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Policy Digest Paper 1

SHIA MILITIAS POWER CENTRALITY MAPPING IN SYRIA: 2015–2020

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The Peace War & Social Conflict Laboratory promotes the interaction of research in the field of peace and conflict that has a policy angle and implication. Our goal is to facilitate a dialogue between academics and policy makers in the field of security. The laboratory is a hub of excellence that where students engage in meaningful research in the field of peace, war, and social conflict. The Policy Digest paper series is the product of these students work.

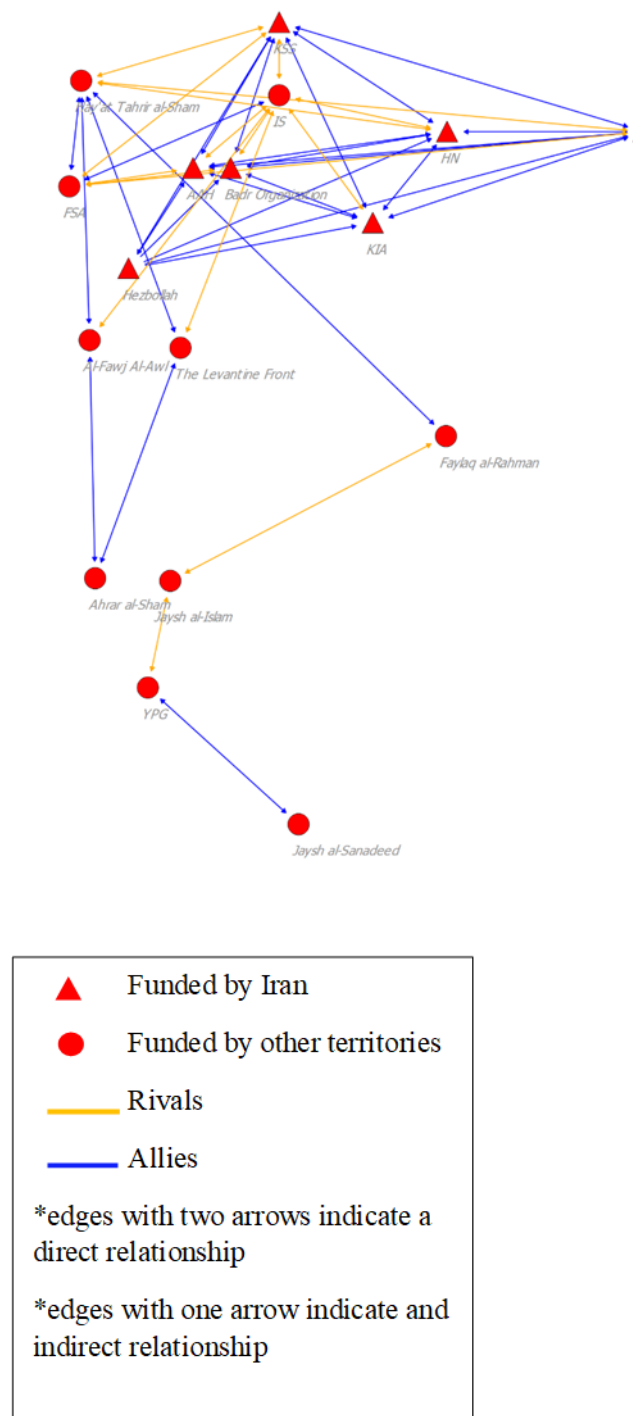# SHIA MILITIAS POWER CENTRALITY MAPPING IN SYRIA: 2015-2020

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The data represented in mapping Shia militias, operating throughout Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria, demonstrates the Iranian power backed behind these organizations. Important to this data is the key insights it brings to the growing network of Iranian-funded proxies consisting of multicultural groups and subgroups. Over the past decade, it has become increasingly apparent of the value that these interrelationships hold. Further research of Shia militia activity allows social scientists and military organizations a better opportunity to understand the on-gong war in these territories. Though, the data provided below only covers a fraction of the types of relationships between the militias, it does provide insight on the power centrality of the Shia militias and their ally/rival relationships between 2015 and 2020.

Though present for a long period in various configurations, the outsourcing of security gained significant momentum with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In those two conflicts, which involved hundreds of thousands of deployed soldiers, the U.S. and its allies relied heavily on private military and security companies (PMSC). Working mostly with U.S. and U.K. based PMSCs, coalition forces used more contractors than soldiers (Figure 1). These contractors were recruited from all over the globe (Christensen 2016, Chisholm 2014a, b, Chisholm 2015, Thomas 2017), introducing it to multiple markets. Figure 1 illustrates the scope of this trend with the number of contractors surpassing the number of U.S. troops on the ground.

For decades, Shia armed groups have reconstructed the sociopolitical topography of the Middle East. Most of these groups are Iranian-backed Shia militias who are meant to ensure the Iranian regime by establishing and protecting military bases in Syria. The campaigns of these militias are often defined as "pro-government", however data from the social network demonstrates that these groups will pursue goals outside of their governments accord. Mapping activities of the Shia militias reveal conflict over ideological, political, and commercial interests. Evidence of this has become increasingly apparent since the Iraqi government creation of al-Hashd al-Shabi (the Popular Mobilization Forces) in 2014, of which consists of predominantly Iranian-backed groups. Mapping the ally/rival relationship between these militias demonstrates Iran's active participation in the ongoing conflicts of the Middle East and their use of multinational networks to ensure Iranian power. Understanding these details allows for further insight on activities going on in this territory and how that will impact American foreign policy.

Shia Militia Power Centrality Mapping in Syria: 2015–2020

The network above covers the active Shia militias documented in Syria between the year 2015 and 2020. ID's documented in the matrix demonstrates the power centrality among the active groups recorded during this period. The nodes represent the group and the edges represent the relationship with the receiving node (group). Nodes in the shape of a triangle represent the groups that are directly funded by the Iranian government, and the nodes in the shape of a circle represent groups who are funded by other sources. Important to note is that those groups who are funded by other territories may still have relations with Iran—descriptions provided by the source of this data do not indicate a direct funding from the Iranian government. All the militias reported were aware of their ally/rival relationships either directly or indirectly. The calculating of power centrality shows that the Islamic State holds the most centrality in terms of rival relationships (represented by the orange edges), the KSS holds the most power in terms of both ally and rival relationships, and the KIA holds the most centrality in terms of just ally relationships (represented by the blue edges). Data used for this map was collected from the Stanford mapping militants' online data source.

The analysis of this topic shows the interrelationships between Shia militias in Syria. Information from this project concludes that there is a power centrality created through the ally/rival relationships among the active militant groups. Again, the network provided above only considers two very specific types of relationships. Further analyzation of the Stanford mapping proves that there are many other types of interactions and connections between these Shia militias. However, this network does provide a visual representation of the relevance an organization holds, and how this relevance is dependent

on the types of relations formed with other militant groups. Overall, the analysis of this topic confirms the significance of understanding these interactions. The relationships of these militias will have a strong impact on the outcome of these conflicts, making their documentation highly impactful.