State-militia relationships in Iraq from 2003-2016

From U.S. invasion to PMF incorporation

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Abstract

State-militia relationships are often explained with the Delegation Argument, in which governments delegate actions to pro-government militias (PGMs) that they must perform. However, state-militia relationships are far more complex, ranging from repression to incorporation. Often state-militia relationships shift over time. I test these shifts using Staniland's categorization on state-militia relationships in Iraq between 2003 and 2016.
In using explaining-outcome process-tracing I looked at how the Popular Mobilization Forces, an umbrella-organisation containing more than fifty PGMs, got incorporated into Iraq's official security structure, linking the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 to the incorporation of the PMF in 2016.

This in-depth case study is based on news media reports, NGO reports, academic articles and secondary historical writings on Iraq. I found that Staniland's categorization of state-militia relationships is applicable to the case of Iraq between 2003-2016, better explaining these relationships that using the Delegation Argument. However, the Iraqi state itself is not a unitary actor, but composed of a plethora of political parties and militias vying for state power at the cost of Iraq's official security institutions. The clientelist Iraqi state, based on patronage networks that opt for the state's resources, was severely weakened as the Islamic State rose to prominence.

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Source: www.mapsopensource.com/iraq-political-map.html.

Chapter 1: introduction

Different militias in Iraq have been active since the invasion of the U.S. in 2003. The Iraqi government has conducted different policies towards militias over time. For example, the Iraqi government together with the U.S. colluded with the "Awakening" in 2005, a Sunni tribal militia that fought Al Qaida in Iraq (AQI). This local militia was better positioned to identify AQI insurgents hiding in their midst (Ahram, 2016, p. 209). Other militias such as the Mahdi Army, a powerful Shia militia headed by al-Sadr, were repressed by the U.S. and the Iraqi government in 2004 (Seliktar & Rezaei, 2020, p. 138). However, since 2014 Sadr's militia, now under the name of Saraya as-Salam (Peace Brigades), fought together with the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) against the Islamic State (IS), the successor of AQI (Levy, 2019, pp. 125-126). Thus, over time relationships between the state and militias can shift.

The relationship between the different ethnic and religious communities in Iraq have deteriorated severely since the U.S. invasion of 2003 (Wehrey, 2014, p. 98). After Saddam Hussein was ousted from power, the Sunni community lost their grip on state power. Kurdish and Shia political parties now dominated the Iraqi political and security landscape (Ismael & Ismael, 2015, pp. 24-25). In reaction to the sectarian policies of the Shia Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki (2006-2014), uprisings in the Sunni Triangle between Bagdad, Tikrit and al-Ramadi broke out in 2013 (ibid., pp. 93-96). Many former Sunni Iraqi military and intelligence officers who had served during Saddam's rule joined IS (Harris, 2018, p. 43). In a reaction to the rapid advance of IS the most senior Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani issued a fatwa to 'defend Iraq, its people and its sacred sites from the Islamic State' (Eriksson & Khaleel, 2019, p. 82). Thousands of Iraqi men answered his call. Because of mixed sectarian and ethnic loyalties, people's commitment to the Iraqi military and police is often questionable (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, pp. 6-7). Therefore, thousands joined the dozens of militias that were already operating in Iraq or that saw the daylight after al-Sistani's fatwa.

The different militias that fought IS combined their force and were put under one command structure in an umbrella-organization called the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). Over 50 militias are active in the PMF varying in size, regional affiliation, political ideology, religion, and ethnicity (Cigar, 2015, p. 14). The PMF had an important role in fighting IS, but the

conquest of Iraq by the Sunni insurgents also showed the ISF's institutional weakness (Rezaei, 2019, p. 128; Ismael & Ismael, 2015, p. 216).

In February 2016 legislation passed the Iraqi parliament that recognised the PMF as a government entity operating alongside the military apparatus (Ezzeddine et al., 2018, p. 3). The bill turned the PMF into an official entity in the security structure of the Iraqi Republic, but under the command of the Prime Minister rather than of the official security forces, giving the PMF semi-official status. Thus, during the war against IS, the relationship between the PMF and the Iraqi government changed from collusion to incorporation.
What made the Iraqi government decide to incorporate the PMF into the official security structure of the Iraqi Republic?

Pro-government militias
A trend in many countries is that states privatize or outsource violence (Wulf, 2007, p. 11). The outsourcing and privatization of violence and security is a fundamental challenge to the state's monopoly of force. The Weberian notion of the state's monopoly of violence implies the elimination of private armies and the disarmament of other armed non-state actors (ibid.). One group that questions the state monopoly are pro-government militias (PGMs). Governments around the world create, align with, or support different kinds of armed groups that operate outside the official security structure and that are not fully under the state's control. Governments use PGMs to achieve political goals or to address a variety of security concerns (Carey & Mitchell, 2017, p. 128). Carey et al. (2012, p. 250) conceptualize PGMs as groups that (1) are identified as pro-government or sponsored by the government; (2) are identified as not being part of the regular security forces; (3) are armed; and (4) have some level of organization. In the literature on PGMs the most common incentives for governments to delegate security tasks to militias are the cheap additional forces, access to local intelligence, and the deniability for violence (ibid., pp. 129-130).

Carey and Mitchell (2017, p. 134) argue that governments that delegate violence to PGMs do so rationally, after making a calculated cost-benefit calculation. The essence of the government-militia relationship is a principale-agent (P/A) relationship, in which the government acts as the principale delegating security tasks to militias which act as the

agents. However, governments can opt to incorporate PGMs into the official security structure, as seen in the case of Iraq. If a government acting as the principale uses PGMs acting as agents, then why would the government incorporate PGMs into the security structure, making them semi-official?

According to Staniland (2015, p. 770) the idea that militias act as subservient proxies of governments ignores the diversity of state-militia relations. Governments can have complex and often unexpected relationships with non-state actors (ibid., p. 771). In reality, the P/A dichotomy between states and militias is oversimplistic; PGMs are not always junior partners to the government (ibid.) Also, over time the relationship between governments and militias can change: insurgents and armed political parties can become PGMs, PGMs may become insurgents. Incorporating militias into the formal security structure seeks to eliminate non-state violence by absorbing militias instead of annihilating them (ibid., p. 775). Militia incorporation occurs when governments decide to make a shift in their relationship with militias, opting for incorporation in the state-apparatus instead of a continuing collusion (ibid.).

As cooperation between states and militias is most likely in periods of armed conflict (Carey et al., 2015, p. 851), it is necessary to understand if and how the relationship between governments and militias evolves during conflict. Is the relationship between governments and militias during armed conflict explainable by the Delegation Argument using P/A theory, in which the state dictates actions that militias must perform? Or is this relationship more complex and fluid over time during armed conflict, as claimed by Staniland (2015)? Militia incorporation occurs when a state makes a shift from a collusion strategy towards incorporating militias into the official security structure (Staniland, 2015, p. 775). Hence my research question: why do governments incorporate PGMs into the official security structure during armed conflict?

To answer this research question I built upon Staniland's categorization of state-militia relationships. I hypothesize that states with weak coercive security institutions either collude with militias or opt to contain them, while states with strong coercive security institutions either repress militias, or incorporate them into the official security structure. Looking at

Iraq, I investigated the causal mechanism between the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the parliamentary bill in 2016 that turned the PMF into an official entity in the security structure of the Iraqi Republic, making them semi-official.

1.1 Why study state-militia relationships?

Militias are present in most civil wars, operating alongside regular security forces (Jentzsch et al., 2015, p. 755; Carey et al., 2012, p. 253). The relationship between militias and the state poses important questions for state-building. When states delegate violent military tasks to militias, they weaken the state as it does not possess the monopoly on violence (Jentzsch et al., 2015, p. 764). Paradoxically, a state can use the relatively cheap militias as proxies when its security institutions are weak, but this delegation can also threaten its existence in the long term (ibid.). Understanding the change over time in the relationship between the state and PGMs can provide insights in the state-building processes during and after armed conflicts. Also, PGMs are often linked with extreme violence and a total disregard for humanitarian laws, so understanding the mechanisms how this violence comes about is necessary (Carey et al., 2015, p. 850). When armed conflict ends and PGMs and the state keep their relationship intact, PGMs are more likely to commit violent acts against civilians again when being ordered by the state (Carey & Gonzales, 2020, p. 1). Although PGMs are linked with violence and repression, they can also be able to provide stability in the short run (Hubbard, 2007, p. 345). Also, PGMs can have popular support for their role in fighting insurgents (ibid., p. 347).

PGMs can also be useful for states to conduct their foreign policy in other countries. States can create or support militias as proxies in civil wars, instead of marching in conventional military forces. This can lead to tensions between outside powers that support different militias and/or government forces (Kan, 2019, p. 3). This foreign sponsorship of PGMs is still an understudies phenomenon (Leenders & Giustozzi, 2020, pp. 1-2). PGMs can have multiple principals. For example, in the Iraqi civil war (2013-2017) PGMs were trained and often led by the Iraqi government, but also by the elite Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and even from other militias like the Lebanese Hezbollah (ibid., p. 6). These complex

relationships could have implications on how the relationship between PGMs and their governments evolves.

After a civil war has ended, or when insurgents are sure to be defeated, the question arises how the state deals with PGMs. In the post-conflict dynamics questions arise on how PGMs are to be handled. Are they to be repressed, incorporated into formal institutions or is there a form of collusion between the PGMs and the government possible and how do these different options affect state-building?

1.2 Methodology

Explaining-outcome process-tracing

To find an answer to my research question, I used explaining-outcome process-tracing. The ambition in process-tracing is that scholars want to go beyond identifying correlations between causes and outcomes (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 1). The central element in process-tracing is to look for causal mechanisms between cause(s) and outcome(s). Causal mechanisms can best be understood as 'a complex system, which produces an outcome by the interaction of a number of parts' (ibid.) In using process-tracing I attempts to identify the intervening causal process, or the causal chain between cause(s) (independent variable or variables) and the outcome (dependent variable or variables) (ibid.). This allows the researcher to open up the 'black box of causality' using an in-depth case study to make a strong within-case inference about causal mechanisms (X → mechanism → Y) (ibid., p. 2). As Beach and Pedersen (2013, p. 2) explain, making strong within-case causal inferences is arguably not possible using other social science methods than process-tracing. In using explaining-outcome process-tracing I attempt to craft a minimally sufficient explanation of a puzzling outcome in a specific historical case. My aim is not so much to test or build a general theory, but to create a sufficient explanation for my specific case, here the incorporation of PGMs into the official security structure during armed conflict in Iraq. My ambition to find an answer to this puzzling outcome is thus more case-centric than theory-oriented.

In explaining-outcome process-tracing explanations of a hypothesized mechanism are viewed as necessary and/or sufficient (ibid., p. 29). Necessary conditions are conditions that have to be present for an certain outcome to occur. If theorized conditions are not present in a case, the outcome does not occur (absence of X → absence of Y). A sufficient explanation describes a situation where a condition, or a set of conditions, is able to produce an outcome (If X → always Y). Thus, in process-tracing the aim is to test the presence or absence of a theorized mechanism in a single-case study (ibid., p. 31).

In this thesis I use an actor-centred approach. Causal mechanisms are processes through which agents with causal capacities operate (Bennet & George, 2005, p. 137). I looked at how individuals' interests and beliefs affect their actions and how individuals interact with each other (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 43). However, this does not necessarily mean that actors are always individuals. In social science many forms of collective actors can be treated as were they individuals (ibid., p. 42). For example, a militia can be regarded as an individual, as does the Iraqi army. Each part of the hypothesised causal mechanism should therefore be conceptualized as entities that undertake activities. Entities engage in activities that produce change, or transmit causal forces through the causal mechanism (ibid., p. 49). Thus, in conceptualizing the causal mechanism, entities use nouns, whereas activities should include verbs that define the transition in the causal chain (ibid., p. 50). To prove the existence of a hypothesized causal mechanism with a sufficient degree of certainty using process-tracing, data collection is a vital element to prove the causal connection between cause(s) and outcome(s).

Data collection

In this thesis I used multiple sources to answer my research question: news media reports, NGO reports, academic articles, and secondary historical writings on Iraq.

News reports are an excellent source to find evidence for my hypothesized causal mechanism. There has been considerable attention for Iraqi security and political developments since the U.S. invasion in 2003. The tensions between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States makes both countries vie for power in Iraq. Since many militias in the PMF are allied with Iran, there has been considerable media attention for the PMF. The

Iraq war against IS and the role of the PMF within it has put them centre-stage in local and international media outlets

I used LexisNexis to find news reports on the Iraqi political and security situation. These news reports covered the time span of 19 March 2003 to February 2016. On March 19 2003 the U.S. invasion of Iraq began by airstrikes, followed up the next day by the entering of ground forces. In February 2016 Prime Minister al-Abadi formally incorporated the PMF into Iraq's security structure during the war against IS. To explain this outcome and to understand state-militia relationships proceeding this outcome, I used a larger timeframe.

I used different terms and catchwords in LexisNexis (e.g. PMF, Islamic State, ISF, Iraqi police, etc.). Also, I searched for names within the political elite of Iraq, U.S. officials in Iraq, and different persons within the PMF (e.g. al-Maliki, Bremer, Mahdi Army, Muhandis, etc.). The news media reports, NGO reports, academic articles, and secondary historical writings on Iraq I used to explain the hypothesized causal mechanism focused on the relationship between the Iraqi state and the different militias operating in Iraq in the time span of 2003-2016.

As the focus in this thesis is on a singular event – PGMs incorporation into the official security sector in Iraq – I used counterfactual reasoning. Multiple hypothesis to explain the causal mechanism linking cause(s) with the outcome are possible (Collier, 2011 , p. 825). In order to provide a sufficient explanation for my hypothesized causal mechanism, I use different tests used in process-tracing. I looked for empirical observations using multiple sources to explain the causal mechanism. In process-tracing the analogy of a law court is often used: the empirical evidence is looked for by the detective, refuted by the advocate , and finally deemed by the judge (Punton & Welle, 2015, p. 2).

In weighing the empirical evidence a first test I used was the "Straw-in-the-Wind Test". This test can increase the plausibility of a hypothesis or raise doubts about it, but are not decisive by themselves. Straw-in-the-Wind Tests do not provide necessary or sufficient evidence to accept or reject a hypothesis, since they have a low uniqueness and a low certainty, but they can provide a valuable benchmark in a research by providing an initial assessment of a

hypothesis (Collier, 2011, p. 826). The second test I used was the “Hoop-Test”. In this test the hypothesis must “jump through the hoop” to remain a consideration, but passing this test does not affirm the theorised hypothesis (ibid.) The Hoop-Test does not pose a sufficient criterion for accepting a hypothesis, but it establishes a necessary condition (ibid.). It does not confirm a hypothesis, but it can eliminate it (ibid.). Contrary to Straw-in-the-Wind Tests, a Hoop-Test weakens the plausibility of rival hypothesis, although alternative explanations can remain relevant (ibid.).

Stronger evidence for a hypothesised mechanism can be reached by a “Smoking-Gun Test”. Here the metaphor is used that a suspect who is caught holding a smoking gun is presumed guilty (ibid., p. 827). This test provides a sufficient but still not a necessary criterion for accepting the hypothesised causal mechanism, as those with no smoking gun may not be innocent (ibid). Smoking-Gun Tests strongly support a hypothesis, but failing to pass does not reject it (ibid.) If the test passes, it substantially weakens rival hypotheses (ibid.). The test that provides the strongest inferential leverage to confirm a hypothesis and eliminates all others is the “Doubly Decisive Test” (ibid). This test provides sufficient and necessary standards to establish a causal mechanism (ibid.). However, in social science establishing causation with this test is rare, but the judgement on a hypothesised causal mechanism can be established by combining multiple tests which together support one explanation and eliminates others (ibid.). Thus, different sources for empirical evidence are needed to confirm the hypothesized mechanism.

I used the above tests to interpret empirical evidence and to weight the evidence against each other. I evaluated the evidence from media reports, NGO letters, academic articles and policy briefs, etc. amongst others on proximity, independence, validity, and diversity. To test my hypothesis (and alternatives) triangulation is vital, thus in finding empirical evidence I searched for multiple sources. In any in-depth case study a fine grained knowledge of the case is required, hence my use of secondary historical literature on Iraq.

Case-selection

I choose to conduct a case study on Iraq to answer my research question. In this country different militias have been active since the U.S. invasion in 2003. The Iraqi government has

conducted different policies towards militias over time that are recognizable in the categorization of Staniland (2015). These different policies a government can pursue are suppression, incorporation, containment, or collusion (ibid., p. 772). In using a larger timeframe (2003-2016) I was able to look at state-militia relationships during different episodes of conflict. Periods of severe violence between the Iraqi government together with U.S. forces against militias and insurgents were alternated with periods of relative ease. This allowed me to research how governments alter their relationships with militias over time.

Case studies are particularly conducive to researching real-life and contemporary phenomena, because they enable a contextual frame in which a particular phenomenon is present (Woodside, 2010, pp. 1-2). The studied phenomenon, here militias incorporation into the official security structure during armed conflict, takes place in a certain country, region, and/or time with its own contextual situation (Zainal, 2007, p. 4). A case study where a single particular outcome in one case is researched can have the disadvantage of being more descriptive than explanatory (Gerring, 2004, p. 47). Yet, descriptive inferences are undervalued within the social sciences, while they provide much contextual knowledge (ibid., p. 347). The complexities in a real-life contextual situation can often not fully be grasped by other research methods (Zainal, 2007, pp. 4-5). Because I want to understand the contextual frame in this particular case, a descriptive research method is necessary.

As process-tracing centres on studying causal mechanisms within a single case, empirical evidence is hard to compare with evidence from other studies. Relevant evidence in one case study can thus not be really meaningful compared to other cases (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 28). However, the difference between an explaining-outcome process-tracing research and a historical research is the focus on the causal mechanism in which the analysis is theory-guided and in which it is the ambition is to go beyond the single case (ibid., p. 36). For this purpose I made an attempt to distinguish between systematic and non-systematic (case-specific or contextual) causal mechanisms. In a within-case study using explaining-outcome process-tracing it is necessary to include case-specific parts in the causal mechanism (ibid., p. 35). However, case-specific mechanisms can be distinguished from systematic ones by asking whether we should expect the mechanism to play any role in other cases (ibid.). In the ambition to go beyond a single case, I tried to identify what

mechanism are case-specific and which ones are systematic and hypothetically transportable to other comparable cases.

Lastly, I hope to provide knowledge of the Iraqi security environment for policy makers. For example, NATO cooperates with the Iraqi state, aimed to improve the capacity of the ISF, its defence and security institutions, and its national defence academies (NATO, 2021). In 2017 the Iraqi government asked NATO for an increase in training and advising efforts (ibid.). In the first part of 2021, the defence ministers of NATO member-states further increased the size of the training mission and expanded its training activities to more security institutions and to areas beyond Baghdad (ibid.). Therefore, the NATO Mission Iraq (NMI) must be aware of the complex security situation since a semi-official PGM is now part of the official security structure in Iraq.

1.3 The procedure of this thesis

I continue with the theoretical background and give a definition of the central concepts. I then provide an explanation of P/A theory used by Carey and Mitchell (2017, p. 134) to explain the collusion between states and PGMs. This is followed up by an explanation of the different categories in state-militia relationships provided by Staniland (2015).

I will then provide the hypothesized causal mechanism linking the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the incorporation of the PMF into the official security structure in Iraq. I will also describe alternative explanations and how to assess them in explaining-outcome process-tracing.

Following the theoretical background, I provide the empirical part of this thesis, consisting of two chapters. In chapter three a description is given of the political developments between the U.S. invasion and the re-election of al-Maliki in 2010. This is followed-up by an analyses on state-militia relationships in the same period. In chapter four the same structure is provided, here from al-Maliki's re-election in 2010 to the incorporation of the PMF into the Iraqi security structure.

In the conclusion I discuss the empirical evidence I found and their implication on state-militia relationships according to Staniland's categorization. I will also discuss limitation on these findings in this thesis and how these limitations affect the relevance of the empirical evidence I found.

Chapter 2: Central argument, theories, and the causal mechanism

2.1. Central arguments and concepts

I argue that when a state has strong coercive security institutions it either opts to repress militias or to incorporate them into the official security structure during armed conflict. When a state has powerful institutions in the security sector the need to collude with militias to gain additional forces is not necessary, thus the state would not risk giving up on its monopoly on violence, as this can lead to state fragility in the long run (Carey & Mitchell, 2017, p. 129). When a state has weak coercive security institutions it either colludes with militias or opts to control them through containment. A state with weak security institutions can be in need for additional cheap forces during armed conflict, making collusion with militias necessary for the survival of the state against insurgents (ibid., pp. 129-130).
A possible exception for states with strong security institutions to work with militias is the possibility for states to deny violence undertaken against civilians, as these are carried out by militias (Carey et al., 2015, p. 851). If regimes undertake violence against civilians themselves they can become vulnerable from political pressure from different actors, for example through Naming and Shaming campaigns (Hendrix & Wong, 2013, p. 652). Also, states with powerful security institutions can be in need for local intelligence during armed conflict, thus using local militias (Carey & Mitchell, 2017, pp. 129-130). However, I argue that reciprocity exist between the strength of the security sector of the state on the one hand and different policies towards militias on the other. This implies that there can be alterations in government's policies towards militias over time and during armed conflict. I use Staniland's (2015) categorization of state-militia relationships to invigorate my argument.

Staniland (2015, p. 772) distinguishes four different strategies toward militias that states can apply: suppression, incorporation, containment, and collusion. When a state suppresses militias it deploys lethal targeting towards a militia. The state's aim is to break the militia's fighting power to the point of disintegration or to force it to make major concessions (ibid., pp. 773-774). Examples of a suppression campaign can include indiscriminate violence against militia members and supporters, large-scale dislocation of populations, consistent and continuing use of lethal force, and hard-line government statements against the militia

(ibid., p. 774). The nature and magnitude of the state's violence can vary, but they are characterised by large-scale investments in destroying the non-state armed actor (ibid.). If a government uses non-state armed groups as an instrument in security policies, they eventually can become the principle threat to the survival of the state or the government (ibid.).

When a government opts for the containment of a militia it uses less state violence than in full suppression. The goal is to keep the militia's activities below a politically acceptable threshold of violence established by the state (ibid.). Although the state does supress the non-state armed group, the intensity of the violence and the size of force deployment are lower to what would be needed for full-scale suppression (ibid.). Governments attempt to avoid escalation of violence, as would often be the case with leadership decapitation (ibid.). The militia is left in place as the government's aim is to maintain stability and in doing so a certain amount of violence and instability is 'prized in' as 'the cost of governance' (ibid.). A strategy of containment is often used in states with endemic but low-level unrest, for example in modulated electoral violence or daily thuggery (ibid.). In containment, the state does not select full-scale suppression or incorporation as its options. According to Staniland containment is often more politically appealing than the monopolization of violence (ibid.).

Collusion between the state and militias means an active and sustained cooperation. This cooperation can take multiple forms: holding back police and military action towards the non-state armed group to actively providing guns, logistics and training (ibid., p. 775). States and militias cooperate and adjust their policies towards each other in force deployment and targeting (ibid.). Militias remain armed and continue to operate as security entities, sometimes also pursuing political goals that are not in line with the government. However, in collusion the militia's violence is not aimed at the legitimacy of the state itself (ibid.). According to Staniland, collusion between the state and militias can be short-term cooperation against a mutual enemy, after which the militia itself is targeted by the state into suppression (ibid.) Also, after armed conflict incorporation into the security and/or political structure can become feasible for the state (ibid.). States and militias can also both opt for a long-term cooperation, based on clear rules (ibid.). There are dangers for states in a collusion strategy. Militias can eventually become unmanageably powerful, thus hollowing

out the power of the state (ibid.). The danger for militias is that lasting collusion between the state and militias can lead to embedment into a system of patronage and control (ibid.). Thus in a long-term relationship, collusion demands a continuing renegotiation between the state and militias (ibid.).

Lastly, incorporation of a militia aims to demobilize it by formally integrating it into the security and/or political institutions (ibid.). It can be seen as a way of state-making as it seeks to eliminate non-state violent actors, but here in the form of integration rather than annihilation (ibid.). When dealing with insurgents this is a strategy of peace-negotiation, while dealing with PGMs this transition can be seen as a formal demobilization (ibid.). However, militias can remain and 'carry their guns', but now formally as a part of the security and/or political institutions of the state (ibid.). Incorporating insurgent or PGMs ultimately aim for the same outcome: the integration of non-state actors in the security and/or political system (ibid.).
In general, incorporation occurs when the state moves away from a collusion strategy toward formal incorporation into the security institutions. Bands of thugs can become special operatives in the army, para-military groups can get uniforms and spots in the police forces or local militias are turned into military units (ibid.). As Staniland claims, incorporation of the nobility into concentrated national apparatuses of coercion in Europe can be compared with this strategy.

The outlined strategies a government can pursue towards militias are fundamental political questions, as governments that face a multitude of non-state armed actors need to evaluate which non-state actors it can use for its security policies and which ones are in need to be repressed (ibid., 776). Governments pursue ideological project: an ideal type state, reflecting its ideological preferences. Examples are a linguistically homogenized polity, a communist party state, or a capitalistic democratic state. The laws, political values, and norms on politically accepted behaviour to a large extent dictate the policies towards non-state armed actors (ibid.). Non-state armed groups can be allies, enemies or they can occupy a grey zone in the ideological eyes or the government (ibid.). As I claim, over time the government can alter their preferences, leading to a shift in policies towards non-state armed actors,

whether insurgents or PGMs. In this thesis I focus on PGMs and the policies the different Iraqi government have pursued towards them between 2003 and 2016.

In this thesis I use the conceptualization of Carey et al. (2012, p. 250) in which PGMs are described as groups that (1) are identified as pro-government or sponsored by the government; (2) are identified as not being part of the regular security forces; (3) are armed; and (4) have some level of organization. In using this concept, the definition is limited to armed groups that contribute to counterinsurgency campaigns (COIN) and that have a link to the government beyond sharing an enemy (Carey & Mitchell, 2016, p. 3). This concepts adds the linkage to the government as opposed to Jentsch et al. (2015), in which the term militia is used to indicate a militia as a non-state actor that is 'anti-rebel'. The linkage to the government is categorized as either informal or semi-official (Carey & Mitchell, 2017, p. 131). Semi-official PGMs have a formalized link to government in which the government can establish the militia by law and members can receive government salaries and pensions (ibid., p. 130). Informal militias do not have a formalized link to the government, but their connection can be widely known in the country and beyond, but the linkage can be denied by the government (ibid.).

Another concept used by Carey and Mitchell is the militia's linkage to society. Locally based militias, opposed to militias that have no connection with communities in which they operate, limit indiscriminate violence and human rights abuses (ibid., p. 135). Militias that are active in their own communities and draw from local populations present fewer control problems, as they are subjected to social control from and accountability by their community (ibid.). Thus, semi-official ties to the government and ties with the local community lower goal variance and present less shirking by the PGMs, as semi-official PGMs are more easily monitored by the government (ibid.).

Lastly, as I look at state-militia relationships in Iraq, I follow the principle that ethnic and religious cleavages shape the supply and demand of irregular armed groups in the Middle East (Carey & Mitchell, 2016, p. 2). For most PGMs in the Middle East ethnicity and religion is the dominant linkage to society (Carey & Mitchell, 2017, p. 138). I use the definition for ethnicity from Cederman et al. (2010, p. 98) in which ethnicity is defined as 'subjectively

experienced sense of commonality based on the belief in common ancestry and shared culture'. Ethnicity and religion can motivate people to form militias "bottom-up", but state leaders can use ethnicity and religion to form PGMs "top-down" (Carey & Mitchell, 2017, p. 138). During armed conflict governments often structure collaboration along ethnic and religious lines (Kalyvas, 2008, p. 1051). This collaboration can also extend across borders, for example with the Iranian IRGC that supports different Shia militias in Iraq.
Because state-militia relationships are basically political relationships, the role of ideology cannot be neglected in explaining the relationship between the state and militias (Carey & Mitchell, 2017, p. 138). Ethno-religious militias are thus also "ideological" since beliefs and belonging provide legitimacy and reasons for taking action (ibid.) However, Carey and Mitchell (2017, p. 139) reserve the label for "political PGMs" for militias that are mobilized by nonreligious ideology, contrary to Staniland (2015) who claims that any relationship between the state and militias is fundamentally political. In this thesis I abide by Staniland's claim, resulting in the fact that ethno-religious PGMs are ideological militias too.

2.2 P/A theory and the Delegation Argument

Existing research on PGMs has focused primarily on collusion between the state and militias, with governments straightforwardly delegating violence to militias (Staniland, 2015, p. 771; Carey et al., 2015; Mitchell**,** 2004). Carey and Mitchell (2016, p. 2) acknowledge Staniland's categorization in state-militia relationships and that these relationships are very divers and dynamic. However, in their research they focus on collusion between the state and PGMs, ignoring the fact that state-militia relationships can alter over time, for example during different governments (ibid.). In taking collusion as the primary relationship between state and militias they mainly focus on P/A theory (ibid., Carey & Mitchell, 2017, p. 133). Agents are best monitored and controlled by governments when they delegate security tasks within the formal chain of command (ibid.). Thus, semi-official PGMs are better controlled than informal PGMs (ibid., p. 132). A formal link lessens goal variance, increases transparency, decreases the information gap, and creates a degree of accountability (ibid.). Militias that are further apart from government's control and monitoring are more likely to have a private agenda and are more difficult to contain, especially when informal militias are not created by the government (ibid.). Although P/A theory can be useful to explain state-militia

relationships during collusion, Carey and Mitchell (2016, p. 14) state that other research challenges the usefulness of P/A theory, for example when looking at government's strategic decisions (Staniland, 2015). In this thesis I look at shifts in the state-militia relationships in Iraq, thus P/A theory in itself cannot fully explain these different relationships, as changes in the connection between the state-and militias occur.

2.3 Causal mechanism

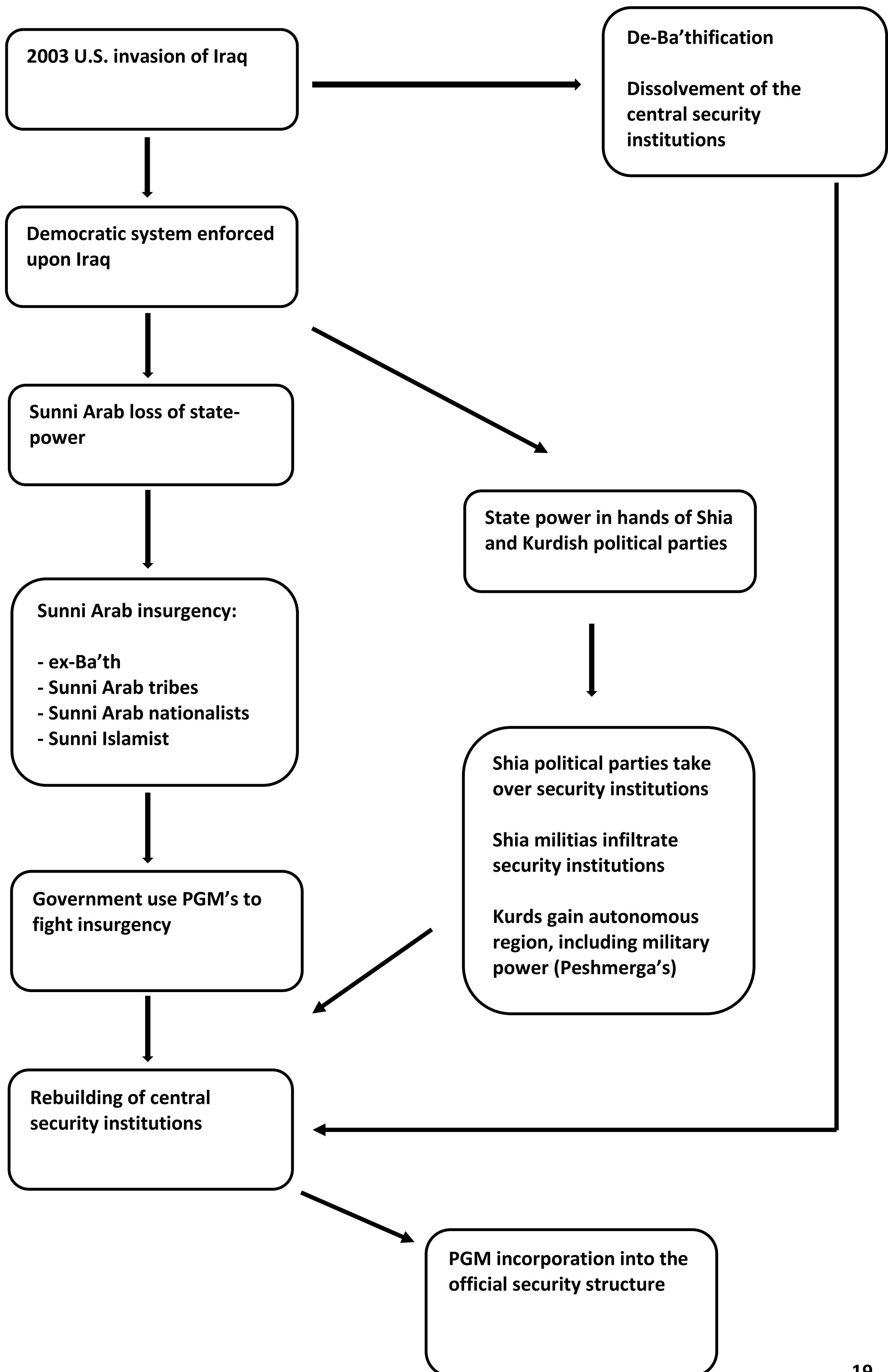
To recap, I look at alterations in the relationship between the state and militias in Iraq between 2003 and 2016 using Staniland's categorization of state-militia relationships. In using explaining-outcome process-tracing I answer the question how the PMF got incorporated into the official security sector, making them semi-official. I hypothesise that states with strong coercive security institutions either opt to repress militias or to incorporate them into the official security structure during armed conflict. States with weak coercive security institutions either collude with militias or opt to control them through containment.

In using explaining-outcome process-tracing I looked at the causal mechanism that led to the incorporation of the PMF into the official security sector in Iraq. Thus, how are causal forces transmitted through a black-boxed causal mechanism to produce this outcome? In conceptualizing the mechanism each part in itself is an insufficient but necessary part of the whole (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 50). In confirming the existence of the hypothesized mechanism with a reasonable degree of certainty, the produced mechanism should show strong evidence how the conceptualized parts of the causal mechanism led to the outcome and show how cause(s) and the outcome are causally connected (ibid.).

In using an actor-centred approach in my hypothesized causal mechanism I opt for a micro-level theorizing, rather than at the macro-level. I look at how actors engage in activities producing certain outcomes, whether deliberately or using contingency as an explanation. As stated earlier, the hypothesized causal mechanism contains case-specific parts because I look at the contextual situation in Iraq in the period 2003-2016. In explaining-outcome process-tracing theory ultimately is guiding, so the essence in the hypothesized causal

mechanism is to look at state-militia relationship during the different parts in the causal mechanism.

Below I present the hypothesized schematic causal mechanism in which actors ultimately produce an outcome, here the official incorporation of the PMF into the Iraqi security structure. The root-cause that set the "wheels of the causal mechanism in motion" is the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the following occupation. In the following two empirical chapters I describe in-depth the main events in a certain time period, followed by an analysis how these events influenced state-militia relationships, using Staniland's categorization (2015). Before I present the empirical chapters, I explain how I deal with alternative explanations for the hypothesized causal mechanism. First, on the following page the causal mechanism is presented, linking the U.S. invasion in 2003 and the incorporation of the PMF into the official security structure.



Causal Mechanism
2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq
De-Ba'thification
Dissolvement of the central security institutions
Democratic system enforced upon Iraq
Sunni Arab loss of state-power
State power in hands of Shia and Kurdish political parties
Sunni Arab insurgency:
- ex-Ba'th
- Sunni Arab tribes
- Sunni Arab nationalists
- Sunni Islamist
Shia political parties take over security institutions
Shia militias infiltrate security institutions
Kurds gain autonomous region, including military power (Peshmerga's)
Government use PGM's to fight insurgency
Rebuilding of central security institutions
PGM incorporation into the official security structure

2.4 Alternative explanations

I theorize state-militia relationships on the reciprocity between the strength of the state's security institutions and its dealings with militias. Theories need to be empirically validated so that they accurately represent reality (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 68). For this I test whether empirical evidence strengthens the confidence in the theory to explain the phenomenon. In doing so I make an inferential leap from what can be observed empirically to conclude that the causal explanation exists or not (ibid). However, in conducting a process-tracing research different hypothesis can exist, thus the hypothesized mechanism could be not sufficiently explanatory. In gathering pieces of evidence during explaining-outcome process-tracing "cherry-picking" of empirical observations that fit the hypothesized theory is a risk (ibid., p. 123). Selection-bias is a particularly acute danger is process-tracing research (ibid., p. 124). Therefore in process-tracing, as in historical research, unexpected empirical evidence can come up during the data-collection.

I particularly look at two alternative explanations as to why the PMF got officially integrated in Iraq's security sector. Powerful outside powers can influence and pressure a state into preferred policies. In the case of Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran has considerable influence over several powerful militias within the PMF and on political coalitions (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, pp. 240-287; Dawisha, 2009). As Seliktar and Rezaei (2020, pp. 127-165) claim, the incorporation of the PMF into Iraq's security sector is a preference of Iran, shaping it into the form of the Iranian Republican Guards Corps. In this way Iran would have considerable leverage over Iraq's security and foreign policy (ibid.). Finding empirical evidence for this theory cannot be ignored during process-tracing, thus the theoretical expectation as to why the PMF got integrated should then be altered. Another alternative explanation for the integration of the PMF in Iraq's security structure could be that the PMF itself has a preference for being integrated, thus pressuring the Iraqi state for official recognition. Official status would give the PMF legitimacy and access to the state's resources.
Thus, in conducting explaining-outcome process-tracing awareness must be kept in mind that empirical evidence can be found pointing in different directions.

Chapter 3: Iraq 2003-2010

3.1: Political developments 2003-2010

3.1.1 U.S. occupation of Iraq

On March 20, 2003, The U.S. and Britain, aided by smaller forces from a few other countries, invaded Iraq. Within three weeks the Iraqi army was defeated, starting the formal occupation, however without a clear plan for a future government (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 205). The U.S. ruled Iraq directly (with some British input) through the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) until June 28, 2004, when sovereignty was transferred to the Iraqis (Dawisha, 2009, p. 243). The CPA was charged with executive powers to restore security and stability and to create conditions for establishing national and local institutions for representative government (Damluji, 2010, p. 73). However, the U.S. and coalition's failure to bring in enough troops to control Iraq and establish law and order led to widespread insecurity and looting (Diamond, 2004). Mobs ransacked ministries, hospitals, and universities as well as power grids and industrial plants (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, pp. 207-208).

The security situation in Iraq deteriorated further by two executive orders issued by Paul Bremer, head of the CPA, that dismantled the entire institutional structure of the old regime (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, pp. 211-212). The CPA ordered the "de-Baʻthification", aimed at disestablishing Saddam's Ba'th Party, to make sure that new to be formed representative institutions would not be threatened by Baʻthist elements returning to power (ibid.). CPA Order 2 ordered the dissolvement of the entire security apparatus of the old regime to be replaced by yet-to-be-established security structures (Tripp, 2007, p. 282). The de-Baʻthification excluded the top four ranks of the party from public-sector employment, affecting 30,000 individuals (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 211). The dissolvement of Iraq's armed forces and its intelligence and security system affected as many as 400,000 Iraqis (and their families), who had now lost their jobs and pensions (ibid., p. 212). As Saddam had established a sectarian hierarchy in his government and security institutions, Baghdad University Professor Younis claimed that 'de-Baʻthification turned out to be de-Sunnification'

(Damluji, 2010, p. 73). The refusal to use Iraq's regular Sunni-led army contributed more than anything else to the deteriorating security situation (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 212). The U.S. not only lost control of Iraq's borders but also its most populous cities, while the alienation of Sunni Arab ex-Ba'th members would turn them into the portion of the population most likely to oppose U.S. policies (ibid.). The bulk of the Ba'th Party comprised of nominal members at best, whose party membership simply meant better jobs and career prospects (Dawisha, 2009, pp. 244-245). Banning all Ba'th members from public-sector employment without investigating who participated in human rights violations, excluded Iraqi professionals whose services were crucially needed in rebuilding the country (ibid).

It is almost certain that in the first year of the U.S. occupation the initiative of the Sunni insurgency came from disenfranchised Ba'thists and ex-soldiers (Dawisha, 2009, p. 245; Damluji, 2010, p. 73). As the insurgency spread it became more sophisticated, showing signs of professional military expertise (Dawisha, 2009, p. 245). By July 2003 attacks against U.S. and allied forces were so frequent and taking such a toll on U.S. forces that U.S. military authorities admitted they were facing a classical guerrilla-type warfare (Tripp, 2007, p. 285). Attacks were not only targeted at U.S. forces, but against anyone seen to be assisting or benefitting from the U.S. occupation (ibid.). Over time the Sunni insurgency took on a local shape, fragmented into dozens of groupings that often co-operated, but that were not submitted to an overall command (ibid., p. 287). Units of the old Iraqi army from villages or localities from where they had been recruited transformed into guerrillas using their military training and the enormous amounts of weapons and explosives that were circulating in Iraq following the looting after the U.S. invasion (ibid.). Ex-Ba'thist military and intelligence resistance were joined by Sunni nationalists, Sunni tribes and Sunni Islamist hostile to the U.S. occupation (ibid.; Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 217). The Sunni Islamists came from Iraqi soil or from other Arab countries who crossed the unguarded Iraqi borders (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 217). Some of the Sunni Islamist groups affiliated themselves with al-Qaida, among others the group under the leadership of Jordanian jihadist Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi (ibid).

In the long run the orders given by the CPA to dissolve the old security structure and the de-Ba'thification enacted a political structure that empowered sectarian parties (Damluji, 2010,

p. 72). After the fall of Saddam, Shia political consciousness grew, emphasizing the past discrimination of the Shia Iraqi majority by the Sunni Arab minority (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 214). However, the Shia were a heterogeneously political force with different political parties vying for power. Initially the most influential Shia politicians in the post-Ba'thist era were the "exiles", coming mostly from Iran, where they had originated during the Iraq-Iran war from 1980-1988 (Allawi, 2007, p. 44) . One of these exile-parties was SCIRI under the leadership of Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim. As a leading Shia spokesman, he saw an important religious-political role for SCIRI in creating a Shia-dominated Islamic republic. The other main Shia-exile Islamist party was Da'wa, headed by Ibrahim al-Jafari.

The CPA's effort to create an Interim Governing Council (IGC) to govern Iraq until the coming elections of 2005 soon ran into difficulties (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 214). After the Sunni insurgency a second force challenged the coalition forces and the IGC. The Shia Sadrist were opposed to the U.S. occupation, like the Sunni insurgents. They also resented the Shia Da'wa and SCIRI and the more secular-pragmatic Shias within the IGC (ibid.). As the most prominent Shia-politicians in the IGC were exiles, the Sadrist had endured Iraq under Saddam, without being included in the new government structure (ibid.; Tripp, 2007, p. 280). The main support for al-Sadr and his movement came from the young and poor Shia's (ibid.). In 2003, al-Sadr announced the establishment of the Mahdi Army, the military arm of the Sadrist movement, calling for open revolt against the U.S. occupation. The U.S., quietly supported by Da'wa and SCIRI that feared for their power, assaulted al-Sadr and his Mahdi Army in Najaf, where the militia was decimated by U.S. forces (ibid.). Realizing he could not win, Sadr turned to mediation by al-Sistani, the top Iraqi Shia cleric. Al-Sadr and the Mahdi withdrew, not required to disarm (ibid). Although the IGC eventually represented the different Iraqi ethnic and religious communities, it was dominated by the Shia religious exiles and Kurds (Marr & al-Marashi, p. 215). The Sunni's, weak and divided, were marginalized in the new Iraqi political order.

3.1.2 The 2005 elections and the referendum on the constitution

The two elections of 2005 confirmed the sectarian divide between the Kurds, Shia, and Sunni communities (Tripp, 2007, p. 305). In March 2005 elections for a constituent assembly were

held, which was to write a draft constitution, followed up with a referendum on it. In December 2005, a second election was held for a new national assembly, which was Iraq's first constitutional government (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 221). However, the Sunni's were not represented in writing the constitution, following the U.S. and coalition forces attack on Fallujah. Sunni fundamentalist preachers had made Fallujah a magnet for radicalized Islamist, forming an alliance of convenience with ex-Ba'thist, orchestrating daily attacks on government and coalition forces (Dawisha, 2009, p. 247). Sunni political leaders were incensed and the Sunni Iraqi Islamist Party (IIP) left the IGC, calling on postponement for the coming elections (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 226). Al-Sistani, representing the Shia community, refused postponement as the Shia community understood that a democratic transition would greatly advance Shia power over the political system (Dawisha, 2009, p. 248). The Sunni political leaders thereafter called upon their constituents to boycott the elections (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 226). Also, al-Sadr again rose up against the U.S. occupation and the political power of the Shia-exile parties, occupying the holy Shia shrine in Najaf (ibid., p. 225). Sistani again mediated a truce. Al-Sadr's Mahdi army could hold on to their weapons, but the key of the Najaf Shrine (and the Shia religious authority) were turned over to al-Sistani, making him the undisputed Shia religious leader (ibid). Al-Sadr was greatly weakened, but still a force to be reckoned with (ibid.).

The Sunni boycott-strategy for the January 30 elections backfired as Shia and Kurdish communities voted in mass, resulting in a 58 percent overall national turnout rate (Dawisha, 2009, p. 248). The winner with 51 percent of the votes was the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), a coalition of mostly Shia religious parties like Da'wa and SCIRI, followed by the Kurdistan Alliance and the more secular nationalist Iraqiyya under the leadership of Allawi coming in third. Iraqi's overwhelmingly voted along ethnic and sectarian lines (ibid., p. 249). At least 75 percent of the Sunni's opted for their preferred sectarian choice, namely boycott (ibid).

The task for the new government under the leadership of Da'wa was to draft a constitution, but the issues to be resolved and the depth of disagreement were formidable (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 230). Hotly contested were the degree of centralization and how power and resources would be shared among communities and regions (ibid., p. 231). Under U.S. pressure a group of Sunni Arabs, the Iraq National Dialogue Front, participated in writing the

constitution. However, due to disagreement, they left during the discussions. This absence of Sunni participation increased Sunni Arab hostility to the resulting constitution (ibid.).

Federalism was the most contentious issue in the deliberations for the new constitution, along with the establishment of regions and how much power and authority should be given to the central government (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 231). Under pressure from the Kurds, Iraq would turn into a decentralized polity with a weak central government, angering the Sunni and secular Arabs that wanted a unified nation with a professional army and bureaucracy (ibid.). The Shia contingent was divided. SCIRI wanted to form a "Shia super region" of nine southern provinces in which SCIRI already held a lot of power (ibid., p. 231; Dawisha, 2009, p. 256). The Sunni argument on this was given by al-Dulaimi, political leader of the Sunni al-Tawafuq: 'We will not accept the creation of regions in the south and centre of Iraq. We only accept the region of Kurdistan because of its historical, geographic and cultural specificities. Such specificities do not apply in the rest of the country' (Dawisha, 2009, p. 256). Da'wa and the Sadrist did not favour the creation of new regions (ibid.). What really concerned the Sunny Arabs most was that they would be left with Iraq's central region without oil resources and thus political influence (ibid., p. 251). Also, Sunni's were angered with the continuing de-Ba'thification, showing the depth of distrust and suspicion between the new Shia leaders and the ousted Sunnis and secularists (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 232). Under U.S. pressure Shia and Kurdish leaders acceded to the Sunni IIP 's demand for a new constitutional committee to be formed after the parliamentary elections of 2005 that would bring "necessary amendments to the constitution" (Dawisha, 2009, pp. 251-252).

The referendum for the constitution defined Iraq as a republican, representative, democratic, and federal polity, with a guarantee of its "unity" (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 234). All powers, except those stipulated as 'exclusive authorities of the federal government', were vested in regions (ibid.). The federal government had few exclusive authority. These included formulating foreign policy and national security policy, exercising control over Iraq's armed forces, securing the country's borders, defending Iraq, and drawing up a national budget (ibid.). The referendum passed although the Sunni Arabs, who wanted a stronger and more centralized state, rejected it in mass (ibid). However, the Sunni

contingent was determined to participate in the coming political process, due to the constitutional committee that was to be formed (ibid.).

The December 2005 elections reinforced the growing ethnic and sectarian divide (ibid., p. 235). A wave of assassinations and attacks occurred on Sunni politicians who advocated participation in the elections and rejection of violence (Dawisha, 2009, p. 254). The winners of the elections were the UIA, dominated by SCIRI, Da'wa and now with the incorporated Sadrist with 46.5 percent of the votes. The Kurdistan Alliance won 19.2 percent, followed by the Sunni nationalists Tawafuq with 16 percent and the secular-nationalist Iraqiyya with 9 percent (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 235). After months of negotiation Nuri al-Maliki headed the new government, consisting of SCIRI, Daʻwa, The Kurdistan Alliance and IIP/Tawafuq (ibid.). Seculars were absent in the government (ibid.).

The long negotiations for the new government and the continuing debates over distribution of power resulted in the rise of sectarian tensions, culminating in the bombing of the Askari Mosque in Samarra in February 2006, one of the holiest shrines in Shia Islam (ibid., p. 236). This attack resulted in the Iraqi civil war from 2006 to 2008, a period of brutal sectarian conflict in which Iraq's most populous cities and neighbourhoods saw ethnic cleansing on an enormous scale by Sunni insurgents and Shia militias (Fearon, 2007, p. 5). An estimated population displacement of 2.8 million Iraqi's occurred in the years following the Askari bombing (Damluji, 2010, p. 76). However, tensions had been building up since the fight with Sunni insurgencies in Fallujah and the combat against the Mahdi Army in Najaf. The Sunni marginalization in the constitutional process made them think in sectarian rather than in national terms, as they became fearful of a permanent shift to a Shia sectarian government and the exclusion of Sunnis from the political process (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 236).

The U.S., still responsible for security in Iraq, tried to stop the civil war that cost an estimated 100 Iraqi civilian lives per day with "the Surge", a troop increase to combat Sunni extremists and Shia militias (Tripp, 2007, p. 308). The Iraqi government was pressured to curb Shia militia activity (ibid., p. 315). Also, the U.S. forces sided with the "Awakening". These were powerful Sunni tribal militias that broke with the Islamist insurgents and got trained, financed, and equipped by U.S. forces (Dawisha, 2009, p. 272). Sunni Islamist extremist's

orthodoxy and brutal practices had alienated the tribal inhabitants of the Sunni provinces and their cities (ibid.). The Awakening played a crucial role in expelling AQI and other extremists fighters from the provinces and their towns (ibid; Marr & al-Marashi,, 2017, p. 243).

The Surge, the siding with the Awakening, the curbing of Shia militia activities, and the accomplished brutal population displacements resulted in a relative peace at the beginning of 2008, yet in a sectarian divided state (Damluji, 2010, p. 84; Dawisha, 2009, p. 272). Although security was still an important issue in parts of Iraq, towards the parliamentary elections of 2010 more pragmatic-interest based issues came to the surface. In particular the Shia Islamists parties failure to provide basic services like electricity, clean water, and jobs (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 263). Exhaustion of the civil war and a desire for a return to normalcy ultimately led to a relative calm (ibid., p. 245).

For this reason al-Maliki's new coalition State of Law (headed by Da'wa) postured itself as a nationalist party. The other powerful contenders for the 2010 parliament elections were Shia Islamists, the Kurdish parties, and finally a combination of secularists and Sunnis (ibid., p. 268). It was Allawi's secular-national Iraqiyya that won the 2010 parliament elections with a two-seat margin, a trans-sectarian coalition with a strong Sunni Arab participation (ibid.). Still, Sunni participation was not without its problems, as five hundred Sunni candidates were disqualified as a result of the De-Ba'thification commission (ibid.). The biggest loss in the election was for SCIRI (ibid.). Voters still voted sectarian, but less Shia Islamist.

Much to the surprise of Allawi's Iraqiyya, Maliki's State of Law and the Sadrist entered in a coalition, making them the biggest. The Shia Islamist parties wanted to prevent the secular-nationalist Iraqiyya with its large Sunni contingent to lead a government (ibid., p. 235). The Iraqi Supreme Court decided in favour of Maliki and al-Sadr, giving Maliki the chance of becoming prime-minister again, angering the Sunni Arab nationalists and seculars (ibid., p. 273).

In chapter 4.1 I provide a political overview from Maliki's re-election to the rise of Islamic State and the integration of the PMF into the official security sector. First, an analyses on state-militia relationships during the above described period is given.

3.2 State-militia relationships 2003-2010

3.2.1 The Sunni Arab insurgency

The Sunni Arab opinion towards the U.S. occupation immediately after the 2003 invasion can be divided into three broad trends (Allawi, 2007, pp. 135-136). First there were the secular, liberal, and democratic Sunni Arabs who accepted the principle of regime change at the hands of foreign powers. They shied away from ethnicity and sectarianism and opted for a secular central state. This was by far the smallest contingent in the Sunni Arab opinion. The second group composed of Sunni Arabs that had opposed the Ba'th regime, yet were tolerated by Saddam's regime. This group was mostly made up of liberal lawyers, professionals, and academics that united into the IIP. The third and by far the largest Sunni Arab group rejected the occupation outright. This group consisted of the leadership class of the old Ba'athist order, including senior bureaucrats and diplomats, various categories of administrators, academics, intelligence officials, businessmen, traders, and tribal chiefs. This groupment formed the base from which violent resistance was to be organised.

Because the de-Ba'thification was applied unrestricted, equated with 'de-Sunnification' by some observers, it exacerbated sectarian tensions in post-war Iraq (ibid., p. 152). Only in 2004 Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reports acknowledged that Sunni loss of power, prestige, and economic influence was a key motivating factor, as was unemployment and a loss of personal status. Many insurgents were motivated by tribal or family grievances, nationalism, and religious duty directly after the 2003 invasion (Pincus, 2005). However, Islamist elements began to play a growing role in the Sunni insurgency. They were a mix of Iraqi's and foreigners and unlike "Former Regime Elements" (FRE) they saw the fight in Iraq as a piece of the broader war against the West (Cordesman, 2008, p. 53). From 2004 onward AQI under the leadership of al-Zarqawi dominated the insurgency and growing civil conflict, many affiliated with tribal families in Iraq (Allawi, 2007, p. 182). AQI tried to instigate a

sectarian civil war between Sunni and Shia Arabs as al-Zarqawi explained in a document, intercepted by the U.S. military on February 9, 2004 (Cordesman, 2008, p. 93). Also in 2004, al-Zarqawi and Al Qaida established formal ties, in which al-Zarqawi pledged allegiance to the organization (Wong, 2006).

The first military battle between U.S. and Iraqi army forces occurred in Fallujah, the heart of Sunni tribalism and religiosity (Allawi, 2007, p. 169). Fallujah became a hotbed for Sunni insurgents in a mixture of ex-Ba'th, tribes, Sunni Arab nationalists and AQI (Cordesman, 2008, p. 95). Although many Sunni insurgents were killed and the U.S. did tactically win the battle (Dawisha, 2009, p. 247), the fall-out was political. The three Sunni members of the Governing Council, an advisory board for the CPA, threatened to resign if the operation continued, showing the complexities in the cooperation between the Sunni population and the U.S. occupational forces (Allawi, 2007, p. 277). The operation was immediately cancelled. The "First Battle of Fallujah" also represented the first collusion between a Sunni Arab militia and U.S. forces. General Shahani, appointed head of Iraq's new security and intelligence services (INIS) offered to assist U.S. Marines in Fallujah with the help of the officer's elite of the former regime, out of a sense of "military prestige"(ibid., p. 278). However, this collusion was unknown by Iraqi interim ministers, the Governing Council, and the CPA (ibid.). Allawi, the Iraqi Minister of Defence, and the National Security Advisor were outraged, fearing that this would mean handing over control to the insurgents, operating under formal military units (ibid., pp. 278-279). The "Fallujah Brigade" eventually operated as an auxiliary force for the U.S. Marines (ibid., p. 278). However, three months later the leaders of the Fallujah Brigade aligned with the insurgents, the local police, and the imams of the city, calling for Islamic government in the city (ibid., p. 279).

During the "Second battle of Fallujah" in December 2004 Sunni Arab politicians in the Interim Government could do little to stop the fighting. Sunni Arab politicians lacked the backing of strong political parties as Sunni Arab politicians were intimidated by insurgents not to enter in Iraqi politics (Dawisha, 2009, p. 248). Assassinations by Sunni Islamist on tribal leaders and politician occurred frequently (Kilcullen, 2007). The indiscriminate violence of Sunni Islamist, coming mostly from AQI, did have enormous consequences. During the second elections in December 2005 AQI threatened with attacks on anyone voting, including

Sunni Arabs (Burns, 2005). AQI already conducted bombings at recruits and police stations, killing Sunni Arabs indiscriminately (Cordesman, 2008, p. 164). These facts, together with the extreme puritan vision on Islamic code of behaviour alien to most Sunni Arab tribes, created tensions in the Sunni Arab insurgency (ibid., p. 512). The Sunni Arab insurgency had never been under an overall command, as it consisted of Islamist, ex-Ba'th, Sunni Arab nationalist, and tribal factions that had different allegiances towards different insurgent-factions (U.S. Department of State, 2005; Crisis Group, 2006). With the bombing of the Askari mosque in Samarra in February 2006 Iraq plunged into a sectarian civil war. As the Sunni Arab populations came under attack of Shia militias and death squads (chapter 3.1.2) they created their own militias for protection. Often these Sunni Arab militias were nothing more than local and informal armed neighbourhood watches, not nearly as powerful and organized as the Shia militias (Cordesman, 2008, p. 285). Some of the Sunni militias were part of the insurgency, others were defensive both against AQI and the Shia militias (ibid.).

At the beginning of the civil war in 2006 the U.S. and Coalition Forces together with the Iraqi government under al-Jafari started working with local Sunni Arab militias that had a moderate and nationalist political outlook and that did not want to participate with the Islamist insurgents (Cordesman, 2008, p. 285). Local militias were financed, equipped and trained by U.S. Forces (Karouny, 2006). The Iraqi government also promised to recruit more Sunni Arabs into the army and police forces (Cordesman, 2008, p. 285). However, the collusion came under tension as Sunni Arab recruits that opted to join local militias or police were transferred to other parts in Iraq, showing the mistrust between the Sunni Arab population and the Shia-dominated government (Hernandez, 2006). The central government did not want Sunni Arab militias or police forces to guard their own cities, although there were already Sunni Arab tribes that were fighting AQI (Cordesman, 2008, p. 287; Negus, 2006).

3.2.2 The Awakening

By 2007, some U.S. officers had 'written off' the Sunni Arab province of Anbar, especially the cities of Ramadi and Fallujah, as the U.S. troop increase during the Surge were just enough to contain the insurgency (Hess, 2007). However, in the spring of 2007 Sunni tribes rose up

against AQI and started working with the U.S. and the ISF (U.S. Department of Defense, 2007). AQI and Sunni Islamist extremist had attacked tribal leaders for not following their puritan dictates, their dismissal of forcing young men to join them, and their refusal for forged marriages between AQI members and tribal women (Kilcullen, 2007; Schon & Magid, 2020, p. 5).

The collusion between the Iraqi government and U.S. forces consisted of financing, equipping and training Sunni Arab militias that united into "The Awakening" under the leadership of al-Rishawa (U.S. Department of Defense, 2007). More than 24 tribes joined the Awakening to fight AQI, including some of the largest and most influential (ibid.). The results were spectacular. Army Col. Sean MacFarland of the Ist Marine Expeditionary Force claimed that when a tribe 'flipped', attacks on U.S. forces and the ISF in that area dropped to zero almost immediately (Ferris, 2007). Once the tribal leaders colluded with the U.S. and the ISF the number of police recruits began increasing exponentially (Cordesman, 2008, p. 515). This was due to the decision that the newly formed police units and militias were now granted permission to serve in their own neighbourhoods, protecting their families (ibid.). As a result 12,000 Iraqis volunteered for the Iraqi security forces in al-Anbar, compared to 1,000 volunteers in 2006 (Michaels, 2007; Liu, 2007). The only Sunni violence confronting the U.S. forces and the Iraqi government now came from AQI. Although they had lost their influence over the biggest cities in al-Anbar, they could still strike from small desert villages (Cordesman, 2008, p. 518; Oppel & Adeeb, 2007).

Although the Awakening is an example of the success of a PGM (Akins, 2020, p. 7; Steinert et al., 2019, p. 249), there are some caveats to be made. First of all, the Awakenings was paid by the U.S. (although eventually the Iraqi government took over the financing). Second, basic services like electricity were still very limited, and unemployment was high in Sunni Arab areas. On top of that, the local government existed in name only (Liu, 2007). The tribes in Anbar rose up against AQI, but this did not mean that an alliance with U.S. forces was translated into support for the Shia-dominated central government. The U.S. built upon the results in the Anbar province in other regions as well. This U.S. policy did not please the Shia central government, however, as arming Sunni groups brought fear that they would attempt to take back state power (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, pp. 255-256). As the U.S. had supplied

and funded a predominately Shia state security force, and was now doing the same for Sunni groups, U.S. feared this policy could result in the arming of two sides in a civil war (Burns & Rubin, 2007). As al-Rikabi stated, a political advisor to prime minister al-Maliki, 'the government's aim is to disarm and demobilize the militias in Iraq, and we have enough militias in Iraq that we are struggling now to solve the problem. Why are we creating new ones?' (ibid.).Thus, although the Awakening proved to be an enormously valuable asset in reducing Sunni Islamist violence, structural economic, social and political fissures between the Shia led government and the Sunni Arab regions remained, eventually leading to the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) (chapter 4).

3.2.3 Shia militias

Three Shia political parties dominated Shia national politics, often fighting each other for dominance in the state institutions: these were the "exile" parties Da'wa and SCIRI, and the "home-grown" Sadrist movement.

Since the U.S. invasion a wide range of small Shia militias originated, protecting Shia parties, shrines and leaders operating at the local level (Cordesman, 2008, p. 37). Often these local militias infiltrated local authorities and local police, but in essence were criminal gangs opting for power and profits, for example in smuggling and extortion (Cochrane, 2008). The Shia political landscape consisted of a wide plethora of national and local political parties, together with local and national militias, often fighting each other for powerful positions in the local and national government and in local and national security institutions. Two main Shia militias however shaped the Iraqi political and security system after 2003: the Badr Organization and the Mahdi army under al-Sadr (Cordesman, 2008, p. 37).

The Badr Organization

The Badr Organization is considered an Iraqi pro-Iran militia because of its close and continuing ties to Tehran (Mapping Militant Organizations, 2019). It originated as the military wing of SCIRI, the dominant Shia party after the U.S. invasion in 2003. SCIRI/Badr were formed during the Iraq-Iran War as an Iraqi exile political party. (ibid.). U.S. military officials warned SCIRI to disband the Badr Brigades after the U.S. invasion. Therefore SCIRI

changed the name of the group to the Badr Organization of Reconstruction and Development to appear less militant (ibid.). Sunni Arabs have accused the Badr Organization numerous times for indiscriminate assassinations of civilians and clerics, which SCIRI/Badr have always denied (Cordesman, 2008, p. 39; U.S. Department of Defense, 2005). However, since the 2003 invasion Badr has infiltrated Iraq's security forces on a large scale. After the January 2005 elections in which SCIRI was the main party in the Shia UIA coalition, SCIRI was determined to control the Ministry of the Interior (MOI), including its national police, which it flooded with Badr militiamen (Allawi, 2007, p. 392). It was a cardinal principle for the UIA that their parties would dominate Iraq's security policy (ibid., p. 394).

Although militias were supposed to be abolished under the CPA authority (Cordesman, 2008, p. 197), and as written in the constitution (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 6), the incorporation into the official security structure was applauded by prime minister Jafari and president Talabani in 2005 for 'their shield to protect Iraq (Finer & Nouri, 2005; Lasseter, 2005; Wong 2005). But as the sectarian tension rose because of the bombing campaign of AQI against Shia shrines and institutions, SCIRI issued a warning for retaliation against the Sunni population (Cordesman, 2008, p. 242). The Shia retaliation killings and the dominance of SCIRI/Badr over the MOI and other security institutions moved Iraq closer to civil war (Tyson, 2005). Although the U.S. demanded more Sunni participation in the security structure to avoid further sectarian tensions, Interior Minister Jabr refused to include thousands of U.S. trained police recruits into the national police (Steele, 2006). The MOI was also purged from Sunni officers (Cordesman, 2008, p. 169). The ISF got infiltrated by Shia militias and Sunni insurgents, though not on the scale of the Iraqi police (ibid., p. 298). General al-Yusef, a Sunni, admitted that almost 90% of his brigade were members of the Badr Organization (Madhani, 2006).

During the civil war of 2006-2008 accusations against Badr for assassinations by death squads on Sunni Arabs were numerous. However, police uniforms and equipment were easily accessible on the black market (Cordesman, 2008, p. 413). Police forces or the ISF that were not affiliated with Badr or other militias failed to hinder militia attacks and let militias pas through checkpoints, often out of fear for reprisals (Oppel & Mizher, 2006; Santora, 2006). Especially the Facilities Protection Service (FPS) of the MOI was associated with Badr

and sectarian violence, since this part of the MOI had little government and U.S. oversight. A former U.S. military commander stated that Badr members under the FPS were tied to kidnappings, execution-style killings and other crimes. (Knickmeyer, 2006).

The powerful 'exiles' of SCIRI/Badr were not only targeted by Sunni insurgents, but often there were bloody clashes with the Sadrists' Mahdi Army and local Shia militias for control over local government and security institutions (Dawisha, 2009, p. 266). As the power of SCIRI/Badr waned in 2006, the Sadrist movement became ever more powerful (Cordesman, 2008, p. 415).

The Mahdi army and the Sadrist movement

The Mahdi army was founded in 2003 by Moqtada al-Sadr. The Sadrist movement, including its armed Mahdi Army pursued both military and political strategies. It also provides social welfare (Cordesman, 2008, pp. 297-298; Mapping Militant Organizations, 2019). It had its popular base among the young and poor Shia's in Sadr city in Baghdad and in south Iraq (Mapping Militant Organizations, 2019). Al-Sadr opposed the U.S. occupation, resulting in direct clashes between the Mahdi Army and U.S. forces and rival Shia groups. These battles were tactically won by U.S. forces, ending in mediation between Ayatollah al-Sistani and the opposing forces (Allawi, 2007, pp. 327-330). However, in the period of 2003-2008, at the height of sectarian violence, al-Sadr's political rise was unstoppable. He took part in the political process from 2005 onwards, being 'kingmaker' for both al-Jafari and al-Maliki, allowing them to become prime minister. U.S. attacks on the Mahdi Army were condemned by prime ministers al-Jafari and al-Maliki. Although al-Maliki repeatedly called for disarming militias, he could not do without al-Sadr's support (Bull, 2006; Abdul-Zahra, 2006). There were also multiple clashes between the Mahdi Army and other militias, mainly Badr, for control over shrines in south Iraq (Mapping Militant Organizations, 2019), although SCIRI/Badr and the Sadrist/Mahdi were present in the same national coalition UIA.

The Mahdi Army infiltrated ISF and local police forces and has been accused of sectarian violence during the civil war of 2006-2007 (ibid.). By 2005 some 90% of local police in northeast Baghdad had ties to the Mahdi forces, where they were reported to be playing a major role in pushing Sunnis out of Shi'ite neighbourhoods (Moore, 2005). Al-Sadr continued

to call for restraint and not to attack Sunni civilians, instead focusing on AQI, ex-Ba'th and U.S. occupation forces (Knickmeyer & Sebti, 2006). However, since the Mahdi Army ballooned in size after the Askari bombing in February 2006, the Sadrist central leadership lost control over his Mahdi Army (DIA, 2006). U.S. intelligence sources indicated groups had broken off from the Mahdi Army that were now funded and trained by Iran's IRGC (McGrory, 2006). One of these powerful militias that split off the Mahdi Army was the pro-Iran Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq (AAH) (Cochrane, 2008). Like the Sadrist movement it developed into a military and political organization, providing welfare to Shia victims of sectarian violence (Cordesman, 2008, p. 412). It is referred to by the U.S. as a "Special Group", meaning a pro-Iran militia (Wyer, 2012). Other powerful faction in the Mahdi Army that eventually split off were the anti-Iranian Fadhila Party and the Imam Hussein's Army and numerous tribal and criminal gangs operating in the Basra province (Cordesman, 2008, pp. 602-603). Militia members, politicians, and western officials described that the Mahdi Army had developed into a fluid organization, splintering into factions of fighters, death squads, and commanders that did not take orders from a central command (Hastings & Johnson, 2006; Michaels, 2006).

Although al-Sadr resumed his clerical studies in Iran in 2007, he ordered the Mahdi Army to return to military action in 2008. This time ISF forces attacked the Mahdi Army under orders from al-Maliki, who had not notified U.S. or British forces of the attack. They were quickly needed for air- and artillery power, which forced al-Sadr to negotiate (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 254). Al-Sadr agreed to an Iranian-brokered cease-fire after a stalemate between the fighting forces (Mapping Militant Organizations, 2019). Al-Sadr split his Mahdi Army into the non-violent Mumahidoon providing social services to the Shia poor and the Promised Day Brigades (PDB), which served as a small elite military branch, purged from extremists, under the charge of Sadr (ibid.). However, al-Sadr's Mahdi Army could be resurrected at al-Sadr's willing (ibid.).

3.2.4 Intra-Shia rivalries

Although Iraq descended into ethnic and sectarian violence between the Shia and Sunni communities (and to a lesser extend the Kurdish), the Shia political and security landscape became a plethora of competing factions and parties at the national and local level.

Especially in the oil-rich Basra there was a constant struggle over control of the police and resources among Badr/SCIRI, the Sadrists, the Fadhila Party, and local gangs, using oil-smuggling to finance their activities (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 254). According to the International Crisis Group (2009, p. 7) Fadhila managed the oil industry, Badr and the Mahdi Army the security institutions and the Mahdi Army the port. In 2006 the province was wracked by violence, in which the situation on the streets was referred to as "turf wars" or mafia-style rule (Ricks, 2007; Tavernise & Mizher, 2006). Local tensions spilled over to the national Shia coalition to the point al-Sistani emphasised unity amongst the Shia political leaders, as the central government and the ISF opted for not to intervene initially (Cordesman, 2008, p. 603).

In 2008 the national government under al-Maliki did step in to end the lawlessness in the Basra province, which basically meant combatting the Sadrist Mahdi Army (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 254). Despite many loyalty problems within the ISF (a number of Iraqi forces deserted or defected) and Basra's local police, the operation eventually led to success, to the relief of Basra's citizens which longed for a return for normalcy (ibid., p. 255). Al-Sadr had asked al-Sistani again to mediate, but this time al-Sistani stated that all arms should be in government's hands. Under negotiations from Iran a cease-fire was eventually brokered, leaving the Mahdi Army severely weakened (ibid., p. 254). Al-Maliki was seen by many Shia's as the national leader for bringing peace and stability (ibid).

3.2.5 The ISF and militia penetration

The training of Iraq's security forces, both the ISF and the police, by U.S. and Multinational Force–Iraq (MNF-I), never reached the desired level. In 2008 the ISF remained dependant on U.S. and MNF-I forces, not able to stand alone against Sunni insurgents, AQI and Shia

militias (White House, 2007). From 2003 onwards the training of Iraq's army was plagued by shortages in manpower, equipment, protection, and weapons, while training standards were poor (Cordesman, 2008, p. 125). In January 2007, al-Maliki stated that Iraq's Security Forces could operate alone within six months if the U.S. would speed up their training efforts and accelerated equipping the ISF (ibid., p. 616). According to the U.S Government Accountability Office (GAO) however, the numbers reported as having been trained and equipped by U.S. training forces grossly overstated the number of Iraqi forces actually on duty (ibid., p. 616). The desired operational level proved disastrous in 2007 during the Surge, where the most capable ISF division, the 9th Mechanized Division, crumbled under fear and pressure in fighting 100 Sunni insurgents in Baghdad. U.S. forces took over command within minutes (Moore, 2006).

Besides the lack of proper training, the ISF and Iraqi police forces were highly politicised, as different militias had penetrated the security forces. The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (2007, p. 8) reported that Iraq's ISF and law enforcement institutions were highly corrupted and marred with increasing internal and sectarian divisions. Colonel Miska of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division stated that everyone in the security forces is to some extend influenced by militias, whether in membership or out of fear for their families when confronting militias (Pincus, 2006). In general, large parts of the Iraqi population did not trust the police, while the Iraqi army did not have the strength or training to secure the country (Cordesman, 2008, p. 451).

3.2.6 Militias and the government response

The CPA developed a reintegration strategy for disbanding the Iraqi militias in May 2004. Militias outside of government control were declared illegal. The idea was to recruit militia members into the official security forces, retiring members with veteran's benefits, and reintegrate members into Iraq's civil society and economy through education, training, and job placement (Government Accounting Office, 2004). Nine parties with militias agreed to these reintegration plans. These were the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Iraqi Islamic Party, SCIRI/Badr Organization, Iraqi National Accord, Iraqi National Congress, Iraqi Hezbollah, Iraqi Communist Party, and Islamic Al-Da'wa Party. Some

of these parties had extensive militias, while others had mere ‘protection units’. Smaller militias were left out, because of ‘insignificance’ (ibid.).

The reintegration was never imposed in reality. The rising influence of al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army made other parties hesitate to disarm, mainly SCIRI/Badr, as the Mahdi Army was left out of the agreement (Cordesman, 2008, p. 82). It was considered too disorganized and untrained to integrate into the official security forces in 2004 (ibid., p. 59). Also, the rise of the Sunni insurgency ensured that the militias did not want to disband willingly (ibid.). As the Kurdish parties, SCIRI/Badr and Da’wa were represented in the Interim Government they hindered efforts to dismantle their militias (ibid., p. 59).

After this effort to integrate militias, serious attempt were not taken until 2016 (chapter 4). Prime minister al-Jafari declared the Shia militias operating in Iraq the ‘de-facto’ reality, although he pledged to eventually integrate the militias into the security forces (Wong, 2006). Al-Maliki, like his predecessor al-Jafari, could not do without the political support of al-Sadr and his Mahdi Army, thus initially refusing to deal with the Mahdi army military, as the U.S. proposed (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, pp. 234-236). Diplomatic efforts to integrate militias failed, leading to a government’s containment strategy. Violent clashes between different (Shia) militias occurred, for instance between Badr and the Mahdi Army, but they were resolved under government’s and Iranian negotiations, without demanding to disarm. Even in 2008, when the Mahdi Army was severely weakened by the government’s attack in Basra and Baghdad, al-Sadr reorganized the Mahdi Army into the Promised Day Brigades (Mapping Militant organizations, 2019). The rise of Islamic State in Maliki’s second term as prime minister showed the institutional weakness of Iraq’s security structure, eventually leading to the integration of Iraq’s militias in the official security sector.

Chapter 4: Iraq 2010-2016

4.1: Political developments 2010-2016

4.1.1 Al-Maliki's second term as Prime Minister

During his first term Prime Minister al-Maliki had postulated himself as an Iraqi nationalist politician, portraying himself as a leader who could reach out beyond his Shia base, providing law and order (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 281). At the end of his second term he was accused of being a Shia sectarian politician (ibid.). However, during his rule he had evolved more into a personalistic ruler, depending on nepotism, clientelism and a divide-and-rule strategy (ibid.). Through a government patronage system and corruption, a new upper-class had developed, dependant on access to state-power by career politicians (ibid., p. 277). Al-Maliki's use of personalistic rule and his divide-and-rule strategy was in fact necessary, as under previous post-Saddam governments each ministry had become a separate entity, where the loyalty of the minister was directed at his party, network or ethno-sectarian group rather than at the state or the Prime Minister (Dawisha, 2009, p. 250). Despite these factors, Iraq made slow but unmistakable progress. AQI had been undercut by the Sunni Awakening militias and relative ease was present (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 266). In the period of 2008-2011 violence only came from Jihadi's using bomb attacks that did not disrupt life for ordinary Iraqi's, as most Iraqi's "got used to it" (ibid.). Another group posing a challenge during this period were small Iranian backed "Special Groups", which were the pro-Iran militias that performed attacks on U.S. forces.

In 2011 a rough pluralism existed in which Shi'a Arabs, Sunni Arabs, and Kurds were all participating (Harris, 2018, p. 43). The rise of the Islamic State in Syria and the drawback of U.S. forces from Iraq by the end of 2011 however, proved disastrous for Iraqi security. After the U.S. withdrawal al-Maliki became increasingly dependent on Iran, as his second term as prime minister was owed to Iranian post-election government formation support, elections that he had lost to Allawi's Iraqiyya (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 8). Much more than during his first term al-Maliki pursued Iranian regional policies, sending Iraqi Shia militias to Syria to

support the Bashar al-Assad regime in the emerging Syrian civil war (Harris, 2018, p. 43.). As the Sunni population feared Iran's influence over the Iraqi state and security institutions via pro-Iran Shia militias, combined with the rise if ISI in Syria, the relative ease in Iraq would soon be over.

4.1.2 Tensions between al-Maliki and the Sunni Arabs

The central issue between al-Maliki's Shia dominated government and the Sunni population evolved around the question of the integration of the Awakening militias into the security sector. The Awakening tribal militias had been financed by the U.S. that now withdrew its forces from Iraq. The Shia government was reluctant to finance the Awakening militias, let alone integrating them into the ISF and Iraqi police (Dawisha, 2009, p. 272). Al-Maliki feared the tribal Awakening militias could return to insurgency with extensive military power, thus to al-Maliki they remained political adversaries (Marr & al-Marisha, 2017, p. 252). Despite some concessions to the Awakening al-Maliki resisted integration into the security forces (ibid., p. 255). As Iranian-backed Shia militias grew considerable under al-Maliki's rule, the government eventually stopped paying Awakening member's salaries (Harris, 2018, p. 46). Besides losing their salaries, Sunni members of the Awakening felt discriminated for not being integrated, as they had fought AQI (Marr & al-Marisha, 2017, p. 281). Sunni tribal communities had little incentive or military means to eject the IS, AQI's follow-up, as they slowly emerged in Iraq in 2013 (ibid.).

The first protests in Sunni area's that culminated into violence came forth after the "Arab Spring" had reached Iraq. Demonstrators requested better governance but the government responded with violence against the "peace camps" which the protesters had set up near Falluja and Ramadi (ibid.; Seliktar & Rezaei, p. 155). In the perception of the Sunni Arabs, al-Maliki's sectarianism burst into the open with the murder and terrorism charges against Sunni vice-president al-Hashimi in December 2011, who fled the country to Turkey, the day after U.S. forces concluded their withdrawal (Harris, 2018, pp. 42-43). More than 150 of his bodyguards and office workers were charged with links to terrorist organizations during the civil war of 2006-2007 (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 282; Seliktar & Rezaei, 2020, p. 155). Al-Maliki's increasing support for Syrian president al-Assad further alienated the Sunni population from the Iraqi central government (Harris, 2018, pp. 42-43).

In December 2012 the al-Maliki government ordered the arrest of several bodyguards of al-Issawi on terrorism charges (ibid., p. 282). Al-Issawi was another prominent Sunni politician as he was the Iraqi Finance Minister (ibid.). When the house of al-Issawi was raided by government security forces, Sunni Arabs protested on the streets, resulting in a fierce denunciation of al-Maliki (Harris, 2018, p. 44). As the turbulence in Iraq intensified, spill-over between Iraq and Syria in both direction became inevitable (ibid.). Many Iraqi Shia felt themselves in the camp of al-Assad and Iran, while Sunni Arab's feelings gravitated towards the Syrian Sunni Arabs (ibid.) The same applied for the Iraqi and Syrian Kurdish populations (ibid.). However, the relations within and between the Iraqi Sunni Arab tribes were also very convoluted, as personal jealousies and factionalism also gave rise to IS (ibid., p. 45)

The Sunni Arab protests were not aimed at dismantling the political system, rather they wanted the continuing de- Ba'thification to end (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 282). Powerful tribes in the Anbar and Ninawa provinces had been the backbone of Saddam's regime, giving Sunni Arab tribes a privileged status. These tribes now formed the backbone of the protests (ibid.). The de-Ba'thification process and the dismissal of experienced Sunni bureaucrats and military officers that had started after the U.S. invasion in 2003 still meant mass unemployment among this demographic group (ibid.). The post-Saddam political system based on patronage and nepotism favoured Iraqi Shia and Kurdish elites. Thus, the protest were also aimed at jobs and better career opportunities (ibid.). As the protests grew in size, Arab Sunni sectarian feelings were stirred up by powerful polarizing Sunni politicians such as al-Alwani, who expressed his grievances over the Shia dominance over the Iraqi state and Iranian influence (ibid.).

Al-Maliki's accusations that Sunni ex-Ba'th members were instigating a new insurgency were not unfounded. Many highly experienced Ba'athist officers, under the leadership of former Iraqi intelligence colonel Haji Bakr, had already merged with IS under the leadership of al-Baghdadi in 2010 (Harris, 2018, p. 43). From 2010 onwards the command structure of IS was increasingly made up of ex-Ba'th members with military or security-related careers (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 295). Their primary objective was to secure a territory on which to establish a state, using IS as a vehicle to reassert power (ibid., p. 296).

The turning point came in Hawija in the Kirkuk province, where government security forces stormed a peace camp, killing more than 50 people (Seliktar & Rezaei, 2020, p. 155). In following clashes more than 300 people died across the northern and central Iraqi provinces (Harris, 2018, p. 46). Jihadist and ex-Ba'th military mobilized to face the authorities (ibid.). Sunni-Shia sectarian killings, car bombs and murders on Awakening and tribal members escalated (ibid.). Estimates on monthly civilian deaths went above the thousand in July 2013, for the first time since the beginning of 2008 (Harris, 2018, p. 47). Iraq again spiralled into sectarian violence as Shia militias, most of them pro-Iran, engaged in revenge killings in Sunni neighbourhoods and towns (Seliktar & Rezaei, 2020, p. 156).

As the violence escalated, Sunni insurgents organized a jailbreak of a possible 7000 largely jihadist detainees from the Abu Ghrayb and al-Hout prisons near Baghdad in July 2013 (Seliktar & Rezaei, 2020, p. 156; Harris, 2018, p. 47). Together with the hundreds of the released hardened Salafists from Camp Bucca and other detention centres after al-Maliki's amnesty in 2009 and the upcoming worldwide influx of Sunni jihadi's, IS posed a formidable security challenge to the Iraqi government.

4.1.3 The rise of the Islamic State and PMF incorporation

IS entered the Iraqi battlefront from neighbouring Syria in December 2013. After the arrest of Sunni Member of Parliament Ahmad al-Alwani at his home in Ramadi violent clashes broke out between the Iraqi army and gunman from the Sunni Dulaym tribal confederacy, the largest tribe in the Anbar province (Harris, 2018, p. 48). The army pulled back and Fallujah and Ramadi were taken over by insurgents, in which IS claimed leadership (ibid.). Here IS seized Iraqi weaponry, including anti-tank missiles (ibid., p. 50). IS further penetrated Iraq along the Euphrates river to the outskirts of Baghdad (ibid.). IS showed professional military capabilities in distracting the Iraqi security forces near Baghdad and the Diyala province, showing ex-Ba'th military expertise (ibid., p. 49). What explains this rapid IS advance is the support from Sunni tribes inflating the numbers for the insurgency and the ex-Ba'thist cells across the north and west of Iraq (ibid., p. 51). The tribal forces gave IS extra security in the deserts out of which it could suddenly emerge into Iraqi towns or across the

border into Syria (ibid.). In less than a month of lightening assault in June-July 2014 Mosul was captured by IS, helped by sympathetic cells among the residents (ibid., p. 53: Seliktar & Rezaei, 2020, p. 156). Morale of the 30,000 Iraqi soldiers in the vicinity collapsed as most of the troops consisted of Shia's in a Sunni city (Harris, 2018, p. 53; Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 290). IS therefore entered a military abandoned city in which vast amounts of money and weaponry could be seized (Harris, 2018, p. 53).

Under the deteriorating security situation al-Maliki's State of Law won the 2014 parliamentary elections, before the Sadrist and ISCI (the former SCIRI), as he claimed to be the only person able to provide security (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 285). However, the loss of Mosul to IS and the breakdown of the ISF after the elections had political consequences for al-Maliki. The Sadrist and ISCI joined Kurdish and Arab Sunni politicians calling for Maliki's resignation (ibid.). Even al-Sistani, the U.S., Iran and Saudi-Arabia pressured al-Maliki to step down (ibid.). He was replaced by another Da'wa member, Haider al-Abadi.

As IS threatened Baghdad and Shia holy cities like Samarra, Karbala, and Al-Najaf Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani issued a fatwa to 'defend Iraq, its people and its sacred sites from the Islamic State' (Eriksson & Khaleel, 2019, p. 82). Thousands of Iraqi men answered his call. Because of mixed sectarian and ethnic loyalties and the fallen army's reputation after the loss of Mosul, people's commitment to the Iraqi military and police was often questionable (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, pp. 6-7). Instead, thousands joined the dozens of militias that were already operating in Iraq or that saw the light of day after Sistani's fatwa. The militias combined their force and put themselves under one command structure in an umbrella-organization called the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). Around 142,000 fighters in over fifty militias were under the PMF-banner, varying in size, regional affiliation, political ideology, religion, and ethnicity (Cigar, 2015, p. 14; Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 3). Although Da'wa originally was opposed to the presence of non-state violent actors, Da'wa's prime minister al-Maliki shifted his thought in early 2014 as he began working with and supporting seven paramilitary forces, allowing them to officially operate in Iraq against IS (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 6). The original predominantly Shia militias in the PMF were the Badr Organization, Asaib ahl al-Haq (AAH), Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH), Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada, Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba, Kata'ib al-Imam Ali, and Kata'ib Jund al-Imam (ibid). Al-Maliki's

change of mind in using militias against IS can be explained by the failure of the security sector, thus militias in the PMF (and the Kurdish Peshmerga's) were necessary to fill the security vacuum (ibid.). However, even before the fall of Mosul al-Maliki worked with the original seven militias of the PMF. Al-Maliki had become reliant on Iranian support after the 2010 lost elections, in which Iranian brinkmanship gave him the second term as prime minister (ibid.; Seliktar & Rezaei, 2020, p. 153). Especially after the U.S. forces had left Iraq, al-Maliki needed Iranian political support against al-Sadr and his Mahdi Army to again become prime minister (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 8). Iran used al-Maliki for its foreign and security policies, as they wanted Iraqi pro-Iranian Shia militias to support the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria's emerging civil war and to preserve a corridor from Tehran to the Levant (ibid.). Furthermore, al-Maliki used the Shia militias to do "the dirty work" of attacking and interrogating civilian protesters after the Arab Spring (ibid., p. 9).

After the fall of Mosul al-Maliki signed an official decree to put all militias in Iraq that fought IS under the banner of the PMF (ibid., p. 6). During the war as many as fifty militias entered the PMF. These militias can be divided into three subgroups. The first are the pro-Iran Shia armed groups that pledge allegiance to Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The second group consists of nationalist Shia armed groups loyal to al-Sistani or al-Sadr. The last group consists of non-Shia armed groups that pursue more limited local objectives, for example the Sunni Tribal Mobilization Forces and the Sinjar Resistance Units, a Kurdish/Yezidi force (Ezzeddine & Van Veen, 2018, p. 3).

At the start of the war against IS the PMF played a critical role in stopping IS (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 287; Knights, 2016, p. 26). However, IS did succeed in conquering a third of Iraq's territory (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 290). From august 2014 onwards IS was no longer capable of conducting serious conquest on Iraq's territory as it faced the recovering ISF (under U.S. training), Iraqi police forces (including the elite Counter Terrorism Service, CTS), Kurdish Peshmerga's, the PMF, and an international coalition forwarded by the U.S. providing airpower. IRGG advisers and Lebanese Hezbollah operatives assisted the pro-Iran Shia forces in the PMF (Knights et al., 2020, p. 68). Initially the PMF played a key role in the protection of Samarra, Baghdad and Karbala, in the relief of the siege of Amerli, in the clearing of IS from large swathes of the Diyala province, and in the conquest of Tikrit

(Knights, 2016, pp. 29-30). However, the relationship between the U.S. and the pro-Iran Shia militias in the PMF was difficult although the U.S. did provide airpower in battles in which the PMF fought (ibid., p. 22).

The U.S. opted to reconstruct, retrain, and re-equip the Iraqi army to have an indigenous force defeat IS as this would provide legitimacy to the conquest (Harris, 2018, p. 63). The U.S. therefore insisted that a significant Sunni Arab participation at all levels in the army was necessary in the liberation, thus it wanted Shia militias kept secondary and supervised (ibid.).

Whether through U.S. pressure or not, the ISF, the Federal Police, and the CTS gradually took over the lead from the PMF in the fight against IS. Besides the above mentioned successes of the PMF it was the Iraqi army and special forces that have led most of the counter-attacks against IS (Knights, 2016, p. 27). The recovery of the ISF after the Mosul debacle has been slow but solid, and in January 2016 significant progress had been made in terms of available forces (ibid., p. 22). Two major battles show how the Iraqi government delegated violence to the PMF. In the attack on Tikrit, the PMF was necessary due to limited Iraqi army forces (Ambrozik, 2019, p. 21). However, in the battle for Ramadi and subsequent clashes the PMF was side-lined to a military role in the rear, as the ISF took control over the pursuing battles against IS (ibid., p. 26). In taking over the responsibility for Iraq's security by the ISF the question how to deal with the PMF occurred. In the next section of this thesis an analyses on state-militia relationships is given in the time-period of 2010-2016, including how the PMF was integrated into the official security sector and the reasons for doing so.

4.2 State-militia relationships 2010-2016

4.2.1 The rentier state and clientelism

In understanding Iraq's state-militia relationships it is necessary to understand the political and economic structure of the Iraqi state, especially during al-Maliki's second term as Prime Minister. Although a democratic system was enforced onto Iraq after the 2003 invasion, Iraq's economic and political structure could still be described as a clientelist state (Abdullah et al., 2018, p. 666). Clientelism is described as 'an exchange relationship for obtaining political support, entailing selective access to resources for those within the bargaining system and the exclusion of others from that access' (ibid.). During Saddam's era Iraq's clientelism was a centralised patronage system, but in the democratic Iraq clientelism became based on both sectarian and partisan lines (ibid.). Clientelism in Iraq was made possible as Iraq is one of the top oil-producing countries in the world, making it a rentier state. Al-Beblawi (1987, pp. 384-385) describes a rentier state as a state where a rentier (here the oil wealth in Iraq) is dominant in the economic system leading to an absence of a strong domestic productive sector. The rentier wealth is in the hands of a few, and the state's government is the principal recipient of the wealth.

Thus, access to the state institutions meant access to government's oil income, which can be used in a corrupted patronage system for obtaining political power. As a private sector still hardly existed in post-Saddam Iraq people are dependant for employment on the state, therefore many Iraqi's try to find opportunities and work in the public sector (Abdullah et al., 2018, p. 670). Political parties coming into government 'hand out many positions from the cleaners up to the post of minister' (ibid.). In the Iraqi "quid pro quo system" the oil wealth is used to obtain political support (votes and support) from powerful tribes, families, small political parties and clans. Examples for buying political support are the creation of ghost jobs, public appointments, bribes, retirement positions, house building for the poor, etc. (Abdullah et al., 2018). According to Transparency International (2011), only Somalia, Myanmar, and Afghanistan were more corrupt than Iraq in 2010.

In using clientelism to build up a patronage network al-Maliki tried to impose a more authoritarian style of ruling during his second term.

4.2.2 Maliki's authoritarian rule

Al-Maliki became prime minister in 2006 as a compromise between SCIRI and the Sadrist, that were both larger parties than al-Maliki's Da'wa in the UIA coalition (Da'wa was in a coalition itself called State of Law, in which Da'wa held the primacy). SCIRI, the Sadrist and the Kurdish parties did not want al-Jafari to return to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and al-Maliki was seen as a weak political figure that could easily be managed (Jabar et al., 2012, p. 3). As SCIR/Badr and the Sadrist/Mahdi army were entangled in a battle for dominance over the Shia UIA coalition and the legitimacy over the primacy over the Shia population, al-Maliki used their rivalry to his own end (ibid., p. 4). As mentioned in the previous chapter, al-Maliki conducted an attack on Sadr's Mahdi Army in Basra, giving him large middle class support. In the Provincial Elections of 2009 Da'wa's State of Law coalition rose to prominence at the cost of SCIRI and the Sadrists. Seven out of nine provinces (Baghdad and the nine southern provinces) now had Da'wa governors, and three independent ones supported al-Maliki (ibid., p. 5).

Al-Maliki's re-election in 2010 as Prime Minister, which he owed to Iranian negotiations with al-Sadr, (Jabar et al., 2012, p. 8) gave him the opportunity for a personalistic and more authoritarian style of ruling (ibid., pp. 10-11). Because of a weakened al-Sadr and SCIRI and al-Maliki's popular support amongst many Shia, al-Maliki could acquire control over the Iraqi Supreme Court. It ruled that the Independent High Electoral Commission, charged with running elections and the Integrity Commission, charged with investigating corruption, were placed under the PMO (ibid., p. 9). Investigations into the corrupt clientelist Iraqi state were now in the hands of al-Maliki (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 275).

The security institutions

Al-Maliki's authoritarian rule led to the creation of a parallel security structure. Therefore he developed the elite Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF) known as the Golden Division, trained by U.S. Green Berets and led by al-Maliki's loyalist al-Kenani (Hoekstra, 2019, p. 692).

The ISOF was placed under the extraconstitutional Counterterrorism Service (CTS), bypassing the military chain of command and put under the direct control of the prime minister (Krieg, 2017, p. 223). Maliki also created the extraconstitutional Office of the Commander-in-Chief, giving him the power to directly operate units and remove commanders at will (Hoekstra, 2019, p. 692). Besides using these official security structures al-Maliki worked with seven pro-Iran militias as the Badr Organization, AHH, KH, Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada, Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba, Kata'ib al-Imam Ali, and Kata'ib Jund al-Imam to target Sunni opponents, to enable Iran conducting operations in Syria's civil war, and to fight off al-Sadr's Mahdi Army (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 6; Hadded, 2020, p. 37). Al-Maliki even urged AAH and the Badr Organization to pursue parliamentary representation in the 2014 elections under his State of Law coalition, in which Badr got 22 seats and AAH, under the political name of Sadiqun, one seat (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, pp. 13-14). Thus, al-Maliki used these militias as a power tool against domestic opponents, in coordination with Iran.

Al-Maliki further appointed trustees in security positions. His son, Ahmed Nouri al-Maliki, was in charge of security in Baghdad's government headquarters known as the Green Zone (Rayburn, 2014, p. 77). In the ISF al-Maliki appointed loyalist to senior positions (Dodge, 2014, p. 13). Nineteen senior generals in the Iraqi army were part of the Malikiyoun, a group of civil servants highly loyal to al-Maliki (Rayburn, 2014, p. 86). Besides stacking the ISF with loyalist and using elite forces and militias to bypass the regular chain of command, al-Maliki also took charge of the complete government's security structures. After his re-election in 2010 al-Maliki was not only Prime Minister, but also Minister of the Interior, Minister of Defence and Minister of National Security (Hoekstra, 2019, p. 691). Other security institutions such as the intelligence agencies were filled with people who would be loyal to him (ibid., p. 692). Al-Maliki did ensure that Sunni Arabs were represented in senior security positions, but this was mostly nominally (ibid.).

4.2.3 The weakening of the ISF

The ISF was already weakened due to poor training and poor equipment by U.S. and Coalition forces and the infiltration of militias, leading to questionable loyalties in the Iraqi Army. The ISF became a highly politicized organisation as different militias and political

parties held sway over different parts of the army. For example, Da'wa was aligned to the Eighth Division in Diwaniyya and Al-Kut, Badr maintained influence over the Fifth Army Division in the Diyala Province and the Kurdish PUK exerted dominant control over the Fourth Division in the Salah al-Din Province (Al-Jabouri, 2009, p. 3). A unitary army that stood above ethnic and religious tendencies was an illusion. Even Saddam's army had a mythical status that appealed to many Iraqi's, both Shia and Sunni (Allawi, 2007, p. 157).
The ISF was further grossly weakened because of the characteristics of the corruptive clientelist state. It was notorious for its "ghost soldiers". Al-Maliki used the ISF to gain political support as he put people on the payroll of the ISF. In reality these 'soldiers' sat at home doing nothing (Abdullah et al., 2018, p. 671). Imaginary soldiers were another reason why the ISF was severely weakened. These soldiers were imaginary names of people on the army payroll, so army officers could draw extra money out of the security institutions (ibid.). Even in the Awakening, the Sunni Arab PGM that had fought AQI, three-quarters of the members were 'troops in the sky' (ibid.). The impact of ghost jobs undermined the effectiveness of the ISF severely (ibid.). A Kurdish MP stated that the existence of 50,000 ghosts in the ISF had a huge impact in the collapse of the ISF during the loss of Mosul to IS (ibid., p. 672; Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 11).

Retirement pensions further weakened the ISF and political institutions in general. No less than 404 women received retirement pensions for high military ranks, none of whom had ever been in the military (Abdullah et al., 2018, p. 673). Many people were employed in the ISF for five days and could then retire if they had connections to specific political parties (ibid., p. 673). The military had become a patronage network for al-Maliki, with officer post awarded to al-Maliki's loyalists, instead of handing them to professional army officers (Marr & al-Marashi, 2017, p. 280). The institutional weak and divided ISF would have little change against a solid and motivated opponent.

4.2.4 The Islamic State and the formation of the PMF

On Friday 6 June 2014, the Islamic State conquered Mosul. Their quick advance a week thereafter led to the conquest of a third of Iraqi soil (Hoekstra, 2019, p. 685). Six ISF brigades had crumbled and disintegrated as IS threatened Baghdad and Samarra (Knights et al., 2020,

p. 3). Al-Maliki used the seven original members of the PMF, the Shia pro-Iran militias, to bolster Iraq's security forces to defend these two cities (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 6). Former intelligence minister Ghabban statet that the use of the PMF was born out necessity (ibid., p. 6).

After the collapse of the ISF al-Maliki singed Cabinet Decree 301, forming the Commission for the Popular Mobilization Forces, allowing the Prime Minister to organise volunteers and provide them with funds and logistic support (Knights et al., 2020, p. 3). The commission answered directly to the office of the Prime Minister, instead of the Ministry of Defence or the Ministry of the Interior (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 9). Although this was forbidden by the constitution, Maliki had gained enough sway over Iraq's judiciary. In this way al-Maliki could keep the seven original PMF militias close to him, thus granting them an autonomous structure and jurisdiction, with access to state resources (ibid.). The Iraqi state provided the funds, while advanced military hardware and other military equipment came from Iran (ibid.). Also, the threat of IS led many to rely on the militias (ibid., p. 6). Even more legitimacy for Maliki's unconstitutional moves came from Ayatollah al-Sistani who issued a fatwa for every Iraqi men to defend Iraq against IS. Al-Sistani wanted people to join the official and national security forces, but al-Maliki used the fatwa to give religious sanction to the Shia militias, that could now operate in the open with full state funding (ibid.). Al-Sistani's fatwa 'popularized, normalized, expanded and ultimately institutionalized the PMF beyond anything the PMF's leaders could have conceived of prior to the fall of Mosul' (Haddad, 2020, p 37).

However, the fall of Mosul and the crumbling of the ISF forced al-Maliki to resign. Nonetheless, he was appointed Vice-President, showing the powerbase he had built up within Da'wa. His aim was to eventually restore his rule as Prime Minister (Mansour, 2016). Maliki's successor, Haidar al-Abadi, now had to deal with the powerful PMF. Although the PMF swallowed up all the different militias in Iraq during the fight against IS, both Sunni, Shia, Turkmen and other religious and ethnic communities, there was no doubt that the pro-Iran faction within the PMF was the strongest (Haddad, 2020, p. 40). Muhandis, leader of the powerful pro-Iran KH became president of the Commission of the PMF. Together with al-Amiri, political and military leader of the Badr Organization and represented in the Iraqi

parliament, they could allocate the funds coming from the Iraqi state over the different militias (Ezzeddine & Van Veen, 2018, pp. 7-8). The Shia pro-Sadr and pro-Sistani militias complained that they did not get the same resources that were allocated to the pro-Iran militias, as they had different views on the forthcoming role of the PMF.

Despite Prime Minister al-Abadi's dislike for the pro-Iran and pro-Maliki militias, he had to accept the status quo as long as IS was a threat to the Iraqi state, thus Abadi had little choice to endorse al-Maliki's decree of legitimizing the PMF (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p.10). Besides, the PMF had an enormous popular legitimacy, due to their successes in defending Iraq against IS and because of al-Sistani's fatwa (ibid.). Nonetheless, after a long process al-Abadi managed to pass Executive Order 91 in February 2016 through the Iraqi parliament. In this order the PMF was recognized as 'an independent military formation and a part of the Iraqi armed forces, and linked to the general commander of the armed forces' (Roggio & Toumaj, 2017). The PMF was now under the command of the Prime Minister in his role of general commander of the armed forces. It now had the same status as that of the Counter Terrorism Service (CTS), which also was directly subordinate to the Prime Minister, and not the Minister of Defence or the Minister of the Interior (Knights et al., 2020, p. 7). Al-Abadi had been under critique for the fact that militias not operating under the command of the Iraqi armed forces were operating in Iraq, which was illegal under Article 9 of the Iraqi constitution. Thus, Prime Minister al-Abadi was pressured to formalize his connection to the PMF (ibid.). Bringing non-state actors under formal command has also been the original Da'wa point of view, as Da'wa was originally opposed to non-state actors (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 5). Although a Da'wa member, al-Maliki's authoritarian rule was an exception towards the original Da'wa line, as he used pro-Iran militias for his own personalistic rule.

The PMF is thus not integrated into Iraq's central security institutions with Executive Order 91, but it became an institutionalized autonomous force, parallel to the existing security institutions (Mansour, 2018). This autonomous structure is different from previous attempts to rein in militia activity. Following the civil war from 2006-2008, al-Maliki either integrated militias into the official security structure or he ordered to attack them. For example, al-Maliki continued the integration of the Badr Organization into the MOI, a process that had started under Prime Minister al-Jafari (however, instead of integration, Badr took over the

ministry, ibid.). Other militias, most notably the Mahdi Army, were attacked to contain their strength (ibid.). Never before had there been militias autonomous in Iraq's post-Saddam official security structure.

From the formation of the PMF onwards there have been powerful Shia militias that expressed a willingness to formally integrate into the traditional security ministries (Mansour, 2018). The four pro-Sistani militias (Saraya al-Ataba al-Abbasiya, Saraya al-Ataba al-Hussainiya, Saraya al-Ataba al-Alawiya, and Liwa 'Ali al-Akbar) that formed as a result of Sistani's fatwa were willing to integrate in the police or army forces or to disband when IS would be defeated (Ohlers, 2018). The same applied for Sadr's militia, now under the name of the Peace Brigades. Although al-Sadr's militias in the past caused havoc, he has nominally expressed the will to integrate his militia in army and police units (ibid.). Nonetheless, the pro-Iran militias got what they wanted in 2016, as the PMF is an independent security institution (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 12).

The pro-Iran militias in the PMF are the strongest within the PMF and were still closely aligned with al-Maliki and Iran in 2016 (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 13). These militias are often seen as arms for Iran's IRGC and the Iranian intelligence agency, Itilaat (ibid.). Iran uses the pro-Iran militias as a fighting force in the Syrian civil war and to protect the Iraq-Iran border (ibid.). Iran vies for power in Iraq to build a corridor between Tehran and the Levant, known as the "Shia Crescent", linking Tehran, Baghdad, Damascus and the Lebanese Hezbollah (Chulov, 2016). Although militias in the pro-Iran camp closely work together with Iran's IRGC and pledge allegiance to Iran's president Khamenei, the pro-Iran militias should not be seen as mere Iranian forces (Alaaldin, 2016; Ezzeddine et al. 2018, p. 3; Haddad, 2020, p. 40). The pro-Iran militias have the same religious outlook on state-religion relationships, pledging religious obedience to the clerical rulers in Qom, Iran. This point of view on politics and religion is contrary to al-Sistani's clerical rule in Najaf, Iraq. However, the pro-Iran militias remain Iraqi militias, historically embedded in Iraq's political and security institutions (Haddad, 2020, p. 40). The Shia pro-Sistani and pro-Sadr militias are wary of Iranian influence in Iraq and oppose the involvement of Iraqi militia in the Syrian civil war (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, pp 16-17; Mansour & Clark, 2014).

Further complicating al-Abadi's Executive Order 91 is politically. The Badr Organization split from SCIRI as SCIRI changed its name to ISCI and made an ideological turn from a pro-Iranian outlook towards a pro-Sistani one (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 13). Badr became a political entity and in 2014 it ran for the parliamentary elections in 2014 in al-Maliki's State of Law coalition (ibid.). The same applies for AAH, which won one seat in the parliament in 2014 (ibid.). The pro-Iran Badr, AHH, and other smaller militias and al-Sadr's militia thus hold political and military power and are described as parochial networks, which have a strong following in parts of the Iraqi population (Mansour, 2021, pp. 13-16).
Although many militias within the PMF were already represented in parliament before 2016, the 2016 Executive Order 91 on paper dictated that members of the PMF must disengage from political, social and partisan organizations, while no political activity by PMF members is permitted (Library of Congress, 2016; Knights et al., 2020, p. 8). In 2016 however, this did not stop Iraqi PGM's from incorporation into the official security structure on an autonomous basis.

4.2.5 The PMF and the ISF

Although al-Abadi got the PMF under the control of the Prime Minister's Office, the PMF was not fully integrated into the army and police forces, as they remained an autonomous entity. However, he did opt to 'side-line' the PMF militias in the battle against IS, when the ISF was strong enough to combat IS. After the fall of Mosul the Iraqi army did regained its strength relatively fast due to American training and equipment (Kalin, 2016; Knights & Mello, 2017). As Ambrozik argues (2019, pp. 21-27) al-Abadi used PMF militias (Sunni and Shia) in the battle for Tikrit in March 2015 because the Iraqi army was not strong enough to fight IS without the help of the PMF, as IS was present at multiple fronts in Iraq. Tikrit was retaken from IS using 20,000 Shia militiamen, 4000 ISF forces and an additional 1000 Sunni tribal fighters (Cunningham, 2015). The PMF was part of the "clear phase", meaning they were present in the actual fighting against IS, as they were necessary because the ISF still lacked power. In December 2015 Ramadi wat recaptured by ISF forces (Eight Division and CTS forces), Sunni tribal fighters and Sunni militias in the PMF. Shia militias were absent. Ramadi was the first battle in which US-trained Iraqi forces were deployed in an offensive against IS. Al-Abadi could thus claim victory for the ISF and not the PMF, opting for a 'rally-around-the-

flag' effect (Ambrozik, 2019, p. 30). Pro-Iran PMF militias were outraged that they were not involved in the battles for Ramadi, Fallujah, and Mosul, as the PMF were only used in the hold-phase after the fighting or in the protection of the flanks during battles between IS and ISF (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 16).
However, training of the ISF was slow and many of the ISF battles against IS were conducted by the small but well-trained special forces (CTS), leading to Amiri's (Badr Organization) critique that Abadi's military planning was a disaster in side-lining the PMF (ibid.).

Knights (2016, pp. 26-29) shares Ambrozik's view. At the end of 2014 the PMF carried most of the burden in the fight against IS after the collapse of the ISF. However, the ISF under U.S. training regained its strength and from the battle for Ramadi onwards it has played the key role in decisive battles against IS. Besides the American equipment and training the ISF could make use of U.S. intelligence and airpower. Although there was still much that needed to be fixed in the Iraqi Army, the Federal Police, the CTS, and other ISF formations, the ISF after the battle for Ramadi regained much of their trust in their officers and was increasingly the Iraqi force that took the lead against IS (ibid., p. 28).

Lastly, it could be that the U.S. pressured al-Abadi to use the ISF against IS, not using the powerful pro-Iran militias. However, there is conflicting evidence (Ambrozik, 2019, p. 29). Kirby, State Department spokesperson, claims that the U.S. government did not take a position in whether al-Abadi used the PMF in battles against IS or not (Youssef & Harris, 2015). Also, the U.S. has provided air-power in battles in which PMF militias participated (Roggio & Weiss, 2015). U.S. Army Colonel Warren stated that if the Iraqi government controlled the militias, realistically, they would participate in battles against IS (Saeed, 2015). Thus, it seems the U.S. government was antagonistic about deploying the PMF against their mutual enemy, IS.

Nonetheless, as IS got slowly driven out of Iraq in 2016 on the merit of the ISF mostly, the Iraqi official security institutions now had a new player among them: the autonomous Popular Mobilization Forces, including powerful Iran-aligned militias. 19659

Chapter 5: Conclusion and discussion

In this thesis I started with the puzzling empirical observation how pro-government militias in Iraq got incorporated into the official state security structure. Using Staniland's categorization on state-militia relationships I hypothesized that states with weak coercive security institutions either collude with militias or opt to contain them. States with strong coercive security institutions either repress militias, or incorporate them into the official security structure.

Staniland's categorization on state-militia relationships can be used in the case of Iraq during the timeframe of 2003-2016, however nuances have to be made, as the Iraqi state is not a unitary actor. P/A theory does not provide a sufficient explanation on state-militia relationships in Iraq from 2003-2016, as states and militias became intertwined in Iraq. Principals and Agents are thus hard to distinguish.

PMF incorporation

The Popular Mobilization Forces were incorporated into Iraq's security structure as an autonomous security institution under the Prime Minister's Office, rather than under the official security forces, giving the PMF semi-official status. Prime Minister al-Abadi opted for the PMF's incorporation into the official security structure as the militias had an illegal status, since they were not under the jurisdiction of Iraq's constitution.

The collusion between PGMs united in the PMF and the Iraqi state on the short term enabled the survival of the state against the Islamic State. The rapid adaption in the deteriorating security situation by using PGMs stopped the advance of the Sunni Arab insurgents. However, a continuing state-militia collusion with powerful PGMs runs the risk of hollowing out the state power, as the PGMs can become unmanageable powerful (Staniland, 2015). PGMs that are not fully under government's control can undermine the government's authority as the PGMs lack accountability. (Carey & Mitchell, 2016). Incorporating PGMs into the official security structure under the command of the Prime Minister is a way of regaining authority and control over PGMs under constitutional jurisdiction, preventing state failure.

Prime-Minister Al-Abadi's predecessor Al-Maliki had used the seven original pro-Iran militias of the PMF for his increasing authoritarian rule, under his personal command, illegal according to Iraq's constitution. Also, al-Maliki was indebted to Iran for their support in al-Maliki's re-election. The seven militias worked closely with Iran's IRGC in security operations in Syria's civil war supporting the Al-Assad regime. After the collapse of the ISF and the loss of Mosul to the Islamic State the PMF 'came out in the open' to battle IS, which it did successfully in 2014 and at the start of 2015. The PMF ballooned in size as thousands joined the militias instead of the ISF, which reputation was severely damaged after the loss of Mosul and large swaths of Iraq's territory and its sectarian reputation. On top of that, Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani's fatwa that called upon every Iraqi man to defend Iraq against IS gave the PMF religious authority, making it a holy institution. The fatwa was misused by al-Maliki to legitimize the increasing manpower of the PMF, in which the pro-Iran militias were by far the most powerful, as al-Sistani had called for men to join the official security institutions, not militias that were not under state authority.

In the background a power struggle was played out between al-Maliki, the pro-Iran militias in the PMF, and the Iranian IRGC on the one hand and Prime Minister al-Abadi, al-Sistani, al-Sadr and Sunni Arab political parties on the other hand. The militias loyal to al-Sistani and al-Sadr were willing to either disband their militias after the fight against IS or to fully integrate them into Iraq's police and army forces. Al-Maliki kept the pro-Iran militias close to him as he became Vice President under al-Abadi's rule. With the increasing (man)power of the PMF, their religious legitimacy and their powerful Iranian support, the pro-Iran faction in the PMF became a considerable powerful entity in Iraq's security structure.

It is not fully clear what role the U.S. and Iran have played in the incorporation of the PMF into Iraq's security structure. Evidence suggest the pro-Iran militias in the PMF militias remain autonomous and are not under direct control of the IRGC, as they are Iraqi militias embedded into Iraq's security, but also political institutions. Evidence of the U.S. calling upon reigning in the PMF is contradictory.

Reciprocity between the ISF and the PMF

As the ISF regained strength after the collapse of Mosul under U.S. training and equipping, they became increasingly the force to combat IS. This was at the cost of the PMF, much to their dismay. This lends support for my hypothesis that states with weak coercive security institutions collude or contain militias. After the Sunni Arab insurgency in 2013 the Iraqi state had no choice other than to collude with the PMF. However, as Iraq's official coercive security institutions regained strength the PGMs were incorporated into the security structure to regain state's authority. However, the PGMs in the PMF were not fully integrated into the armed forces in 2016, yet they remained an autonomous entity in the security structure.

After the dissolvement of Iraq's security structure in 2003 by the Coalition Provisional Authority efforts were made to rebuilt the army and police forces. However, this has been a considerably difficult process. U.S. training and equipping the army and the federal and local police forces lacked the necessary operational standards. The ISF got infiltrated by militias, mostly by the Badr Organization and the Mahdi Army, as the security situation after 2003 deteriorated, leading to sectarian tension. Al-Maliki's use of the army as a patronage system further severely weakened the armed forces. Nonetheless, the ISF did take on most of the burden in fighting IS from the end of 2015 onwards, under U.S. training.

State-militia relationships

Staniland's categorization of state-militia relationships is useful in studying state-militia relationships in Iraq from 2003 to 2016, yet there are strong nuances to be made. After 2003 a wide plethora of different Sunni Arab insurgents and militias rose up. The same applied for the Shia's where both local and national party militias came to force. Especially the Mahdi Army under the leadership of Al-Sadr was repressed by Iraqi and U.S. army forces. However, in the end the Mahdi Army was contained instead of repressed as it could hold on to its weapons. The Badr Organization got integrated into the Ministry of the Interior, mostly into the Federal Police. However, Badr militia members took over the ministry.

The difficulty in describing state-militia relationships in Iraq is that Iraq is not a unitary state that holds the monopoly of force. As a democratic system was enforced upon Iraq after 2003

a wide range of political parties, mostly organized on sectarian lines, entered the Iraqi political landscape. These political parties often had their own militias or paramilitary protection units. For example, the Badr Organization originated as the military wing of SCIRI, that gained dominance over the MOI and its Federal Police. The Mahdi Army was often represented in the local police forces in Sadr City, Baghdad and Basra, but also in the Iraqi parliament and ministries. The Kurds gained regional autonomy, including its own military forces, the Peshmerga's. Sunni Arab political parties did not have strong armed political parties. Sunni Arab tribal militias either colluded with AQI/IS to combat the central Shia-Kurdish government or functioned as PGMs in defence towards the Sunni Islamist. At the local level a wide range of different militias operated, either in defence against sectarian opponents or to pursue wealth and power in the local administrations.

Iraq is a rentier state that has evolved into a political system revolving around a "quid pro quo" clientelism and patronage system, based on oil wealth. Access to the political system, for example as representative in Iraq's parliament or in senior positions in the ministries, means access to the state's resources that can be used to buy political support. Political parties with their militias thus vie for power in the system. This has led to militia confrontations for control over security institutions, both local and national, and for control over dominance of economic activities, for example in Basra. During these confrontations, the militia's political parties were in the same national coalitions in government. The official security organizations lacked power, got infiltrated by militias, and were not the unitary security provider standing above the different political parties and their militias.
Further complicating Iraq's political and security landscape is the entry of militias into the Iraqi parliament or even at ministerial positions. Examples are the Badr Organization that split from SCIRI and entered Iraq's parliament in 2014. The same applied for the powerful al-Haqq militia that broke off from the Mahdi Army.

Thus, although the different categories of Staniland (2015) are present in Iraq during 2003-2016, one has to wonder what the Iraqi state itself entails. Iraq became a fragmented state, without powerful central security institutions, but instead is full with local and national militias in the security and political state

The findings that I have presented in this thesis have serious limitations. As I conducted an in-depth case study based on process-tracing, the generalizability is severely limited. As I conducted an explaining-outcome process-tracing research method in order to find a satisfying answer to a specific empirical outcome, the relevance for other countries is rather limited. Also, the used dataset is small, though triangulation efforts have been made. This too limits the relevance of my findings, possibly making them too superficial to provide a sufficient answer to the research question.

Nonetheless, I deliberately opted for an in-depth case study to look at state-militia relationships in Iraq, as this county is known to have many operational militias between 2003-2016. Staniland's categorization as a tool to study state-militia relationships in Iraq has been useful, although the state of Iraq is not a unitary ensemble. P/A theory, often used too explain collusion between PGMs and governments, has its severe limitations, as it does not account for the shifts in state-militia relationships in Iraq during 2003-2016.

The limitation of the used data presents a bigger concern, as a small number of news media publications, secondary historical writings, NGO reports and academic articles limits the analysis to answer the research question and the testing of the hypothesis. However, I did opt to use high profile news outlets, NGO reports and reputational historical writings on Iraq. Thus, despite limitations in the amount of data, the quality of the used sources still validates my conclusions.

Using an in-depth case study with limited data potentially restricts the findings in this thesis, making them hard to compare to other countries, which have their own contextual background. Any statements based on the findings in this thesis can only be done with great caution. Using an in-depth case study did have benefits as it allowed me to look at the causal mechanism on a larger time-frame. I abide to Beach & Pedersen (2013) that explaining a specific outcome in a particular case is arguably not possible using any other research method than process-tracing, as using a causal mechanism to explain PGM incorporation is always context-specific.

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