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Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups

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CTC Sentinel

August 2019

Tehran-backed militias must be monitored more closely on a host of destabilizing activities, though policymakers should be careful not to lump them in with the many PMF factions that don't support Iran.

The pro-Iranian militias within the PMF do not represent all—or even most—of the Popular Mobilization Forces. As a result, U.S. officials would be wise to never publicly use the words PMF, Hashd, Shia militias, or any other collective descriptor because the popular mobilization, as a societal experience and as an institution, is viewed with reverence and respect by many Iraqis. Many average citizens have relatives who fought honorably in the PMF structure primarily for the benefit of Iraq, not Iran or pro-Iranian militia leaders. The U.S. government arguably alienates potential allies when it publicly criticizes the PMF phenomenon in a generalized manner.

Even behind closed doors, none of the old descriptors make sense due to the multi-ethnic composition of the Iraqi components of Iran's threat network. There is a very strong argument for a new descriptor for those groups with primary loyalty to U.S.-designated terrorist Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and who are willing to provide material support to IRGC-QF and other sanctioned entities. What Iraq faces today are effectively the new 'Special Groups' of the Iraqi militia scene—'special' in that, like their forerunners in 2006-2011, they are not under government control and they provide material support to sanctioned Iranian entities...

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