

CSAG INFORMATION PAPER:

The Future of the Popular Mobilization Forces Law in Iraq

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1. **Subject:** The Future of the Popular Mobilization Forces Law in Iraq

2. **BLUF:**

- The Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) bill aims to grant the PMF greater autonomy as a military and security institution, while also providing its members with enhanced financial and professional privileges and expanding its organizational structure. The powers granted under the law to military leaders loyal to Iran will increase the level of threat and risks to security within Iraq and to U.S. interests
- The vote on the PMF bill has been postponed due to ongoing political disagreements and opposition from the United States. The legislation was recently removed from the parliamentary agenda but is expected to be reintroduced for consideration in the next parliamentary session in 2026.

3. **Purpose:** This paper is an analysis of the future of the Popular Mobilization Authority legislative bill, and highlights the level of risk associated with its adoption.

4. **Introduction:** The legislative trajectory of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) began on November 26, 2016, when Iraq's Parliament enacted Law No. 40, formally integrating the PMF as an umbrella organization of mostly Shi'a paramilitary groups that were mobilized by Grand Ayatollah Sistani's fatwa in response to the ISIS threat in 2014.¹ The Presidency of the Republic issued the PMF law on December 14, 2016. Since then, particularly in early 2025, new legislative initiatives originating from the Coordination Framework coalition introduced substantial amendments have triggered internal divisions and international pressure.²

5. **Facts:**

- a. *The "Service and Retirement of Popular Mobilization Forces" Draft Law (March 10, 2025).*

¹ CRISPIN SMITH* & JACQUES SINGER-EMERY, "Servants Of Two Masters: The Risks Inherent In Iraq's Hashd Al-Sha'abi Legislation," *The NYU Journal of International Law & Politics*, December 26, 2019, <https://nyujilp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/NYI103.pdf> (accessed October 1, 2025).

² Future Center for Advanced Research and Studies, "Iraqi Popular Mobilization Law," *Future Center for Advanced Research and Studies*, May 2025, <https://www.epc.ae/en/details/scenario/risky-maneuvers-iraq-s-pmf-law-between-internal-disputes-and-external-pressure> (accessed October 1, 2025).

- (1) The law was proposed due to disagreements within the Coordination Framework leadership over the legal retirement age of senior military leaders.
 - (2) The disagreements were triggered by attempts from some parties to appoint military leaders loyal to other militias.
 - (3) As a result of these disputes, the draft law on retirement and service benefits for PMF fighters was withdrawn.³
- b. The “Amending the organization of the Popular Mobilization Force ” Draft Law.
- (1) The Iraqi government withdrew the retirement law originally formed by the Coordination Framework Coalition, the largest political alliance in the Iraqi parliament.
 - (2) The previous retirement law was replaced with a new draft aimed at amending and expanding the organization and authority.
 - (3) The new draft law underwent its first reading on that date, with parliamentary discussions continuing until July 16, 2025.
 - (4) The law is facing political disagreements within the Coordination Framework coalition.
 - (5) Sunni and Kurdish parties and blocs oppose the law, due to worries regarding the increasing power and impact of factions in Iraq that support Iran.
 - (6) The United States is also opposes the legislation, expressing concern that the draft PMF law would institutionalize Iranian influence and armed terrorist groups undermining Iraq’s sovereignty.⁴
- c. Upcoming Parliamentary Elections and the PMF Law
- (1) The Iraqi parliamentary elections on November 11, 2025 have directly impacted the fate of the PMF reorganization bill in parliament.
 - (2) Political polarization intensified among Shi’a Coordination Framework parties and Sunni and Kurdish blocs, escalating debate over the law. The proposed law would grant the PMF independent legal status and wide powers in financial, administrative, and military areas. Many fear the law’s passage could be used as electoral leverage by blocs controlling the PMA, altering Iraq’s power balance.
 - (3) Sunni and Kurdish MPs boycotted related sessions, expressing strong opposition to the law and even the Coordination Framework was divided, with some members objecting, and others demanding major amendments. The situation was further complicated by U.S. pressure. In response, Iraq’s top leadership institutions, the Presidency, Prime Minister’s Office, Parliament, and Judiciary, agreed to withdraw the draft law.⁵
 - (4) The bill is postponed until after the elections, pending a new political balance in the next parliament. Debate continues nationally and internationally over the PMA’s future role in Iraq’s political and security structure.⁶

³ “Iraqi PM Suspends Popular Mobilization Forces Retirement Law”, <https://english.aawsat.com/arab-world/5121064-iraqi-pm-suspends-popular-mobilization-forces-retirement-law> , March 12, 2025 Asharq Alawsat, (accessed Oct 1, 2025).

⁴ Cathrin Schaer, “Iran or the US? How a new law is testing Iraq's independence”, Aug. 26 , 2025, Deutsche Welle, <https://www.dw.com/en/iran-or-the-us-how-a-new-law-is-testing-iraqs-independence/a-73773047> , (accessed Oct 1, 2025).

⁵ David Schenker, “Iraq Passes the New PMF Law the U.S. Response Should Be Severe”, The Washington Institute, Aug. 4 2025, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/if-iraq-passes-new-pmf-law-us-response-should-be-severe> , (accessed Oct 1, 2025).

⁶ Shafaq News stuff, “Iraq’s presidencies agree to delay PMF Law”, Shafaq News, Sept 1 2025, <https://www.shafaq.com/en/Iraq/Iraq-s-presidencies-agree-to-delay-PMF-Law> , (accessed Oct. 1, 2025).

6. Assessment:

- a. It is likely that the future of the PMF law will be shaped by several important political factors, especially with the end of the current term for Iraq's parliament and government approaching, and the upcoming parliamentary elections in November 2025.
- b. According to the Iraqi constitution, a new parliament traditionally begins its legislative work by electing a new Speaker, followed by a vote to select the next President of the Republic, the process of forming a new government, and then the establishment of parliamentary committees, totaling 25 specialized permanent committees.
- c. These steps represent the primary legislative priorities for any new parliamentary cycle. Given the procedural complexity of forming alliances and distributing key positions, this entire process commonly takes between six months and a year before contentious legislative projects, such as the PMF law, return for renewed debate in parliament. This will likely be the case here, in light of ongoing political fragmentation and sustained pressure from influential domestic and international actors on Iraq's legislative decision-making.
- d. The most likely scenario with the vote on the PMF law in Iraq indicates that it will grant the PMF broader organizational, administrative, and financial independence. This will consolidate the dominance of pro-Iranian factions over the political, security, and military landscape. It will also develop and increase their capabilities in several respects (manpower, funding, weapons, and military capabilities). All this likely leading to a reduction in the powers of the Iraqi army and police, raising the level of threat to U.S interests in Iraq.

7. Conclusion:

- a. The future of the PMF law in Iraq constitutes a strategic issue with far-reaching implications for both domestic stability and regional security. The postponement of its ratification, primarily due to sustained Western pressures, can be interpreted as a political success for actors seeking to delay or influence the final form of the legislation.
- b. The law remains suspended for the time being, largely because of the imminent Iraqi parliamentary elections. The results of these elections are expected to reshape the composition of the new Parliament and consequently affect the formation of the forthcoming Iraqi government. It is therefore plausible that the deferral of the PMF Law might extend for approximately a year or longer, with renewed parliamentary deliberations anticipated during the 2026–2030 legislative cycle.
- c. Although the process is expected to face political and procedural challenges, current policy path and parliamentary dynamics suggest that the government is moving toward increased support and the PMF's legal legitimacy in the near future.