



Clingendael

Netherlands Institute of International Relations

Period February – May 2018

Mapping and tracking the power, relations and attitudes of Iraq's Al-Hashd al-Sha'abi

Justificatory note on methodology

To the reader:

- This document outlines the methodological issues associated with phase 2 of our mapping and tracking project of the power base, relations and attitudes (towards the Iraqi state) of selected Iraqi Al-Hashd al-Sha'abi groups for the period February – May 2018.
- It should be read in conjunction with our main methodological note that includes a reflection on phase 1 monitoring for the period January – September 2017 and our excel spreadsheet that contains the content of our methodology, i.e. how we have operationalized our key concepts through indicators and variables.

Conflict Research Unit (CRU) – Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'

This note is part of the Levant research program on hybrid security organizations:

<https://www.clingendael.org/research-program/levant>

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1. Introduction

This short document outlines the methodological issues related to phase 2 of our mapping and tracking project of the power base, relations and attitudes (towards the Iraqi state) of selected Iraqi Al-Hashd al-Sha’abi groups between February 1 and May 11 (the eve of the Iraqi parliamentary elections) in 2018. It complements a more extensive methodology note and excel spreadsheet that contains the content of our baseline methodology.

2. Main issues

- **Velocity of change:** Data for some dimensions and/or variables takes more than one tracking period to change. This is caused by the longitudinal characteristic of some variables (for example, parliamentary representation only changes every 4 years) or due to other contextual factors that limit changes in specific dimensions and/or variables (for example, the decrease in the intensity of the fight against the Islamic State reduced the relevance of coercive capabilities of the different Hashd groups, which has meant that their hiring/firing has largely been put on hold during the current tracking period). In turn, this means that some dimensions became less relevant and show limited change.
- **Volume of data:** Data availability varied significantly across different dimensions and/or variables for this monitoring period. This is the result of bias in incident reporting by open-source media during the tracking period that has focused on headline events characteristic of the period. For example, the parliamentary elections of May 2018 skewed the data with an over-reporting of political incidents. This created reporting (and thus data) gaps on coercive & security and socio-religious power dimensions. To address this issue, proxy indicators were used for some dimensions and/or variables. For instance, meetings of particular Hashd groups with tribes served as proxy for socio-religious power by viewing them as part of as their electoral outreach strategy.
- **Relevance of data:** Data availability for different groups depends to a significant extent on the degree to which they remain active at the level of national politics in Iraq, which is what the project tracks. When the intensity of the fight against the Islamic State decreased, several groups (for example the Tribal Mobilization Forces and Sinjar Resistance Units) have largely focused on their local interests and reduced their role at the national level (in politics or in national security). This automatically weakens the power and intergroup relations of such groups within our framework – even though they might still play a significant role in the local context of the towns and cities they dominate.
- **Data representativeness:** Due to data volume and relevance challenges, it was necessary to modify the list of open-sources used within this tracking period. This included adding extra sources to cover gaps (for example, the LSE ME Blog, the International Center for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, and expert social media accounts – Inna Rudolf, Matthew Barber, and others). Also, due to the redundancy of incidents reported by some open-source media outlets, a number of local media outlets were dropped (for example, Afaq TV as it also proved time consuming to track videos of news segments). Finally, several data gaps were covered through key informant interviews with experts working in/on Iraq.
- **Veracity of data:** Originally, we deployed the term ‘socio-religious legitimacy’, which we replaced in this monitoring period with the term ‘socio-religious power’ to align it better with the other dimensions of power and in reflection of the fact that our variables and

indicators reflect power more than legitimacy. For this monitoring period, socio-religious power has mostly been measured by the proxy of outreach activity (e.g. meetings and patronage deals with tribes). This is imperfect as we are not sure whether/how this actually increases the legitimacy of the Hashd groups engaging in such activities. Lacking reliable public perception surveys, we found no other online sources to get a better handle on the issue.

3. Conclusion

By and large we feel we have addressed the major methodological issues in a way that has ensured the data representation remains true to the objectives of the project. Our second policy brief offers as good an approximation of the reality of Hashd developments as we could gather from online, open-source information in English and Arabic, bearing in mind the issues highlighted above.

Annex 1: About Clingendael, CRU and the Levant research program

Clingendael. Founded in 1983, the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' (or the Clingendael Institute) is a leading think-tank and training centre in the field of international relations. The research and training programmes of the Institute focus on security and conflict, European studies, diplomatic studies, and international energy studies. Clients of the Institute are ministries of foreign affairs, defence, development cooperation, economic affairs and justice, as well as international organisations and the private sector.

The Conflict Research Unit. The Conflict Research Unit (CRU) is a specialized team within the Institute, conducting applied, policy-oriented research and developing practical tools that assist national and multilateral governmental and non-governmental organizations in their engagement in fragile and conflict-affected situations. Clients include the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its Embassies, as well as ministries of foreign affairs and development cooperation of other bilateral donors (e.g. the United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Germany), UN organisations, the OECD/DAC, the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the European Commission, and Dutch and International NGOs. Building on a solid understanding of the political economy of conflict dynamics and transition processes, CRU research activities encompass the three central components of a comprehensive approach towards fragile and conflict-affected situations, i.e. security, justice and rule of law; governance and statebuilding; and peacebuilding, job creation and socio-economic development. Additional areas of research are gender and conflict; and (inter)national aid effectiveness and aid architecture issues.

The Levant research program. CRU's Levant research program analysis the impact of hybrid coercive organizations in the Levant (mostly Syria and Iraq) on state performance and development. It understands hybrid coercive organizations as those that compete and collaborate with the state at the same time but with varying intensity, depending on issues and time. Towards this end, the research program includes four dimensions of analysis: 1) the nature and behaviour of hybrid coercive organizations themselves (this focuses on the Hashd, the Peshmerga, pro-Assad militias and the Kurdish YPG); 2) conflict, reconstruction and reconciliation in Syria and Iraq, 3) the foreign policy of Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia towards the conflicts in Syria and Iraq and 4) wider socio-political developments in the broader Middle East. See: <https://www.clingendael.org/research-program/levant>