Peace and Conflict Studies
Lund University
Department of Political Science

Supervisor: Roxanna Sjöstedt

Day after the Caliphate

A comparative study of the political participation of Shia militias in post IS Iraq using the militia to party framework

LUNDS UNIVERSITET

Abstract

The territorial defeat of the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq in 2019 marked a turning point in the country's security and political order, foregrounding the challenge of integrating powerful Shia militias into formal politics while preserving state authority and democratic processes. This study examines why some militias have been more successful than others in translating wartime influence into electoral and institutional power in post-IS Iraq. Drawing on the militia-to-party framework, supplemented by network-based approaches, the paper conducts a comparative case study of the Badr Organization and Kataʾib Hezbollah (KH). Despite shared ideological roots, participation in the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), and close ties to Iran, these two groups have achieved markedly different political outcomes.

The analysis focuses on three key explanatory dimensions: internal cohesion and incentives (factions), societal support and mobilization (followers), and the relationship between political participation and organizational purpose. The findings demonstrate that Badr's comparatively strong electoral performance and sustained parliamentary presence are rooted in early institutional penetration, cohesive leadership, broad societal embedding, and incentive structures that reward political participation. In contrast, KH's political engagement remains subordinate to a resistance-centered identity, with selective incentives and prestige still anchored primarily in military activity, limiting its ability to expand electoral appeal.

The study argues that divergent outcomes are best explained by organizational adaptation and strategic choice rather than ideology or external patronage alone. More broadly, the Iraqi case challenges linear militia-to-party models by illustrating how armed actors can participate in formal politics without full demilitarization, contributing to a durable hybrid political order. The article thus advances understanding of post-conflict political transitions in contexts where armed groups remain central to governance.

Key Words: Iraq; Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF); militia-to-party transition; Shia militias; Badr Organization; Kataʾib Hezbollah; post-conflict politics; hybrid political order;

Word Count: 7443

Table of contents:

1. Introduction

The defeat of the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq in 2019 marked a critical turning point in the country's political and security landscape (Britannica, 2025). Shi'a militias have been central to this transformation, particularly those incorporated into the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), which emerged as powerful military and political actors during the war against IS (Mansour, 2018). In the post-IS period, Iraq has faced the challenge of reintegrating these groups into formal state structures while maintaining political stability and democratic processes (Center for Preventive Action, 2024).

Within this context, armed groups have adopted different strategies in responding to the transition from wartime mobilization to post-conflict politics. Some militias have increasingly pursued political participation through elections and parliamentary engagement (Haddad, 2019. pp. 47-55), while others have remained more focused on maintaining armed autonomy and authority structures parallel to the state (Al-Kaabi, 2025). These diverging paths raise important questions about why certain groups are more successful than others in translating military influence into political power.

To address these questions, this study draws on the *militia-to-party* theoretical framework, which examines how armed groups transition into political actors following the end of conflict. The framework emphasizes factors such as organizational competence, group cohesion, ideological flexibility, and willingness to operate within state institutions.

Applying this framework to post-IS Iraq allows for a comparative analysis of the Badr Organization and Kata'ib Hezbollah, two influential Shia militias that share similar origins but have achieved different electoral outcomes (Makhzoomi, 2024). While both groups played significant roles in the fight against IS and maintained ties to external patrons such as state entities in Iran and armed groups in Lebanon and Syria (Crenshaw & Robinson, 2021; Crenshaw & Robinson 2024), their approaches to political engagement and state integration differ substantially (Knights et al,. 2021; Crenshaw & Robinson, 2024). Badr and KH got 18 and 6 seats respectively in the parliamentary election of 2025 (Channel8, 2025), which highlights the consequences of these differences. Examining these differences provides insight into how organizational behavior and strategic choices shape electoral outcomes in a post-conflict environment.

By situating these cases within Iraq's broader post-IS political conditions and the militia-to-party literature, this study seeks to explain how variations in militia behavior contribute to different levels of political success. In doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of post-conflict political transitions and the challenges of democratic consolidation in contexts where armed actors remain influential.

1.1 Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the different priorities and outcomes of emergent militias after the fall of IS in Iraq relating to literature surrounding armed groups in transition. To clearly illustrate and highlight these differences the theoretical framework *Militias turned parties* will be utilized. The focus will be on two groups originating from the same ideological background. Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) and the Badr Organization represent differing branches of the growing shia-militias in Iraq and the aim of this paper is to analyse their respective paths using the aforementioned theory. To do this we will answer the question: *What factors explain the different political outcomes of the Badr Organization and Kata'ib Hezbollah in their transition from militias into political actors in post-IS Iraq?*

2. Previous Research

2.1. Iraq

Academic research on Iraq has been extensive but uneven, shaped largely by external political and security developments rather than sustained scholarly engagement with domestic dynamics. Periods of intense academic attention have tended to coincide with moments of crisis, most notably the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, the subsequent sectarian conflict, and the rise and defeat of the Islamic State (IS) (Ahram, 2016, pp. 850-858). As a result, the literature is heavily concentrated on moments of rupture and transition, while periods of relative stability or post-conflict consolidation have received comparatively limited attention.

Much of the existing scholarship focuses on state failure, sectarianism, and foreign intervention, particularly the role of the United States and Iran (Mansour, 2021. pp. 3-8). Studies examining Iranian influence in Iraq have been especially prominent, often analysing

Shia militias primarily through the lens of proxy warfare and regional power competition (Zimmt, 2025). While this body of work provides valuable insight into external constraints on Iraqi political actors, it frequently treats militias as extensions of foreign policy agendas rather than having its own agency with internal structures, strategic preferences, and domestic political ambitions (Knights & Smith, 2025. pp. 1-9).

A similar pattern is evident in research on the rise and defeat of IS. The majority of studies centre on IS as the primary object of analysis or on large-scale military coalitions involved in its defeat. In this context, Iraqi militias, particularly those incorporated into the PMF, are often discussed only as components of a broader security apparatus (Mcfate, 2015). This approach has contributed to portrayals of PMF factions as relatively homogeneous actors, limiting more granular analysis of variation among individual groups (Mansour, 20221. pp. 3-8).

Consequently, there remains a notable gap in the literature concerning the post-IS period and the political transformation of pro-government militias. Specifically, few studies systematically examine how these groups have navigated the transition from wartime mobilisation to post-conflict politics or how differences in organisational behaviour shape their political outcomes. This study seeks to address that gap.

2.2. Militias turned parties

In research regarding militias transforming into political parties there are a few key researchers. Söderberg Kovacs (2007) wrote her doctoral thesis about why some rebel groups/militias turn into political parties and why others do not, examining different factors that influence the success of this transformation. Manning (2007, 2008) has written articles in a similar vein, also examining the factors that lead militias to successful or unsuccessful transitions. Zaks (2023, pp. 251-252) takes a different approach in her research and defines transitioning militias into three categories based on their chance for success in transformation. The consensus of this research is the need for transforming actors to appeal to the broader population and the importance of collective incentives, that everyone in a militia has to have the intention to transform the militia in order for the transformation to succeed.

Outside the field of militia-to-parties there has also been other research into hybrid systems where elites, such as the leaders of militias employ patronage systems for popular support, in

a mix between neo-patrimonial and modern states (Barma, 2017, pp. 186-189). The case studies these researchers have used focus on a variety of actors such as the KLA in Kosovo, the FMNLN in El Salvador, The Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and more. This theoretical framework has been applied to a wide range of cases. However, much of the existing research focuses on militias that rebel against the government and later transform, or attempt to transform, into official opposition parties. In this case, this is not applicable as the militias coexist with the government relatively peacefully. The militias that are central to this analysis fought on the side of the government against IS and were part of the government-coordinated PMF. This analysis fills a gap in the literature by examining militias aligned with the government as they become political actors instead of militias that are in opposition to the government.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Militias turned parties

This analysis aims to analyse the transitional phase of the respective groups and utilize the framework established by Zaks (2023, p. 250-252) to categorize the participation of the groups as either “failed”, “nominal” or “seated”. This study will use Zaks’ categorization to outline how their differing strategies have contributed to their respective electoral success. Zaks' emphasizes the chronological aspect of the transition, separating parties that participate in one election and those that remain for three or more election cycles (Zaks, 2023, p. 252). For the sake of this analysis that parameter will not be included since the selected groups only entered politics after the fall of IS.

Söderberg Kovacs highlights three major factors that have an effect during the peace process: 1) *Factions*, the internal cohesion of the rebel group/militia, 2) *Followers,* the level of support the rebel group/militia enjoys from the population and 3) *Friends,* the amount of legitimacy the international community is willing to grant the rebels (Söderberg Kovacs, 2007, p. 26). Manning similarly divides the challenges facing transitioning militias into two categories. Those which imply adjustments in inter-elite relations and those which require changes in the parties’ collective incentive structures, since the incentive strategies that work in war may not work in politics (Manning, 2007, p. 254).

For this paper three factors have been chosen to analyze and compare the two actors:

First, an analysis of the internal cohesion of the group, the overarching goal and the selective incentives the group provides will be stated as *Factions*. This analysis leans on the frameworks of Söderberg Kovacs and Manning and will be measured through infighting among leadership, statements regarding political goals and ambitions, and what incentives are provided to members of the respective organisations.

Second, an analysis on the nature of support among the broader population and the collective incentive strategies employed by the organisations will be stated as *Followers*. Integrating Manning and Söderberg Kovacs perspectives on the need for militias to shift their focus to receive wider support from the population. This will be measured through the actions or speeches of leaders that imply a shift from appealing only to the ingroup to the broader population.

Third, an analysis of a shift from a military organizational structure to one that is more politically focused will be stated as *Participation and Purpose*. This is based on Van de Goor & De Zeeuw (2007) and Manning's research in this area and will be measured by if former military leaders have transformed into political spokespeople, and if the structures of the organizations have shifted from military to political.

We will combine these theoretical perspectives and factors into a framework that we can use to explain the reasons for the success or failure of transition for the militias. Can the varying factors that Manning, Söderberg Kovacs, Van de Goor & De Zeeuw and Zaks emphasize explain why the Badr Organization had a more successful 2025 election as compared to Kata'ib Hezbollah?

3.2 Networks and organization

In addition to the primary framework as described above this analysis draws on the network-based approaches developed by Staniland (2014) and adapted to an Iraqi context by Mansour (2021) as a complementary conceptual tool. Whereas Zaks' framework centres on electoral participation and parliamentary outcomes (2023, pp. 249-252), the network perspective allows for a more granular assessment of the organisational structures and strategic capacities that underpin those outcomes. Rather than serving as an alternative

explanatory model, this approach is used to contextualise variation in behaviour among armed political actors operating within similar institutional constraints.

Building on Staniland's emphasis on internal cohesion and Mansour's extension of this logic to post-conflict and hybrid political orders (2021, p. 9), the framework highlights two key dimensions: horizontal cohesion within leadership structures and vertical integration with social constituencies and state institutions.

While Mansour and Staniland both emphasise the adaptive and evolving nature of armed networks over time (2021, pp. 9-15), the chronological dimension of organisational development is not foregrounded in this analysis. As with the exclusion of temporal sequencing in Zaks' framework (2023, p. 250), this decision is made to maintain analytical focus on the selected groups and to avoid overextending the framework in a highly volatile political environment. Used in this manner, the network approach supplements Zaks' categorisation by linking electoral outcomes to underlying organisational and strategic variation rather than treating participation alone as determinative.

4. Research Design

4.1. Methodology

We have elected to perform a comparative case study analysis based in the militia to party framework to understand how KH and the Badr Organization have achieved different outcomes in their transition from militias to political actors in Post-IS Iraq. These groups have been selected as comparable cases due to their shared traits such as Shia militia origins, being part of the PMF coalition and their relations to Iran (Counter Extremism Project:a, n.d., pp. 1-5, Counter Extremism Project:b, n.d., pp. 1-5). With these similarities in mind it becomes necessary to find the factors that can explain their differing political engagement and varying levels of success in elections.

The analysis focuses on how differences in organizational institutionalization and engagement with the Iraqi state influence each group's political transformation. The militia-to-party framework helps identify key factors such as the civilian following the group is trying to attract, collective and selective incentives granted by the group, internal cohesion and splintering within the groups and finally electoral participation and its political purpose.

The analysis relies on a combination of primary data, mainly utilizing the few direct statements from the groups in question and parliamentary election results. This will be supplemented by secondary academic literature describing the internal organisation of the groups in question. These materials are used to identify patterns in organizational behavior, political engagement, and strategic decision-making that reflect each group's level of institutionalization and relationship with the Iraqi state.

This forms a clear empirical basis and allows us to understand and assess each group's political integration. Indicators such as electoral participation, stated political ambitions and bureaucratic capacity will be used to evaluate the political transition. Drawing on these empirical indicators in combination with the framework established above this analysis will attempt to explain how differences in internal organization and strategic choices can contribute to divergent political outcomes despite similar ideological circumstances. Throughout this process, a reflexive approach is applied, acknowledging how interpretive choices and potential researcher bias may influence the selection and evaluation of evidence. By consistently applying the same criteria to both cases, the study seeks to ensure a balanced and transparent comparison.

4.2 Material

This study draws primarily on secondary academic literature, supplemented by electoral data and official statements issued by the armed–political organizations under examination. The analytical framework is grounded in peer-reviewed scholarship on armed group transformation, militia institutionalization, and post-conflict political participation, particularly the work of De Zeeuw, Manning, Söderberg Kovacs, Mansour, and Zaks. This literature provides the conceptual tools necessary to analyze changes in organizational behavior, leadership roles, and forms of political engagement, while situating the Iraqi case within broader comparative debates on militia-to-party transformations.

Empirically, the study relies on academic analyses of the PMF, KH, and the Badr Organization, which offer detailed accounts of organizational evolution, internal hierarchies, and relationships with the Iraqi state and external patrons. These works form the core

empirical foundation for assessing how armed groups adapt to political participation following major conflict.

To complement the secondary literature, the analysis incorporates official Iraqi parliamentary election results to evaluate levels of political participation, representation, and electoral performance over time. This data facilitates systematic comparison between armed actors that have achieved sustained parliamentary presence and those whose electoral engagement has been more limited. In addition, the study examines public statements, policy platforms, and official communications released by KH, the Badr Organization, and affiliated political movements. It should be mentioned that these are read as translations to English and not in original Arabic text, meaning that there is a risk of mis-translations.

These materials are used to assess how each group articulates its political objectives, frames democratic participation, and positions armed resistance in relation to governance and state authority. Together, this combination of secondary scholarship and selectively integrated primary material enables a grounded and analytically rigorous assessment of militia transformation in post–Islamic State Iraq.

4.3 Delimitations

Several delimitations define the scope of the analysis. First, the study focuses on the period following the territorial defeat of the Islamic State in 2019. Earlier phases of militia formation and armed activity are addressed only insofar as they provide necessary context for post-IS political participation and organizational adaptation. This temporal focus allows for closer examination of political behavior after large-scale conflict has receded.

Second, the analysis is limited to KH and the Badr Organization. These cases share similar ideological roots in Shia Islamist politics and longstanding ties to Iran (Counter Extremism Project, n.d., pp. 1-5), yet display divergent patterns of political participation. This case selection controls for ideology and external alignment, allowing the analysis to emphasize organizational choices, leadership adaptation, and modes of engagement rather than doctrinal differences.

Third, the study confines its scope to formal political behavior, including electoral participation, parliamentary representation, and public political discourse. Informal practices such as coercion, patronage, and parallel security structures, as well as internal decision-making and factional dynamics, are not examined systematically due to limited reliable data.

Finally, reliance on secondary literature and publicly available materials constrains insight into internal motivations and strategic debates, but ensures analytical consistency and comparative clarity across cases.

5. Background

5.1. Iraq and the Emergence of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)

The post-2003 Iraqi political order has been shaped by weak institutions, fragmented authority, and the persistence of non-state armed actors. The dismantling of the Baʿathist security apparatus following the US-led invasion eroded the state's monopoly on violence. Subsequent governments faced difficulties rebuilding professional and politically neutral security institutions (Britannica, 2025). Sectarian polarization, elite competition, and uneven security-sector reform created permissive conditions for armed groups to operate alongside, and often outside of, formal state authority (Anbori et al, 2024. pp. 232-236).

These dynamics became pronounced in 2014, when the Islamic State (IS) captured significant territory following the rapid collapse of the Iraqi Security Forces (Britannica, 2025). In response, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani issued a fatwa calling for national mobilization, leading to the formation of the PMF. Although frequently described as a spontaneous popular response, the PMF incorporated numerous pre-existing armed groups with established leadership structures, ideological orientations, and external patronage ties (Knights et al., 2021).

From the outset, the PMF occupied an ambiguous position within Iraq's security architecture. While formally linked to the state, many constituent factions retained autonomous command

structures, independent sources of legitimacy, and distinct political objectives (Azizi, 2022. pp. 506-509). The PMF functioned less as a unified organization than as a networked assemblage of militias whose coordination was driven by shared threat perceptions rather than centralized command and control (Knights et al., 2021).

Patterns of financing reinforced this hybrid character. Over time, the PMF secured a permanent allocation from the national budget, strengthening its institutional durability and political leverage (Mansour, 2021. pp. 12-17). However, state funding did not eliminate factional autonomy. Several groups maintained independent revenue streams through control of border crossings, checkpoints, and local economic activity, allowing them to operate with relative independence while benefiting from legal recognition (Rached, 2025. pp. 1174-1178). Financial institutionalization consolidated the PMF while limiting the state's capacity to enforce discipline across its factions.

By the time of IS territorial defeat in 2019, the PMF had become an established component of Iraq's security and political landscape. Its continued relevance can be explained by its role in counter-IS operations and the Iraqi state's reliance on non-state actors to manage security threats (Knights, 2024. pp. 1116-1121). The PMF framework disproportionately empowered long-standing, well-organized, and externally supported militias, which came to dominate leadership positions and resource distribution (Rached, 2025. pp. 1170-1174).

Within this framework, KH and the Badr Organization emerged as particularly influential actors. Both possessed significant organizational capacity, combat experience, and close ties to Iran, enabling them to shape PMF structures from within. Badr integrated politically early through embedding itself within state institutions, whereas KH remained confrontational and armed, resulting in two different processes of political transformation post-IS.

5.2 Kataʾib Hezbollah

Kataʾib Hezbollah emerged in 2003 as an umbrella organization composed of several smaller Shia factions. Its founder, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, had prior involvement with the Badr Organization and longstanding ties to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Lebanese Hezbollah. These relationships shaped KH's ideological orientation, organizational structure, and operational capacity. Early recruits received training from Lebanese Hezbollah,

and analysts assess that the IRGC played a direct role in the group's formation. KH also developed logistical networks to facilitate Iranian weapons transfers into Iraq (Crenshaw & Robinson, 2024).

After consolidating into one group in 2007, KH conducted attacks against US and coalition forces, leading to its eventual designation as a terrorist organization by the United States in 2009. Following the US withdrawal in 2011, the group declined to disarm, citing continued instability and foreign military presence (ibid).

The emergence of IS in 2014 represented a significant institutional opportunity for KH. Muhandis co-founded the PMF and assumed a central role in its organization, facilitating the placement of KH-affiliated figures in leadership positions within the PMF (Knights, 2024). KH's participation in major operations, including Jurf al-Nasr, Fallujah, and Mosul, contributed to its reputation as one of the PMF's most capable factions (Crenshaw & Robinson, 2024).

Following the PMF's formal incorporation into Iraq's security framework, KH gained increased institutional legitimacy. However, its close alignment with Iran and alleged involvement in the suppression of protests in 2021 generated domestic criticism. The killing of Muhandis alongside IRGC commander Qassem Soleimani in a US drone strike in January 2020 further had already disrupted KH's internal leadership structure, leading to factional competition (Knights et al., 2023).

After 2021, KH expanded its political engagement through its political wing, the Hoquq Movement, and its alignment with the Fateh Alliance. While electoral outcomes were mixed, KH retained influence through its role in government formation, including support for the administration of Prime Minister Mohammed al-Sudani. During this period, KH-affiliated actors contributed to the expansion of PMF legal and financial privileges, including increased budget allocations and protections for personnel (Crenshaw & Robinson, 2024). Parallel to these political activities, KH has continued to emphasize armed resistance as a core component of its identity (al-Kaabi, 2025).

5.3 The Badr Organization

The Badr Organization is among the oldest and most institutionalized Shia political-military actors in Iraq. It originated in the early 1980s as the armed wing of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), formed by Iraqi exiles in Iran during the Iran–Iraq War. From its inception, Badr received extensive support from the IRGC and functioned as an auxiliary force in Iranian military operations (Gulmohamad, 2024). This experience shaped its hierarchical structure, strategic orientation, and enduring ties to Iran (Knights et al., 2021).

Following the 2003 invasion, Badr returned to Iraq and pursued a strategy of political integration rather than demobilization. The collapse of state authority enabled it to convert its armed capacity into political influence while retaining military capacity (Knights et al., 2021). Badr adopted a dual strategy combining electoral participation with deep institutional penetration, particularly within the Interior Ministry and security services. Sectarian violence during the mid-2000s reinforced Badr's security role and facilitated its expansion within state institutions. The organization participated in elections from 2005 onward, consolidated its bureaucratic presence, and increasingly framed itself as a conventional political actor (Gulmohamad, 2024).

The rise of IS in 2014 further strengthened Badr's position. As a leading PMF faction, it leveraged organizational cohesion and Iranian ties to enhance its legitimacy. Formal incorporation into the PMF provided legal status and state funding but did not result in full subordination to central authority. Badr retained autonomous command structures, reinforcing ongoing ambiguities surrounding sovereignty and the state's monopoly on violence (Gulmohamad, 2024; Al Aloosy, 2023).

By the post-IS period, Badr had become a central actor within Iraq's political and security architecture, illustrating a militia-to-party transformation rooted in early institutional penetration rather than post-conflict demobilization (Thurber, 2014. pp. 904-906).

6. Analysis

6.1. Factions

Söderberg Kovacs conceptualizes *factions* in terms of internal cohesion, arguing that power struggles and divergent strategic goals within organizations constitute significant obstacles to successful transformation. The transition from armed struggle to legal politics may disrupt existing distributions of selective benefits and disrupt the balance of power in the organisation. If not carefully managed, this can weaken organizational cohesion and alienate core constituencies. One way organizations can mitigate these risks and stabilize internal cohesion is through selective incentives, which reward members whose roles may be less valuable in a political context and help align them with the organization's overarching goals (Söderberg Kovacs, 2007, p. 27-29).

KH illustrates the challenges of factional competition. Following the death of Muhandis, the position of secretary general was contested between the factions of al-Hamadawi and al-Mohammadawi, with al-Hamadawi reportedly requesting that al-Mohammadawi step aside (Knights 2023). Despite KH's leadership split, al-Hamadawi and al-Mohammadawi have continued to serve jointly since 2021, and the organization has consistently worked toward further military integration since then (Knights, 2022), suggesting that factional disputes have been managed without affecting the core goal of the organisation. From the perspective of Söderberg Kovacs (2007, pp. 26-29), disputes within the organisation can weaken cohesion and obstruct political transformation. Even if those disputes are later resolved, having them at key points during political transformation will inevitably posit a negative effect on said transformation.

KH provides their members with selective incentives through the valorization of martyrdom. They post pictures and photos of martyrs on their website (Kataib Hezbollah, 2026). In Islam, martyrdom confers symbolic capital, status, and honor on fighters and their families (Al-Shia, 2024). The focus on martyrdom is an example of how KH leadership prioritizes the military branch of their organization which is in line with Mansour's (2021, pp. 11-13) definition of KH as a vanguard network that has weak vertical ties to its base , limiting their broader political transformation. By contrast, political participation within KH's affiliated party,

Huquq, offers comparatively limited symbolic or material rewards. While Huquq's six parliamentary representatives feature regularly in the movement's social media output, they receive minimal public engagement (Harakat Huquq, n.d.) (Huquq Movement, n.d.)

Badr, by contrast, demonstrates how cohesive leadership paired with strategically aligned incentives facilitates transformation. Under the longstanding and dominant leadership of Hadi al-Amiri, Badr has integrated its members into Iraq's formal political institutions, including parliament, ministries, and provincial offices (Crenshaw & Robinson, 2021). They have also provided access to benefits like contracts and resources to members and allies (Mansour, 2021, pp. 26-27). The result of that becomes that Badr ties the loyalty of their members directly to political participation. By embedding incentives within the political sphere rather than a militarized structure, Badr strengthens internal cohesion while promoting its transformation into a viable political actor.

A similarity between the organizations is that both Badr and KH refer to the PMF as an integral component of the Iraqi security apparatus (Sommer, 2025, p.19). This framing serves a dual purpose: it presents the organizations as indispensable to national security while simultaneously legitimizing the provision of selective incentives to their own members. The PMF provides both groups with an efficient mechanism to grant selective benefits to their followers, as it allows them to externalize costs to the state (Mansour, 2021, pp. 27-29). This helps the organisations solidify their base to avoid factional fragmentation. Accordingly, the leaders of Badr and KH, al-Amiri and al-Hamadawi respectively, have prioritized expanding the PMF's legal, financial, and institutional privileges, including access to state pensions, immunity provisions, and increased budgetary allocations (al-Kaabi, et al., 2025). This strategy aligns with Söderberg Kovacs' (2007, p. 29) argument that sustaining selective incentives for members whose military utility declines in a more political context is essential to maintaining their commitment during transformation. By institutionalizing benefits through the PMF, Badr and KH are able to secure the loyalty of their core constituencies while continuing the process of political transition. KH maintains internal cohesion through military-focused incentives and shared goals, but its factionalism and militarized priorities limit political transformation, whereas Badr combines cohesive leadership, unified political goals, and strategically aligned incentives to facilitate both loyalty and integration into state politics.

6.2. Followers

In line with Söderberg Kovacs' (2007, p. 26) conceptualization, the factor *Followers* refers to the level of support a group enjoys among the wider population and the extent to which this support extends beyond active members of the organization itself. In a transitional context, this dimension becomes particularly relevant, as organizations are required to shift from mobilizing support through conflict-oriented narratives to appealing to a broader electorate. Applying this perspective to the Iraqi case, there appears to be a clear difference between Badr and KH in terms of how each group relates to and mobilizes its respective support base, which may help explain their differing electoral outcomes in the 2025 parliamentary elections (Channel8, 2026).

Utilizing Mansour's network-based definition of Iraqi armed actors, Badr can be understood as fitting into the category of parochial networks, while KH resembles what Mansour defines as a vanguard network. Parochial networks are characterized by their ability to command a social base that extends beyond the organization's armed members to include regular members of society, who engage with the group through elections and other state-linked institutions. Vanguard networks, by contrast, are less embedded in society and tend to rely on ideological cohesion, hierarchical structures, and external patronage rather than broad-based popular support (Mansour, 2021, pp. 9-15).

Badr's position as a parochial network implies that it commands a follower base that participates in elections and thus grants the organization a degree of institutional power within the Iraqi state. As Mansour (2021, p. 9) notes, parochial networks such as Badr "command a social base, which vote for them in elections and as such provide them with institutional power in the Iraqi state," resulting in authority derived from both ideational and economic capital connected to state structures. This broader base of followers appears to influence the organization's behavior, as the need to appeal to voters outside the immediate ingroup requires the articulation of clearer political ambitions and positions related to governance, reform, and participation in the political process.

This dynamic corresponds with Manning's (2007, pp. 252-254) argument that militias seeking to transition into political actors must adjust their incentive structures and political messaging in order to attract wider support from the population, as strategies that are effective during conflict may not translate effectively into an electoral context. Badr's

engagement in electoral politics and its emphasis on institutional participation can be interpreted as part of a broader attempt to appeal to a heterogeneous electorate. In this sense, the organization's follower base not only provides electoral support but also shapes the direction of its political discourse, contributing to a gradual reframing of its public image toward the broader Iraqi population.

Following Söderberg Kovacs (2007. pp. 23-25) conceptualization of incentives, the nature of the Badr Organisation enables them to offer collective incentives since the aforementioned reframing has granted them political legitimacy. The organisation is no longer viewed as a fringe group mostly involved in armed activity but rather a political machinery with armed elements that has the ability to orchestrate political change that will benefit its electorate (Knights et al., 2021). This means moving away from dealing only in matters related to security and opposition to foreign presence in Iraq, since these issues are no longer seen as the most pressing (Arab Barometer, 2024, pp. 3-8). Badr's alteration of their collective incentives follows Manning's theory that collective incentives change the identity of the party (2007, p. 254) and highlights the transformative capacity of the organization.

KH, on the other hand, appears to face more significant constraints in this regard. According to Mansour (2021, p. 10), vanguard-style networks such as KH are "less accountable to a large social base" and are therefore ill-equipped to manage a transition into conventional politics or to develop forms of governance that resonate with wider segments of society. The limited size and scope of KH's follower base restrict the organization's ability to mobilize electoral support, despite its continued relevance as an armed actor.

This limitation is also reflected in KH's stated political goals and rhetoric (Kata'ib Hezbollah, n.d.). While the political wing expresses intention to democratically participate and achieve constitutional change (Huquq, 2026), much of KH's discourse remains centered on the role of the resistance, past military sacrifices, and opposition to foreign interference (Al Kaabi, 2025). This framing represents a perpetuation of wartime narratives rather than a shift toward addressing the broader concerns of the Iraqi electorate. Söderberg Kovacs (2007, pp. 21–22) argues that rebel groups/militias which remain strongly tied to conflict-era identities often struggle to expand their follower base in post-conflict political environments, as voters may prioritize stability, service provision, and institutional governance over ideological or militarized appeals.

Furthermore, KH's focus on ideological objectives, such as the Islamization of cultural identity and confrontation with external actors (Sommer, 2025, p. 933), may contribute to maintaining internal cohesion but does little to broaden its appeal beyond a relatively narrow constituency. Manning (2007, pp. 254-258) similarly notes that reliance on selective incentives and ideological commitment, while effective for maintaining discipline within armed groups, is often insufficient for securing widespread electoral support. As a result, KH's participation in elections does not appear to translate into the level of societal backing required for sustained parliamentary success.

The absence of a broad follower base also has implications for the organization's external orientation. As Mansour (2021, p. 11) highlights, networks that lack strong societal roots are more likely to rely on foreign patrons for legitimacy and resources, which may further weaken their domestic appeal and constrain their ability to present themselves as nationally representative actors. Within Zaks' (2023, pp. 249-252) framework, this suggests that KH's participation in elections can be characterized as limited or nominal, as electoral engagement does not result in significant representation or long-term institutional integration.

In contrast, Badr's ability to mobilize followers beyond its core membership appears to place it in a more favorable position within Zaks' categorization. The organization's sustained electoral participation and comparatively stronger parliamentary representation indicate a form of seated participation, grounded in a stable and socially embedded support base (Zaks, 2023, pp. 249-252). From this perspective, differences in the follower dimension provide a partial explanation for Badr's comparatively more successful 2025 election.

6.3. Participation and Purpose

Building on the work of Van de Goor and De Zeeuw (2008), as well as Manning's analysis of militia transformation (2007), the factor *Participation and Purpose* captures to which extent armed organizations shift from military structures toward political forms of organization. In this framework, successful transformation requires not only formal entry into political processes, but also a reorientation of organizational purpose away from armed struggle and toward political representation, governance, and institutional engagement. De Zeeuw (2007, pp. 14-16) emphasizes that participation without a corresponding change in purpose risks entrenching hybrid actors that remain militarized despite formal political inclusion. Manning

(2007, pp. 253-256) similarly argues that such transitions depend on changes in leadership roles, incentive structures, and public-facing functions, particularly the transformation of military leaders into political representatives.

Operationally, participation and purpose are assessed through two indicators: first, whether organizations recruit or elevate political figureheads capable of operating within electoral and institutional arenas; and second, whether former military leaders assume roles as political spokespeople, signaling a shift in authority from coercive command to representative leadership. Applying this framework to the Iraqi case reveals significant variation between KH and the Badr Organization, both of which participate in formal politics but differ markedly in how participation relates to organizational purpose.

While KH has formally entered the political arena through its political wing, the Huquq Movement, and its alignment with the Fateh Alliance, this participation has not been accompanied by a substantive redefinition of organizational purpose (Knights et al, 2023). KH's leadership structure remains dominated by individuals whose authority derives primarily from military credentials and ideological alignment rather than electoral legitimacy (Crenshaw & Robinson, 2024). Although some figures associated with the organization engage in parliamentary politics and public discourse, these roles are typically occupied by former commanders or security officials who continue to function within parallel military hierarchies (Knights et al, 2023).

KH's recruitment of political figureheads appears limited and instrumental. Rather than incorporating independent civilian politicians or technocratic elites, the organization has largely repurposed existing military leadership for political functions (Knights et al, 2023). This blurring of military and political roles appears to constrain the organization's ability to present itself as a civilian political actor. Manning (2007, pp. 255-258) notes that when former commanders retain both coercive and representative authority, political participation tends to reinforce militarized organizational logics rather than replace them. KH's continued emphasis on resistance narratives and armed deterrence (Al-Kaabi, 2025), further indicates that political engagement functions as an extension of military strategy rather than a substitute for it.

The transformation of military leaders into political spokespeople within KH has therefore been partial and conditional. While leaders have a say in governance-related issues, their

identity remains grounded in wartime sacrifice and ideological commitment rather than responsiveness to a broad electorate (Rudolf, 2024). This continuity with conflict-era identity reflects Söderberg Kovacs' (2007, p. 25) argument that organizations which fail to redefine their purpose beyond armed struggle often struggle to adapt fully to post-conflict political environments. KH's participation in politics appears limited in scope, reinforcing Zaks' characterization of their participation as nominal, where engagement with electoral institutions does not result in meaningful institutional integration (Zaks, 2023, pp. 249-252).

In comparison, Badr's recruitment of political figureheads has been more pronounced and sustained. The organization has promoted leaders whose primary public roles are as parliamentarians, ministers, and coalition negotiators (Knights et al, 2021). Although many of these individuals possess militant backgrounds, they exercise their authority through political institutions (Crenshaw & Robinson, 2021). This transition reflects the type of leadership transformation identified by Manning (2007, pp. 255-256) as central to successful militia-to-party conversion, in which former military leaders become political representatives accountable to institutional processes.

Furthermore, Badr's participation in the PMF, appears to have reinforced, rather than undermined, its political transformation. Wartime legitimacy gained through the fight against IS was translated into electoral credibility and administrative influence (Mansour, 2018). Badr demonstrates a clearer, though still incomplete, shift toward political organization. Armed capacity remains present, but political functions have taken an increasingly bigger role in the group's identity (Crenshaw & Robinson, 2021).

Rather than transitioning from militias into civilian parties, KH and Badr have evolved into armed political actors operating within state institutions. The key distinction lies in the relationship between participation and purpose: while KH has expanded participation without redefining purpose, Badr has gradually aligned its organizational purpose with political engagement.

In short, the framework demonstrates that militia transformation in Iraq is a gradual spectrum of adaptation, not a binary change. Differences between KH and the Badr Organization illustrate how variation in the aims of leadership, recruitment of political figures, and the framing of organizational goals shape the extent to which armed groups become embedded in

formal politics. These findings indicate that there is a need to look beyond binary "failed transition" or "successful transition" theory and adapt to the hybrid security landscape in Iraq.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

This study set out to explain what factors can explain why the Badr Organization and Kataʾib Hezbollah, two Shia militias with similar background have achieved vastly different outcomes in their transition from armed groups into political actors in post–Islamic State Iraq. Drawing on the militias turned parties literature, supplemented by network-based approaches, the analysis focused on three key factors: *factions*, *followers* and *participation and purpose*. The findings demonstrate that variation in political outcomes is best explained by differences in organizational adaptation, societal embedding, and the strategic prioritization of politics relative to armed activity.

Taken together, the analysis shows that Badr's comparatively successful electoral performance and sustained parliamentary presence stem from its early and gradual institutionalization within the Iraqi political system. Badr developed mechanisms for managing internal cohesion, cultivated a broad and electorally relevant follower base, rebalanced selective incentives in favor of political participation, and reoriented organizational purpose toward governance and institutional influence. KH, by contrast, has pursued a model of political engagement that remains subordinate to armed and ideological resistance. While KH participates in elections and holds institutional positions, this participation has not been accompanied by a substantive transformation of organizational purpose or leadership authority. As a result, its electoral outcomes have remained limited despite continued relevance as a military and security actor.

The factor of internal cohesion, highlights an important but ultimately secondary distinction between the two organizations. Although leadership tensions emerged in KH following the death of Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, these divisions did not result in ideological fragmentation or competing political strategies. Leadership committed to maintaining KH's identity as a resistance-oriented armed organization. Badr, meanwhile, benefited from long-standing leadership stability, which facilitated strategic continuity and reduced the risk that political participation would threaten internal cohesion. However, the analysis suggests that cohesion

alone does not determine political success. Rather, cohesion becomes politically consequential when combined with a willingness to redistribute authority and prestige away from exclusively military roles.

Furthermore, internal cohesion is heavily dependent on the selective incentives the organisations can provide. Both KH and Badr rely on selective incentives channeled through the PMF, including salaries, pensions, and legal protections, which helps to maintain internal cohesion and reduce factional fragmentation. However, Badr has gone further in redistributing status and opportunity toward political roles. Parliamentary seats, ministerial positions, and bureaucratic influence function as meaningful selective incentives within Badr's organizational hierarchy. In KH, by contrast, martyrdom, military sacrifice, and resistance credentials remain the primary sources of prestige. Political participation does not offer comparable rewards, reducing incentives for members to prioritize electoral engagement. Additionally, leadership in KH is entrenched in the military and as a result they benefit from furthering military integration, hurting KH's political transformation. Incentive structures that remain anchored in conflict-era identities constrain the capacity for political adaptation and may entrench hybrid organizational forms.

Differences in the scale of following provides another reason for the divergent political outcomes. Badr, as a parochial network, has been able to mobilize a socially embedded support base capable of participating in elections. Having deep roots in society creates both incentives and pressures to present comprehensive political agendas related to governance, service provision, and state institutions. In contrast, KH more closely resembles a vanguard network, characterized by ideological cohesion, hierarchical command, and limited societal penetration. KH's support base is sufficient to sustain armed activity and internal discipline, but insufficient to generate consistent electoral success. These differences reinforce Söderberg Kovacs' argument that successful transformation requires expansion beyond the original conflict constituency as well as alignment with the voter preferences that emerge in a post-conflict context.

The differences between Badr and KH are most clearly illustrated in the category of *participation and purpose.* Both participate in formal politics, yet they differ fundamentally in regards to organizational purpose. Badr treats political institutions as the primary arena for exercising power, with armed capacity functioning increasingly as a background resource rather than a defining identity. In contrast, KH's political wing and participation in politics

serve primarily to protect organizational interests by shaping legislation related to the PMF, and influencing government formation. They use politics as an auxiliary tool for armed resistance rather than transforming into a purely political actor.

These findings underscore the limits of militia-to-party theory when applied to hybrid political orders such as Iraq's. Unlike cases in which armed groups demobilize following peace agreements, the militias examined in this case retained their capacity for violence when they were incorporated into the state. PMF integration into the state lowered the costs of political participation without forcefully imposing demilitarization. As a result, participation became possible without transformation. This explains how KH and Badr can participate in politics without full transformation and further explains that Badr's deeper adaptation reflects a strategic choice rather than a structural necessity. The Iraqi case challenges assumptions about transition and highlights the possibility of adapting the militia-to-party frameworks to contexts where violence is institutionalized rather than eliminated.

The broader implications of these findings extend beyond the two cases. The analysis of Badr illustrates how armed actors can successfully embed themselves within state institutions without relinquishing coercive leverage, contributing to a form of militarized governance rather than democratic consolidation. The analysis of KH demonstrates how limited societal embedding and resistance-oriented identity can sustain parallel authority structures that operate alongside formal institutions. Together, these cases suggest that post-IS Iraq is moving toward a system of armed pluralism in which militias function as political actors without fully transforming into civilian parties.

In conclusion, Badr's success is explained by its ability to realign incentives, broaden its follower base, and redefine organizational purpose around political participation. KH's limited electoral outcomes are explained by the perpetuation of a resistance-centered identity in which politics remains secondary to armed influence. These findings highlight the need to move beyond binary models of militia transformation and to recognize the durability of hybrid armed–political actors in post-conflict states where sovereignty remains fragmented. Further research must consider these factors to gain a deeper understanding of this complex political environment. It is important to move beyond viewing these actors as a single, unified group and instead recognize that they are characterized by the distinct conditions and contexts they operate in.

8. Bibliography:

Ahram, A. I. 2016. The Rise and Fall of Iraq in the Social Sciences. *Social Science Quarterly*, *97*(4), 850–861. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26612357 [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Al-Aloosy, M. 2023. Ruling Without Responsibility: Badr Organisation, Asacib Ahl al-Haq, and Katacib Hezbollah After Defeating ISIS in Iraq. *Rebel Governance in the Middle East*, 187-216. Availaible at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-1335-0_7 [Accessed: 2025-12-15]

Al-Kaabi, A. 2025. Game On: Sadr and the Iraqi "Resistance" Clash Over State Control of Arms. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 17 July. Available at: https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/game-sadr-and-iraqi-resistance-clash-over-state-control-arms [Accessed: 2025-12-17].

Al-Kaabi, A., Knights, M. & Malik, H. 2025. *Threatened Militia Escalation Related to the PMF Draft Laws*. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 5 August. Available at: https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/threatened-militia-escalation-related-to-the-pmf-draft-laws [Accessed: 11 January 2026].

Al-Shia. 2024. *The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam*. Al-Shia. Available at: https://en.al-shia.org/the-concept-of-martyrdom-in-islam [Accessed: 11 January 2026].

Anbori, A., Al-Mumin, A., Ab. Waha, A., & Beaumont, R. Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq. *Geopolitics Quarterly, 20 (Special Issue)*, 231-272. Available at: https://doi.org/10.22034/igq.2024.482451.1958 [Accessed: 2025-12-17].

Arab Barometer. 2024. *Iraq Country Report – Wave VIII*. Arab Barometer. Available at: https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/Iraq-Country-Report-EN.pdf [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Azizi, H. 2022. "Integration of Iran-Backed Armed Groups into the Iraqi and Syrian Armed Forces: Implications for Stability in Iraq and Syria." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 33(3): 499–527. https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2021.2025284 [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Barma, N. 2017. *The Peacebuilding Puzzle: Political Order in Post-Conflict States*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press. [Pdf] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/2020715167/. [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Center for Preventive Action. 2024. Instability in Iraq, *Global Conflict Tracker*, Council on Foreign Relations. Available at: https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/political-instability-iraq [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Channel8. 2026. *Iraqi Parliamentary Elections 2025*. Available at: https://iraqelection.channel8.com/english [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Counter Extremism Project:a. n.d. *Badr Organization profile*. Counter Extremism Project. Available at: https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/badr-organization/report [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Counter Extremism Project:b. n.d. *Kata'ib Hezbollah profile.* Counter Extremism Project. Available at: https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/kata'ib-hezbollah/report [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Crenshaw, M., & Robinson, K. 2025. *Mapping Militants Project*. Rice University. https://doi.org/10.25613/G0K4-WF70
Mapping Militants Project. *Kata'ib Hezbollah*. Last modified September 21, 2024. Available at: https://mappingmilitants.org/node/427/ [Accessed: 2026-01-11].
Mapping Militants Project. *Badr Organization of Reconstruction and Development.* Last modified June 1, 2021. https://mappingmilitants.org/node/342/ [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Gulmohamad, Z. 2022. Munathamat Badr, from an armed wing to a ruling actor. *Small Wars & Insurgencies,* 33(8), 1285–1313. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2021.1875310 [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Haddad. F. 2019. The Diminishing Relevance of the Sunni-Shi'a Divide. *POMEPS Studies 35: Religion, Violence, and the State in Iraq. Washington*. DC: POMEPS. Available at: https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/POMEPS_Studies_35.1.pdf [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Harakat Huquq. n.d. *X profile*. Available at: https://x.com/harakatthuquq

Huquq Movement. 2025. *Huquq Movement Telegram channel*. Available at: https://t.me/s/hoquqmovement?after=586 [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Huquq. 2026. *Huquq website*. Available at: https://harakathuqooq.com/ [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

J de Zeeuw. 2007. "Understanding the Political Transformation of Rebel Movements" in J de Zeeuw (ed.). *From Soldiers to Politicians: Transforming Rebel Movements After Civil War.* Lynne Rienner Publishers. Available at: https://www.rienner.com/uploads/5ec6a37425a0a.pdf [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Kata'ib Hezbollah. n.d. *About Kata'ib Hezbollah*. Available at: https://www.kataibhezbollah.me/about [Accessed: 2026-01-11]

Kennedy, H., J.E. Woods, R.L. Chambers, M. Khadduri, and G.H. Blake. 2026. *Iraq*. Encyclopedia Britannica. Available at: https://www.britannica.com/place/Iraq [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Knights, M. 2022. *Muhandis Replaced by Not One Man, But Two?* The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Available at: https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/muhandis-replaced-not-one-man-two [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Knights, M. 2024. "Real or Imagined Consolidation? The Case of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces." Studies in Conflict & Terrorism 47, no. 9: 1110–1126. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2021.2013759 [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Knights, M., Smith, C. & Malik, H. 2021. *Profile: Badr Organization*. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2 September. Available at: https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-badr-organization [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Knights, M., Smith, C. & Malik, H. 2023. *Profile: Kataib Hezbollah*. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Available at: https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-kataib-hezbollah [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Makhzoomi, K. 2025. *Pro-Iran Militias Are the Big Winners in Iraq's Election.* The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Available at: https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/pro-iran-militias-are-big-winners-iraqs-election [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Manning, C. 2004. Armed Opposition Groups into Political Parties. *Studies in Comparative International Development, 39(1)*, 54-76. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02686315 [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Mansour, R. 2018. *More Than Militias: Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces Are Here to Stay.* War on the Rocks, April. Available at: https://warontherocks.com/2018/04/more-than-militias-iraqs-popular-mobilization-forces-are-here-to-stay/ [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Mansour, R. 2018. *The Popular Mobilisation Forces and the Balancing of Formal and Informal Power.* Middle East Centre Blog (London School of Economics and Political Science), 15 March. Available at: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2018/03/15/the-popular-mobilisation-forces-and-the-balancing-of-formal-and-informal-power [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Mansour, R. 2021. Networks of Power: The Popular Mobilization Forces and the State in Iraq. London: Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs. Available at: https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/2021-02-25-networks-of-power-mansour.pdf [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

McFate, J. L. 2015. The Isis Defense In Iraq And Syria. Institute for the Study of War. Available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07905 [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Rached, K. 2025. Financing of Non-State Armed Groups in the Middle East: Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) as a Case Study. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,* 48(10), 1165–1190. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2022.2161136 [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Rudolf, I. 2024. *Kataib Hizbullah (Iraq)*. European Council on Foreign Relations. Available at: https://ecfr.eu/special/mena-armed-groups/kataib-hizbullah-iraq. [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Smith, C., Knights, M. 2025. How Iran Aligned Militias Seized Iraq: Irregular Warfare, Lawfare and Regime Change. *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 36(4), 659-697. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2025.2471644 [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Söderberg Kovacs, M. 2007. *From Rebellion to Politics: The Transformation of Rebel Groups to Political Parties in Civil War Peace Processes.* PhD diss., Uppsala University.

Sommer, F. 2025. "Islamic and Sectarian or Secular and Nationalist? New Classification of Iraqi Shi'a Political Actors Based on Ideological Anchorage." British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies 52 (4): 929–953. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2024.2373066 [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Staniland, P. 2014. *Networks of rebellion*. Cornell University Press.

Thurber, C. 2014. Militias as Sociopolitical Movements: Lessons from Iraq's Armed Shia Groups. *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 25(6). pp. 900–923. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2014.945633 [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Zaks, S. 2023. Do we know it when we see it? (Re)-Conceptualizing Rebel-to-Party Transition. *Journal of Peace Research*, 61(2), 246-262. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433221123358 [Accessed: 2026-01-11].

Zimmt, R. 2025. *The Need to Reexamine the Concept of the "Shiite Axis."* Institute for National Security Studies. Available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep70754 [Accessed: 2026-01-11].