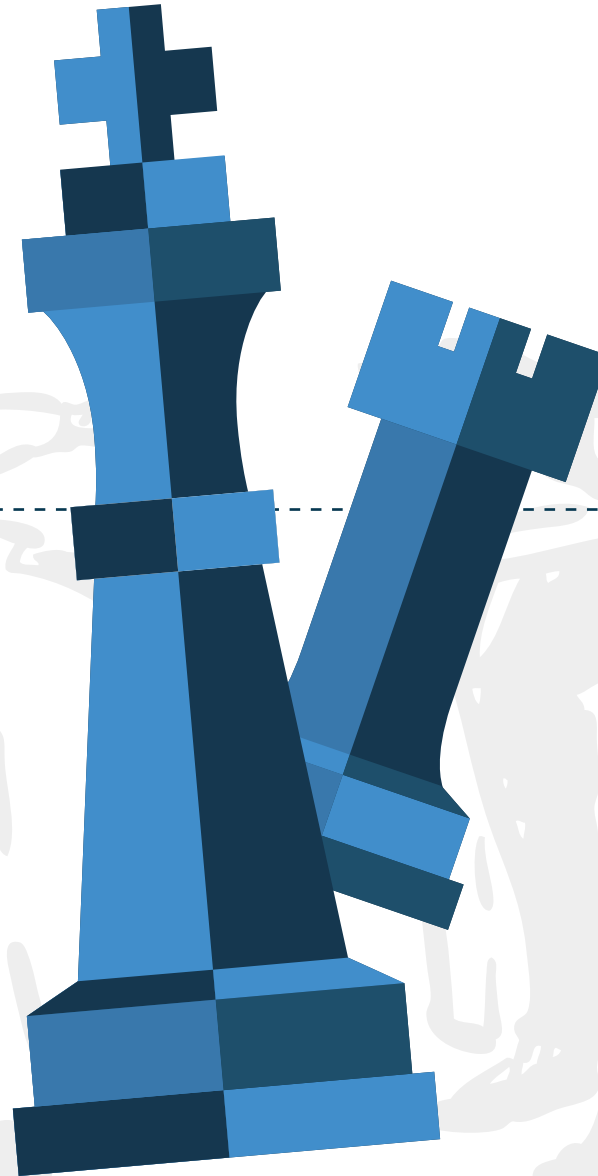
Despite acknowledging the risks of delegating authority to para-state or extra-institutional security providers, ruling elites have consciously resorted to such auxiliaries for the sake of preserving their institutional grip on power and resource distribution.

Under the veil of law enforcement, these power holders and their occasional auxiliaries tend to share both the burden and the benefits of protecting the status quo at the cost of corroding state institutions.

The established oligopoly on the coercive - though not always legitimate - use of force has constituted a double-edged sword for both sides of the bargain.

While the upper ranks of state authorities and their embedded commissioners may resort to pleading plausible deniability vis-à-vis human rights violations and repression of dissent, their inability to declare and hold a perpetrator responsible will further undermine their credibility as self-proclaimed guardians of the sovereign state.

Similarly, auxiliaries' flirtation with formal bureaucracies may indeed unlock additional access to resources and institutional leverage, but their formalised affiliation with a dysfunctional state apparatus also risks rubbing off against their initial popular or street legitimacy.



Being in the infancy phase of their organisational development, the evolution of Iraq's Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) has come to both reflect and reproduce these trends, which have to a large extent paved their own trajectory towards a state-sanctioned though ideologically heterogenous and internally fragmented paramilitary umbrella.

Breaking this path of dependence would require moving beyond any Weberian or Westphalian coloured state-centred approaches of security sector reform, allowing decision-makers to accommodate if not to reverse the realities of the existing heterarchical order.

Though interest driven, the logic of political survival still holds the potential to push the triumvirate of formal state authorities, the PMU and their extra-legal outgrowths to revisit their modus vivendi.

The resilience of people's discontent in Tahrir Square has demonstrated that the heterarchical power sharing arrangement has reached its maximum lifespan. The heightened public awareness in Iraq has left no one to buy into or even condone the blame gaming and finger pointing of allied security agencies, rejecting liability on grounds of a compromised chain of command, albeit a consciously fractured one.