On Coercion and Persuasion

How militia group Hashd al-Shaabi made strategic use of
legitimacy sources in establishing civilian compliance
in Ninewa governorate, Iraq, in 2017 and 2018

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Photograph on cover page: A bird rests on an electricity pole in one of the valleys of the Ninewa Plains, with dark clouds either coming in or going away.

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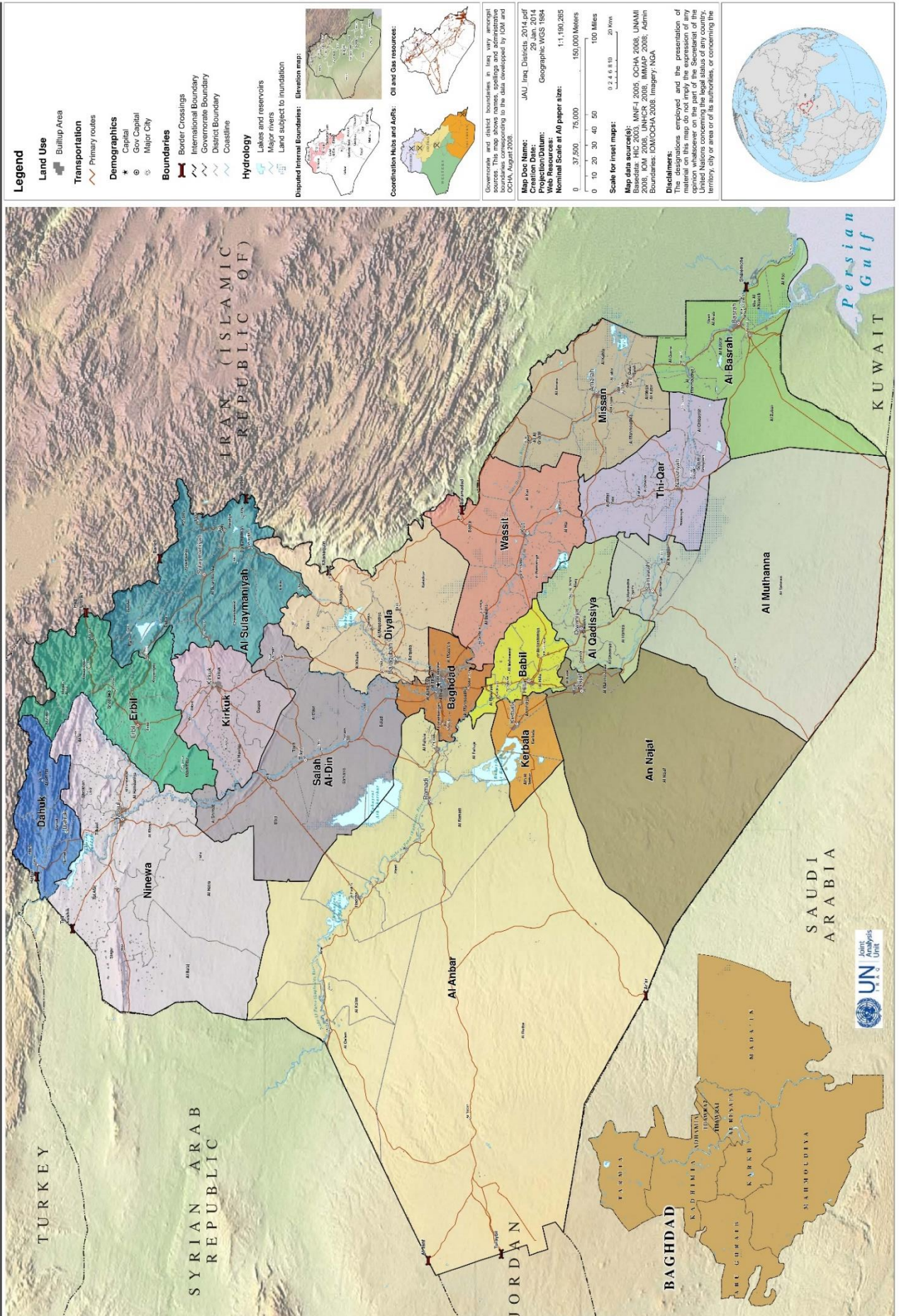
Figure 1 Map of Iraq, with governorates and districts. Source: Humanitarian Response (2014)
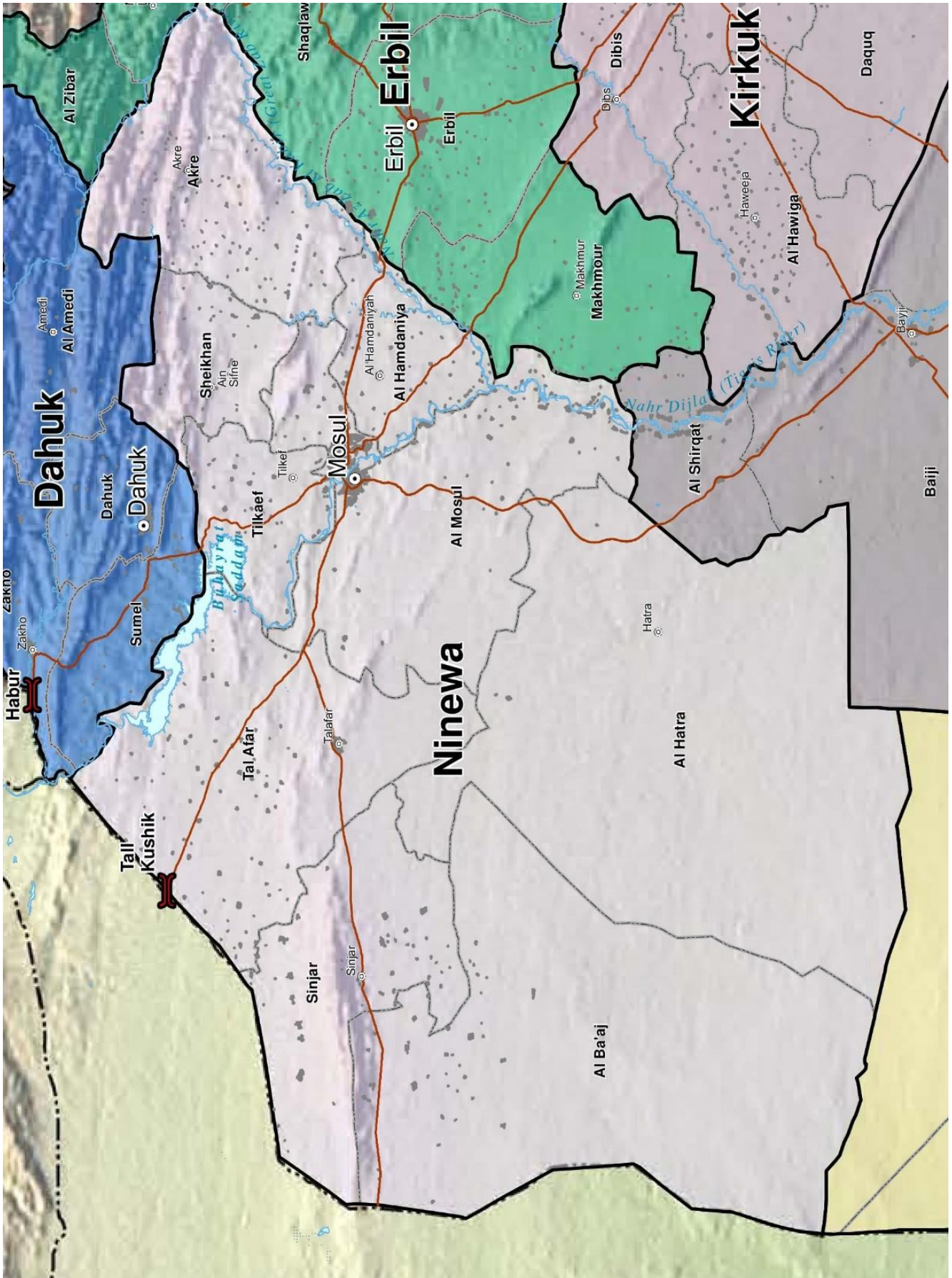
Figure 2 Map of Ninewa governorate, with districts. Source: Humanitarian Response (2014) [map was edited by author]

Abstract

This thesis is focused on the strategic use of legitimacy sources in establishing civilian compliance by an armed group. It zooms in on the case study of Hashd al-Shaabi in Ninewa governorate, Iraq. This armed group mobilized in 2014 through a *fatwa* issued by the highest Shia leader of Iraq, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, with the purpose of defeating Islamic State (IS) on Iraqi territory. During the successful fight against IS, Hashd al-Shaabi became increasingly active in governance and was recognized as official government organization.

Academic literature suggests that in order to establish control and authority, armed actors will seek civilian compliance, which can be based on coercive strategies or persuasive means. Because authority based on pure coercion is not sustainable and very costly, armed actors are expected to move towards persuasion instead, thereby focusing on acquiring legitimacy. Starting from this theoretical debate, this thesis operationalizes legitimacy along the lines of symbolic sources of legitimacy (such as myth-symbol complex, grievances and external threat) as well as performance-centred sources (charismatic leadership, sacrifice and martyrdom, personal loyalties, providing services and formalization).

Although coercion is an important element in Hashd al-Shaabi's attempts to establish civilian compliance, and large parts of their governance system are based on their military power, three legitimacy sources are strategically used. These are myth-symbol complexes, partly linked to grievances, sacrifice and martyrdom and personal loyalties. Through a qualitative research method of policy document analysis, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, field notes and observations, this thesis has added empirical insight in debates on legitimacy, civilian compliance and governance by armed actors. Its focus on local developments provide a useful approach to avoiding reductionism and advocates for further research into these complex actors, contexts and issues.

Key words: legitimacy, civilian compliance, governance, armed actor, militia, legitimacy sources

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1. Introduction

On 13 June, 2014, a representative of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the highest Shia religious leader in Iraq, issued a *fatwa* on the Ayatollah's behalf during the Friday prayer in the mosque of Karbala, in southern Iraq. The representative said:

"Citizens who are able to bear arms and fight terrorists, defending their country and their people and their holy places, should volunteer and join the security forces to achieve this holy purpose (…) He who sacrifices for the cause of defending his country and his family and his honour will be a martyr"
(Al Jazeera, 2014)

This *fatwa* was issued in response to the massacre of 1.700 unarmed Shia cadets of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) at Camp Speicher, close to the Iraqi city of Tikrit (Al Jazeera, 2019; Meacher, 2017:13). The perpetrators later became known as the Islamic State (IS),[1] who would declare a Caliphate on 29 June 2014, two weeks after the massacre at Camp Speicher (The New York Times, 2014). By this time, IS had secured full control over the largest cities of Iraq, namely Fallujah, Ramadi, Tikrit and Mosul, and continued their onslaught towards Baghdad (Gaston & Derszi-Horváth, 2017:17). Sistani's *fatwa* urged able bodied men to join the official security forces, the ISF, to drive out IS. However, after the Camp Speicher incident and the rapid advancement of IS in general, the ISF suffered grave credibility issues, which made men reluctant to join them. Instead, Sistani's *fatwa* encouraged powerful Shia figures to seize the moment as an opportunity to re-invigorate their militias of the past, or set up new militias which would keep IS away from Shia holy sites in Iraq. In total, around 50 militias rose to the calling of the Grand Ayatollah and, cooperating with international and national partners, managed to push IS back. While some of these groups existed before, they now became known under the name of Hashd al-Shaabi.[2] Hashd al-Shaabi quickly grew to over 100.000 fighters and cooperated in the fight against IS. In doing so, they worked alongside the ISF, Peshmerga and the Global Coalition Against Da'esh

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[1] Western media often refers to IS as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or al-Sham (ISIS), or Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). In Arabic, the acronym Da'esh is common, which denounces the implicit recognition of a state-like entity. In this study, Islamic State (IS) is used.
[2] The name of this armed actor is in Arabic, and would literally be pronounced as al-Hashed al-Shaʿabi. They are also referred to as Popular Mobilization Units or Forces in English (PMUs/PMFs). This study will use the name Hashd al-Shaabi, based on the Arabic pronunciation. In quotes, interviewees and focus group discussants will at times abbreviate this name to 'Hashd'.

(O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017B:34), which was initiated by the U.S. in September 2014 and since then joined by 80 members (Global Coalition Against Da'esh, 2019).

Three years later, in December 2017, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared victory over IS in Iraq (The New York Times, 2017). Several developments had occurred by this time that signal a change in Hashd al-Shaabi's posture and demeanour. In 2016, Hashd al-Shaabi had been officially recognized as a government organization, under the direct command of the Prime Minister himself (Al Jazeera, 2016). The retaking of large swaths of territory from IS, pushed Hashd al-Shaabi to become active in governance, defined as the "whole set of practices and norms that govern daily life in a specific territory" (Mampilly, 2007 in: Duyvestein et al, 2015:31). Hashd al-Shaabi gained territorial control over the so called 'disputed territories'[3] in October 2017 (International Crisis Group, 2018B:14), which made them a governance actor to even larger lengths. In 2018, two political parties linked to Hashd al-Shaabi forces received the most votes in Iraq's national elections, which turns Hashd al-Shaabi leaders into important political figures (Mansour & Van den Toorn, 2018:6). Over the course of 2017 and 2018, these developments seem to highlight that Hashd al-Shaabi transitioned from a purely military force to a governance actor that ultimately gained the trust of the Iraqi constituency.

1.1 Empirical complication

The transition process introduced above presents a highly interesting yet complicated development in the history of Hashd al-Shaabi. Podder (2013:16) argues that armed actors going through such a transition are increasingly seen as valuable partners in the intervention stage and the post-conflict state-building, yet there is a lack of understanding of the ideologies, goals and practices of these actors. The military cooperation between the US-led fight against IS with local armed actors such as Hashd al-Shaabi can be seen as security cooperation. Watts and Biegon (2018:1) and Demmers and Gould (2018:3) regard this strategy as part of remote warfare, as it allows international actors to intervene military without boots on the ground, but by training and advising local partners to do the fighting and dying on their behalf. Such cooperation can be highly problematic as they lack transparency and accountability structures, especially when the armed actors at stake have been accused of severe human rights abuses, which is the case for Hashd al-Shaabi (Meacher, 2017). Schmelzle and Stollenwerk (2018:450) warn that "legitimacy (…) is increasingly seen both as an antidote to state fragility (…), and as a panacea for the ills of ineffective development assistance (…), peace-building (…) and even full-scale state-building interventions". The cooperation with armed actors transition towards governance actors demand a

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[3] These territories are recognized as 'disputed' under the Iraqi constitution (article 140, 2005) and the Transitional Administrative Law (article 58, 2004) and are claimed by both the central government of Iraq and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Erbil. While *de jure* sovereignty was in Baghdad's hands, Erbil had *de facto* power through its Peshmerga forces.

thorough understanding of their goals, ambitions and ideologies. This empirical complication inspired this thesis, by focusing on an actor that recently underwent this process. This is done by zooming in on Hashd al-Shaabi, answering the following research question:

How were sources of legitimacy strategically used by Hashd al-Shaabi in establishing civilian compliance during their transition process from military actor engaging in the US-led fight against IS to a governance actor in Ninewa governorate, in 2017 and 2018?

This research question is answered through a combination of desk research and a field work period of three months in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Although I was not able to travel to Ninewa governorate myself, I have conducted in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with over forty individuals living under the direct influence of and working together with Hashd al-Shaabi. I managed to speak to people from all over Ninewa, representing different ethno-religious and geographic communities and districts. I have engaged with supporters of the group, as well as opponents and those holding a neutral stance. Their perspectives, added with field notes and observations, form the core of this thesis.

1.2 Academic contribution

According to the academic literature, "the pursuit for authority" (Terpstra & Frerks, 2018:1007) requires legitimacy for it to be sustainable and successful (Schlichte & Schneckener, 2015:410; Terpstra & Frerks, 2017:279; Levi, 2018:603). Following Weber (1947:152), governance can only be truly effective once legitimacy is established and maintained. In order words, legitimacy is "the master question of politics" (Barker, 1990 in: Terpstra & Frerks, 2018:1031). Research on legitimacy and governance has for a long time been purely state-centred, leaving out actors like Hashd al-Shaabi who definitely prove their relevance on this stage. These perspectives run the risk of reductionism and fail to do justice to the empirical reality. Instead, governance should be understood as a highly hybrid system, thereby including non-state actors, according to Boege, Brown and Clements (2009). Schmelzle and Stollenwerk (2018:450) add that the link between legitimacy and governance should be further substantiated and is not as linear and straightforward as it seems. The link with governance is complicated as legitimacy is seen as "a precondition for effective governance" (Risse & Stollenwerk, 2018:410) and operates in a virtuous circle, whereby "effective governance increases the legitimacy of the responsible governance actors, and higher levels of legitimacy increases their effectiveness" (Schmelzle & Stollenwerk, 2018:450).

Besides recognizing the importance of legitimacy in establishing and maintaining successful governance, it is unclear how armed actors in particular derive legitimacy in the first place. Duyvestein

(2017:670) finds that "there are important and under-investigated processes of legitimation of a variety of actors that deserve more of our attention, most notably the non-state actor". Contrary to other political actors, an armed actor often cannot base its legitimacy on legality, for it acts against the monopoly on violence of the state (Krieger, 2018:565). Therefore, armed actors need to look for different sources of legitimacy. Risse and Stollenwerk (2018:410) see that studies on "consolidated statehood" have focused on categories of input legitimacy, throughput legitimacy and output legitimacy. Others have argued for inclusion of religious, cultural and identity related elements, or advocated for a pure focus on performances and practices (Risse & Stollenwerk, 2018:410). This thesis will add to the literature on sources of legitimacy by empirically testing a framework of legitimacy sources focused on armed actors, set up by Schlichte and Schneckener (2015), added with insights on the relational character of legitimacy by Duyvestein (2017) and Schneckener (2017). This framework is particularly strong as it includes both symbolic and performance-centred sources of legitimacy. Additionally, this thesis aims to bring the discussion one step forward by providing an understanding of how these sources are strategically used by an armed actor in practice. In turn, this thesis sheds light on the transition process from military actor to governance actor, the role that legitimacy plays in this process, and, going one step further, analysing whether locals recognize this process and experience legitimization attempts. Hashd al-Shaabi forms an interesting case through which these elements can be investigated: it is a complex armed actor which recently underwent a transition from a military to a governance actor in 2017 and 2018, and is thereby expected to introduce and use legitimacy sources in order to maintain in power.

Moreover, this thesis adds to the literature on remote warfare and rebel governance, for the case study at hand is linked with both concepts. Remote warfare, security cooperation in particular, can be retrieved in the collaboration between international actors and local forces, such as Hashd al-Shaabi. Some Hashd al-Shaabi forces collaborated with the U.S. in the fight against IS, which was largely pursued through a strategy of airstrikes and training local partners, thereby fighting an enemy from a distance. The U.S. directly provided weapons and training to particular Hashd al-Shaabi forces (Gaston & Derzsi-Horváth, 2017:19). At the same time, Iran has heavily supported other forces part of Hashd al-Shaabi, which have grown to be the strongest parts of Hashd al-Shaabi (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017A:26; Gaston & Derzsi-Horváth, 2018:21-22; Mansour & Jabar, 2018:13). The local implications of these strategies of security cooperation have to be analysed in order to understand their long term effects. Rebel governance focuses on the governance practices of non-state actors, such as rebels opposing the state. These actors "have been found to be capable and able governance providers, both as alternatives to the absent state and as stand- alone 'governors' with neither claims nor ambitions to state power" (Duyvestein, 2017:672). Hashd al-Shaabi is not a rebel group according to the strict definition, as it did not oppose the state but fought alongside it. As Krieger (2018:566) notes: "detailed categorization [of

armed actors] is often disputed, not least because categories will overlap". By focusing on the transition of Hashd al-Shaabi from a purely military actor to a governance actor, this thesis also adds to the literature on rebel governance, or governance by an armed actor that is partly rebellious, and partly government-allied.

1.3 Geographical and temporal scope

The chosen geographical scope of Ninewa governorate is relevant because Ninewa was an important area where the fight against IS took place. Ninewa was for the most part captured by IS. Its capital is Mosul, which is the third largest city of Iraq (International Crisis Group, 2009:1) and IS declared its Caliphate here on 29 June 2014 (The New York Times, 2014). Ninewa formed an important stage for Hashd al-Shaabi as military actor in fighting IS and as government actor in retaking territories. This makes Ninewa an interesting place to conduct this research. Additionally, Ninewa governorate hosts several of the so called disputed territories, of which it is unclear whether they are part of Iraqi or Kurdish territory (International Crisis Group, 2018A:1). The dispute over territories between the governments in Baghdad and Erbil is still ongoing, making the area prone for governance actors outside of the state. Lastly, Ninewa is home to a variety of ethno-religious communities, where Arabs (Muslims, Sunni and Shia), Kurds (various religions), Shabaks (Sunni and Shia), Turkmen (Sunni and Shia), Christians and Yezidis live together (International Crisis Group, 2009:23). In Iraq's violent recent history, and under the reign of Saddam Hussein, Iraq has endured conflicts deliberately created along ethno-religious identity lines. As a Shia oriented group, Hashd al-Shaabi is thus expected to use a variety of legitimacy sources beyond a purely ethno-religious focus. In other areas where Hashd al-Shaabi is present (such as Salah ad Din governorate) has a majority of Shia communities which makes acquiring legitimacy perhaps more straightforward.

The chosen timeframe covers 2017 and 2018, and is significant because it captures the (arguable) defeat of IS in 2017, an important change in the behaviour of Hashd al-Shaabi in October 2017, and the Iraqi national elections of 2018. In short, Hashd al-Shaabi changed from a cooperative force defending Iraq against IS to an offensive force, occupying territory and ignoring Baghdad, thereby arguably compromising Baghdad's state legitimacy. Additionally, Hashd al-Shaabi was very successful in the 2018 elections through several parties set up by their militia leaders (Mansour & Van den Toorn, 2018; Gurbuz, 2018). For this reason, these two years were chosen as timeframe for this study.

1.4 Reading Guide

A further exploration of the research design and methodology underlying this thesis, shortly introduced in the previous paragraph, is given in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical framework focusing on the knowledge gaps of the transition from military to governance actor, the link between legitimacy

and governance in this process and the legitimacy sources relevant to this process. Chapter 3 ends with presenting an analytical framework guiding the analysis. In Chapter 4, additional contextual information is given. Then, Chapter 5 focuses on the transition process of Hashd al-Shaabi from military actor to governance actor, and explores the role that legitimacy plays in this transition. Chapter 6 then focuses on the coercive strategies of Hashd al-Shaabi in establishing civilian compliance in 2017 and 2018. Chapter 7 looks into the other side of establishing civilian compliance, namely through persuasion, which is linked to legitimacy sources. It elaborates on the strategic use of these sources, which are identified in Chapter 3. This leads to the conclusion and discussion in Chapter 8, where the research question is answered and new empirical and theoretical insights brought forward by this thesis are discussed.

2. Research Design and Methodology

This chapter will outline the research design and methodology used in this thesis. It presents the research design, data collection techniques and sampling techniques. It then discusses important ethical considerations and ends with some methodological reflections.

2.1 Research design

This thesis finds its ontological fundament in a structurationist approach. It does not assume that either structure or agency is the source of the social interactions at stake in this research. Instead, it is focused on the action of a group of individuals and their impact on other individuals and the wider system in place. Through transitioning from a military to a governance actor, Hashd al-Shaabi influences the wider governance system. Although this thesis is focused on the individual actors of Hashd al-Shaabi forces, leaders and members, it situates these actions within the wider structures of international remote warfare and security cooperation. It aims to add empirical insights to theories on legitimacy and governance. In these ways, it follows the structurationist ontological framework as laid out by Giddens (1984) and explained by Demmers (2017) and Jabri (1996). Epistemologically speaking, this thesis is positioned in the interpretivist tradition, as it follows the ideas on doing research from within. It is aimed at understanding the processes at hand. Additionally, its theoretical assumptions concerning the analytical frame of sources of legitimacy and the transition process from military to governance actor are largely based on the work of Weber (1947) providing insight into the links between power, authority and legitimacy. Weber's work has often times been used within positivist and institutionalist academia and policy making. Institutionalists and positivists have however left out important elements of Weber's work, according to Lottholz and Lemay-Hébert (2016). Authors of these traditions using Weber are "omitting almost entirely the wealth of thought on interpretivist method" (Lottholz & Lemay-Hébert, 2016:1467). Instead, they argue that Weber's notions of the state, legitimacy and power cannot be limited to these narrow interpretations. They argue that Weber never intended such a positivist interpretation. The authors show that Weber's work is applicable to, for instance, hybrid forms of governance and non-state actors holding power or legitimacy (Lottholz & Lemay-Hébert, 2016:1477), which form some of the theoretical fundaments of this thesis.

The ontological and epistemological stances of this research make way for a qualitative research method. Several methodological approaches have been used fitting with this approach. I have

conducted 22 interviews of 45-60 minutes each and two focus group discussions of three hours with eight and nine participants respectively. In total, I have reached out to 41 individuals. During the interviews and focus group discussions, I have made field notes and observations which guided and informed the research further. A detailed explanation of the methodological approaches, sampling techniques and different groups of interviewees will be discussed after the operationalization of the research question, analytical frame and sub-questions are presented.

2.2 Operationalization and sub-questions

The main research question, presented in Chapter 1, is formulated as follows:

How were sources of legitimacy strategically used by Hashd al-Shaabi in establishing civilian compliance during their transition process from military actor engaging in the US-led fight against IS to a governance actor in Ninewa governorate, in 2017 and 2018?

This research question is situated in the wider realm of understanding the links between establishing authority, the use of force and the role of legitimacy herein by armed actors. Terpstra and Frerks (2017:280) find in establishing authority, or civilian compliance, armed actors have two strategies: one is based on coercion, the other on persuasion. According to Weber (1947:152), Schlichte and Schneckener (2015:410, Terpstra and Frerks (2017:279) and Levi (2018:603), full reliance on coercion is not sustainable. Armed actors will thus seek to use persuasion in establishing civilian compliance (Terpstra and Frerks (2017:280) to win authority through support. In other words, these groups seek to legitimize their presence and actions: "[l]egitimacy (…) refers to the acceptance by populations of a regime as correct and appropriate" (Podder, 2013:20). Legitimacy is a fluid and complex concept but can be operationalized through 'sources of legitimacy' (Schlichte & Schneckener, 2015; Duyvestein, 2017:748; Risse & Stollenwerk, 2018:410). Legitimacy sources are defined as: "a stock of context-specific ideas, figures and symbols to construct narratives to bolster (…) claims" (Schlichte & Schneckener, 2015:416). Such sources can be based on symbolic elements, such as identity or religion, or on performances and actions (Schlichte & Schneckener, 2015:417). Following in the footsteps of these debates, armed groups like Hashd al-Shaabi will seek to establish civilian compliance in the territories they occupy, in which legitimacy, or persuasion, is sought for their authority to be sustainable.

This thesis will look into this expectation, and goes one step further by analysing which sources of legitimacy are then relevant for Hashd al-Shaabi in Iraq and see how local communities experience these developments. In doing so, several sub-questions have been formulated. They are focusing on the transition process from a military actor to a governance actor, establishing civilian compliance, the role of legitimacy in doing this and which sources of legitimacy contributed to this process. In order to

understand the role of persuasion and establishing legitimacy in the larger frame of establishing civilian compliance, the coercive tactics used are also discussed.

1. What is the role of legitimacy in establishing civilian compliance by actors like Hashd al-Shaabi?
    a. How can civilian compliance be established by armed actors engaging in governance?
    b. What is the role of legitimacy within establishing civilian compliance?
    c. What does legitimacy entail for an armed actor such as Hashd al-Shaabi?
    d. Which sources of legitimacy can be distinguished for armed actors such as Hashd al-Shaabi?
2. What does the transition process from military actor to governance actor entail for Hashd al-Shaabi?
    a. What was the role of Hashd al-Shaabi in the US-led fight against IS?
    b. How has security cooperation influenced Hashd al-Shaabi as a military actor?
    c. What kind of behaviour did Hashd al-Shaabi employ as military actor?
    d. Which developments occurred that ignited the transition process towards governance actor for Hashd al-Shaabi?
    e. What governance practices has Hashd al-Shaabi engaged in?
3. What is the role of coercive strategies in establishing civilian compliance by Hashd al-Shaabi after becoming a governance actor?
    a. What type of coercive strategies does Hashd al-Shaabi use?
    b. How are they adding or harming civilian compliance in the case of Hashd al-Shaabi?
    c. What is the link between coercive strategies and persuasive strategies in establishing civilian compliance by Hashd al-Shaabi?
4. Which sources of legitimacy are strategically used by Hashd al-Shaabi?
    a. Which symbolic sources of legitimacy have been used by Hashd al-Shaabi?
    b. Which performance-centred sources of legitimacy have been used by Hashd al-Shaabi?
    c. How is the use of sources of legitimacy experienced by local communities?

The sensitizing concepts coming forward in these sub-questions, the transition process, security cooperation, governance, civilian compliance, legitimacy and its sources, are investigated from a theoretical vantage point, using academic literature. Sub-question 1 is addressed through a review of the academic literature (see Chapter 3). Before the actual analysis of the other sub-questions commences, policy document analysis has informed a more in-depth background of the various Hashd al-Shaabi forces (see Chapter 4). Sub-question 2 concerns the transition process and was answered through policy document analysis, interviews and focus group discussions, informed by field notes and

observations (see Chapter 5). Sub-questions 3 and 4 have been answered through policy document analysis, interviews and focus group discussions and corresponding field notes and observations (see Chapter 6 and 7 respectively).

2.3 Methodology

Four methodologies, and a review of the academic literature, have been used in this thesis. This paragraph will address the relevance of policy document analysis, semi-structured interviewing and focus group discussions, as well as field notes and observations.

2.3.1 Policy document analysis

Policy document analysis was performed in gathering information for Chapter 4 on Context and sub-question 1. The outcomes of document analyses was checked in interviews and focus group discussions, as the information in the documents was sometimes contradictive. The documents under analysis are listed below:

- Gaston, E. & A. Derzsi-Horváth (2018) Iraq After ISIL:Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control. Global Public Policy Institute, Berlin, Germany.
- O'Driscoll, D. & D. Van Zoonen (2017) The Hashd al-Shaabi and Iraq: Subnationalism and the State. Middle East Research Institute, Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.
- International Crisis Group (2018B) Iraq's Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State. Middle East Report N°188.
- Mansour, R. & F.A. Jabar (2017) The popular mobilization forces and Iraq's future. Carnegie Middle East Centre

All four documents can be categorized as policy research or policy reports and all are written by independent think-tanks with renowned status. The document analysis that has taken place concerned retrieving information, cross-checking with the other sources and a verification in interviews and focus group discussions to see whether the information was still relevant.

2.3.2 Interviews and focus group discussions

As was already said, several data gathering techniques have contributed to this thesis. Semi-structured interviews allowed for, what Johnson and Rowlands (2012:100) term "deep" knowledge, found below the superficial exchange of information. These authors (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012:101) find that this technique fits best with exploratory and inductive studies, which fits with the objectives of this thesis. Semi-structured interviews provide room for flexibility for each interview addresses the same topics,

yet the researcher can have the interviewee 'lead' them (Fontana & Frey, 2005 in: Gubrium et al, 2012:2). As I interviewed different groups of interviewees, with different perspectives within the groups, this flexibility was necessary. Another technique used in this thesis is the focus group discussion. Ideally, I would have been able to do focus group discussions with all LGRs, as they do not only provide data output in the form of transcripts or notes. Morgan (2012:163) points out that the data output from these discussions also consist of an analysis of the interactions and group dynamics taking place. In one of the focus group discussions, participants 'silenced' another participant. In order to include their perspective as well, I reached out for a follow up interview with this person. Both focus group discussions required translation, and no females were involved, meaning that potential gender issues between men and women did not occur.

As can be noted in table 1 (next page), four groups of interviewees and focus group discussants have been reached. I have not been able to record and transcribe all interviews and focus group discussions, as interviewees or participants did not always approve of this. Fortunately, I have full transcripts of 16 interviews. Both focus group discussions and the other six interviews have been analysed through the notes I took during the interaction. Table 1 gives a full overview of the interviewees and focus group discussions conducted and indicates to which group individual belong and whether the data is captured in full transcripts or notes. All four groups of interviewees were important in answering the four sub-questions presented above, however, they all provide different perspectives on the topics addressed. These perspectives together provided me with a balanced an nuanced view avoiding personal or organizational biases.

Ten interviews and two focus group discussions were conducted in Kurdish or Arabic, for which a translator was required. I had no access to an official translator but the three translators involved were native speakers in both languages and turned out to be important cultural guides and helped me interpret certain claims or statements. As Fujii (2013:149-152) notes, interpreters are good guides in an unknown cultural or social environment. Johnson and Rowlands (2012:104) mention the importance of a sense of trust and gender awareness in interviews and focus group discussions. My own gender did not seem to harm the research as both men and women felt free to speak out during the interviews. The translators involved were all males. All but two interviews in which they were involved also concerned male interviewees, avoiding potential gender issues there. The male translator in the two interviews in which there were female interviewees involved was a well-known acquaintance to these women and the trust between them had already been established. I made sure to ask every interviewee for their informed consent.

Group	Pseudonym		Translator?	Data output
NGO and civil society representatives (9 individuals)	NGO expert 1	International NGO		Transcript
	NGO expert 2	International NGO		Transcript
	NGO expert 3	International NGO		Transcript
	NGO expert 4 & 5	4: International NGO 5: Local NGO		Transcript
	NGO expert 6	Local NGO		Transcript
	Civil society expert	Local organization		Transcript
	Activist in Mosul	Local organization		Notes
	Civil society expert in Telafar	Local organization	Yes	Notes
Government representatives (excluding FGD:4 individuals including FGD:21 individuals)	Local government representative Hamdaniya		Yes	Transcript
	Local government representative Sheikhan		Yes	Transcript
	Local government representative Telkaif		Yes	Transcript + notes
	Local government representatives Telafar Eight participants FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION		Yes	Notes
	Local government representatives Sinjar Nine participants FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION		Yes	Notes
	National government representative Ministry of Peshmerga		Yes	Transcript
	National government representative Ninewa Provincial Council		Yes	Notes
Journalist/fixers (4 individuals)	Local expert 1			Transcript
	Local expert 2			Notes
	Local expert 3			Transcript
	Local expert 4			Transcript
Youth activists (7 individuals)	Three Muslim youth activists from Mosul		Yes	Transcript
	Two Christian youth activists from Hamdaniya (Qaraqosh sub-district)		Yes	Transcript
	A Turkmen youth activist from Hamdaniya (Bartella sub-district)		Yes	Transcript
	A Shia Shabak youth activist from Hamdaniya (Bartella sub-district)		Yes	Transcript

Table 1 Overview of interviewees and focus group discussants.

The NGO and civil society representatives work at international NGO's (indicated with (int)), local NGO's (indicated with (loc)) and local civil society organizations. Their title indicates a geographic location if the interviewees were only active in one particular area. NGO and civil society experts deal with Hashd al-Shaabi in gaining access to territories in Ninewa. They see the more 'formal' side of Hashd al-Shaabi, in terms of the rules and regulations they set for these organizations.

The second category consists of government representatives and consists of local government representatives [hereafter: LGRs] (such as district mayors, sub-district mayors and district council members) and national government representatives [hereafter: NGRs], one of the Kurdish side (representing the Ministry of Peshmerga) and one of the federal Iraqi side (representing the Provincial

Council of Ninewa). In this category, both focus group discussions took place, one focusing on the district of Sinjar and one focusing on the district of Telafar. Unfortunately, I have not been able to reach out to LGRs of three of Ninewa's districts. In Hatra and Ba'aj, LGRs did not respond to correspondence. In Mosul, the local government has been removed because of an incident in March 2019.[4] Aqre is technically part of Ninewa but is under de facto control of the KRI, there is no influence of Hashd al-Shaabi here. The perspectives of LGRs were important because they work under the direct influence of Hashd al-Shaabi. Depending on the strength of the forces present in a particular district, the impact of their presence and actions differs. The two NGRs included in the study provide perspectives from the Kurdish side and the federal Iraqi side. Both the Peshmerga and Provincial Council deal with Hashd al-Shaabi forces on a daily basis in Ninewa.

The third group of interviewees are local experts working in the media industry, namely three fixers/journalists and one journalist. The fixers/journalists are Iraqi nationals and worked as fixers and journalists for renown international media outlets such as the New York Times, CNN, the Guardian, BBC and *Nieuwsuur.* The journalist is not from Iraq but has worked for a local news broadcaster for several years. Just as Fujii (2013:149-152) identifies that local interpreters can be a source of knowledge and guidance, information coming from fixers turned out to be valuable input. Their local knowledge is immense and they have access to places that others cannot reach. These local experts have had direct contact with Hashd al-Shaabi during the fight against IS, in the October 2017 events and in the run up to the 2018 national elections, and have also seen the 'hidden' sides of Hashd al-Shaabi, outside of their formal or governmental behaviours.

The fourth and last group comprises youth activists from two different districts and four different ethno-religious backgrounds. Two of these interviews were conducted in a group setting, where the interviewees answered questions after one another or supplemented the answers of the previous spokesperson. The perspectives of youth activists were important as they operate outside of the formal settings that group 1 and 2 operate in. Their work is much more grassroots, working in informal settings and thereby providing different perspectives to the research topic. All youth activists were older than 18 years, in order to avoid ethical issues considering interviewing minors.

2.3.3 Field notes and observations
Lastly, my field notes and observations during the interviews and focus group discussions further informed this thesis as they captured my thoughts and considerations while gathering the data. My field notes mostly concern the wide context in which the developments take place. Iraq is a complex

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[4] See BBC (2019) Mosul ferry sinking: Iraq orders arrest of ex-governor and Al Jazeera (2019) Iraq Fires Governor over Mosul Ferry Disaster for more information.

environment, which I attempted to understand through various conversations with MERI colleagues. Their experience provided me insight which was valuable in understanding and interpreting the information I received from interviewees and focus group discussants. Observations were important especially during the focus group discussion, where internal power relations or personal loyalties sometimes played a role, as described above.

2.3.4 Sampling

The sampling methods used in this study are purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling suits a research project aimed at a specific population (Lune & Berg, 2017:39), as it aims to sample these groups at a specific location or in a specific realm of society. In addition, I used gatekeepers to acquire access to the sample group. These are "people or groups who are in positions to grant or deny access" (Lune & Berg, 2017:112). An important gatekeeper for this study was the Middle East Research Institute (MERI), where I worked as a research assistant. They provided me access and set up meetings with the local and national government representatives and the civil society expert. They also organized and facilitated the two focus group discussions. Through my work at MERI, I got in touch with several NGO experts. I then used snowball sampling to reach out to other potential interviewees. Snowball sampling involves asking previous interviewees to introduce the researcher to potential new interviewees. It works along (personal or professional) networks and is especially applicable to populations who are difficult to reach (Lune & Berg, 2017:39). Through snowball sampling, I was introduced to the youth activists, local experts and the activist from Mosul. Purposive and snowball sampling are non-probability sample strategies, which means that the results of the study are not generalizable over the wider population.

2.4 Ethical considerations

As the topic of this thesis concerns the actions of an armed group capable of harming those who speak out against them, it deals with potentially sensitive data. Therefore, I have followed the ethical guidelines set out by Brooks (2013:52). I clearly stated my identity as a researcher connected to Utrecht University and MERI and explained the purpose of the interview or focus group discussion. I grant anonymity to all interviewees and focus group discussants and asked their opinions on how to refer to them in this thesis. This is why I gathered verbal informed consent, as putting a signature under a written consent form would unveil the identities of the participants. I have informed interviewees that they hold the right to cancel the interview at all times, for whatever reasons they may have. Interviewees were made aware that they could withdraw the information they disclosed should they feel uncomfortable with the information they shared. I never asked for people's ethno-religious background, as this is a sensitive topic. When ethno-religious identities are mentioned, the interviewees brought them up by

themselves. Additionally, I never asked directly whether people supported or opposed Hashd al-Shaabi in order to avoid guiding the interviewees towards certain answers or opinions. I kept a neutral stance, emphasized objective facts about Hashd al-Shaabi and when I did mention subjectivities, I introduced them with "I heard that…" or "Some people say …" in order to distance myself from the opinion. Lastly, the location where the research took place, Erbil, the capital of KRI, formed a safe space where interviewees and focus group discussants fell outside of the reach of Hashd al-Shaabi, making them confident to speak out.

2.5 Methodological reflections

Because of safety reasons, I have not been able to travel to Ninewa governorate[5] myself to witness and observe the situation there or interview Hashd al-Shaabi members. This means that this thesis is based on perspectives of outsiders. It would have been valuable to include perspectives from Hashd al-Shaabi members on how they experiences the transition process and their use of sources of legitimacy. It means that I did not have access to 'inside information'. Nevertheless, this study has been successful in capturing local effects and consequences of the transition process from military to governance actor by Hashd al-Shaabi, their ways of establishing civilian compliance and the role of legitimacy sources herein. In addition, this thesis provides insight into (rebel) governance of an armed actor and security cooperation with an armed actor. Through the perspectives of diverse groups of people who live directly under and work together with Hashd al-Shaabi, this study provides important insight into these local developments, which are often left out of the equation.

Additionally, Utrecht University made it clear that I could not leave the city of Erbil for safety reasons, which meant I had to do all data gathering from Erbil. Fortunately, many NGOs working in Iraq have their headquarters in Erbil, which is a safe environment for their employees. LGRs and NGRs frequently visit Erbil as they organize meetings and conferences here. The same goes for media experts and youth activists. The location may also have been an advantage for securing the safety of my sources. One of the interviewees mentioned off the record that asking these kind of questions in Hashd al-Shaabi areas, or even in Baghdad, would be dangerous for me as a researcher and for them as an informant. This person indicated that this situation is completely different in Erbil: the rule of law here protects freedom of speech on this topic and makes it possible for all interviewees to share information in a more open and unrestricted manner. This statement led me to believe that I probably would not have been able to gather data of similar quality and richness in Ninewa as I have in Erbil. I made it clear during the

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[5] The Dutch Ministry's travel advice indicates Ninewa governorate as 'red zone' which means that any travel there is discouraged. Source: Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2019) Travel Advice for Iraq.

interviews that I could not travel to Ninewa myself, which may have relaxed informants that I simply could not share the information with Baghdad or Hashd al-Shaabi officials.

3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter will lay out the theoretical framework upon which the rest of the study is based. It discusses the three main elements playing a central role in this thesis: the transition process from military actor to governance actor, the ways in which civilian compliance can be established and, focusing on the more persuasive side of civilian compliance, an elaboration on legitimacy and its sources. It discusses the relevant sensitizing concepts and addresses sub-questions 1 more specifically, elaborating on the role of legitimacy in establishing civilian compliance.

3.1 Power, legitimacy and authority

Weber (1947) attempted to provide more insight into the dynamics of authority in his work on 'The Theory of Social and Economic Organization'. Weber (1947) starts by pointing to several relevant forms of authority between which important differences become clear. *Macht*, or "power", concerns the likelihood that a 'ruler' can pursue specific objectives or, simply said, do what they want. *Herrschaft*, or "imperative control", is the likelihood that this power is accepted by an audience of the 'ruled'. (Weber, 1947:152). This means that there is a relationship between *Macht* and *Herrschaft*, for the former is dependent on the latter. This puts emphasis on the two-way process that sits behind the exercise of power. There is an important role for the 'ruled' in Weber's understanding of power. According to Weber (1947:153) legitimate authority equals *Herrschaft*: here, the emphasis is on the acceptance of power rather than on exercising power itself. When *Macht* is transformed into *Herrschaft*, true legitimate control is established. Such control is based on what Weber (1947:124) calls "legitimate order". The decision of the 'ruled' obeying to the 'ruler' is embedded in a belief in the righteousness of the system. This belief is translated to action, such as obeyance. Such orders are legitimate systems as long as obeyance is based on this belief. This shows that action is not solely based on self-interest, as righteousness may apply to a communal interest just as well.

Legitimate authority is thus largely based on the extent to which a 'ruler' can establish a belief in the righteousness of their power. This belief, Weber argues, is what is called legitimacy. Matheson (1987) provides an elaborate analysis of Weber's understanding of legitimacy. Weber sees three broader fundaments on which the belief of legitimate authority can be based. Legitimate authority can firstly be based on tradition or custom. Traditional legitimacy is found in the repetition of certain actions or power structures, which are regarded as legitimate just because they have existed and have been

reproduced for a long period of time (Matheson, 1987: 206-207). The second element upon which legitimacy can be based is charisma, based on appearance and some form of attractiveness of the 'ruler'. Examples can be found in the holiness of a 'ruler' or charismatic leadership which charms others (Matheson, 1987: 208-209). A last fundament for legitimacy is a rational-legal interpretation, which finds itself rooted in rules and norms. A straightforward example is found in the written rules of the law, which are agreed upon within the system of legitimate order (Matheson, 1987: 209-211).

When some form of control has been established, governance comes into play. Governance can be defined as the "whole set of practices and norms that govern daily life in a specific territory" (Mampilly, 2007 in: Duyvestein et al, 2015:31). In maintaining authority and legitimacy, a 'ruler' would be smart to give something to the 'ruled' in return for their support. Three core governance practices are seen as essential by Weber. These are providing security, a set of basic services and a form of political representation (Boege, Brown & Clements, 2009:17-19). Political representation focuses on giving the 'ruled' some form of check on their 'ruler', to make sure that the 'ruler' does not forget about their wants and needs. It is effectively keeping the power in order. The provision of services can be adjusted to whatever the 'ruled' find that they need to be provided with, which has changed through the ages and differs per context. Security concerns the capability of protections the 'ruled' to whichever threat and potentially establishing some form of rule of law.

3.1.1 From state-centrism to hybridity

The interpretations of Weber on authority and legitimacy are often criticized for being too state-centric and institutionalist (Lottholz & Lemay-Hébert, 2016:1473-1474). Weber's notions on authority and legitimacy are however largely based on his analysis of western concepts such as corporate systems or the nation-state that slowly developed through the centuries. This means they lose part of their explanatory power when applied to different contexts. Nevertheless, scholars and policy makers alike did apply Weber's notions to non-western contexts, excluding important actors and practices in doing so. Boege, Brown and Clements (2009:17) point to the relevance of indigenous practices, colonial legacies and informal structures, which overlap with central, formal and institutionalized forms of governance. Boege, Brown and Clements (2009:15) mention "extended families, clans, tribes, religious brother- hoods, village communities — and traditional authorities such as village elders, clan chiefs, healers, big men, and religious leaders" as important non-state actors that require understanding if governance processes are studied. Hagmann and Péclard (2010: 551) identify "a varying number of actors" such as "'big men', politicians, businessmen, diplomats, but also religious leaders, NGO representatives, military commanders, etc.) and others who have been denied access to the negotiation table (typically minority groups, women, groups with a lower socio-economic status)". Ferguson and Gupta (2002:990) point to the role of international organizations in these processes. The authors point

to a dual process of governing actors outsourcing responsibilities and international organizations obliging these actors to comply with rules and regulations. Although these developments are sometimes mistaken for a retreat of the state, Ferguson and Gupta (2002:989) argue that they should instead be seen as "a new modality of government". These authors all contributed to a notion of hybrid governance, in which a more empirical approach, including all actors involved, is a t stake.

A specific type of governance actor, relevant to this study, is the armed actor. Kalyvas (2006 in: Terpstra & Frerks, 2017:283-284) captures their relevance in stating that "[i]nsurgency can best be understood as a process of competitive state building rather than simply an instance of collective action or social contention". A range of concepts and terms have been developed in academic literature, to understand insurgents or armed actors. Perhaps one of the most straightforward category in this regard is the rebel group, which is defined by Mampilly (2007:2) as "armed factions that use violence to challenge the state". Duyvestein et al (2015:34) see that rebel groups are often treated as aggressors trying to ruin the state, yet the authors point to the fluid identity that rebel groups may have: "[t]he distinction between contestation and cooperation (…) is not always as clear-cut as it may seem". Militias can be found on the other end of the spectrum of state cooperation or contestation. Jentsch, Kalyvas and Schubiger (2015:755) define militias as "armed groups that operate alongside regular security forces or work independently of the state to shield the local population from insurgents". Podder (2013:16) stays away from details on these groups and simply refers to non-state armed groups (NSAGs), defines as "A multiplicity of armed groups with no clear hierarchy, affiliation, and command and control structures". In studying the actions and presence of armed actors, Weinstein (2007) introduced an influential rational choice approach in studying rebel groups, focusing on their strategies of economic gain and 'opportunism'. Critics responded with saying that "armed groups do much more than acquire and distribute material resources" (Schlichte & Schneckener, 2015:411). Podder (2013:16) emphasizes that armed actors simply cannot be seen "exclusively as spoilers" as this ignores their roles as governance actors, establishing authority through acquiring legitimacy.

3.2 Civilian compliance

Terpstra and Frerks (2017;2018) focus on analysing civilian compliance of people living under the authority of an armed actor. Terpstra and Frerks (2017) find two different strategies in establishing civilian compliance, which can be pursued simultaneously. On the one hand, civilian compliance can be achieved through coercion, for instance through violence or the threat thereof (Terpstra & Frerks, 2017:280). Duyvestein (2017:673) argues that coercion and force often form essential strategies in establishing authority for armed actors. Schneckener (2017:808) distinguishes three forms of (ideal type) violence in the case of government-allied militias: counter-insurgency, counter-rival and counter-criminal violence. The identification of insurgents, rivals or criminals follows the interests of the militia

itself and can in no way be seen as objective judgement. Militias focusing on counter-insurgency aim to fight those rebels threatening the state with whom they are allied. Counter-rival violence concerns intimidation, deterrence and physically harming competitors "for political and economic positions in the state and society" (Schneckener, 2017:809). Counter-criminal violence is aimed at maintaining order and helping the state in doing so. In this case, militias may "claim that they provide security and protect the property of citizens" but should always be viewed critically as their interpretation may be heavily biased (Schneckener, 2017:809-810). Scheckener (2017:805) also conceptualized the relation between coercion and persuasion. There is a dual effect that the use of violence can have on legitimacy. While it may be interpreted as protection on the one hand, it can also "eat up legitimacy", especially when it continues for a long time and has an indiscriminate character. In providing a more thorough understanding of legitimacy, Scheckener (2017) identifies the use of violence as one of the main challenges to acquire legitimacy. There is a fine line between appearing as powerful, protecting the 'in-group' against 'outsiders' and simply coming across as ruthless murderers.

Instead, civilian compliance is much more powerful if it relies on strategies of persuasion, as reliance on coercion is not feasible: "[e]xhaustion will occur because pure coercion is a very costly way to rule" (Duyvestein, 2017:673). Persuasive strategies focus on establishing what Weber called a 'legitimate order', as they concern legitimation of the 'ruler'. Strategies of legitimation may include "a series of actions – speech, writing, ritual, display – whereby people justify to themselves or others the actions they are taking and identities they are expressing or claiming" (Barker, 2001 in: Terpstra & Frerks, 2017:280-281). Civilian compliance does not have to be based on either coercion or persuasion and legitimation but can involve a combination of the two. In order to achieve sustainable civilian compliance, the 'ruler' should invest in finding "the balance of coercion and legitimation" (Terpstra & Frerks, 2017:280).

3.3 Conceptualizing legitimacy

Duyvestein (2017:671) summarizes the critical debate on Weber's approach to legitimacy along three lines. Firstly, Weber's interpretation of legitimacy is seen as too heavily focused on belief, instead of clarifying what "moral and normative categories" shape these beliefs (Duyvestein, 2017:671). Secondly, there is a reductionist element in the focus on belief, which leaves the nuances and fluidity of legitimacy out of the equation. Thirdly, in understanding processes of legitimization, it helps to involve practices in addition to belief, as they are practical examples of legitimization processes and strategies (Duyvestein, 2017:671-672). In applying Weber's ideas to armed actors, a problem arises on the notion of legality. The actions of armed actors are often illegal by definition, as they may defy the monopoly on violence of a state actor. This applies especially to the category of rebel groups (Duyvestein, 2017:672-674). If this is the case, then the category of rational-legal legitimacy defined by Weber (1947) does not apply,

although the author warns not to "equate rational-legal categories of legitimacy with the Western understanding of them" (Duyvestein, 2017:673). Instead, Duyvestein (2017:669) advocates an understanding of legitimacy based on the origins of legitimacy beliefs and corresponding practices.

3.4 Sources of legitimacy

The framework provided by Schlichte and Schneckener (2015) has been introduced. It consists of two main categories, symbolic and performance-centred sources of legitimacy, and divided these two into several sub-categories. These will now be addressed to see check for their relevance in this thesis.

Schlichte and Schneckener (2015) followed the same line of thought and recognized several different sources of legitimacy, divided between symbolic sources and performance-centred sources. Or in other words, between "what they say" and "what they do" (Schlichte & Schneckener, 2015:417). Symbolic sources for legitimacy revolve around cultural 'myth-symbol complexes', community grievances or external threats. The performance based elements on the other hand centre around actions and practices. Schlichte & Schneckener (2015:418) distinguish charismatic leadership, respect and credibility earned through sacrifice and martyrdom, personal loyalties and the patrimonial system emerging from them, providing (basic) services and, finally, formalization of the organization of an armed group. Both categories are further explained along the lines of the situation in Iraq, at stake in this thesis.

3.4.1 Symbolic sources of legitimacy

The myth-symbol complexes that Schlichte and Schneckener (2015) link to armed groups were originally used in explaining ethnicity, captured by Smith (1999:14) as "the unifying role of a whole range of cultural and symbolic components — myths and symbols, but also values, memories, rituals, customs, and traditions". Kaufman (2004:204) finds this myth-symbol complex to be the core of how an identity is constructed. From this myth-symbol complex, a discourse is built which resonates with the proposed audience on an emotional level (Kaufman, 2004:209). Myth-symbol complexes are inherent part of identity formation (Smith, 1999:14; Kaufman, 2004:204). In Iraq, the reign of Saddam Hussein has severely impacted identity formation processes. Saddam Hussein successfully installed a complete system of distrust "by inventing and reinventing his enemies from the entire mass of human material that was at his disposal" (Khalil & Khalil & Makiya, 1989:13). While Saddam Hussein first based his identity politics on a Pan-Arabist notion, thereby excluding and dehumanizing minority groups such as Kurds, Christians, Yezidis and others, he changed this strategy to a full reliance on tribal identities after the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) (Adeed, 1999:563-566). In doing so, he created lines of distrust between Arab and non-Arab identities and between different tribes. In order to stay in power, Saddam Hussein is said to have created quarrels between tribes so that they would fight each other instead of him. This installed a complete system of distrust. After the fall of Saddam, established through the 2003 U.S.

invasion, the Baathist policies were dismantled and made way for different forms of competition. Shia communities mobilized and claimed positions in power while Sunni communities had yet to invent their sectarian identity in this new society, as it had not existed before in the same way as the Shia identity (Haddad, 2014:146). Ultimately, this led to a situation which "effectively forced Arab Iraqis to view themselves primarily as members of sect a or b for practical reasons of self-interest and self-preservation if for no other" (Haddad, 2014:150), largely forming Iraq's myth-symbol complex of today.

The second symbolic legitimacy source identified by Schlichte and Schneckener (2015) is the removal of grievances. Grievances can play an important role in mobilizing support. Kaufman (2004:204) points out that grievances or traumas, real or imagined, can be helpful in "defining the group as a victim which must seek security or revenge". An armed actor can then portray itself as the saviour or protector. Logically, the violence under Saddam Hussein created serious feelings of grievances inside every Iraqi. Not only was the violence exerted by the state beyond cruelty, it created a society based on terror of which every Iraqi, supporting or opposing Saddam Hussein was a victim. According to Khalil & Makiya (1989:13), "[e]very Iraqi today, whether in the opposition or outside it, carries the marks of that victimhood deep inside". This applies as much to Arab identities as minority groups. Although the U.S. invasion may have sparked some relief when Saddam Hussein fell, it also sparked violent opposition, creating loss and violence all over Iraq. Since 2006, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki had cooperated with the U.S. forces to crack down on armed actors such as Al Qaeda and the Mahdi Army[6] (which would later become relevant within Hashd al-Shaabi) (Mansour & Jabar, 2017:4). The violence following the U.S. invasion of 2003 escalated into a civil war and ultimately a state in which not every community felt included or adequately catered to by the newly elected democratic governments.

External threats as a source of legitimacy links with theories on boundary formation, in which identifying an enemy is a strong strategy in establishing clear 'us' and 'them' categories, potentially leading to establish depersonalization of this outsider (Tajfel, 1981:21). Saddam's tactics installed a constant awareness of potential external threats. Anything hostile should be eliminated. This is a legacy of the militarization of the Saddam era, which glorified violence and force as opposed to inclusion and debate. According to Haddad (2014:150), "the profound sense of Shia victimhood (real or perceived) under Saddam Hussein meant that Shias regarded the downfall of the Baath as *their* salvation as a sectarian group". As Sunni communities did not, this created further distrust. The reliance on sectarian identities as explained by Haddad (2014:150) and each of those identities turning their attention to their own ingroup, combined with the militarization and politicization of these identities made way for a dangerous situation where social boundaries are increasingly reified and hostile relations strengthened.

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[6] The Mahdi Army is also known as Jayshd al-Mahdi (the army of Mahdi), abbreviated to JAM by U.S. forces at the time.

3.4.2 Performance-centred sources of legitimacy

Performance centred legitimization strategies can comprise charismatic leadership, which links back to charismatic legitimacy, one of the three categories of legitimacy as defined by Weber (Matheson, 1987:208). This source is indicated by worshipping a leader, for instance by portraying them as 'holy' or invincible. A sense of charismatic leadership can be distinguished in the reign of Saddam Hussein, as he glorified himself through media such as newspapers and radio stations: "in a typical political broadcast, his name is mentioned thirty to fifty times an hour" (Khalil & Makiya, 1989:64). This may have installed some recognition of the potential charisma of leaders in the minds of Iraqis. The 2003 invasion of Iraq has impacted Iraq's notions of leadership and governance system to a great extent. Where Saddam Hussein exerted a powerful reign, the invasion made way for a multitude of actors struggling for power. According to Dodge et al (2018:4), due to the 2003 U.S. invasion, Iraq's political system became characterized by the so called *muhasasa ta'ifia* system. This system was installed through the 2005 constitution and is in fact a system of "sectarian apportionment" where ethno-religious identities form the basis to a specific powerful position and therewith also to opportunities in resources and employment (Dodge et al, 2018:5). Although it was set up to guarantee a 'government of national unity' (Dodge et al, 2018:4), one of its consequences is that political leadership is highly interlinked with religious institutes, tribal leaders and other non-state actors. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani has for instance actively supported a specific Shia coalition in Iraqi elections until 2005. According to Dodge et al (2018:8), Sistani's withdrawal of the political stage has caused fragmentation, which provided room for other groups celebrating sectarianism, all installing a different sense of leadership, while still being strongly linked to religion.

As Shia leaders gained strong power positions in Iraq's new democratic environment, their ideological and religious perspectives gained more traction within Iraqi society. This may have provided room for sacrifice and martyrdom as useful strategy in acquiring legitimacy. Moghadam (2007:129) explains the relevance of martyrdom and sacrifice within the Shia identity, centring around the martyrdom of Hussein. According to the story, Hussein[7] was killed during the month of Muharram, while he was travelling to Karbala, Iraq, in the year 680. A second element in the Shia understanding of martyrdom is the belief in the return of the Twelfth Imam. Shiites believe that there were eleven rightful imams since the Prophet died, who have all been murdered. The Twelfth Imam is believed to have been taken by Allah, to protect him from a similar faith. Shiites believe that this Twelfth Imam will return to

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[7] Hussein is the son of Ali, who in turn is the cousin of Prophet Mohammed. According to Shia Islam, Ali should have been the successor of Prophet Mohammed after he died in 632. Ali was however killed before he could successfully reach that position. Hussein was then seen as the last living closest male relative to the Prophet, and therefore has such a symbolic and important role in Shi'ism. Source: Moghadam (2007)

earth as the *mahdi*, or "'the one guided by God" who will bring justice and rightfulness to the earth (Moghadam, 2007:130). These events made way for an inherent link between 'suffering' and Shia Islam, Moghadam (2007) argues.

Personal loyalties are a major element in Iraq's political and governance system since the 2003 U.S. invasion. Dodge et al (2018:4) call this phenomenon the "political marketplace". This marketplace consists of transactions, whereby political promises are delivered for material gain (Dodge et al, 2018:5). It is where the Arabic word *wasta* (واسِطة) becomes relevant. *Wasta* means something along the lines of connections, or your personal network, and is often linked with nepotism. This system of patrimonialism includes a range of actors involved in governance beyond the formal political system, like businessmen, into the governance system. As they give material rewards, they can influence whatever happens in terms of official decisions. The influence of tribes within this system should not be underestimated. Different ethno-religious communities have influential tribal systems, participating in the political marketplace explained by Dodge et al (2017). In Mosul district, for instance, which is a dominantly Sunni Arab area, there is a highly tribal composition of society. These tribes determine what is allowed, interfere with the legal system and form important determinants of social status. They are also representing their tribe members in local District Councils, as is stated by Al Tahreer Foundation in their project for UNDP and GIZ (2017:34;40). Yezidis also have an intricate system of *sheikhs* (community leaders) and *fakeers* (religious leaders) influencing governance through formal channels such as District Councils and informal channels in the social composition of society (Sanad for Peacebuilding & Social Inquiry, 2018:6). In return, certain benefits are allocated in the political marketplace system.

Fourthly, providing services is seen as a potential source of legitimacy. Terpstra and Frerks (2018) recognize that next to highly symbolic narratives, performances and inscriptions, providing services and security is an important strategy in legitimization as well. The hybrid governance approach showed the relevance of non-state and armed actors in the provision of services. (see Boege, Brown & Clements, 2009; Hagmann & Péclard, 2010). As is shown in an actor mapping report by Sanad for Peacebuilding and Social Inquiry (2018), several actors are relevant in governance practices on the district level in Iraq. These are, besides the official roles of the District Mayor and the District Council, tribal leadership, armed actors and political parties or movements (Sanad for Peacebuilding & Social Inquiry, 2018: 3). These governance actors may in turn influence the provision of services, in which an armed group could portray itself as filling the gaps left by other actors.

The last performance-centred source of legitimacy identified by Schlichte and Schneckener (2015:418) concerns formalization, meaning "the use of formal procedures (e.g. regular meetings, party congresses or internal elections)" which "might attract those potential followers who have been disappointed by competing groups that ended up in overt patrimonialism". The authors identify a link with Weber's notion on rational-legal legitimacy which should be treated with caution. The mistake that

is often made is that Weber's notion of rational-legal legitimacy is directly transferred to non-western contexts, whereas Weber intended to apply this form of legitimacy solely to western contexts. His other two forms of legitimacy, traditional and charismatic legitimacy, do allow for power sources outside of the state, and show more flexibility towards non-western contexts, according to Lottholz and Lemay-Hébert, 2016:1476). The formal procedures as pointed out by Schlichte and Schneckener (2015:418) should therefore be understood within the complex Iraqi context and not in a western sense of the word.

3.5 Relational aspects of legitimacy

Although Duyvestein (2017:678) appreciates the effort of providing more insight into legitimacy by Schlichte and Schneckener (2015), she criticizes their approach for it lacks to shed light on the relational aspect of legitimacy. "[L]egitimacy is an active and participatory relationship", Duyvestein (2017:678) argues. Essentially, legitimacy should be seen and understood within the particular cultural and social context that it is embedded in. In a highly religious society, legitimacy claims based on holy books or scripts will resonate, while they are likely to be void in a state based on progressive, humanist and secular fundaments.

One such relational aspect is highlighted by Schneckener (2017), focusing on the relation between the state actor and the armed actor. When an armed actor finds itself in the category of militia, being a government ally, it may ride the wave of that government's legitimacy, and its legality as well. This is what Schneckener (2017:800) calls 'borrowed legitimacy'. Militias may "profit, at least initially, from the principal's or stakeholder's legitimacy – or even from a (semi-)official or legalised status granted by state authorities. This difference also plays out in militias' politics of legitimacy and their legitimation narratives". What borrowed legitimacy ultimately does is open up both 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' channels through which a militia can legitimize their actions. They now have direct links to an officially recognized actor, while still holding an important local footprint as well (Schneckener, 2017:800).

Applying these notions to the case at hand, the violent history of Iraq should be taken into account when seeking the relevance and use of certain legitimacy sources. The fluidity of researching armed actors like Hashd al-Shaabi makes way for a complex endeavour, whereby the academic concepts of legitimacy and its potential sources should be contextualized. In order to do so, a short introduction has been given in the previous paragraph. Chapter 4 will provide more context into specific Hashd al-Shaabi forces. Some of the forces within Hashd al-Shaabi were active since the 1980s, and fought the Iraqi government (first Saddam Hussein, then the democratically elected government supported by the U.S.). This means they can be regarded as rebel groups. The fluidity in rebel groups' stances, as emphasized by Duyvestein et al (2015:34) becomes clear when they transitioned to non-state armed

groups, fighting IS alongside the state and the U.S. forces they used to rebel against. Now, Hashd al-Shaabi was fighting "alongside regular security forces" (Jentsch, Kalyvas & Schubiger, 2015:755) changing them from a rebel group into a militia. The notion of borrowed legitimacy became even more relevant with the recognition of Hashd al-Shaab as official government organization in 2016. On the other hand, the Iraqi state did not have a good reputation per se with the losses of the ISF and the rapid onslaught of IS, party believed to be created through sectarian politics maintained by the Iraqi state institutions (Gaston & Derzsi-Horváth, 2017:15).

3.6 Analytical framework

Combining the framework of Schlichte and Schneckener (2015) with Duyvestein's (2017) attention for context and the relational aspect of legitimacy, such as the one highlighted by Schneckener (2017), leads to an interesting framework in which both beliefs and actions can be analysed, while keeping an eye on the social interaction inherently embedded in it. This chapter has addressed the first sub-question concerning the role of legitimacy in establishing civilian compliance. It has provided a framework which will be discuss in the chapters to come. Chapter 4 will firstly address the context, highlighted by Duyvestein (2017), in which different Hashd al-Shaabi forces were established and what their internal relations and ideologies are. This is important as it shows the fluidity of armed actors and lays the ground work for their diverse practices in establishing legitimacy. Chapter 5 discusses Hashd al-Shaabi's transition process from a military to a governance actor, in which their military legacy is discussed, which may play a role in how they aim to establish civilian compliance. To what extent is their military repertoire relevant in this? Chapter 6 addresses this question, diving into the use of coercion by Hashd al-Shaabi. Although the focus of this thesis is on legitimacy and the strategic use of its sources, in order to understand the relevance of this within the larger frame of establishing civilian compliance, it is essential to see how coercion plays a role too. As Duyvestein (2017:673) noted: coercion can be crucial in an armed actor's quest for authority. Chapter 7 then concerns how legitimacy sources were used, through the framework of Schlichte and Scheckener (2015) added with Duyvestein's (2017) attention for the relational aspect of legitimacy.

4. Understanding Hashd al-Shaabi

This context chapter provides more insight into Hashd al-Shaabi itself, in order to have a solid understanding of the different factions within the wider umbrella organization. Hashd al-Shaabi is a Shia orientated militia but Mansour and Jabar (2017:12-15) identify three major divisions. One group is pro-Iran, following Ayatollah Khamenei of Iran; one pledges allegiance to religious leader Sistani and one fights against all foreign influences in Iraq after the United States (U.S.) invasion of 2003, led by Muqtada Sadr. More recently, several Sunni militias and militias representing different minorities have been established (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017B:35). Unfortunately, the scope of this thesis is not wide enough to discuss all Hashd al-Shaabi militias, so a selection has been made to discussing only the most apparent and important militias.

4.1 Pro-Khamenei forces

O'Driscoll and Van Zoonen (2017A:26) discuss ten militias, which they find representative of the main ideologies present within Hashd al-Shaabi. Of the ten militias they discuss, the authors find that five militias fit into the pro-Khamenei group. These are the Badr Organization, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, Kata'ib Hezbollah, Harakat al-Nujaba and Saraya al-Khorasani (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017A:26). Gaston and Derzsi-Horváth (2017:21) add Kata'ib al-Imam Ali to this list. Because of the fact that Harakat al-Nujaba and Saraya Khorasani are mostly or originally active in the Syrian conflict against IS (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017A:20-23), they are left out of the equation, as the focus of this thesis is on Iraq only. Additionally, none of the respondents mentioned any of these two militias.

One person is consistently linked to Hashd al-Shaabi, especially the pro-Khamenei forces, and that is Qasim Soleimani. Soleimani is the commander of the Quds force, part of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Force (IRGC) and is responsible for special missions outside of Iran's territory Gaston & Derzsi-Horváth, 2017:19). Soleimani has often visited Iraq and was active under Shia insurgents trying to get rid of Saddam Hussein (The Guardian, 2019). Soleimani is said to have been physically present during Hashd al-Shaabi missions in fighting IS and has celebrated victories together with Hashd al-Shaabi forces. Additionally, some Hashd al-Shaabi forces receive financial support and military training and equipment from Iran (Gaston & Derzsi-Horváth, 2017:19). In May 2019, Soleimani has supposedly told some of the Hashd al-Shaabi forces to "prepare for proxy war" in May 2019 (The Guardian, 2019).

4.1.1 Badr Organization

The Badr Organization is the oldest militia within the pro-Khamenei group and probably of all Hashd al-Shaabi militias, as it was established in the 1980s. It was then known as the Badr Brigade, part of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). In 2012, the Badr organization and SCIRI split ways, as the Badr Brigade wanted to remain close to Iran, as SCIRI (which had changed its name to Islamic Supreme Council for Iraq (ISCI) by then) distanced itself (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017A:20; Gurbuz, 2018:3). The Badr Brigade in turn changed its name to Badr Organization and has established a strong political and military presence in Iraq. Gaston and Derszi-Horváth (2017:21) estimate their numbers around 20.000 troops in 2016. Its leader, Hadi al-Ameri, has been a Minister in Maliki's cabinet between 2011 and 2014 (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017A:20) and is leader of the Fatah Alliance in the Iraqi parliament. The Fatah Alliance enjoys support from several other Hashd al-Shaabi militias (Mansour & Van den Toorn, 2018:7), namely Asa'ib Ahl al Haq, Kata'ib Hezbollah and Kata'ib al-Imam Ali.

4.1.2 Asa'ib Ahl al Haq

Asa'ib Ahl al Haq is established in 2006 and are said to consist of 5.000-10.000 fighters in 2016 (Gaston & Derszi-Horváth, 2017:21). Asa'ib Ahl al Haq has been involved in Lebanon, supporting Hezbollah, has backed Bashar al-Assad in Syria and has fought U.S. forces in Iraq until 2011 (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017A:19). Moreover, Amnesty accused Asa'ib Ahl al Haq of harassing, torturing and killing Sunni boys and men, especially in Diyala governorate (Meacher, 2017:16). Its leader is Qais Khazali, who is known for his threatening statements towards Sunnis (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017A:19) and Kurds (Counter Extremism Project, 2017:3). He was nevertheless welcomed into politics by former Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki who was happy to cooperate with Khazali, as he has "committed no crime under Iraqi law", according to Maliki (Counter Extremism Project, 2017:3. In 2011, upon the withdrawal of the U.S. forces, Asa'ib Ahl al Haq became politically active (Wyer, 2012:9). In 2017, it first ran under its own name but it did not leave its military activities at all, as is shown in the involvement in Syria and Iraq itself.

4.1.3 Kata'ib Hezbollah

Kata'ib Hezbollah was established in 2007 with the goal of fighting U.S. forces in Iraq. Its links to Iran are really strong, as it see Ayatollah Khamenei as the sole righteous leader of Shiites. This is called the Guardianship of the Jursists or *velayat-e faqih*. Kata'in Hezbollah has also been active in Syria (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017A:22-23). Its leader and founder is Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis (Gurbuz, 2018:3), who is currently the Deputy Commander overseeing all Hashd al-Shaabi forces. He supposedly called for a withdrawal of all Hashd al-Shaabi forces in August 2018 (Kurdistan24, 2018) but this order has not been obeyed by plenty of groups within Hashd al-Shaabi. Al-Muhandis also has close ties to Iran and has

referred to himself as "a soldier of Soleimani" (Gurbuz, 2018:4). Kata'ib Hezbollah has also been accused of various harassments, extrajudicial killings and tortures by Amnesty International (Meacher, 2017).

4.1.4 Kata'ib al-Imam Ali

Kata'ib al-Imam Ali or the Imam Ali Brigades were formed after Sistani's *fatwa* but hold close ties with Iran and its Quds force. Although they have been important forces at the frontline fighting IS, they are also known for crimes such as burning and beheading captives (Gaston & Derzsi-Hortvath, 2017:22). Their leader is Shebl al-Zaidi who was once part of the Mahdi Army, and is closely connected to Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and Qasim Soleimani (Levitt & Smyth, 2015). Kata'ib al-Imam Ali is however said to have trained Christian and Yezidi minority forces, such as the Babylon Brigade and the Sinjar Brigade Gaston & Derzsi-Hortvath, 2017:22).

4.2 Pro-Sistani forces

O'Driscoll and Van Zoonen (2017A:26) recognize two militias as being part of this faction, namely the Abbas Division and Ali al-Akbar Brigade. They were both established as a result of the *fatwa* in 2014, and have no ties to political parties or figures. They work closely with the ISF and are expected to follow Sistani's orders for integration or disarmament (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017A:25;27).

4.2.1 Abbas Division

The Abbas Division is estimated to comprise 7.000 fighters, who are focused on protecting the holy Shia shrine of Abbas in Karbala. Gaston and Derzsi-Hortvath (2017:22) find it to be a neutral militia, despite its Shia orientation. The Abbas Division is known for its collaboration with the ISF and has received weapons and training from the official security forces. According to O'Driscoll and Van Zoonen (2017A:25), one of its commanders, Sheikh Maitham al-Zaidi, has refused Iranian weapons which were being distributed to Hashd al-Shaabi forces. Instead, the commander argued, weapons should be distributed through the ISF. The Abbas Division has expressed willingness to integrate into the ISF, should they receive the order to do so (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017A:25).

4.2.2 Ali al-Akbar Brigade

The Ali al-Akbar Brigade is also committed to protecting Shia shrines, and consists of 5.000 fighters, according to Gaston and Derzsi-Horváth (2017:22). Just as the Abbas Division, the Ali al-Akbar Brigade has strong ties with the ISF and was supposedly even preferred over other Hashd al-Shaabi militias on missions in Ninewa fighting IS (Gaston and Derzsi-Hortvath, 2017:22)..Additionally, the Ali al-Akbar Brigade has quite a notable inclusion rate of Sunni fighters, as opposed to purely Shia militias. Estimates vary around 16-20% (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017A:27; Gaston and Derzsi-Horváth, 2017:22).

4.3 Pro-Sadr forces

Lastly, Muqtada Sadr is somewhat different from the aforementioned leaders. Sadr is a cleric, who has fought against American occupation through his Mahdi Army[8] (known as Jayshd al-Mahdi or JAM to American troops). The Mahdi Army endured splits into Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017:19) and eventually developed into Saraya al-Salam, which "stands against foreign interference in Iraq, including that of Iran" (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017:21).

4.3.1 Saraya al-Salam

Saraya al-Salam's name can be translated to Peace Brigades and reemerged in response to the *fatwa* of 2014. Its predecessor, the Mahdi Army, had been deactivated when Muqtada Sadr entered Iraqi politics in 2013. Saraya al-Salam is estimated to comprise around 14.000 soldiers (Gaston & Derzsi-Horváth, 2017:22) but is said to have the capacity to activate 100.000 volunteers should the need be there (Mansour & Jabar, 2017:14). Its reputation is somewhat more positive than many other Hashd al-Shaabi forces (Gaston & Derzsi-Horváth, 2017:22). Saraya al-Salam is linked to a political movement, called the Sadrist Movement, which strongly objects any foreign interference in Iraq and is therefore seen as anti-western. The Sadrist Movement was founded by Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, Muqtada al-Sadr's father. Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr was killed in 1999, and Muqtada al-Sadr continued his legacy through the Sadrist Movement, the Mahdi Army and later Saraya al-Salam. All follow a Shia induced nationalism, a conservative interpretation of Islam and presents itself as anti-sectarianist (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017A:21-22). Interestingly, the Mahdi Army had received funding from Iran, during their fight against U.S. forces. However, Sadr did not continue the strong link with Iran. Nowadays, Sadr opposes Iranian influence in Iraq, which fits with his Iraqi nationalist stance. Because of this, Saraya al-Salam does no receive Iranian funding, which may limit their capacity somewhat. Nevertheless, Saraya al-Salam builds on the popularity of the Sadr family and its history of political and military strength. Additionally, Saraya al-Salam can be hesitant in identifying itself as Hashd al-Saabi because of the clear Iranian link that comes with this name (Mansour & Jabar, 2017:14-15). It did however join in the fight against IS and was (re)activated upon the *fatwa*, and can thus be considered as part of Hashd al-Shaabi. Its differences with the other two factions should however be taken into account.

4.4 Minority forces

Next to the large mobilization of Shia troops, several minority forces have been established representing the Sunni, Turkmen, Shabak, Yezidi, Christian and some other minority communities present in Iraq. As

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[8] The name of Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army stems from this belief in the Twelfth Imam, called *mahdi* in Arabic. Source: Stanford University (2017) Mapping Militant Organizations: Mahdi Army.

Ninewa is known for its diverse ethno-religious composition, these groups have been especially relevant in this governorate. Interestingly, some of these communities have never had the opportunity of carrying arms as they were excluded from the army or other militias. Although this may sound like a very inclusive policy within Hashd al-Shaabi, most of these forces are dependent on the Shia Hashd al-Shaabi forces, in terms of salaries and financial support. This means that minority forces are lower in rank than Shia Hashd al-Shaabi and are in fact administered by them. The Badr Organization and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq are known to be important actors in supervising and controlling minority forces (Gaston & Derzsi-Horváth, 2017:24-25). The following paragraphs will introduce a selection of these minority forces, coming from Sunni, Turkmen, Shabak, Christian and Yezidi origins.

4.4.1 Sunni minority forces

According to Mansour and Jabar (2017:12), the failure of Sunni politicians in Baghdad to unite Sunnis wanting to fight IS under one military unit, led them to join Hashd al-Shaabi forces instead. The U.S. has played a significant role in further establishing and strengthening Sunni minority forces, which became known as Tribal Mobilization Forces (TMFs) or Hashd al-Ashair. According to Gaston and Derzsi-Horváth (2017: 25), the U.S. sponsored a plan to recruit Sunni men into "local "hold" forces" which would occupy checkpoints and remain present after the area was cleared from IS influences. Estimates say that Hashd al-Ashair forces counted 18.000 soldiers, which received training from U.S. forces in addition to the financial support and equipment offered by larger Hashd al-Shaabi forces (Gaston & Derzsi-Horváth (2017: 25). The Ninewa Guards are a separate force, comprising of mostly Sunni fighters but also including Kurdish, Christian and other minority identities (Gaston & Derzsi-Horváth, 2017:25).

4.4.2 Turkmen minority forces

The Turkmen community is based in Telafar district, in northern Ninewa. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein, the Turkmen community is plagued by inter-community strife between its Sunni majority (60%-70%) and Shia minority. The district of Telafar has since formed a base for Sunni insurgency and both Al Qaeda and IS found a base of supporters in the disenfranchised Sunni community here (Van Zoonen & Wirya, 2017B:5). [9] While a large part of the Sunni Turkmen community has been accused of joining IS, its Shia component have been active in several minority forces. Brigade 16 and 52 are most notable in this respect, comprising 3.000 fighters. Brigade 16 is said to be linked to a range of Hashd al-Shaabi forces, among which are Kata'ib Hezbollah, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq and Saraya al-Salam). Brigade 52 is completely supervised by the Badr Organization (Gaston & Derzsi-Horváth, 2017:26).

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[9] An analysis of the historical, cultural and ethnoreligious richness of the Turkmen community is beyond the scope of this study. See Van Zoonen & Wirya (2017B) for more information.

4.4.3 Shabak minority forces

The Shabak community lives in the so called Ninewa Plains area, which covers the districts of Hamdaniya and Sheikhan and lies east of Mosul city. The Shabak identity is difficult to disentangle, as it find its bases in Arab, Kurdish and Turkmen communities and has been a victim of pressure to adopt Arab or Kurdish identities in the various conflicts between Kurds and the central government of Iraq. While Shabaks historically adhered to a particular branch of Islam close to Sufism, they have increasingly developed into the more traditional Sunni-Shia divides. Currently, around 30% of the Shabak population is said to be Sunni and 70% is Shia. Shabaks have been victim of waves of sectarian and ethnic violence, leading to displacement within the Ninewa Plains. This is when disputes with Christian communities started to develop, as Christians felt threatened by the increasing presence of Shabak Muslims in 'their' homelands (Van Zoonen & Wirya, 2017A:5-6).[10] Shia Shabak fighters joined the 30th Brigade, which fell under the control of the Badr Organization. It is especially known for looting, harassments and retaliation efforts against Sunni Muslims. Interestingly, the 30th Brigade has an important link with another notorious minority force: the Babylon Brigade.

4.4.4 Christian minority forces

The Christian community in Iraq consists of Assyrian, Chaldean and Armenian sub-communities, which have been victim to harsh sectarian violence, displacement and policies forcing them to identify as either Kurd or Arab under Saddam Hussein.[11] Before the rise of IS, there were large Christian communities based in Hamdaniya, Telkaif and Mosul district (Wirya & Fawaz, 2017:5). The Babylon Brigade is often categorized as a Christian minority force, but in fact consists of mostly Shia Arab fighters. Its leader is however Christian-Chaldean, called Rayan al-Kildani, and claims to protect Christians. The Babylon Brigade is said to be mostly driven by revenge, which has led to highly problematic abuses, lootings and killings of potential enemies. It is mostly active in Bartella (part of Hamdaniya district) but has been seen patrolling checkpoints and accompanying other Hashd al-Shaabi forces in different parts of Ninewa (Gaston & Derzsi-Horváth, 2017:26). Another prominent (and truly) Christian force is the Ninewa Plains Protecton Unit (NPU), which consists of 3.000 fighters. Unlike Babylon, NPU enjoys more independence within the Hashd al-Shaabi structure. They have received training from U.S. forces and are mostly active in Hamdaniya (Gaston & Derzsi-Horváth, 2017:27).

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[10] An analysis of the historical, cultural and ethnoreligious richness of the Shabak community is beyond the scope of this study. See Van Zoonen & Wirya, 2017A for more information.

[11] An analysis of the historical, cultural and ethnoreligious richness of the Christian community in Iraq is beyond the scope of this study. See Wirya & Fawaz (2017) for more information.

4.4.5 Yezidi minority forces

The Yezidi community is the second largest ethno-religious minority after the Christians and has suffered tremendously from the various disputes between Kurdistan and federal Iraq.[12] Moreover, IS has committed crimes against the Yezidi community which are increasingly recognized as genocide (Van Zoonen & Wirya, 2017C:5; 7-9). Two Yezidi forces are said to have ties to Hashd al-Shaabi forces. These are the Sinjar Resistance Units (Yekîneyên Berxwedana Şengalê or YBS) and the Sinjar Protection Forces (Hêzen Parastina Shingal or HPS). The YBS has received financial support from Hashd al-Shaabi forces and has close ties to the Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK) and the People's Protection Units (YPG), based in Turkey and Syria respectively (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017A:27). The HPS used to be supported by PKK as well but "later changed sides and was on Baghdad's payroll" as were other Hashd al-Shaabi forces (Gaston & & Derzsi-Horváth, 2017:28). These groups are mostly active in Sinjar, which is the heartland of the Yezidi community.

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[12] An analysis of the cultural and ethnoreligious richness of the Yezidi community is beyond the scope of this study. See Van Zoonen & Wirya (2017C) for more information.

5. From Military to Governance Actor

This chapter addresses sub-question 2, concerning the transition process from military to governance actor. It does so by unravelling the role that Hashd al-Shaabi played in security cooperation in the US-led fight against IS, what practices Hashd al-Shaabi pursued as military actor, which developments ignited the start of the transition process towards becoming a governance actor and what governance practices Hashd al-Shaabi is engaged in as governance actor. By answering these questions, this chapter provides the fundaments upon which an increase in relying on persuasion in establishing civilian compliance by Hashd al-Shaabi is expected.

5.1 The fight against IS

The report presented by Knights (2016:23) identifies which ground forces were active in the fight against IS. These were the ISF, the various Peshmerga forces and a range of Hashd al-Shaabi forces, together forming an army of over 270.000 cadets as of January 2015. All these forces received some form of support through security cooperation mechanisms. The various Hashd al-Shaabi forces were supported by the U.S., Iran and Turkey and played an essential role in securing the areas and cities around Baghdad, preventing IS to take over the capital city. Diyala governorate and the cities of Samarra, Ramadi and Karbala would not have been defended properly without Hashd al-Shaabi (Knights, 2016:29). They also played a vital role in liberating the IS occupied territories in the north (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017B:34). After having liberated certain areas, these ground forces would remain in these places. This created a patchwork of different forces occupying areas in Ninewa after pushing IS out. While the Peshmerga defeated IS in Sinjar[13] and Sheikhan,[14] the ISF liberated Mosul together with Hashd al-Shaabi,[15] who was also present in Hamdaniya.[16] All ground forces were supported by international partners, which were the U.S. and the U.S.-led Coalition, Iran and Turkey.

The role of the U.S. and the Coalition in the fight against IS becomes clear through the report of McInnis (2016). One of the 'lines of effort' established by the Global Coalition Against Da'esh in

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[13] Focus Group Discussion with LGRs of Sinjar District on 21 February 2019.
[14] Interview with LGR of Sheikhan District on 13 May 2019.
[15] Interview with youth activists from Mosul on 2 May 2019.
[16] Interview with LGR of Hamdaniya District on 2 March 2019; Interview with youth activists from Hamdaniya (Christian) on 2 May 2019; Interview with youth activists from Hamdaniya (Turkmen) on 2 May 2019; Interview with youth activists from Hamdaniya (Shabak) on 2 May 2019.

December 2014 concerns "supporting military operations, capacity building, and training" and is "led by the United States and Iraq" (McInnis, 2016:2). The military part of the Coalition's work is embedded in Operation Inherent Resolve, which is supported by close to 30 nations. Here, too, the focus is on support, training and building capacity of local forces. According to McInnis (2016:2-3), "[t]he philosophy underpinning the campaign appears to be that fighting the Islamic State requires a long-term campaign for which Iraqis and their neighbors should take the lead; thus, in its view, U.S. and coalition forces should therefore focus on supporting Iraqis, Syrians, and others rather than taking on significant ground combat roles themselves". (Gaston & Derzsi-Horváth, 2017:19). While the European partners in the Coalition against Da'esh participated in training missions to the ISF and Peshmerga, the U.S. provided them with weapons Gaston and Derzsi-Horváth (2017:65).

Additionally, the U.S. established a programme through which particular Hashd al-Shaabi forces also enjoyed security cooperation in the form of training and weapons. These forces were the Hashd al-Ashair forces, or the Sunni tribal minority forces, also known as Tribal Mobilization Forces (TMFs). The Hashd al-Ashair forces are the only Hashd al-Shaabi forces who received "direct training and support" (Gaston & Derzsi-Horváth, 2017:19). These forces were selected for this programme according to a vetting system approved by the U.S. government. Forces were checked for terrorist activities or linkages to terrorist organizations for instance. Then, they would receive training and weaponry, the former provided by mostly European Coalition partners, the latter largely offered by the U.S. As Gaston and Derzsi-Horváth (2017:65) make clear, even with vetting procedures in place, it is difficult to establish exactly where such support ends up. As Hashd al-Ashair was fully integrated into the Hashd al-Shaabi structures, and minority forces seem to have a weaker stance within this larger structure, such equipment may also have ended up with other Hashd al-Shaabi forces, with negative consequences for local populations:

" [O]ne time, there was a mixed group, (…) men and women. There was a girl, a very young one. (…) In Iraq, we have honour killing. She was saying: '(…) are you going to meet those International Coalition, maybe?'. 'Maybe', I said, I can see one of the advisory of them (…) She was saying: 'I have a message for them, you have to send this message to them' which was 'all of those weapons, which they giving to Hashd al-Shaabi, to Peshmerga, to all of those forces… when they come back, they are threatening on us and they are killing us, as women."[17]

Research by Amnesty International found that weapons supplied by the U.S. were sold over social media (Meacher, 2017:26). It also confirmed tanks, Humvees, rifles and small arms provided by the U.S. to the ISF had ended up in the hands of the Badr Organization and Kata'ib Hezbollah (Meacher, 2017:33-34). An interviewee confirms that corruption exists among fighters of all ground forces: if they are in need

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[17] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019.

of money, they may sell received equipment to another force. Also, the ISF cooperates with Hashd al-Shaabi forces that the U.S. excluded from their programme, which may mean that equipment ends up in places it was not meant to arrive.[18]

Iran and Turkey were involved in training and equipping other Hashd al-Shaabi forces. As is already discussed in Chapter 4, the three most powerful forces within Hashd al-Shaabi, the Badr Organization, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq and Kata'ib Hezbollah, are supported by Iran through financial means, equipment and military advise (Gaston & Derzsi-Horváth, 2017:14;18-19). Interestingly, Kata'ib Hezbollah, one of the forces supported by Iran is considered a terrorist organization by the U.S. (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017A:14). Turkey supported the Ninewa Guards, a mainly Sunni minority force in which other minority communities are also involved (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017A:24). Turkey was directly involved in training and equipment, and Ninewa Guards is said to have enjoyed support from Sunni Gulf States a well (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017A:24). Turkey even installed an army base in Hamdaniya district, and their close support is rejected by the Iraqi government in Baghdad (Gaston & Derzsi-Horváth, 2017:19). Both international partners seem to pursue their own interests in Iraq. While Iran is arguably working on "completing the Shia crescent"[19], Turkey's main goal is to decrease the strength of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), also active in Iraq (Gaston & Derzsi-Horváth, 2018:58-59).

Several Hashd al-Shaabi forces became well known for cruelties and war crimes. Hashd al-Shaabi forces, especially the pro-Khamenei groups, have been accused of committing extra-judicial killings, torture and disappearances of (mostly Sunni) men and boys. The leader of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, Qais Khazali, has made comments about recapturing Mosul from IS that links this fight to the death of Hussein, an important figure in Shia Islam.[20] Khazali has been quoted in local media saying that "recapturing the city represents "revenge and vendetta" for the killing of Imam Hussein" and that "revenge would be directed at the descendants of Imam Hussein's killers, raising fears of revenge attacks against the Sunni community" (Meacher, 2017:12). Amnesty International found that war crimes had been committed against Sunni communities on the same day, which was denied by Khazali (Meacher, 2017:12). According to the interviewees, the Badr Organization, Kata'ib Hezbollah and the

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[18] Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019.
[19] Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019; Focus group discussion with LGRs of Sinjar District on 21 February 2019.
[20] Hussein is the son of Ali, who in turn is the cousin of Prophet Mohammed. According to Shia Islam, Ali should have been the successor of Prophet Mohammed after he died in 632. Ali was however killed before he could successfully reach that position. Hussein was then seen as the last living closest male relative to the Prophet, and therefore has such a symbolic and important role in Shi'ism. Hussein was killed while travelling to the Iraqi city of Karbala in the year 680.

Babylon Brigade are also known for misbehaving.[21] Looting is mentioned, as well as killing: "those are terrible guys. They can kill anybody for nothing".[22]

5.2 Becoming a governance actor

In recognition of its accomplishments and critical importance in this period, and in an attempt by then Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to integrate the forces into one entity controllable from a government position, Hashd al-Shaabi became an officially recognized "government entity operating alongside the military", commanded by the Prime Minister's office and providing government salaries and pensions in 2016 (Al Jazeera, 2016). Abadi did this through Order 91, which read: "the PMF will be an independent military formation and a part of the Iraqi armed forces, and attached to the general commander of the armed forces" (Mansour & Jabar, 2017:10). Several interviewees are sceptical about this move: "They are belong [sic] to the Prime Minister but believe me they don't follow any order from Prime Minister".[23] Confirming Mansour and Jabar's (2017:10) analysis, the Prime Minister is said to have had no other choice than to recognize Hashd al-Shaabi as a government force,[24] but in reality, Hashd al-Shaabi forces "are not taking the order of the Ministry of Defence, they are taking it from their leaders, which is Hadi al-Ameri and Madi al-Muhandis".[25]

When territories were freed of IS rule, all forces involved remained present in the areas liberated by them, leading to a situation where several of Ninewa's districts were under Peshmerga control and others under ISF or Hashd al-Shaabi control. This already pushed Hashd al-Shaabi to become more active as a governance actor, as controlling the liberated territories required practices outside of their military repertoire. Interviewees noticed this development as they argue that in the course of 2016 and 2017, Hashd al-Shaabi's behaviour changed. There was less looting, less harassment and less violence in Ninewa than before.[26] As was the case before the rise of IS, the officially recognized 'disputed territories' were in the hands of the Peshmerga. In October 2017, Hashd al-Shaabi militias transgressed these informal borders and pushed the Peshmerga out of the disputed territories. This happened with a minimum amount of violence, as the Peshmerga had been warned beforehand. After the fight against IS, the Peshmerga wanted to avoid another battle and withdrew from these areas without much resistance. [27]While these events are arguably orchestrated by Baghdad revenging the Kurdish

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[21] Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019; Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019; Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 6 on 29 April 2019.
[22] Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019.
[23] Interview with NGO expert 6 on 29 April 2019.
[24] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019.
[25] Interview with local expert 3 on 30 April 2019.
[26] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 4 and 5 on 14 May 2019; Interview with youth activist from Hamdaniya (Shabak) on 2 May 2019.
[27] Interview with NGR of Ministry of Peshmerga on 22 April 2019.

referendum in September 2017, Hashd al-Shaabi has occupied the territories since (International Crisis Group, 2018B:12-13; O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017A:26).

5.3 Governance practices

In December 2017, al-Abadi declared IS to be defeated in Iraq. By this time, Hashd al-Shaabi had been recognized as official government organization, had territorial control over large parts of Ninewa governorate and had become active in governance practices. The transition from a military repertoire to governance practices has been noticed by interviewees, who say that violence decreased while Hashd al-Shaabi's territorial influence increased.[28] This paragraph explains how Hashd al-Shaabi became active in the three core practices of governance, as defined by Weber (Boege, Brown & Clements, 2009:17-19), in order to understand how they organized their governance.

5.3.1 Security

Hashd al-Shaabi's most obvious presence is at the various checkpoints alongside Iraqi roads, forming the gateways into cities or villages, between different districts but these can also be located in the middle of a highway.[29] Hashd sometimes occupies these checkpoints on their own and sometimes in collaboration with the police or the Iraqi army.[30] Hashd al-Shaabi is seen as the strongest actor present here.[31] The goal of these checkpoints is to filter out IS affiliates to make sure they are arrested and do not enter the city or district. Checking for IS affiliation is done through databases with names of those who are either known or suspected of being affiliated to IS. If someone's name pops up in the database, they cannot enter the guarded area and will be arrested.[32] Interestingly, Hashd al-Shaabi uses a different database than the National Security Service or Intelligence databases, which are used by the ISF and police. It could be the case that your name is not on the list of the ISF or police, but it is on the list of Hashd al-Shaabi.[33] Several interviewees argue that this is an issue of the past, because the system was changed, so that less mistakes can be made.[34] Instead of checking for first, middle and sur names only,

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[28] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 4 and 5 on 14 May 2019; Interview with youth activist from Hamdaniya (Shabak) on 2 May 2019.

[29] Interview with NGO expert 1 on 16 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 4 and 5 on 14 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 6 on 29 April 2019; Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019; Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019; Interview with local expert 3 on 30 April 2019; Interview with local expert 4 on 27 April 2019; Interview with LGR of Telkaif District on 28 February 2019 and 7 May 2019; Interview with LGR of Sheikhan District on 13 May 2019; Interview with youth activist from Hamdaniya (Turkmen) on 2 May 2019.

[30] Interview with NGO expert 6 on 29 April 2019; Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Interview with NGO expert 4 and 5 on 14 May 2019.

[33] Interview with NGO expert 4 and 5 on 14 May 2019; Interview with activist from Mosul on 13 May 2019.

[34] Interview with NGO expert 4 and 5 on 14 May 2019; Focus Groups Discussion with LGRs from Telafar District on 24 April 2019.

the forces now check for names of family members and other data as well.[35] Other interviewees find however that the procedure is still problematic, leading to people avoiding checkpoints manned by Hashd al-Shaabi only[36] and they heard of or experienced situations of humiliation and harassment at checkpoints manned by Hashd al-Shaabi.[37]

5.3.2 Providing services

None of the interviewees sees Hashd al-Shaabi engaging in services like education or health care, which are two of the service areas identified by Terpstra and Frerks (2017; 2018). Hashd al-Shaabi seems to have little involvement in the ministries or public sector.[38] Although Hashd al-Shaabi is not directly offering public services, they are influencing these sectors. Because of Hashd al-Shaabi's strong presence at checkpoints, they determine who can enter certain areas and who cannot. The impact of this role is remarkable.[39] Even though Sheikhan district is still under Kurdish de facto power and there are no Hashd al-Shaabi forces present, the export and import of products is heavily affected by Hashd al-Shaabi. One example is trade, as agricultural products are transported from Sheikhan to be sold in Baghdad. Hashd al-Shaabi has stopped some of these transports which resulted in lower profits for Sheikhan's farmers. Another example is health care. Sheikhan's hospital caters to the needs of large IDP communities and its medicines come from Baghdad. These transports are also stopped by Hashd al-Shaabi forces in checkpoints, which leads to a shortage in supplies for the hospital. These acts are seen as a way of revenging Sheikhan's alliance with the KRG.[40]

Another way that Hashd al-Shaabi seems to be using their stronghold in checkpoints is through granting or denying access to specific areas for NGOs. Their role in allowing NGOs access is emphasized by all interviewed NGO experts:

"For a humanitarian agency, the most important thing you work towards is getting access to specific areas. (…) Achieving this sometimes affects the humanitarian principles, because you may legitimize a certain actor in doing so".[41]

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[35] Interview with NGO expert 4 and 5 on 14 May 2019.
[36] Interview with activist from Mosul on 13 May 2019.
[37] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 6 on 29 April 2019; Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019; Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019; Interview with local expert 3 on 30 April 2019; Interview with youth activist from Hamdaniya (Turkmen) on 2 May 2019.
[38] Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019.
[39] Interview with LGR of Sheikhan District on 13 May 2019.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Interview with NGO expert 3 on 9 May 2019.

State institutions, if present, are likely to have been damaged or destroyed by IS, so local populations are often dependent on actors like NGOs in getting services like health care or education.[42] Being the gatekeeper to these organizations is therefore a powerful position to be in. All NGO experts emphasize that dealing with local Hashd al-Shaabi forces can be tricky.[43] NGOs require official registration papers stating their goals and activities.[44] Besides these papers, Hashd al-Shaabi commanders often demand that they are personally consulted for approval. If an NGO works in areas where different Hashd al-Shaabi forces are active, this means that they need to visit each and every commander separately to make sure that they can execute their activities:

"But Hashd, even they give me this permission letter, even it will be from Ninewa provincial council (…) They ignore it. Even, I have a permission on my phone, from prime minister's office in Baghdad (…). It's for everyone, for intelligence, for Iraqi army, for Hashd (…) but Hashd, no, (…) they said they don't consider this (…). Let's say, in popular [language], they don't give a sh*t about it."[45]

According to five interviewees, having personal relations with Hashd al-Shaabi commanders or anyone close to them is helpful.[46] Approval processes can take months, especially for NGOs with an American background.[47] Some interviewees are locals themselves and invested in establishing relations with Hashd commanders. Through these connections they are even able to speed up these processes for other NGOs.[48] One interviewee is surprised by the ease with which her organization has been able to collaborate with Hashd al-Shaabi in Telafar, but emphasized that this is largely due to the personal relations that her local contacts have developed with local Hashd al-Shaabi forces. [49]

5.3.3 Political representation

As has become clear in Chapter 4, several of the Hashd al-Shaabi forces have clear links with political parties or figures. This does not apply to the pro-Sistani forces and to the minority forces. The pro-Sadr and pro-Khamenei forces however, have very strong ties. Next to political parties, the Sadrist movement

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[42] See the Humanitarian Action Plans for Iraq of 2017 and 2018 for a detailed overview of needs.
[43] Interview with NGO expert 1 on 16 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 3 on 9 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 4 and 5 on 14 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 6 on 29 April 2019.
[44] Interview with NGO expert 4 and 5 on 14 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 6 on 29 April 2019; Interview with activist from Telafar on 24 April 2019.
[45] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 29 April 2019.
[46] Interview with NGO expert 1 on 16 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 4 and 5 on 14 May 2019; Interview with youth activist from Hamdaniya (Shabak) on 2 May 2019; Interview youth activists from Hamdaniya (Christian) on 2 May 2019; Interview with youth activist from Hamdaniya (Turkmen) on 2 May 2019.
[47] Interview with NGO expert 4 and 5 on 14 May 2019.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Interview with NGO expert 1 on 16 May 2019.

supported the massive 2015 protests. These protests started in Basra and urged Shia political parties to reorganize themselves, as they focused on issue politic instead of identity politics (Jabar, 2018:9). The issues at stake were corruption, the political system of *muhasasa ta'ifia* (sectarian apportionment) and the lack of availability of public services. The protests started in the midst of summer, as the heat emphasized the need for electricity (for air conditioning systems) and water. In September 2015, the Sadrist Movement openly backed the protests (Jabar, 2018:15-16). Despite the fact that the protests eventually died down towards the summer of 2016, Sadr's involvement and his leadership is still remembered:

"So, in one Friday, in Freedom Space, they call it, in Baghdad, Tahrir square, there were one million… One million people coming from different cities of Iraq. (…) They entered the Green Zone, (…) they entered parliament, they fired parliament. They entered the building of Prime Minister. They fired everything. And then, you know, they wanted to attack embassies, which is existing there. But Muqtada [al-Sadr], he could, you know, announce and say: 'okay, we did it for a peace way' and stuff. So, it was for, really, effectiveness. So, they calmed down after two, three, let's say, days."[50]

His involvement in these protests may have led Muqtada al-Sadr to his victory in the elections of 2018. The protests were partly focused on showing discontent with the leading elites and establishment and the corruption they lived off. Sadr not only joined and supported the protests, he also listed new names with his newly established Saairun coalition (Mansour & Van Den Toorn, 2018:13), formed through an alliance between the Sadrist Movement and the Iraqi Communist Party (Dodge et al, 2018:8). Although the turnout was incredibly low in 2018, through disengaging with the established elite, Sadr was able to become the biggest party after the elections. Another winner of the 2018 elections was the Fatah alliance, led by Hadi al-Ameri, who was also involved with the Badr Organization. Fatah profited of the anti-establishment vibe as well, and its links to Hashd al-Shaabi groups greatly supported their political victory. Their pledges to provide for former fighters in terms of follow up employment, compensating martyrs' families and their identity as part of Hashd al-Shaabi contributed to this (Mansour & Van Den Toorn, 2018:13).

An even more intrusive element of Hashd al-Shaabi's influence on politics is happening on the local district level. In the case of Sinjar, Hashd al-Shaabi have effectively taken over the positions of the District Mayor and District Council. The official District Mayor of Sinjar and the District Council, who were at the time still displaced due to IS, have been replaced by a District Mayor and Council backed by Hashd al-Shaabi in October 2017 (International Crisis Group, 2018A:12). This move is not recognized by

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[50] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019.

the government in Baghdad, but the government is supposedly engaging with both the old and the new District Mayor.[51] There is little action being undertaken to change the situation:

"We went to police and registered a court case against Fahad [the new District Mayor] who is pretending to be something that he is not, and Baghdad court has issued an arrest warrant, but no one dares touch him because he is supported by the PMU."[52]

According to the LGRs, the district "is outside state control".[53] They argue that the armed actors present here, of which Hashd al-Shaabi is only one, PKK and YBS are present as well, have taken over the district. According to the LGRs, Hashd al-Shaabi troops are being extremely violent towards locals who have been part of government institutions:

"An (…) [ISF soldier] threw an empty water bottle at a Hashd al-Shaabi [leader] . (…) The Hashd al-Shaabi leader took him by his neck, kicked him to near death. No one could do anything about it."

In Telafar, they supposedly run the district, and the mayor is not able to do anything without their approval.[54] Youth activists mention that Hashd al-Shaabi avoids to interfere with local people directly, outside of checkpoints, but under the surface they have a say in everything that happens in Mosul.[55] In Telkaif, the former District Mayor has been replaced along a more formal route by a new District Mayor who has collaborated with Hashd al-Shaabi before.[56] Because of the fact that they are an armed and officially recognized security force, they have enough power to make sure things go their way. Next to the formal routes and official elections, Hashd al-Shaabi are increasingly influential on political levels through local governmental bodies. Several interviewees agreed separately from each other that Hashd al-Shaabi has established "a state within a state",[57] a "shadow state"[58] or a "deep government",[59] "that goes beyond state control".[60]

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[51] Interview with NGR of the Ninewa Provincial Council on 25 February 2019.
[52] Focus Group Discussion with LGRs of Sinjar District on 21 February 2019.
[53] Focus Group Discussion with LGRs of Sinjar District on 21 February 2019.
[54] Interview with civil society activist in Telafar on 24 April 2019.
[55] Interview with youth activists from Mosul on 2 May 2019.
[56] Interview with LGR of Telkaif District on 28 February 2019 and 7 May 2019; Interview with LGR of Sheikhan District on 13 May 2019.
[57] Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019.
[58] Interview with NGO expert 3 on 9 May 2019.
[59] Interview with activist from Mosul on 13 May 2019.
[60] Interview with LGR of Telkaif District on 28 February 2019 and 7 May 2019.

5.4 Reflecting on the transition process

Hashd al-Shaabi was an important ground force, who were successful and essential in the fight against IS, especially in the early days. Their capability has been increased through security cooperation, as they received training from Iran, Turkey and the U.S. Security cooperation also secured influential roles for these international actors. Turkey expands their internal conflict with the PKK across the border into Iraq, Iran increases their influence westward and the U.S. seems keen on remaining some foot on the ground and letting others do the fighting on their behalf. Additionally, the supply of weapons from the U.S., although provided through vetting systems, do reach unintended benefiters such as the Pro-Khamenei Hashd al-Shaabi forces. As Hashd al-Shaabi captured territories from IS, they became increasingly engaged in governance practices, as their military repertoire did not suffice to daily governing of these districts. This is recognized by interviewees, who see a switch happening around 2016.[61] When Hashd al-Shaabi managed to take the disputed territories from the Peshmerga in October 2017, they enlarged their territorial control significantly. Increasingly, they have become more active in governance practices, although they are most active in maintaining security, close to their original nature of a security force. Their involvement in security also established an impact on service provision, as Hashd al-Shaabi controls who or what can cross a checkpoint. Political involvement is happening on the national level and the local level. Pro-Khamenei and Pro-Sadr forces are active in national politics, and Sadr has supported the 2015 political protests, establishing a role in this type of politics as well. On the local level, the districts of Sinjar, Telafar and Telkaif have seen increasing influence of Hashd al-Shaabi, through tribal leaders, District Mayors or otherwise, since the events of October 2017. According to interviewees, the rise and involvement of Hashd al-Shaabi created local dynamics of a complexity never seen before.[62]

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[61] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 4 and 5 on 14 May 2019; Interview with youth activist from Hamdaniya (Shabak) on 2 May 2019.
[62] Interview with NGO expert 4 and 5 on 14 May 2019.

6. Civilian Compliance Through Coercion

As a military actor, Hashd al-Shaabi depended on their capacity in conflict, relying on coercion to defeat IS. After IS was defeated, Hashd al-Shaabi became active in different ways. In order to establish sustainable territorial control, civilian compliance became a necessary objective. As is explained in Chapter 3, civilian compliance can be demanded through force or requested through persuasion. This chapter will look into the coercive strategies pursued by Hashd al-Shaabi, before moving on to persuasive tactics, along the lines of legitimacy sources. It will answer sub-question 3, outlining which coercive measures are used, how they link to establishing civilian compliance and what their effect may be on persuasive strategies.

6.1 Coercion in civilian compliance

As Terpstra and Frerks (2017) indicate, civilian compliance can be based on force or persuasion. The focus of this thesis is on persuasion, but in order to understand what relevance this has in the larger frame of establishing civilian compliance, it is important to discuss coercive tactics as well. Duyvestein (2017:673) emphasizes the importance of these strategies for armed actors like Hashd al-Shaabi. As Hashd al-Shaabi started as a military actor with a clear military goal, coercion can be assumed to be their primary repertoire. In the fight against IS, some of the forces were especially cruel and have been accused of human rights abuses (Meacher, 2017). These forces are mostly found on the side of the Pro-Khamenei groups, according to Meacher (2017) and O'Driscoll and Van Zoonen (2017A:23). These claims are supported by interviewees, who find that "[Kata'ib Ahl] al-Haq, [Asa'ib] Hezbollah, those are terrible guys. They can kill anybody for nothing"[63] and "the groups who are related to Iran, (…) [are] much more tough against Sunni".[64] As has become clear in Chapter 5, Hashd al-Shaabi is mostly active in the security domain, even as a governance actor, sticking close to their military repertoire. This could mean that coercion and the use of force remains important in establishing civilian compliance.

Schneckener (2017:808) distinguished three types of violence for militias such as Hashd al-Shaabi. The first type of violence is counter-insurgency violence, aimed at fighting rebels or other insurgents threatening the state allied with the militia in case. Schneckener (2017:808) emphasizes that the identification of certain people as rebels or insurgents is not an objective judgement, but is

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[63] Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019.
[64] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019.

completely in the eyes of the beholder, in this case Hashd al-Shaabi. It seems that Hashd al-Shaabi identifies Kurds as a threat to the state, as several interviewees mention violent actions or threats clearly aimed against sympathizers of Kurds or Kurds themselves:[65]

"My friend he is [active in] election monitoring. (…) He is supporting Kurdish (…) parties (…) in Bashiqa. He was monitoring [the] election and suddenly Hashd al-Shaabi call his father and say 'your son is supposed to come here today, directly'. But my friend told him that 'I'm in election, I'm monitoring election. How can I come? I can't come today'. Anyway, Hashd al-Shaabi, they come to the election centre, arrest him and put him in a jail. Why? Because (…) he has a Kurdish background. They told him: 'you support the Kurdish people'."[66]

The events of October 2017 further confirm these sentiments, as Hashd al-Shaabi conquered territories liberated from IS by the Peshmerga. Although it was allegedly a move orchestrated in cooperation with the government in Baghdad, there are more sentiments of Hashd al-Shaabi revenging Kurds or opposing their potential power. In Sheikhan, one of the few Ninewa districts still under de facto Kurdish control, Hashd al-Shaabi's involvement in obstructing import and export is interpreted as revenge for Sheikhan's allegiance to Kurdistan.[67] In Hamdaniya, Hashd al-Shaabi is said to have harassed non-Shia people at checkpoints[68] and actively targeted KDP and PUK supporters.[69]

Counter-criminal violence is another category put forward by Schneckener (2017:809-810), focused on eliminating 'criminal elements' within the areas where the militia is active. In the case of Hashd al-Shaabi, IS sleeper cells or affiliates are identified as criminal element. As was mentioned, Hashd al-Shaabi and other security forces check for IS-affiliation at checkpoints. If your name is found in the database, you will be arrested by Hashd al-Shaabi.[70] You will however not receive the treatment as is common within the national justice system, as Hashd al-Shaabi has allegedly created a parallel justice system with courts and prisons.[71] Families of 'disappearing' people do not know what happened to their relatives. This threat posed to potential IS affiliates is a clear example of counter-criminal violence, and it is sometimes addressed to Sunni Muslims in general, without confirmation of support for IS.[72] Sunni

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[65] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 6 on 29 April 2019; Interview with youth activists from Bartella (Shabak) on 2 May 2019.
[66] Interview with NGO expert 6 on 29 April 2019.
[67] Interview with LGR of Sheikhan District on 13 May 2019.
[68] Interview with youth activists from Hamdaniya (Turkmen) on 2 May 2019.
[69] Interview with youth activist from Hamdaniya (Shabak) on 2 May 2019.
[70] Interview with activist from Mosul on 13 May 2019.
[71] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019; Interview with activist from Mosul on 13 May 2019; Interview with local expert 3 on 30 April 2019.
[72] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 6 on 29 April 2019; Interview with activist from Telafar on 24 April 2019.

Muslims are embarrassed and harassed at checkpoints and cannot exercise their religion freely, according to some interviewees.[73]

The last type of militia violence is counter-rival violence. Schneckener (2017:809) identifies 'rivals' "as competitors for political and economic positions in the state and society". This is where internal violence between different Hashd al-Shaabi forces becomes relevant. As they pursue different ideologies, they may form each other's competitors for certain powerful positions. Internal disputes are said to be settled through tit-for-tat kidnappings and arrests.[74] Mosul, with more than a dozen forces present,[75] has been the scene of this type of violence.[76] Additionally, the pro-Sistani forces are said to be especially proud of their identity as liberators, fighting off IS. In maintaining this identity, they are keen in eliminating fighters who are accused of abuse or harassment, through internal executions.[77] This has allegedly also happened in keeping minority forces in line.[78] In Hamdaniya, when a minority force refused to obey orders from a more powerful Hashd al-Shaabi group (said to be part of the pro-Khamenei group), members of the minority force were abused and arrested. They were put in jail until the local situation was calm again, then they were released.[79]

6.2 The dual effect of use of force

The link between the use of coercion and persuasive strategies in establishing civilian compliance is found in the dual effect that force may have on legitimacy of an armed group. On the one hand, force may come across as powerful gesture, confirming the strength of the armed actor in being able to eliminate enemies. On the other hand, it may be detrimental to legitimacy as it harms people's potentially positive notions of the armed group in case (Schneckener, 2017:805). Violence always requires some form of justification in order to become acceptable in the eyes of an audience (Schneckener, 2017:804). For Hashd al-Shaabi, positive effects of the use of force may be seen through the lens of suppressing IS sleeper cells and bringing affiliates to justice. Depending on the ideology of the person in case, opposing Kurdish and American influence may also be regarded as positive. Negative feelings may concern unfair treatment, harassments and looting.

The 41 interviewees and focus group discussants questioned in this study can be divided in three groups in terms of their perspectives on whether Hashd al-Shaabi is using force in a positive or negative way. A small group of interviewees remained neutral: they recognize Hashd al-Shaabi's presence and

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[73] Ibid.
[74] Interview with NGO expert 3 on 9 May 2019.
[75] Interview with civil society expert on 20 February 2019.
[76] Interview with youth activists from Hamdaniya on 2 May 2019.
[77] Interview with NGO expert 3 on 9 May 2019.
[78] Interview with NGO expert 6 on 29 April 2019.
[79] Ibid.

power, while refraining from giving their own opinion about this.[80] Interestingly, none of these interviewees are locals themselves, although they live and work in and around Ninewa governorate, they are not originally from Iraq. Thirty interviewees express negative opinions about Hashd al-Shaabi,[81] saying they are bad for social cohesion,[82] or simply criminals looting and harassing local communities.[83] All these interviewees are local Iraqis, living and working in Ninewa governorate. Twelve interviewees, all Iraqi nationals, expressed positive opinions,[84] saying they feel that Ninewa is safer and more stable since Hashd al-Shaabi is present[85] or expressing the will to join them if Hashd al-Shaabi calls upon their service.[86] Interestingly, those interviewees making the last mentioned statement of joining Hashd al-Shaabi if they are asked to do so also declared to be Shia Muslims, expressing a clearer link between the myth-symbol complex and religious call attached to Hashd al-Shaabi.

The negative perceptions on Hashd al-Shaabi's coercive strategies were mostly linked to looting, of which the Babylon Brigade is for instance accused.[87] The Babylon Brigade is said to have become active in Hamdaniya first, where they engaged in stealing and harassing local houses, people and religious places, such as churches.[88] Interestingly, Babylon is often regarded as a Christian force, while actually their leader is one of the few Christians involved. The rest of the force consists of Shia Shabak fighters.[89] After they left Hamdaniya, they became active in Telkaif District, where they were less violent and established a more positive legacy.[90] A story from Telafar is especially striking in this regard. In December 2018, there was a bomb attack in the city of Telafar. People's initial thoughts were that this

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[80] Interview with NGO expert 1 on 16 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 3 on 9 May 2019; Interview with local expert 4 on 27 April 2019.

[81] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 6 on 29 April 2019; Interview with civil society expert on 20 February 2019; Interview with activist from Mosul on 13 May 2019; Interview with activist from Telafar on 24 April 2019; Interview with LGR of Hamdaniya District on 2 March 2019; Interview with LGR of Sheikhan District on 13 May 2019; Focus Group Discussion with LGRs of Sinjar District on 21 February 2019; Interview with NGR of Ministry of Peshmerga on 22 April 2019; Interview with NGR of Ninewa Provincial Council on 25 February 2019; Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019; Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019; Interview with local expert 3 on 30 April 2019; Interview with youth activists from Mosul on 2 May 2019; Interview with youth activists from Hamdaniya (Christian) on 2 May 2019.

[82] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019.

[83] Interview with activist from Mosul on 13 May 2019; Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019; Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019; Interview with local expert 3 on 30 April 2019.

[84] Interview with NGO expert 4 and 5 on 14 May 2019; Focus Group Discussion with LGRs of Telafar District on 24 April 2019; Interview with youth activist from Hamdaniya (Shabak) on 2 May 2019; Interview with youth activist from Hamdaniya (Turkmen) on 2 May 2019.

[85] Interview with NGO expert 4 and 5 on 14 May 2019; Focus Group Discussion with LGRs of Telafar District on 24 April 2019.

[86] Interview with youth activist from Hamdaniya (Shabak) on 2 May 2019; Interview with youth activist from Hamdaniya (Turkmen) on 2 May 2019.

[87] Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019.

[88] Interview with LGR of Telkaif District on 28 February 2019 and 7 May 2019.

[89] Interview with LGR of Telkaif District on 28 February 2019 and 7 May 2019; Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019.

[90] Interview with LGR of Telkaif District on 28 February and 7 May 2019.

must be an IS attack. However, evidence seems to point into the direction of Hashd al-Shaabi. Logically, these events harmed the image of liberators of the local forces present.[91]

Most interviewees with a positive attitude towards Hashd al-Shaabi's presence and actions do mention that there have been incidents involving unjustified violence but they do not see a pattern in this type of behaviour, as they regard it as a couple of isolated incidents committed by 'the bad apples' in the group. Although non-Shia communities are said to be harassed most by Shia-oriented Hashd al-Shaabi forces, two Shia youth activists mention that they were also victim of some form of harassment or heard about such events from close friends or relatives.[92] Nevertheless, these are still regarded as incidents that do not de-legitimize Hashd al-Shaabi as a whole. Similar nuances are made on the side of negative perspectives. Compared to the civil war under Maliki, the presence of Hashd al-Shaabi is regarded as being more effective in terms of protection.[93] However, Hashd al-Shaabi is generally speaking not seen as a positive influence: "for (…) the Sunnis, [their land] it's occupied, it's not liberated. And we are talking about (…) more than six million Sunni [living] under Hashd al-Shaabi and they are not happy".[94] Similar sentiments are expressed by Yezidi communities[95] and Christian communities.[96]

6.3 The role of coercion

In establishing civilian compliance, Hashd al-Shaabi, in particular pro-Khamenei forces, has stayed close to their military repertoire, even after transitioning from a military actor to a governance actor. Their governance activities are most prominent in the security realm and they have not refrained from using violence here. At time, this violence is unjustified and excessive and is aimed at potential insurgents, criminals and rival groups. Kurds, or supporters of Kurdish political parties or the Peshmerga, are personally targeted, at least in the districts of Hamdaniya and Sheikhan. IS affiliates or former IS fighters are identified as criminals and treated as such. This is one in checkpoints through the database system. However, innocent Sunni Muslims are said to be targeted as well, through harassment, humiliation and even arbitrary arrests. The parallel court system put in place by Hashd al-Shaabi forces is an interesting case in point, where torture and extrajudicial killing is allegedly taking place. Counter-rival violence occurs between different Hashd al-Shaabi forces, who punish each other for certain actions in the case of Pro-Sistani forces, or revenge opposition from minority forces, as has happened in Hamdaniya.

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[91] Interview with NGO expert 1 on 16 May 2019.
[92] Interview with youth activist from Hamdaniya (Shabak) on 2 May 2019; Interview with youth activist from Hamdaniya (Turkmen) on 2 May 2019.
[93] Interview with local expert 3 on 30 April 2019.
[94] Interview with local expert 3 on 30 April 2019.
[95] Interview with civil society expert on 20 February 2019; Focus Group Discussion with LGRs of Sinjar District on 21 February 2019.
[96] Interview with LGR of Telkaif on 28 February 2019 and 7 May 2019; Interview with youth activists from Hamdaniya (Christian) on 2 May 2019.

Focusing on the interviewees and focus group discussants part of this study, this violence is viewed in a negative way: its justifications do not resonate with most of the interviewees and focus group discussants. The treatment of non-Shia communities is problematic, as Ninewa governorate has a highly diverse ethno-religious composition. Although 41 people cannot speak for the whole Ninewa population, the personal stories of harassment come from many different districts in Ninewa and while they seem to be mostly focused on non-Shia communities, Shia Muslims have been victims as well. Such behaviour may be reaching the threshold of violence that "is exerted over a longer period of time and in an indiscriminate way (Schneckener, 2017:805), which has a negative effect on legitimacy. At the same time, the positive elements are mentioned by interviewees as well: Hashd al-Shaabi is by some seen as successful actor in countering IS influence and in establishing a safer situation than in the civil war prior to the rise of IS.[97]

Linking the findings from the previous and current chapter to the main research question at stake in this thesis, Hashd al-Shaabi has not refrained from using coercion as a strategy in establishing civilian compliance in Ninewa governorate in 2017 and 2018. The pro-Khamenei forces and the Babylon Brigade in particular have used their military repertoire in their governance practices, while establishing further control in political spheres. Here, too, the fact that they are the strongest armed actor in Ninewa at this moment, provides them with the necessary leverage to secure a powerful position. The examples of Sinjar, Telafar and Telkaif show that there is hardly any resistance to their influence on the local government level, partly because they may revenge any opposition in this arena as well. Before the balance between these coercive means and persuasion is discussed in Chapter 8, Chapter 7 will address the persuasive side, by analysing the strategic use of legitimacy sources.

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[97] Interview with NGO expert 4 and 5 on 14 May 2019; Interview with activist from Mosul on 13 May 2019; Interview with youth activist from Hamdaniya (Shabak) on 2 May 2019; Interview with youth activist from Hamdaniya (Turkmen) on 2 May 2019.

7. Sources of Legitimacy

This chapter addresses the analytical frame of this study: the strategic use of sources of legitimacy. The sources of legitimacy as identified by Schlichte and Schneckener (2015) serve as guideline throughout this chapter, answering sub-question 4. In addition, the relational aspects emphasized by Duyvestein (2017) and Schneckener (2017) are discussed to adhere to a context-specific interpretation of the identified sources.

7.1 Symbolic sources of legitimacy

Schlichte and Schneckener (2015:417-418) distinguish three symbolic sources of legitimacy, namely myth-symbol complexes, grievances and external threats.

7.1.1 Myth-symbol complexes

Myth-symbol complexes serve in forming a certain group identity, as explained in Chapter 3. In the case of Iraq, determining who is part of your group and who is not, is an essential feature of the social landscape. This has to do with finding safety: "You receive safety from your own group. It is the ultimate fragile state situation, in which your safety is dependent on your identity".[98] The widespread distrust towards other communities finds its roots in the Saddam era but are strengthened through the civil war period after the 2003 U.S. invasion and the onslaught of IS. It becomes hostile through another fundament in Iraqi society, which is militarization. Decades of ongoing conflict have created a mindset within the country that one has to pick up a gun and fight for whatever cause might be beneficial to their own identity group. Militarization is seen as an essential component in explaining why Hashd al-Shaabi is seen as a legitimate actor: they are simply one of the strongest actors present. In a militarized context, that alone may suffice as legitimization. Myth-symbol complexes thus seem to play a big role but they must be contextualized within militarization.[99] Social cohesion between ethno-religious components is severely damaged, which partly resulted in everyone turning to their closest community and only trusting those with similarities, constructed in myth-symbol complexes.[100] Two myth-symbol complexes are highlighted by interviewees: Shia Islam and tribalism.

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[98] Interview with NGO expert 3 on 9 May 2019. [quote was translated from Dutch to English by the author]
[99] Ibid.
[100] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019.

Shia Islam plays a major role, as Hashd al-Shaabi's fight is based on a religious decree, which legitimizes Hashd al-Shaabi's actions and presence in the eyes of Shia communities.[101] Several interviewees mention the *fatwa* as a clear call to arms.[102] The survival of Shia Islam is sometimes seen as more important than the survival of Iraq as a country.[103] The reasoning behind this sentiment is that they feel that a country like Iraq is relatively easy to defeat, or wipe off a map so to say, but an ideology and a religion is inside people's heads, which would make it much more difficult to get rid of. In this sense, Shiism provides a safe and secure haven to these people, potentially more secure than the Iraqi state can provide them.

"Because they are Shia, (…) they need to support each other. Especially now, there is like, expanding of Shia thoughts, and (…) they [Shia communities] support them [Hashd al-Shaabi] very well because they (…) think if something happened, (…) Hashd al-Shaabi will defend them against anyone. They [Hashd al-Shaabi] will fight anyone (…) to keep them [Shia communities] safe"[104]

The religious element to the myth-symbol complex at play is deliberately echoed by those involved in Hashd al-Shaabi: "during the holy events, they are talking about (…) how Hashd al-Shaabi are holy, how they are, you know, angels and stuff".[105]

On a tribal level, the system of protection for your own group is at stake as well. Interestingly, Hashd al-Shaabi seems to make use of tribal structures in places where (large) Shia communities are absent. This is the case in Telafar, where a local Sunni tribal force has been established, which enjoys high levels of local legitimacy.[106] In Telafar, this may have caused an increase in the relevance of tribalism altogether.[107] Tribal leaders have seats in the Telafar District Council, which intensifies the influence of Hashd al-Shaabi through tribal structures in both informal and formal ways.[108] The importance of decades of militarization is mentioned again.[109] Some tribes constantly change their allegiance to whoever is in power at that time:

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[101] Interview with NGO expert 6 on 29 April 2019; Interview with LGR of Sheikhan District on 13 May 2019; Interview with LGR of Hamdaniya District on 2 March 2019; Interview with LGR of Telkaif District on 28 February 2019 and 7 May 2019; Interview with NGR of Ministry of Peshmerga on 22 April 2019; Interview with youth activists from Mosul on 2 May 2019.
[102] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 3 on 9 May 2019; Interview with the activist in Mosul on 13 May 2019; Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019.
[103] Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019.
[104] Interview with NGO expert 6 on 29 April 2019.
[105] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019.
[106] Interview with NGO expert 1 on 16 May 2019.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Interview with activist from Telafar on 24 April 2019.
[109] Interview with NGO expert 3 on 9 May 2019.

"In the Saddam era, they would say 'we are a Sunni Arab tribe'. When the Peshmerga came, they would say 'we are a Kurdish tribe', and when the Americans came: 'we are an American tribe'. So, [they act] like a chameleon. (…) The tribes are especially accustomed to continuously adjusting themselves to the changes in power, because, well, they have grown to be very pragmatic".[110]

Tribal structures are not apparent everywhere, Hamdaniya does not have a strong tribal system for instance.[111] In the absence of both Shia communities and tribal structures, Hashd al-Shaabi seems to turn to minority forces, based on different religious and sectarian identities as was the case in Telkaif, Sinjar and Hamdaniya.[112]

7.1.2 Grievances

As was explained in Chapter 3, the Saddam era has installed a nation-wide sense of victimhood, which may have grown further because of the civil war after the 2003 U.S. invasion and the cruelties committed by IS. These grievances apply to all ethno-religious communities in Iraq but play out in different ways. The changes in the Iraqi political landscape, with Shia politicians' success in consolidating power, marginalized Sunni and minority communities (see Chapter 3). For Shia communities, the events of the civil war are fresh memories, according to interviewees. Maliki's attempt to secure and centralize power included a crackdown on potential members of Shia militias such as the Mahdi Army, resulting in fear and distrust within the Shia communities:

"For (…) eight years, people suffer a lot. (…) [P]overty, injustice, civil war, (…) they changed everything. Like, you are sitting in the house and one knock the door, you have a paper: you have two days, you have to go and (…) leave this house or they will kill you, because you are Shia." [sic] [113]

Hashd al-Shaabi may be considered as a much needed unifying force standing up for the grievances of the Shia communities. The support from Iran during the Saddam era, the supply of weaponry in early fight against IS are considered to be major events consolidating support for pro-Khamenei Hashd al-Shaabi forces.[114] The involvement of Muqtada al-Sadr in the 2015 protests work in similar ways for the pro-Sadrist forces.[115]

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[110] Ibid. [quote was translated from Dutch to English by the author]
[111] Interview with Christian youth activists from Hamdaniya on 2 May 2019; Interview with Turkmen youth activist from Hamdaniya on 2 May 2019; Interview with Shia Shabak youth activist on 2 May 2019.
[112] Interview with LGR of Telkaif District on 7 May 2019; Focus Group Discussion with LGRs of Sinjar District on 21 February 2019; interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019.
[113] Interview with local expert 3 on 30 April 2019.
[114] Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019.
[115] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019.

A second set of grievances results from the lack of opportunities in terms of employment and education. This applies specifically to the younger population and is not exclusively a problem concerning Shia communities. Youth have now found an objective in which they can be part of something bigger:

"Especially [the] young, you know, they have energy (…) which they cannot spend (…) in a good way because of, you know, lack of facilities, infrastructure… corruption, lack of plan with the government, so the only way that they can (…) get out this energy (…) is to be with Hashd." [sic] [116]

This statement is supported by several interviewees, who all mention that earning a living is one of the key drivers of young people to join Hashd al-Shaabi as a fighter or support them otherwise, as there are hardly any alternatives.[117]

For minority communities, the grievance of lack of protection is regarded as essential. Minority communities have always been divided over (forced) affiliation with either Arab or Kurdish identities.[118] They were dependent on protection by others, and this has not led them to safety and security. The Yezidi community, usually quite loyal to the Kurds, feels betrayed by the Peshmerga forces, which left Sinjar district the night before IS entered (Van Zoonen & Wirya, 2017C:10). Christian communities emigrate from Hamdaniya district in increasing numbers, which is seen as a strong indication of feelings of insecurity.[119] In Sinjar, Hashd al-Shaabi is seen as a strategy to at least secure some protection for Yezidi communities. Yezidi fighters feel like at least they will not be hurt by Hashd al-Shaabi if they join them. It splits these communities however, as others do not want to be associated with Hashd al-Shaabi at all.[120] For many communities, being part of a minority force means being able to have access to weapons, giving them some feeling of security.[121] Several interviewees indicate however that in the wider Hashd al-Shaabi structure, the influence of these minority forces on decision making processes are negligible, as the real power resides with the pro-Khamenei forces.[122]

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[116] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019.
[117] Interview with NGO expert 3 on 9 May 2019; Interview with the NGR of the Ministry of Peshmerga on 22 April 2019; Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019; Interview with local expert 3 on 29 April 2019.
[118] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019.
[119] Interview with DM of Hamdaniya on 2 March 2019.
[120] Focus Group Discussion for LGRs of Sinjar District on 21 February 2019.
[121] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019.
[122] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 6 on 29 April 2019; Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019; Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019; Interview with local expert 3 on 30 April 2019; Focus Group Discussion with LGRs of Sinjar District on 21 February 2019.

7.1.3 External threats

Hashd al-Shaabi was essentially mobilized by the presence of an external threat, which was the rise of IS.[123] The lack of trust in other security actors is also highlighted, which made people look for a credible alternative, found in Hashd al-Shaabi forces.[124] One interviewee sees a link between fear of IS and support for Hashd al-Shaabi in Telafar:

"Basically, what can be noticed is that those [people] fiercely opposing and really afraid of IS, thereby also opposing reintegration of IS affiliates, are strong supporters of Hashd. Hashd blocks returns of IS affiliates. So, those [people] afraid of IS are generally strong Hashd supporters."[125]

Hashd al-Shaabi has put forward two strategies to show itself capable of dealing with this external threat, according to the interviewees. Firstly, Hashd al-Shaabi mans checkpoints which are located alongside Iraqi roads. A second strategy concerns extending the external threat posed by IS. Officially, IS has been defeated in Iraq and Syria, according to the Iraqi heads of state (New York Times, 2017) and the so called U.S. backed Syrian forces (The Guardian, 2019). However, its threat remains real and apparent, as so called sleeper cells are still active. This is widely recognized, and forms an interesting strategy for Hashd al-Shaabi who say that IS will return to Iraq if Hashd al-Shaabi leaves.[126]

Another external threat identified by some of the forces is that of U.S. influence. The pro-Khamenei forces and pro-Sadr forces have stated to oppose U.S. influence in Iraq, which can also be seen in the counter-insurgency violence discussed in Chapter 6. Ninewa is a governorate where Saddam Hussein enjoyed support under some of the Sunni communities. The ousting of Saddam Hussein during the 2003 U.S. invasion and the tensions between the U.S. and Iran play a role here. As a large parts of Ninewa's population allegedly worked for Saddam's Baath Party, they were not happy with the American invasion and its aftermath. In addition, one interviewee mentions that the image people have of Iran plays a role here: while Iran is seen as a holy place by people in lower social classes, higher social classes see Iran as an opportunity to make money. For both, Iran is an interesting and important place.[127]

7.1.4 Strategic use of symbolic sources of legitimacy

In terms of symbolic sources of violence, it is fair to say that Hashd al-Shaabi strongly uses myth-symbol complexes. As their mobilization was based on a religious *fatwa*, essentially saying that "jihad is

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[123] Interview with NGO expert 1 on 16 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 3 on 9 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 4 and 5 on 14 May 2019; Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019; Interview with NGO expert 3 on 30 April 2019.

[124] Interview with NGO expert 3 on 9 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 4 and 5 on 14 May 2019.

[125] Interview with NGO expert 1 on 16 May 2019

[126] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 29 April 2019.

[127] Ibid.

necessary against ISIS",[128] Shi'im plays a major role. However, Shia communities are not present in all districts of Ninewa. When this is the case, Hashd al-Shaabi forces seem to gather legitimacy through strategic use of either tribal structures (in Sunni environments) or sets up minority forces (for Christian, or Yezidi communities). These local forces seem to increase legitimacy as Hashd al-Shaabi is represented through local people, who speak the same dialect and come from a nearby village. This encourages other people from this community in the sense that your neighbours are more likely to protect you than outsiders, and it is not in their interest to loot or act in criminal ways. The potential threat, installed through militarization and previous conflicts, is thus somewhat lifted. The local embeddedness of strategies related to myth-symbol complexes is an interesting strategy here.

This search for protection is linked with grievances, where Hashd al-Shaabi seems open to a range of identity groups and integrates them in the wider Hashd al-Shaabi structure. As Hashd al-Shaabi is capable of paying decent salaries (through the Iraqi government and with international support from the U.S. and Iran), they have an interesting offer in addressing grievances of making a living. They are able to cover the grievance of insecurity through supplying weapons. However, it is questionable whether this is a smoke screen, as in the words of one of the interviewees: "I will not call this security and stability. This is fear, this [is] no security".[129]

External threats constitute an element in the mobilization and existence of Hashd al-Shaabi. They make use of this legitimacy source by showing capability to manage the threat posed by IS, for instance using harassment and maltreatment to show their force. In addition, the IS threat is extended through spreading fear for the return of IS if Hashd al-Shaabi leaves. As the lack of trust in the ISF will hardly be restored, these strategies are likely to work. Pro-Sadr and pro-Khamenei forces are also expressing a threat in the U.S. presence. This legitimacy source is however not as strong as the myth-symbol complexes, and its link to grievances as it is more seen as 'being in the right place at the right time' by interviewees.

7.2 Performance centred sources of legitimacy

Schlichte and Schneckener (2015:418) find five relevant types performance centred sources of legitimacy. These are (1) charismatic leadership, (2) sacrifice and martyrdom, (3) personal loyalties, (4) providing services and (5) formalization.

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[128] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019.
[129] Interview with local expert 3 on 30 April 2019.

7.2.1 Charismatic leadership

As Hashd al-Shaabi has many different forces, charismatic leadership should be understood in terms of a variety of leaders, forming a charismatic figure to specific forces. Several interviewees mention that each force has a different leader leading to a lack of central command. [130] These forces abide by their own rules and apply these to the territory under their control. Officially, there is a central Hashd al-Shaabi command but O'Driscoll and Van Zoonen (2017A:13) find that it "is predominantly made up of people with close links to Iran and does not represent the wide range of ideologies that exist within it". Nevertheless, three names are mentioned by a lot of interviewees as being the ultimate leadership of Hashd al-Shaabi. These are Hadi al-Ameri,[131] Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis,[132] Muqtada al-Sadr[133] and, last but definitely not least, Qasim Soleimani,[134] who is seen as one of the persons in the highest power position.[135] These men can be characterized as charismatic leaders, as their legacies in Iraqi society go far beyond their involvement in Hashd al-Shaabi. The charisma of these leaders is expressed by local Hashd al-Shaabi forces, whose portraits and pictures can be found in checkpoints and offices. This also applies to the portrait of Ayatollah Khamenei, whose portrait is displayed by pro-Khamenei forces such as the Badr Organization.[136] Moreover, Hadi al-Ameri and Muqtada al-Sadr have successfully presented themselves as non-conformists in the Iraqi national elections of 2018, according to Mansour and Van den Toorn (2017) this is partly based on their leadership of Hashd al-Shaabi.

Interestingly, all these leaders are situated on the side of Shia Hashd al-Shaabi forces, mostly pro-Khamenei and pro-Sadr. The pro-Sistani forces are not exerting such a strong cling to specific leaders, although Sistani's picture has been seen at a couple of checkpoints.[137] On the side of minority forces, Rayan al-Kildani, leader of the Babylon Brigade, is mentioned, but is more seen as a menace than

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[130] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 6 on 29 April 2019; Focus Group Discussion with LGRs of Sinjar District on 21 February 2019; Interview with the NGR of the Ministry of Peshmerga on 22 April 2019; Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019; Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019; Interview with local expert 3 on 30 April 2019; Interview with local expert 4 on 27 April 2019.

[131] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 6 on 29 April 2019; Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019; Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019; Interview with local expert 3 on 30 April 2019; Interview with the NGR of the Ministry of Peshmerga on 22 April 2019; Interview with DM of Telkaif on 28 February and 7 May 2019.

[132] Interview with NGO expert 6 on 29 April 2019; Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019; Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019, Interview with local expert 3 on 30 April 2019; ; Interview with the NGR of the Ministry of Peshmerga on 22 April 2019; Interview with DM of Telkaif on 28 February and 7 May 2019; Focus Group Discussion with the DM and DC of Sinjar on 21 February 2019.

[133] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 3 on 9 May 2019; ; Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019; Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019; Interview with local expert 4 on 27 April 2019.

[134] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019; local expert 1 on 28 April 2019; Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019

[135] Ibid.

[136] Interview with local expert 4 on 27 April 2019.

[137] Ibid.

a charismatic leader.[138] An explanatory factor here could be the false Christian character Kildani is trying to give the Babylon Brigade (see Chapter 4).

7.2.2 Sacrifice and martyrdom

Chapter 3 already introduced the role that martyrdom plays in Shia Islam through the stories about Hussein's death and the Twelfth Imam (or *mahdi*). An interviewee mentions the tradition of reliving the faith of Hussein by Shia communities during the month of Muharram, in which Hashd al-Shaabi fighters allegedly join. People will chastice themselves with swords to keep the memory of Hussein's martyrdom alive, sometimes ending their own lives in doing so. This tradition has been prohibited by Grand Ayatollah Sistani but is nevertheless still performed.[139] This also has consequences for other ethno-religious communities:

"There is a month we call shar Muharram, (…) Shia, they don't get married. It's their sect, their believeness [sic] (…) In Sunni sect, it's okay, you can get married. Many time, Hashd al-Shaabi…even before (…) ISIS, (…) during the (…) wedding party, they were even beating them by hand and violations [happened]"[140]

Another channel through which sacrifice and martyrdom become apparent is through the status of a fighter, and the honour of dying on the battlefield: [141]

"If you did not participate in the fight against ISIS but you were 'just' an IDP and you've lived a relatively good life in Karbala, in Najaf. [People will ask] what did you give [for the fight]? What was your contribution? Those questions are very real (…) If you are needed, you have to be ready. You have to defend your country, you have to defend your people, your tribe or ethnic community. It may be difficult to imagine but it is very real here".[142]

These contributions are then rewarded through salaries and social status, and when a fighter dies he is seen as a martyr who died in a holy war. These martyrs are honoured on 'martyr squares' such as in Telafar, where their photos are displayed and their stories retold.[143] There is a Martyrs Foundation on the side of pro-Khamenei forces.[144] Commanders are sometimes called *hedji,* which translates to pilgrims.[145] For martyrs' families, programmes are set up which support them financially and for fighters

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[138] Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019; Interview with LGR of Telkaif District on 28 February 2019 and 7 May 2019.
[139] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019; Interview with NGO expert 3 on 9 May 2019.
[142] Interview with NGO expert 3 on 9 May 2019. [quote was translated from Dutch to English by author]
[143] Interview with NGO expert 3 on 9 May 2019.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019.

returning from the battle field, the pro-Khamenei forces organize religious trips to the holy city of Qom in Iran, as well as follow up employment schemes.[146]

7.2.3 Personal loyalties

As was explained in Chapter 3, Iraqi society is largely based on personal connections, through which *wasta* is exercised. Hashd al-Shaabi forces are not so much creating a new system, they are making use of the system in place since 2005.[147] In politics, this is established through direct links between politicians on the national and provincial level to LGRs on the district level.[148] An example can be found in the replacement of the District Mayor in Sinjar, who was pro-Kurdish, to a new Mayor supporting Hashd al-Shaabi. Although an official complaint charge has been filed, the national government is not doing anything to help the pro-Kurdish Mayor although it has officially stated that the pro-Kurdish Mayor is the legitimate Mayor.[149] Additionally, the government in Baghdad is interacting and engaging with the pro-Hashd al-Shaabi Mayor, thereby implicitly recognizing his claim to power, according to interviewees.[150] Another example is the Ninewa Provincial Council, where critical voices are suppressed by powerful figures in Baghdad.[151] Basically, the feeling is that "if (…) [Hashd al-Shaabi is] supporting somebody, nobody will change him and nobody (…) [is] able to say any single word to him" [sic].[152] Another channel through which *wasta* becomes relevant is the tribal system. Tribal leaders are said to be persuaded to support Hashd al-Shaabi because it gives themselves, or their sons, brothers or other (male) family members, a special treatment. [153]

The gained benefits are shared among Hashd al-Shaabi commanders, according to interviewees.[154] Hashd al-Shaabi is allegedly taking over businesses and 'giving' these businesses to loyal supporters, asking a share of the profit in return. Some would argue this is 'protection money'.[155] Full on bribery also takes place: the activist from Telafar was obliged to give every security force present in Telafar a brand new laptop if he wanted to open an official office for his organization.[156] He refused, which means that his organization has to be run from various living rooms and cafés instead. These ways

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[146] Interview with NGO expert 3 on 9 May 2019.
[147] Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019.
[148] Interview with NGO expert 3 on 9 May 2019.
[149] Focus Group Discussion with LGRs of Sinjar District on 21 February 2019; Interview with LGR of Sheikhan District on 13 May 2019.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Interview with NGR of Ninewa Provincial Council on 25 February 2019.
[152] Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019.
[153] Interview with local expert 3 on 30 April 2019.
[154] Interview with activist from Telafar on 24 April 2019; Interview with activist from Mosul on 13 May 2019; Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019; Interview with local expert 3 on 30 April 2019.
[155] Ibid.; Interview with youth activists from Mosul on 2 May 2019.
[156] Interview with civil society activist from Telafar on 24 April 2019.

of acquiring gains from some people are then used to win support from LGRs, tribal leaders and business owners.

7.2.4 Providing services

Chapter 3 briefly explained that Hashd al-Shaabi is not actively providing services to local communities. They are however acting as a gatekeeper, providing or denying access to these services.[157] It seems to be a strategy in rewarding supporters and pressuring opponents or critical voices. Through this system, and because they are seen as the strongest actor present, they seem to control large parts of the economy, public services through their checkpoint presence and private businesses through a mix of extortion,[158] acquisition of businesses left by IDPs or IS affiliates[159] and 'protection money'.[160] Several interviewees also mention Hashd al-Shaabi's activities in smuggling drugs and alcohol and human trafficking.[161] Another way of making money is put forward by two interviewees who argue that there is a system in place through which IS affiliates can avoid a thorough security check.[162] When the IS affiliates pay a certain fee (allegedly $10.000), Hashd al-Shaabi will leave them alone.[163] Three other interviewees say that some of the people who now join Hashd al-Shaabi used to be IS fighters or supporters.[164] The definition of an IS affiliate is however problematic, as it is unclear whether someone actively fought with or supported IS, or merely stayed in their own homes trying to sit the invasion out. Nevertheless, it is an element that links to the more criminal side of Hashd al-Shaabi, which is mentioned by most interviewees and should not be left out of the equation. Where pro-Khamenei forces are mentioned in relation to harassment, the Babylon Brigade is particularly mentioned in relation to criminal activities.[165]

7.2.5 Formalization

Hashd al-Shaabi does not organize the meetings or conferences to display transparency and openness as pictured by Schlichte and Schneckener (2015:418). Checkpoints are a good example of places where Hashd al-Shaabi's presence has a somewhat formalized character, as being on guard here is part of their

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[157] Interview with LGR of Sheikhan District on 13 May 2019; Interview with LGR of Telkaif District on 28 February 2019 and 7 May 2019.
[158] Interview with local expert 3 on 30 April 2019.
[159] Interview with NGO expert 4 and 5 on 14 May 2019.
[160] Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019.
[161] Interview with civil society expert on 20 February 2019; Focus Group Discussion with LGRs of Sinjar District on 21 February 2019; Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019; Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019; Interview with local expert 3 on 30 April 2019.
[162] Interview with civil society expert on 20 February 2019; Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019.
[163] Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019.
[164] Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019; Focus Group Discussion with DM and DC of Sinjar on 21 February 2019; Interview with DM of Telkaif on 28 February 2019 and 7 May 2019.
[165] Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019.

mandate as a security force. They also have city offices in some districts. Two examples are Telafar[166] and Mosul.[167] In both districts, they are however not allowed to be present inside the cities, by local government decree, so these formal representations are somewhat problematic.[168]

An important aspect within formalization is found in the official recognition as a government organization in 2016. Several interviewees agree that this did not change much on the ground, as most Hashd al-Shaabi groups did not take any orders from the Prime Minister but still resorted to their own local commanders.[169] Despite this, the recognition is still seen as being influential in terms of gaining legitimacy.[170] Another formal institution that may play a role here is the *Marja'iyyah*, or "the Shiite clerical establishment in Najaf" (International Crisis Group, 2018B:5). The *Marja'iyyah* has supported Hashd al-Shaabi, although it refused to overtly legitimized them, according to Mansour and Jabar (2017:11). The *Marja'iyyah* allegedly plays an important role in the lives of strictly religious Shia communities, as their rules and regulations are neatly followed. [171]

7.2.6 Strategic use of performance-centred sources of legitimacy

Looking into performance-centred legitimacy sources, Hashd al-Shaabi has made strategic use of some of the systems in place in Iraqi society. Examples are found in the *wasta* system of personal loyalties and the embeddedness of sacrifice and martyrdom in Shia Islam, combined with militarization. They grant economic benefits, social status and employment opportunities to their supporters, while actively obstructing critical voices and opponents. The social status of a fighter is not something that is installed by Hashd al-Shaabi but they are actively reinvigorating this notion by establishing martyr squares, providing for martyrs' families and retired fighters and maintaining a discourse that links Hashd al-Shaabi's work to religious figures, such as pilgrims.

In terms of charismatic leadership and providing services, Hashd al-Shaabi seems to work in different ways than pictured by Schlichte and Schneckener (2015). Charismatic leadership is not very straightforward when an organization consists of dozens of sub-forces. Nevertheless, several leaders are strategically used in terms of legitimization. Religion plays an important role here, again, as Ayatollah Khamenei is one of the leaders displayed by pro-Khamenei forces. Other figures worth mentioning are Hadi al-Ameri and Muqtada al-Sadr, who have established a majority in Iraq's parliament through the 2018 national elections, thanks to their involvement in Hashd al-Shaabi. For the non-Shia forces,

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[166] Interview with activist from Telafar on 24 April 2019.
[167] Interview with youth activists from Mosul on 2 May 2019.
[168] Interview with activist from Telafar on 24 April 2019; Interview with youth activists from Mosul on 2 May 2019.
[169] Interview with local expert 4 on 27 April 2019.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019; Interview with youth activists from Mosul on 2 May 2019.

charismatic leadership is found to be less applicable. Considering service provision, Hashd al-Shaabi is not engaged in providing services but has stablished a gatekeeper function for itself, through which it has established control over large parts of the economy, according to interviewees. Formalization is a tricky issue in the case of Hashd al-Shaabi, as the Iraqi governance system is characterized by largely informal dynamics, which Hashd al-Shaabi is actively using.

7.3 Relational aspects

In respecting Duyvestein's (2017) notions on the relational aspect of legitimacy, this paragraph looks into two different relations inherent to Hashd al-Shaabi's strategic use of legitimacy sources. These are, firstly, the local embeddedness of these sources, and secondly, the relation between Hashd al-Shaabi and the Iraqi government.

When contextualizing the sources of legitimacy identified by Schlichte and Schneckener (2015) to the local context, several sources turn out to be highly relevant, while others are less applicable. In the context of Iraq, formalization turns out to be a difficult legitimacy source, as the governance system is largely made up of informal dynamics, outside of western or traditional expectations. Myth-symbol complexes linked to grievances, as well as sacrifice and martyrdom and personal loyalties turn out to be highly relevant. These sources find their relevance in the deeply entrenched sectarian nature of Iraq's society, the interpretation of Shia Islam and militarization of Iraqi society. Important links can be noticed between these sources, as sacrifice and martyrdom is not only rooted in Shia Islam but also in the social status attributed to a fighter. Personal loyalties on the other hand are linked with myth-symbol complexes and militarization, ultimately establishing a system in which each provides for their own group, and distrusts others. Providing services is just something that Hashd al-Shaabi is not engaging in, at least not in the ways that Schlichte and Schneckener (2015) and Terpstra and Frerks (2017) identify.

Although formalization is a difficult legitimacy source in a highly informal governance system, it is where the notion of 'borrowed legitimacy' becomes relevant (Schneckener, 2017:800). The fact that Hashd al-Shaabi cannot be seen as rebel group after their recognition as government organization, allowed for borrowed legitimacy to play a role. Although the Iraqi state is not necessarily highly valued, the role of Hashd al-Shaabi in 'liberating' Ninewa and being rewarded for doing this has an impact, according to interviewees. [172] The link with the *Marja'iyyah* also plays a role as well, as this religious institute is highly valued among Shia communities.[173] The relation between the state and Hashd al-Shaabi deserves some more attention though, as several Hashd al-Shaabi leaders were well-known in Baghdad, even before Hashd al-Shaabi was recognized as government organization. Hadi al-Ameri

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[172] Interview with local expert 4 on 27 April 2019.
[173] Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019; Interview with youth activists from Mosul on 2 May 2019.

served as Minister in Maliki's government from 2011-2014 and Muqtada al-Sadr has been an influential figure since the 1980s (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen, 2017A:20;22). Since the recognition of 2016 is largely seen as a result of pressure from Iran (Mansour & Jabar, 2017:10), the borrowed legitimacy at stake should not be seen as something that developed spontaneously. However, it did allow Hashd al-Shaabi to further establish legitimacy, as the channels for 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' recognition were now fully opened.

8. Conclusion and Discussion

The goal of this thesis was to provide more understanding on legitimacy and armed actors in the context of establishing civilian compliance. Non-state and armed actors are increasingly seen as valuable partners in peacebuilding (Podder, 2013:16) and security cooperation (Watts and Biegon, 2018:1), while there is a thorough lack of understanding of who they are and what they do (Jentsch, Kalyvas and Schubiger, 2015:755). Moreover, popular support is too easily regarded as large-scale legitimization by 'the people' (however defined) which could lead to problematic situations with detrimental outcomes (Schmelzle and Stollenwerk, 2018:450). Therefore, a further understanding of legitimacy itself and the ways it is acquired by armed group is deemed necessary (Duyvestein, 2017:670). Following the lines of reasoning set out in the literature, sustainable authority cannot be based on coercion but requires legitimacy for it to maintain (Schlichte & Schneckener, 2015:410; Terpstra & Frerks, 2017:279; Levi, 2018:603; Weber, 1947:152). Armed groups are often engaged in establishing civilian compliance through a combination of coercion and persuasion. Persuasion is equal to legitimization, according to academic literature (Terpstra and Frerks, 2017:280). The assumption then becomes that over the course of finding the balance between coercion and persuasion, an armed actor engaging more in establishing authority outside of the military realm, will have to increasingly turn their focus to acquiring legitimacy.

This assumption was tested with the case study of militia group Hashd al-Shaabi in Ninewa governorate, Iraq. Hashd al-Shaabi went through a transition phase, from a purely military actor to a governance actor, engaging in governance practices. According to the literature, Hashd al-Shaabi would tilt the balance towards persuasion, and legitimacy, over coercion, in establishing a sustainable authority in Ninewa. In order to understand Hashd al-Shaabi's activities along the lines of establishing civilian compliance and legitimacy in particular, the following research question was formulated:

How were sources of legitimacy strategically used by Hashd al-Shaabi in establishing civilian compliance during their transition process from military actor engaging in the US-led fight against IS to a governance actor in Ninewa governorate, in 2017 and 2018?

On the basis of an academic literature review, policy document analysis, 22 interviews and two focus group discussions with 41 individuals, as well as field notes and observations, an answer to this question has been presented in this thesis. Firstly, the transition process from a military actor to a governance

actor was discussed. Secondly, the role of coercion in establishing civilian compliance was analysed, in order to better contextualize the role that persuasion, or legitimacy, plays herein. Thirdly, the strategic use of legitimacy sources was investigated, in order to understand the ways in which legitimacy plays a role in civilian compliance. Legitimacy sources were divided over symbolic sources (myth-symbol complex, grievances and external threats) and performance-centred sources (charismatic leadership, sacrifice and martyrdom, personal loyalties, providing services and formalization) (Schlichte & Schneckener, 2015) while being aware of the relevant contextual and relational elements (Duyvestein, 2017; Scheckener, 2017). By formulating a theoretical framework connecting legitimacy to governance practices, civilian compliance and the role of coercion, this thesis has attempted to provide more insight into the relations between these concepts. It has tested this framework on an empirical case study.

8.1. Research findings

As a military actor, Hashd al-Shaabi was supported by the U.S., Iran and Turkey in the fight against IS. All international actors involved supported different Hashd al-Shaabi forces, potentially reinforcing their own interests through these local actors. Several Hashd al-Shaabi forces, the pro-Khamenei forces and Babylon Brigade in particular, have been accused of committing human rights abuses. After the defeat of IS was officially announced, Hashd al-Shaabi became increasingly involved in governance practices but remained attached to its military repertoire in the domain of security. The link with its original military character was thus maintained. Hashd al-Shaabi's influence in other governance domains, providing services and political representation, is largely based on and built from their military power. Hashd al-Shaabi's presence at security checkpoints forms the fundament from which they have an impact on service provision, by allowing who or what enters or not, and political representation, as they are the most powerful actor present and cannot be challenged by others. As their influence in both national, provincial and local levels of politics has steadily grown, several informants describe a situation of "a state within a state"[174] when explaining Hashd al-Shaabi's power.

Hashd al-Shaabi's attachment to the security domain provides an explanation the important role that coercion continues to have in Hashd al-Shaabi establishing civilian compliance. They are active in counter-rival, counter-criminal and counter-insurgent violence, and stories about harassment and looting are plenty, again mostly linked to the pro-Khamenei forces and the Babylon Brigade. Some see these events as incidents, while the majority of the interviewees and focus group discussants see a trend that has become increasingly irreversible. If coercion indeed plays an important role, what is left for persuasion? Several sources of legitimacy are strategically used by Hashd al-Shaabi as a means of acquiring legitimacy. Firstly, on the symbolic side, religion is an essential aspect within the wider myth-

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[174] Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019.

symbol complex. Shia Islam is used in gathering support and resonates with Shia communities. This makes logical sense, as Hashd al-Shaabi was established through a *fatwa* issued by the highest religious leader in Iraq, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. This created a powerful momentum around which several pre-existing militias gathered and formed Hashd al-Shaabi. The strongest Hashd al-Shaabi forces, in the pro-Khamenei group, also exert Shia sentiments but then oriented towards the Iranian Ayatollah Khamenei.

Interestingly, in case of a district without a Shia majority, Hashd al-Shaabi has turned to tribal structures and established minority forces. Although these are not as powerful as the original Hashd al-Shaabi forces, they are successful in establishing some local sense of trust. This seems to work along the lines of the sectarianism and myth-symbol complex installed under Saddam Hussein, where everyone tends to their own group in search for protection. The same system is fuelling Christian and Yezidi minorities, who tend to see Hashd al-Shaabi as a way of arming themselves, to at least be able to defend themselves should a clear threat arise. There is a link here with grievances as source of legitimacy: the need for protection of Sunni and other minority communities fuels Hashd al-Shaabi's legitimacy. Nevertheless, these minority groups are at the same time oppressed as they are allegedly not able to refuse any orders from larger Hashd al-Shaabi forces. Harassment and humiliation of civilians are also mentioned as contrasting issues related to minority groups. Sunni tribal leaders are said to be persuaded through certain benefits in terms of social status or economic gain, which leads to their support, and then this initial support is substantiated through a sense of trust in the tribe.

The symbolic sources of grievances outside of the search for protection and an external threat do play a role but are not as present as myth-symbol complexes. Although Hashd al-Shaabi forces cater to grievances of some (Shia) youth in providing them a higher social status and a salary as a fighter, Hashd al-Shaabi was not established out of a feeling of injustice, attempting to point attention to certain grievances and claiming certain rights in that sense. They mainly represent Shia sentiments, yet ignore many of the other grievances apparent in the Iraqi society. Muqtada al-Sadr, leader of the pro-Sadr force Saraya al-Salam, is somewhat of an exception, as he supported the protests in 2015 and voices a will to unite the Iraqi people through his political party, the Saairun Coalition. The external threat of IS was the momentum through which Hashd al-Shaabi was mobilized in 2014. Although this is a significant moment in the history of Hashd al-Shaabi, there was too little evidence to suggest that this is legitimacy source is strategically used. Hashd al-Shaabi is keen on showing their capability to counter any possible threat from IS though, through their presence at checkpoints and, sometimes, through arbitrary arrests.

On the side of performance-centred sources, there are two elements that speak to Shia communities mostly. These are charismatic leadership, as the most prominent leaders are all Shiites and their pictures are portrayed at checkpoints, and sacrifice and martyrdom. The latter is definitely in the strategic interest of Hashd al-Shaabi as they have set up programmes in which financial support for

martyrs' families and employment and religious support for retired fighters are provided. At the same time, the notion of sacrifice for your tribe or sect is deeply engrained in Iraq's militarized society. Nevertheless, two political parties stemming from Hashd al-Shaabi forces (Fatah, led by Hadi al-Ameri and Saairun, led by Muqtada al-Sadr) were rewarded for it during the 2018 national elections. Another legitimacy source widely apparent in Iraq is a system of personal loyalties. *Wasta* is not a new thing in Iraq and Hashd al-Shaabi is said to have used this system in acquiring support and legitimacy, again relying partly on tribal structures. Hashd al-Shaabi is not so much engaged in providing services to the local populations but it controls parts of the economy through its presence at checkpoints and interference with private businesses. Lastly, formalization is not very apparent when understood as organizing meeting or conferences, but is at stake when the focus is on the formal recognition of Hashd al-Shaabi as a government organization and its link to the *Marja'iyyah*. This is where the relational aspect of borrowed legitimacy plays a role: through aligning with a legal, official actor, Hashd al-Shaabi became less of a shady actor in the eyes of many people. Despite this, there is hardly any evidence on increasing transparency through formal meetings or gatherings found in this thesis.

8.2 Situating findings in academic and empirical debates

Some commentators in both academic as well as policy circles may suggest that the behaviour of some Hashd al-Shaabi forces should be labelled as criminal. Although this study confirms that some of the behaviour mentioned by interviewees and focus group discussants is definitely criminal and highly problematic, it also asserts that a discussion purely along the lines of the criminal character of (non-state) armed actors, rebel groups or militias is simply not helpful. Instead, this study has used a different way of understanding this type of behaviour, along the lines of strategies in establishing civilian compliance. This theoretical insight proved to be relevant in distinguishing coercive means from persuasive means and brings more nuance to the debate. From an academic point of view, a focus on either criminality or greed does not suffice in understanding these actor for it neglects the popular support that they also possess.

This should however not be regarded as a green light to policy makers to establish cooperation in peacebuilding or security domains. The effects of security cooperation with Hashd al-Shaabi by the U.S., Iran and Turkey have secured a powerful position for Hashd al-Shaabi in Iraq, but may be detrimental to a peaceful future, as each of these international partners has conflicting interests of their own. Weapon equipment by the U.S. has shown to be controversial as they spread over to forces that were not selected in vetting procedures due to corruption and (online) weapon markets. Moreover, establishing cooperation with specific forces within Hashd al-Shaabi neglects and marginalizes others. Cooperation with Christians ignores the grievances of Yezidis, Sunnis and Shiites. Supporting the Shia forces is likely to lead to harassment and humiliation of others, if current trends continue. Collaborating

with tribal leaders means reinforcing tribal systems, which often exclude women and youth and have proven to be sensitive to nepotism. Here, too, nuance and a thorough contextual investigation are essential to understand who, why, where and how actors act in the ways they do.

A focus on whether, and if so, how, these groups gain traction among (sections) of a local population brings far more insight to the table. The complexity of these groups, which is confirmed by the interviewees and focus group discussants, simply does not allow for any straightforward categorization in terms of their character, activities or whether they constitute partners in peacebuilding or security cooperation.

8.3 Discussion

With this study, I have attempted to add empirical insights to theoretical knowledge on legitimacy, governance and civilian compliance issued by armed actors in a highly complex context of Ninewa governorate Iraq, in the tumultuous timeframe of 2017 and 2018. Although I was not able to travel to Ninewa myself, due to safety issues, I have consulted more than 40 individuals on their experiences and perceptions on Hashd al-Shaabi. Despite not being able to observe the situation with my own eyes or speak to Hashd al-Shaabi insiders myself, their experiences as civilians of Ninewa showcase the ways in which civilian compliance is established by Hashd al-Shaabi, and their strategic use of legitimacy sources herein. Additionally, Erbil provided a safe haven where people felt free to talk openly and share their personal opinions with me. This thesis is based on the perceptions of supporters as well as opponents and includes neutral perspectives as well. I made sure to check controversial statements as much as possible with other interviewees or focus group discussants and in relevant literature. Lastly, this group of informants allowed me to truly grasp local developments instead of a top-down perspective from within the Hashd al-Shaabi structure, potentially organized by their PR department.

This thesis focused on the collective of Hashd al-Shaabi forces present in Ninewa and distinguished between the three groups of pro-Khamenei, pro-Sadr or pro-Sistani, or between individual forces, when possible. However, the differences between these three groups and individual forces should not be underestimated. Their interests, ideologies and strategies differ and should be seen as such. Nevertheless, the Hashd al-Shaabi forces have collectively impacted Iraqi society since 2014 and are often regarded as one collective by local communities. When individual forces were mentioned, I made sure to include them in this study, in order to provide transparency over which force is active in which district, in which forms of establishing civilian compliance or strategic use of legitimacy sources.

Future research would however benefit from such an individual approach, seeking the relations between the bigger forces and the smaller minority or tribal forces and disentangling their individual governance practices and legitimacy sources in order to provide insight into their impact on Iraqi civilians. This study disentangled numerous links between different sources of legitimacy. Martyrdom

as performance-centred source is for instance based on the myth-symbol complex of religion in the case of Hashd al-Shaabi. An investigation into those links and, if necessary, an adjustment to the framework of Schlichte and Schneckener (2015) to account for these links would be advised. A last but strong contribution is repeated once more: academic and policy research needs to incorporate nuance into dealing with armed actors. Instead of regarding them as 'good' or 'bad', they may very well be 'something in between'. Although that is a more difficult message to capture in theory and a challenging message to sell in politics, it does justice to the empirical reality on the ground.

Epilogue

This epilogue comments on an important development that occurred outside of the timeframe of this thesis. In June 2019, several attacks were committed on U.S. targets, such as an oil refinery of Exxon Mobile and an Iraqi army base where U.S. advisors were staying. These attacks are suspected to come from Hashd al-Shaabi forces, although these allegations have not (yet) been confirmed. The U.S. diplomatic services have withdrawn all their non-essential diplomatic staff from Iraq in May 2019, as they found that U.S. diplomatic staff was in too much risk by staying in Iraq. It is unclear what the U.S. drove to this decision, although they may have had intelligence on the June 2019 attacks. Meanwhile, tensions between the U.S. and Iran are on the rise.[175]

On the 1st of July 2019, Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi issued a decree that would integrate all of the Hashd al-Shaabi forces into the ISF.[176] The deadline for full integration was set on the 31st of July 2019 but Falih Alfayyadh, advisor to the committee tasked with organizing the integration process, has requested an extension of two more months.[177] This means full integration would have to be finished by October 2019. Additional analysis and future research can investigate whether and to what extent the integration process is successful and what effect this has on the local dynamics presented in this thesis.

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In respecting the privacy and anonymity of the interviewees and focus group discussants, I do not disclose their names or any other information that may trace back to them, including the time and place of the meeting between us.

Group 1: NGO and civil society experts
Interview with NGO expert 1 on 16 May 2019 on videocall.

Interview with NGO expert 2 on 6 May 2019 in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Interview with NGO expert 3 on 9 May 2019 in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Interview with NGO expert 4 and 5 on 14 May 2019 in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Interview with NGO expert 6 on 29 April 2019 in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Interview with civil society expert on 20 February 2019 in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Interview with activist from Mosul on 13 May 2019 on videocall.

Interview with activist from Telafar on 24 April 2019 in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Group 2: government representatives
Interview with LGR of Hamdaniya District on 2 March 2019 in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Interview with LGR of Sheikhan District on 13 May 2019 in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Interview with LGR of Telkaif on 28 February 2019 in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq and 7 May 2019 on Skype.

Focus Group Discussion with LGRs of Sinjar district on 21 February 2019 in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Focus Group Discussion with LGRs of Telafar District on 24 April 2019 in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Interview with NGR of the Ministry of Peshmerga on 22 April 2019 in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Interview with NGR of Ninewa Provincial Council on 25 February 2019 in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Group 3: media experts
Interview with local expert 1 on 28 April 2019 in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Interview with local expert 2 on 29 April 2019 in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Interview with local expert 3 on 30 April 2019 in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Interview with local expert 4 on 27 April 2019 in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Group 4: youth activists
Interview with youth activists from Mosul District on 2 May 2019 in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Interview with youth activists from Hamdaniya (Christian) on 2 May 2019 in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

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