Democratization Under Occupation:

Sectarianism and Violence in post-2003 Iraq

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Abstract

English

In 2003 an American-led international coalition of armies invaded Iraq and toppled Saddam Hussein's regime, ending nearly four decades of Baathist autocracy in the country. The United States justified the invasion with a promise of bringing democracy and meaningful, representative elections to beleaguered Iraq. However, a mere four years after the fall of Baghdad to the Americans, and after multiple, freely contested elections, a brutal civil war between the country's two main sectarian groups, Shi'i and Sunni Arabs, was in full swing, claiming hundreds of lives per month. It seemed that the promise of democracy ended in a nightmare of violence. In this paper, I explore the historical and political factors that led to a violent inter-sectarian war between 2007 and 2008 In Iraq following the U.S. invasion of the country. I ask the following questions: What were the historical institutional and political processes in pre-invasion Iraq that exacerbated violent enmities between Sunni and Shi'i identities in the country? How did the American invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq shape and reshape these sectarian identities and politicize them to an increasingly violent degree? What was the role of the new Iraqi political elite brought to power by Americans in this new politics of sectarianism? And why did the introduction of democratic institutions, namely multiparty competitive elections, exacerbate inter-sectarian conflict rather than ameliorate it?

Français

En 2003, une coalition militaire internationale dirigée par les États-Unis a envahi l'Irak et renversé le régime de Saddam Hussein, mettant fin à près de quatre décennies d'autocratie baasiste dans le pays. Les États-Unis justifièrent l'invasion en promettant d'instaurer une

démocratie et de véritables élections représentatives à l'Irak assiégée. Or, à peine quatre ans après la prise de Bagdad par les États-Unis, et après de multiples élections librement disputées, une guerre civile brutale entre les deux principaux groupes confessionnels du pays, chiites et sunnites arabes, battait son plein, faisant des centaines de victimes chaque mois. La promesse de la démocratie semblait se solder par la violence. Dans cette dissertation, j'analyse les facteurs historiques et politiques qui ont mené à une violente guerre interconfessionnelle entre 2006 et 2008 en Irak à la suite de l'invasion américaine. Je pose les questions suivantes : Quels ont été les processus institutionnels et politiques en Irak avant l'invasion qui ont exacerbé les hostilités entre sunnites et chiites dans le pays ? Comment l'invasion américaine et l'occupation subséquente de l'Irak ont-elles formé et remodelé ces identités confessionnelles, pour ensuite les politiser à un degré de plus en plus violent? Quel a été le rôle de la nouvelle élite politique irakienne amenée au pouvoir par les Américains dans cette nouvelle politique de confessionnalisme ? Et pourquoi l'introduction d'institutions démocratiques, à savoir des élections concurrentielles et multipartites, a-t-elle exacerbé les conflits interconfessionnels au lieu de les améliorer ?

Introduction

Research Questions

This thesis' goal is to contribute to the ongoing discussion on sectarianism in Iraq and its effects on political stability and democratization. In doing so, it aims to help in refining the analysis around sectarianism in Iraq beyond issues of identity-based forms of violence by highlighting the role of structural factors and historical processes in leading Iraq's Sunni Arab and Shi'i Arab communities to attacking each other in the Iraqi Civil War of 2006-2008. Thus, I ask the following questions: What were the historical institutional and political processes in pre-invasion Iraq that exacerbated violent enmities between Sunni and Shi'i identities in the country? How did the American invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq shape and reshape these sectarian identities and politicize them to an increasingly violent degree? What was the role of the new Iraqi political elite brought to power by Americans in this new politics of sectarianism? And why did the introduction of democratic institutions, namely multiparty competitive elections, exacerbate inter-sectarian conflict rather than ameliorate it?

Relevance of Study: Understanding Sectarianism in the Context of Iraq

Sectarianism in Iraqi politics has a long pedigree. It is in Early Islamic Iraq that Sunnism and Shi'ism crystalized as distinct religious traditions within Islam. Nearly all major historical moments that defined Shi'ism took place in Iraq, most notably the assassination or death of most Shi'i Holy Imams and the establishment of the nerve center of Shi'i religious seminaries in Najaf, Karbala, and al-Kadhimayin. Sunnism, similarly, enjoys an illustrious history in the country since medieval Iraq served as the heartland of the (Sunni) Abbasid Caliphate and many founders and prominent figures of Sunni theological and legalistic traditions lived in and/or

studied at Baghdad. In such a geographic space rich with histories and monuments of religious significance appeals to confessional sentiments for political gains is inevitable. Indeed, concerns over what type of Islam should be predominant in the government of Iraq can be traced with clarity to at least the mid-19th century, the era that saw the introduction of state apparatus and modernity itself into the lands that would come to form modern Iraq later.[1] By the Ottoman period (1534-1920), Sunni Arabs became the dominate political class in the lands comprising Iraq, while Shi'i Arabs and Kurds found less fortune in the political sphere. Since then, and throughout the different periods of Iraqi history: Mandate and Monarchical (1920-1958), Early Republican (1958-1968), and Baathist (1968-2003), sectarian identities and expressions, would continue to find a place, sometimes plain, sometimes hidden, in Iraqi political imagination.[2]

With variance in the intensity and pervasiveness of state suppression across the decades, the status quo of Sunni Arab dominance at the expense of Shi'i Arabs and Kurds remained the case up until 2003.[3] In aftermath of the US-led invasion a radical change took place. The new Iraq became dominated by the former opposition to the Baathist regime, which was Shi'i Islamist and Kurdish nationalist in character. Consequently, the equation was flipped as Sunnis became the new losers in the Iraqi political sphere and they lost their position as the dominate community. In the following years, short-sighted US occupation policies, incompetence of the new political elite, infiltration by foreign Jihadist, collapse of state institutions and the resultant

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[1] Persian-Ottoman relations, conversion of Arab tribes to Shi'ism in southern Iraq, and economic and social ties between Shi'is and Sunnis in urban centers complicated Ottoman policies dealing with Shi'is in Iraq, see Selim Deringil, "The Struggle against Shiism in Hamidian Iraq: A Study in Ottoman Counter Propaganda." *Die Welt Des Islams* 30, no. 1-4 (1990): 45–62; Karen M Kern, *Imperial Citizen : Marriage and Citizenship in the Ottoman Frontier Provinces of Iraq* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2011).

[2] For example, in the plurality-Kurdish and mixed city of Kirkuk, in an oi-rich region contested between the federal and Kurdish regional governments, linguistic and ethnic identities, in addition to the oil industry, were the two major factors that determined politics and social life since the Kurdish region was permanently attached to Iraq by the British in the 1930s. See Arbella Bet-Shlimon, *City of Black Gold: Oil, Ethnicity, and the Making of Modern Kirkuk* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019).

[3] Hala Mundhir Fattah and Frank Caso, *A Brief History of Iraq*, Brief History (New York: Facts On File, 2009), 173, 217, 232-33.

proliferation of militias and criminal gangs, all contributed to the flaming of a violent civil war between Sunni and Shi'i Arabs on a mass-scale not seen before in Iraqi history. This is the process that this thesis will analyze. Its goal is to demonstrate how communal violence is contingent upon specific historical and political factors, and not on religious identities in conflict over theological differences.

Before advancing further and for the purposes of clarity, I'll give a working definition of sectarianism, a word that will be recurring throughout this thesis. In this thesis sectarianism refers to the ideological, political and security frameworks that defines and separate the three main linguistic-religious groups in Iraq: Arabic-speaking Sunnis, Arabic-speaking Shi'is, and Kurds. Thus, when used here, sectarianism, or any of its derivatives, does not refer to social discrimination between one group and another (which exists of course), but to the dynamics that govern the precarious positions held by Kurds, Shia, and Sunnis vis-à-vis state power. In doing this it follows in the footsteps of recent literature that studied in depth the security and politico-legal frameworks, developed mostly during the Baathist period, that Iraqi governments consistently adopted and reworked to create administrative and military policies to repress resistance to the state perceived to be emanating from specific ethnic or religious communities.[4] That being said, the focus of this thesis would be on Sunni-Shi'i dynamics after 2003, with dynamics in previous eras and issues relating to the position of Iraq's third major community, the Kurds, being referred to when relevant.

Outline

So far in this introduction, I have outlined the research questions and the goal of this research. Chapter one will review the literature related to the theme of sectarianism in Iraq, in

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[4] Dina Rizk Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime: Soldiering, Martyrdom, and Remembrance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 110-121.

addition to discussing some definitional and theoretical issues related to the study of this topic. Chapter two will explore the historical process that shaped political dynamics between Sunnis and Shi'is in Iraq before the 2003, with a special emphasize on the Baathist period (1968-2003). Chapter three will analyze two important events to the enshrining of sectarianism in Iraqi politics: the American Invasion of 2003 and the country's first democratic elections following it in 2005. Chapter four will outline the process by which the policies of the post-2003 political elite policies towards Sunnis marginalized and failed to incorporate the community in the new political system, incentivizing it to take up arms against the state and Shi'is. Finally, the conclusion will review the finding of the thesis.

Chapter One

Theories of Sectarianism

Sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shi'is in the Middle East, including Iraq, is usually framed in two contrasting analytical frameworks: primordialism and constructivism, similar to the classical bifurcation found in studies of nationalism.[5] The primordialist approach, which is sometimes referred to as the maximalist or alarmist approach in academic literature, holds that exclusivist religious identities and convictions are at the center of Arab and Muslim political culture and imagination. Thus, one way or another Arab and Muslim politics will inevitably lead to religious and sectarian conflict. This perspective is rare in academia but more common in popular and polemical accounts of the region.[6] Indeed, it was marshalled by many in the American hawkish camp during the years leading up the 2003 invasion.[7] It's reverse side is the constructivist approach, alternatively called minimalist or reductionist, which holds that sectarian identities have no real value, politically or otherwise, and also that sectarian violence is the result of non-organic developments, usually manipulation by foreign states or cynical politicians.[8] Most academic works on this issue avoid the pitfalls of these rather essentializing frameworks. They often utilize an approach that both recognizes the perceived immutability and embeddedness of religious identities to their holders and the contextual factors (political, social, economic or ideological) that shape these identities at a given time and place.[9] The

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[5] Fanar Haddad, *Understanding 'Sectarianism': Sunni-Shi'a Relationsin the Modern Arab World* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2020), 128.

[6] Some examples of primordialism in US policy recommendation, see Daniel Byman, "Let Iraq Collapse," *National Interest*, 45 (Fall 1996): 48–60; David Rieff, "History Resumes: Sectarianism's Unlearned Lessons," *World Affairs*, 175:2 (July–Aug, 2012): 29–38.

[7] Byman, "Let Iraq Collapse," 1996.

[8] Haddad, *Understanding 'Sectarianism'*, 129.

[9] For examples of such works, see *Nawaṣib Wa Rawafiḍ: Munāza'āt as-Sunnah Wa Ash-Shi'ah Fī al-'ālam al-Islamī al-Yawm*, ed. Hazim Saghiya (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Saqi, 2009).

general conclusion in these works is that categories of "Sunni" and "Shi'i" are neither clear cut nor always the main referent for a person's political and social outlooks; like all other identities, they interact and intersect other facets of one's life.[10] Thus, after all, few with practical knowledge of Iraq would believe a Sunni, urban, Kurdish man from Mosul would see himself as belonging to the same group as a Sunni, tribal, Arab women from Basra on account of their mutual religion, and vice versa.[11]

For the purpose of this paper, sectarian relations in Iraq is defined in four interconnected spheres: doctrinal, subnational, national, and transnational.[12] This means the following: Doctrinally, Sunnism and Shi'ism in Iraq are two separate and discreet institutionally-framed interpretation of Islam. On the subnational level, the regional, social and economic statuses of an Iraqi in his society play a fundamental role in shaping his sectarian identity. A Baghdadi Shi'i of immigrant-background living in the slums of shantytown Sadr City understands and expresses his Shi'i identity differently than another belonging to a branch of one of the scholarly families of the clerical establishment in Najaf. On the national level, Sunni and Shi'i Iraqis, barring the most fundamentalist of both group, consider themselves partners in the same multireligious nation-state, albeit usually unequal partners. This is a distinguishing characteristic of sect-based conflict in Iraq that most, less academically-oriented accounts fail to consider: The political conflict in Iraq between Shi'i and Sunni groups is essentially about the political character of the country and which community should lead it, it is not a war of

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[10] For example, Lebanese scholar Hazim Saghiya draws attention to the economic modes of production that have historically underpinned Sunni and Shi'i social and political identities in the Levant and Iraq. Since Ottoman times at least, he clarifies, Sunni Arabic-speakers have dominated urban centers, making up most of the bourgeoise class and dominating trade and artisanal production, as well as providing the state with bureaucrats and administrators. Arab Shi'is, conversely, due to their need to escape state scrutiny (always from Sunni states), largely flourished in the countryside and their modes of social life and economic production centered around husbandry and oral traditions. See Hazim Saghiya, "Nawaṣib Wa Rawafiḍ: Mulāḥaẓāt 'āmah Fī as-Siyyasah," in *Nawaṣib Wa Rawafiḍ: Munāza'āt as-Sunnah Wa Ash-Shi'ah Fī al-'ālam al-Islamī al-Yawm*, ed. Hazim Saghiya (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Saqi, 2009).

[11] This can be extended to the division between Kurds, Sunnis, and Shi'is in Iraq in general. When speaking of Sunnis in Iraq, the term almost always refers to Arabic-speaking Sunnis exclusively, even though most Kurds are Sunni Muslims too.

[12] Following Fanar Haddad's classification, see Haddad, *Understanding 'Sectarianism'*, 81-82.

secessionism or outright extermination, with the notable exception of Al-Qaeda under Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and the Islamic State.[13] Finally, the transnational level manifest itself in Iraq in the regional factors influencing the country, whether it's the spread of Al-Qaeda and other Jihadist groups in the immediate post-invasion period, or later on the rise of Iranian influence and the fallout from the Syrian Civil War.

With the nature of inter-sectarian relations clarified, the next section of this chapter will discuss theoretical and definitional issues related to the idea of Sectarianism. Following that, it will provide a review of literature dealing with the question of how to best politically deal with sectarian diversity in multiethnic and multireligious countries so as to avoid conflict, all to better understand why the post-2003 invasion political process in Iraq failed to do just that.

What Does it Mean to be Sectarian?

One of the main issues faced by scholars endeavoring to study the position of sectarian identities in Iraq and their socio-political ramifications is the porous meaning of "sectarian" itself. Ambiguities in its meaning is compounded by the negative connotations that usually comes with using it. This holds true in Iraq, where slanders and accusations of being "sectarian" (Ar. *ṭā'ifī*) has been used as a weapon to discredit one's political opponents since the country's foundational era.[14]

What qualifies as a "sectarian" act is also not always clear. For example, some use the word expansively and collapse under it all expressions of identity-based particularistic politics. Others use it to refer to all forms of discrimination based on subnational identities, even if they weren't sectarian per se, i.e., discrimination or prejudice towards ethnic and religious

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[13] Fanar Haddad, "Sectarian Identity and National Identity in the Middle East," *Nations and Nationalism* 26, no. 1 (2020): 128. https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12578.

[14] Elie Kedourie, "Anti-Shiism in Iraq under the Monarchy." *Middle Eastern Studies* 24, no. 2 (1988): 249–53.

minorities in general like Kurds, Copts, Blacks, etc.[15] In both cases such understandings are analytically problematic since they expand the definition to such an extent that it lacks a concrete meaning. Seeing any expression of sect-centeredness as 'sectarian' can overstate the relevance of sect-based identities at a given situation or period. For instance, both the Iraqi Ba'ath regime under Saddam Hussein and its Syrian cousin under the Assads are often portrayed as "Sunni" and "Alwaite", respectively. Such a description ignores the fact that both regimes are family-based kleptocracies that violently repressed coreligionist opposition when it suited them.[16] Similarly, the second understanding of sectarianism raises the problem of usefulness, since ethnic or racial identities are usually perceived differently than religious/sectarian ones. When successive Iraqi governments interacted with Kurds and administrated their land, for instance, they did so based on different priorities and presumptions than the ones they held doing the same with Shi'i or Sunni Arabs.[17]

Unique to Iraq, is a paradoxical reluctance, if not hostility, to the very idea of recognizing the existence of sectarianism in the country, unlike in neighboring Lebanon for example, whose confessional power-sharing system the present Iraqi political system is inspired by. This came to be the case through a long process. In order to create social homogeneity, Iraqi governments historically denied or underplayed the relevance of non-Arab and non-Sunni social identities in the country. Thus, even the basic fact that Shi'i Arabs form the majority of Iraq's population came as a shock to most Sunnis when the country's first post-2003 election made Shi'is

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[15] For examples of the first usage, see Khalil F. Osman, *Sectarianism in Iraq: The Making of a Nation since 1920* (London: Routledge, 2015). For an example of the second, see Eric Davis, "Introduction: The Question of Sectarian Identities in Iraq," *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 4, no. 3 (December 2010): 229–42.

[16] Nikolaos van Dam, "Middle Eastern Political Cliches: 'Takriti' and 'Sunni Rule' in Iraq; 'Alawi Rule' in Syria; A Critical Appraisal," *Orient: German Journal for Politics and Economics of the Middle East*, 21:1 (Jan. 1980): 42–57.

[17] Lisa Blaydes, *State of Repression: Iraq under Saddam Hussain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 33-35.

numerical superiority clear to all.[18] Indeed, denying that there was any political or social discrimination towards the Shia, Kurds, and other non-Sunni and non-Arab groups was the politically correct thing to do for most urban and educated Iraqis up until 2003.[19] This refusal to discuss Iraq's cultural, linguistic and religious diversity extended to all of the country's political elite, regardless of political allegiance. It is only in the aftermath of the 1991 Uprising, which brought the chasm between the Shi'i and Sunni perceptions of the Baathist regime to the fore, do we see a willingness to address this problem. Hence, Iraqi-Swiss author, Salim Mater, writing in this period, recognized that the solution Iraqi elites came up with to deal with the question of diversity was, "keeping silent and avoiding any notice of inherent differences between the different denominations, religions, and linguistic groups that comprise Iraqi society".[20]

Furthermore, even in academia one can see an aversion to discuss political tensions between sectarian identities in Iraq that persisted until the 1990s. Sometimes this aversion was due to political biases, and in other times due to the fact that sectarian identities didn't seem to matter at all at the then-present historical moment.[21] Thus, Peter and Marion Sluglett, otherwise two of the most renowned and prolific scholars of Iraq, give sectarianism in the country only a passing thought during the 70s, believing that Sunni Arab political dominance would be offset naturally as other communities are lifted into the middle class by the expanding petro-economy.[22] Even today, in spite of its present pervasiveness, the salience of sectarian identities is denied by some scholars who, usually afraid of feeding into a essentialist framing of Iraqi

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[18] Fanar Haddad, "Sectarian Relations in Arab Iraq: Contextualising the Civil War of 2006–2007," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 2 (April 2013): 132, https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2013.790289.
[19] Khalil Osman, *Sectarianism in Iraq: The Making of State and Nation since 1920*, Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Democratization and Government (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 5.
[20] Salim Matar, *Al-Dhāt al-Jarīḥah: Ishkalīyyat al-Hawīyyah Fī al-'Irāq Wa al-'Ālam al-'Arabī "al-Sharqmutawaṣṣitī,"* 4th Edition (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Kalimah al-Hurrah, 2008), 362.
[21] For a clearly apologetic pro-Baath example, see Christine Moss Helms, *Iraq: Eastern Flank of the Arab World* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution, 1984).
[22] Peter Sluglett and Marion Farouk-Sluglett "Some Reflections on the Sunni/Shi'i Question in Iraq," *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)* 5, no. 2 (1978): 79–87.

society, deny that sectarian and ethnic identities were ever organically relevant to Iraqi politics. For instance, security expert and historian Reidar Visser in many of his writings on Iraq blame the overemphasis on sectarian politics in Iraq on Western foreign policies and media, and he points to "dearth of sectarian patterns" in the history of Iraq prior to the post-2003 period.[23] He further maintains that what is perceived to be sectarian politics is rather more accurately politics that centers regionalism within Iraq as the main issue instead of sect.[24]

Because of this historical reluctance to treat the ways in which non-Sunni and non-Arab social identities influence the political decisions of Iraqis, we are at an analytical disadvantage when studying sectarianism in Iraq. Luckily, this problem is increasingly been noticed in more recent works that have been produced to fill this lacuna.[25] It should be noted, however, while many point out the analytical and theoretical problems that comes with the usage of the term 'sectarianism', few offers alternatives to this problem aside from providing even more definitions to an already over-defined word.[26] With the problems of defining sectarianism overview, its usage in this paper can be clarified. For the purpose of this paper, sectarianism refers to Arab Sunni-Shi'i dynamics in the political sphere of Iraq, specifically the unequal relationship between the two communities in the fields of the government, army, and state bureaucracy.

Literature Review

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[23] Reidar Visser, "The Western Imposition of Sectarianism on Iraqi Politics," *The Arab Studies Journal* 15–16, no. 2–1 (2007): 86; Reidar Visser, "Ethnicity, Federalism and the Idea of Sectarian Citizenship in Iraq: A Critique," *International Review of the Red Cross* 89, no. 868 (December 2007): 809–22.
[24] Reider Visser, "Introduction," in *An Iraq of Its Regions: Cornerstones of a Federal Democracy?*, ed. Reider Visser and Gareth Stansfield (London: Hurst & Company, 2007), 1.
[25] For example, see Peter Sluglett, "The British, the Sunnis and the Shi'is: Social Hierarchies of Identity under the British Mandate," *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 4, no. 3 (2010), https://doi.org/10.1386/ijcis.4.3.257_1.
[26] Haddad, *Understanding 'Sectarianism'*, 2.

The voluminous literature on sectarian politics in the Middle East has yet to reach a consensus on the precise nature of and role played by sectarian identities in shaping political change. Scholars working in the tradition of political culture stress the embeddedness of sectarian and ethnic identities for their communities in developing and post-civil war countries. They argue that the best way to avert possible violence resulting from tensions between sectarian communities is to establish a shared political space where identity-based elites can interact in a peaceful manner. Federalism as consociationalism is the most commonly suggested framework for achieving this goal found in this type of political science literature. Examples include works highlighting the successes of such models in developed countries like Canada and Northern Ireland, and less frequently (and now seemingly absurd), Lebanon.[27] The post-2003 Iraqi state is officially federal, and much has written discussing its system. Notably, while recognizing its value in accommodating Kurdish autonomy within a sovereign Iraq, literature on Iraqi federalism problematize it by pointing out how it failed, if not abated, the massive spread of corruption, nepotism and clientelism, state failure, and institutional weakness.

In Iraq, federalism was introduced as the country's governing system by American occupation authorities and the Iraqi Transitional Governing Council (TGC) as a compromise to guarantee inclusion and representation for the three major ethno-sectarian communities in the new Iraq. A literature from the discipline of political science developed as a result to study Iraqi federalism, which is unique not only due to its constitutional form, but also the way it was introduced, i.e. through the supervision of a foreign occupying force and a radical break with previous traditions. Theoretically, the Iraqi constitution allows for any two governorates or

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[27] For example, John McGarry and Brandan O'Leary, "Iraq's Constitution of 2005: Liberal Consociation as Political Prescription," in *Constitutional Design for Divided Societies: Integration or Accommodation?*, ed. Sujit Choudhry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 342–68; Adham Saouli, "Sectarianism and Political Order in Iraq and Lebanon," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 19, no. 1 (2019): 67–87.

more of the country's nineteen to form an autonomous region, but in practice this has never happened so far.[28] Only the Kurdistan Region, made up of four governorates, is a federal region with its own government, parliament, security forces, and other autonomous apparatuses. All other governorates have little autonomy and are completely subject to Baghdad, creating an asymmetrical federation of a unitary Iraq and a federated Kurdistan.[29]

Alex Danilovich notes that federalism was first introduced to accommodate Kurdish nationalism and convince the de facto independent and separatist government in the Kurdish region to cease, however temporarily, from attempting to secede from Iraq, as, "[a]ll attempts to do that within a unitary state by domestic actors failed."[30] He further clarifies that an inherent paradox exists within this arrangement because while a federal system can guarantee the territorial integrity of the state, in the same time it perpetuate the threat of secession by allowing the creation of state structure at the local level and thus reducing the cost of secession for ethnic nationalists.[31] Conversely, Brandan O'Leary, a specialist of federalism in Northern Ireland and Iraq, writing in 2010, a time of high optimism for democratization possibilities in Iraq, warn against hasty plans to disregard federated options for Iraq. He maintains that decentralization and relinquishing of security to the hands of local powers is the option most likely to avoid future violence along ethno-sectarian lines. He adds that the creation of multiple autonomous regions: Shi'i, Kurdish and Sunni, can help elevate communal tensions by clearly demarcating each group's region, while integrating them economically.[32] He admits, nonetheless, that regionalization in Iraq is often, "has regrettably not just been the result of logic, persuasion,

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[28] IRAQ CONST. art. 119.
[29] Brandan O'Leary, "Thinking About Asymmetry and Symmetry in the Remaking of Iraq," in *Asymmetric Autonomy and the Settlement of Ethnic Conflicts*, ed. Marc Weller and Katherine Nobbs (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 183–212.
[30] Alex Danilovich, *Iraqi Federalism and the Kurds: Learning to Live Together*, Federalism Studies (Surrey, England ; Ashgate, 2014), 18.
[31] Danilovich, *Iraqi Federalism and the Kurds*, 20.
[32] O'Leary, "Remaking of Iraq," 205-06.

reasoned discourse, and information about pluralist federations, but owes more to the territorial homogenization flowing from sectarian and ethnic expulsions, and "fear of the other"".[33]

Khalil Osman reaches a similar conclusion in his monograph on sectarianism in Iraq. He notes that the success of the Kurdish region in terms of superior safety and economic growth relative to the rest of Iraq has inspired similar demands from certain Shi'i factions for an autonomous southern region or regions.[34] Agreeing with the general consensus of casting doubts on the feasibility of federalism outside of Kurdistan, Osman holds that calls for new federal regions are usually motivated by barely concealed feelings of "sectarian victimhood and the need to right sectarian wrongs" inflected by the other communities.[35] Thus, calls to establish a federal supra-region in the Shi'i south in 2008-2010 and another in the Sunni west in 2011 were opposed by most Shi'i and Sunni parties and politicians supporting decentralization, who feared such an act would weaken even further an already weakened Iraqi national identity.[36]

The same is argued by authors who were even involved in the process of building Iraq's legal infrastructure. For example, Feisal al-Istrabadi, legal theorist and principle drafter of the interim Iraqi constitution applied from 2003 to 2004, believes that the permanent constitution promulgated in 2006 was stillborn due to its inorganic development. This was mostly the result of two reasons: the US occupation of the country and tutelage of its drafters, and the lack of trust between political parties dictating its writers, most notably seen in the exclusion of elected Sunni representatives by a Kurdish-Shi'i alliance after repeated impasses.[37] Raad Alkadiri, similarly, holds that an overemphasis on "finding the balance" between Iraq's main

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[33] O'Leary, "Remaking of Iraq," 206.
[34] Khalil Osman, *Sectarianism in Iraq: The Making of State and Nation since 1920*, Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Democratization and Government (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 246-247.
[35] Osman, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, 249.
[36] Osman, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, 248.
[37] Feisal Amin Istrabadi, "A Constitution Without Constitutionalism: Reflections on Iraq's Failed Constitutional Process," *Texas Law Review* 87 (2009): 1628–29.

communities have overshadowed serious consideration of other zones of contentions in Iraqi partisan politics. He singles out most importantly the fields of energy and gas laws, as well as foreign intervention by neighboring states, all laying outside of questions of representations and identity.[38]

Another scholarly perspective that aims to study Iraqi sectarianism is historical institutionalism. This perspective takes into account the contextual historical processes and external dynamics that have enabled elites to deftly instrumentalize sectarian identity for political purposes. This school of thought is very useful in explaining the instrumentalization of sectarianism, the evolution of sectarian allegiances over time, and critical changes in the role of sectarian identities in politics.[39] However, it falls short in specifying the form of regime and political institutions that can explain variations in terms of the relationship between sectarianism and the state. Thus, for example, they paint with the same brush federalist, semi-democratic regimes such as Iraq, closed, authoritarian regimes like Syria, and consociationalist, weak states such as Lebanon.

Scholarly Works concerning the sectarian system in Lebanon, on which Iraq's own is partially based, are the richest in detail and sophistication. They offer much in helping understand sectarianism in Iraq as it developed historically and institutionally. Historian Ussama Makdisi, in a work that is now considered a classic in studies on sectarianism, demonstrates that the creation of national Lebanese entity, both through Ottoman and colonial French intervention and through communal literary production by Lebanese Christians and Muslims, was intrinsically linked to the formation of a sectarian system as the *only* legitimate

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[38] Raad Alkadiri, "Oil and the Question of Federalism in Iraq," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 86, no. 6 (2010): 1315–28.

[39] Bassel F. Salloukh et al., *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2015); Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*; Ussama Samir Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2000).

and logical framework for the realization of a modern and pluralistic Lebanon (instead of a civil or a secular state, for example). Makdisi showcases how Lebanese political and cultural elites strived to portray the civil wars of 1840-60 and 1975-91 as the products of errant premodern traditions that can only be erased with a modern, nationalistic society and state. However, a closer examination of these events suggests a different picture, one in which sectarianism is deeply tied to Lebanese nationalism and the construction of modern Lebanese citizens.[40] While Makdisi offers an informative historical analysis of sectarianism, Bassel Salloukh et al. take it to its present by giving a picture of the politico-economic networks through which Lebanese political elites form and propagate sectarianism in Lebanon. In a series of critical articles deconstructing the Lebanese sectarian power-sharing model, they explore the political economy of sectarianism to underline the connection between sectarian politics, economy, media, and social mobilization. The result of this system is a sectarianism that, "obfuscates all kinds of income and regional disparities, while at the same time enabling the elite to protect their financial privileges and escape public accountability. The result…reproduces sectarian modes of subjectification…and perpetuates the sectarian/political elite's clientelist infrastructure of control."[41]

Recent works on Iraq have been following in the footsteps of literature on Lebanon that emphasize the historical and institutional rule of the state in the creation of sectarianism and its reproduction. The Baathist state's role in contributing to sectarianism is perhaps the most well-studied due to the accessibility of the regime's archives to Western scholars.[42] Profiting

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[40] Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, 166-67.
[41] Salloukh et al., *The Politics of Sectarianism,* 174.
[42] The Baath Party Records (1968–2003) include approximately 11 million documents housed at Stanford University's Hoover Institution. Most of the documents are from the late period of the regime (1990s and early 2000s). They include correspondences, membership and personnel records, judicial dossiers, investigatory reports, and administrative files. Since most of them were taken en masse from Iraq by the occupation authorities or individuals associated with them, the morality and legality of their usage have been sources of great controversy in academia and beyond, see Michelle Caswell, "'Thank You Very Much, Now Give Them Back': Cultural Property and the Fight over the Iraqi Baath Party Records," *The American Archivist* 74, no. 1 (2011): 211–40.

from rocketing oil revenues in the 1970s and most of the 1980s, the Baathist regime was able to penetrate Iraqi society to a degree not seen before nor since. Religion and sectarian identities, both at the individual and communal levels, were transformed by their interaction with the state during this period, as the Baathist regime securitized social identities as potential threats.

Using evidence from the archives of the Baathist regime, Samuel Helfont argues that similar to other dictators in the 20th century, Saddam Hussein instrumentalized religion to reinforce his political control. This was done through imposing the Baathist brand of Arab nationalism on the curricula of existing religious seminaries, as well as creating specialized state institutions to train new cadres of Baathist clergymen of all religions, but especially Sunni Islam.[43] These policies exacerbated sectarian animosities in the wake of the 2003 invasion by providing Sunni jihadists a fully-formed religious networks to recruit from and refine theological justifications for murdering non-Sunnis.[44] Dina Rizk Khoury, in an illuminating study of the militarization of Iraqi society during the Baathist period, concurs with Helfont's conclusions on the role of the state under Saddam in creating the fertile grounds in which sectarian violence flourished after the invasion. Khoury convincingly argues, "that current politics and rhetoric of members of Iraq's political elite and their detractors are to a significant degree the extension of the politics of the Iran-Iraq war and the Iraqi uprising [in 1991]." [45] Other works reach similar conclusions, and they stress the failure of the post-Saddam Iraqi government in healing the damage done to Iraq under the dictator's reign. In addition, they highlight the continuity between the two periods, Baathist and post-2003, in terms of policies

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[43] Samuel Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein, Islam, and the Roots of Insurgencies in Iraq* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).
[44] Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion*, 222-233.
[45] Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 3.

that solidify sectarian identities and animosities by using victimhood as the main frame for claiming political rights and privileges.[46]

The third and last group of literature approaches sectarianism from a deconstructionist perspective, choosing to look at the unfolding of sectarianism on the popular level. These works emphasize the economic grids underpinning sectarianism and determining its popularity among communities. In doing so, they attempt to expose the real-life factors behind the successes or failures of sectarian mobilization in different contexts. Useful as they are in showing the specific factors that sometimes make sectarian politics desirable by the public, such analyses lack a big-picture perspective on sectarian dynamics in society at large. Again, studies on Lebanon are the most informative and analytically rich.[47] Literature on Iraq's comparatively less sophisticated sectarian system is smaller due to its novelty, yet still very informative.

Bassam Youssif traces sectarianism in Iraq to the radical economic transformations that accompanied the introduction of European markets and global capitalism to Ottoman Iraq during the latter half the 19th century. He especially highlights amongst these transformation the end of nomadism as a viable economic lifestyle, and the Ottoman system of land reforms that was taken up and expanded by the British later.[48] These structural changes created a class of underprivileged Shi'i peasantry, due to their economic and tribal structures just as much due to their religious difference, in the south of the country that would continue to be a source of

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[46] Most notably Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Aaron M. Faust, *The Ba'thification of Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Totalitarianism.* (New York: University of Texas Press, 2016); Toby Dodge, "Beyond Structure and Agency: Rethinking Political Identities in Iraq after 2003," *Nations and Nationalism* 26, no. 1 (January 2020): 108–22.
[47] For example, Paul W. T. Kingston, *Reproducing Sectarianism: Advocacy Networks and the Politics of Civil Society in Postwar Lebanon* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013); Melani Claire Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism: Welfare and Sectarianism in Lebanon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).
[48] Bassam Yousif, "The Political Economy of Sectarianism in Iraq," *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 4, no. 3 (2010), 358-60.

worry for the various, Sunni-dominated governments that ran Iraq until 2003. Similarly, noted Iraqi sociologist and historian Falih Jabbar notes the essential role played by socioeconomic transformation during the 20th century in politicizing Shi'i identity especially. He explains that, "the migration of the Shi'i [peasants] to the cities, notably to Baghdad, changed the sociological profile of the Shi'is from a predominantly rural to a predominantly urban population. However, it was the Shi'i migrants who augmented the ranks of marginalized, disenfranchised urban poor. The Shi'ite modern middle classes and urban poor were thus alienated from their affluent and upper-class co-religionists by social, political and ideological divides."[49]

Political ramifications of dictatorship had similar effects. Lisa Blaydes, writing on the Baathist infrastructure of coercion and surveillance, argues that the form in which ethnic and sectarian identities in Iraq are conceived of and articulated in is largely informed by how Shi'is and Kurds were targeted by the Baathist regime.[50] She further states that although the Baathists avoided highlighting the religious and ethnic particularism of Shi'is and Kurds, certain elements made the two communities "unintelligible" to the state. These elements were the former community's independent religious networks external to state infrastructure and the latter's linguistic difference and the impenetrability of Kurdish topography, which facilitated armed resistance.[51] Thus, Shi'i and Kurdish opposition was especially singled out for repression, and the communities as a whole were subject to discriminatory policies throughout the Baathist period that Sunni Arabs were spared from. Fanar Haddad argues that the same process of 'identity politicization' happened to Sunni Arabs in Iraq after 2003. While he emphasizes the contextuality of the salience of sectarian identities by drawing attention to the ebb and flow of their centrality, if not relevance, to Iraqi politics, Haddad argues that the post-2003 period saw the appearance of a political Sunni identity that had no precedent in previous

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[49] Falih A. Jabbar, *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq* (London: Saqi, 2003), 66.
[50] Blaydes, *State of Repression*, 6.
[51] Blaydes, *State of Repression*, 306.

eras. According to him, after 2003 the Iraqi state commenced a project of state-building that envisioned Iraq as a multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian state with an Arab Shi'i primacy, and this project inspired a Sunni rejection.[52] By the late 2010s, when it became clear to all that the new Iraqi power-sharing system is here to stay, "Sunnis had to develop a politicized sense of themselves as Sunnis to be relevant in a system that was fundamentally based on identity politics."[53]

Methodology

This thesis' theorical framework synthesizes three types of secondary literature focusing on Iraq and sectarianism in the Middle East: studies on Baathist authoritarianism, Sunni-Shi'i sectarianism in Iraq, and the political ramification of the 2003 US-led invasion in Iraq. This literature will allow me to explain how sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shi'i exploded in the civil war of 2006-2008.

Through using works on Baathist authoritarianism, I will analyze the role of state power and elites in shaping sectarianism in Iraq from the country's foundation in the early 1920s onwards.

Drawing upon literature on Sunni-Shi'i relations in Iraq will allow me to closely study inter- and intra-sectarian relations over time to shed light on how sectarianism is seen on the ground, not solely as an elite construction, but also as a mass-movement. This will help in explaining how tensions between Sunni and Shi'i political groups trickled down to their communities, causing them to organize into violent militias and attack each other when the political climate incentivized such behavior after 2003.

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[52] Haddad, *Understanding*, 266.
[53] Fanar Haddad, "A Sectarian Awking: The Reinvention of Sunni Identity, 2003-2014," in *Iraq Since the Invasion: People and Politics in a State of Conflict*, ed. Keiko Sakai and Philip Marfleet (Abingdon, Oxon : New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 51.

Lastly, I'll be also utilizing literature on the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, specifically its motivation, the mindset and ideology of its planners, and the political changes it introduced to Iraq as it turned into an occupation. American occupation policies in Iraq were a major factor shaping sectarian relations in after 2003, as it was the US government who had the final say the shape of the elite and form of government of the new Iraq. The literature I'll be using will be diverse, including firsthand accounts of politicians and journalist embedded in Iraq from 2003 to 2008, in addition to political science analyzing the invasion and occupation in depth.

Moreover, in addition to textual analysis of secondary literature, I will consult primary sources in the form of speeches, local media content such as newspapers, and interviews, among others, when the need arises and to draw an accurate picture of the development of sectarianism in Iraq.

Chapter Two

Ethno-Sectarian Relations in Pre-2003 Iraq: Social Identities, Political

Marginalization, and State-Building

Present sectarianism in Iraq is inexorably tied to the country's political history. Sectarian dynamics own their existence to the country's pre-invasion national politics as much as they do to post-invasion developments. This chapter overviews ethno-sectarian communal relations in 20th century Iraq. It relates them to Iraqi political history since the late Ottoman period, with reference to the concomitant societal transformations, efforts at state-building by successive regimes, and authoritarian politics. By doing so it aims to shed light on why sectarian identities were poised to acquire an exclusionary political salience on the eve of the collapse of the Baathist regime in 2003. In addition, by highlighting the changing nature and meaning of what it means to be a Sunni or a Shi'i in different historical conjunctions, this chapter emphasizes the porousness of sectarian identities and their amalgamation with other national, subnational, and supranational identities in Iraq throughout the 20th century.

In this chapter I argue sectarian identities and inter-sectarian dynamics have been part and parcel of Iraqi politics and indeed the state itself, since its foundation in the early 20th century. Whether one was a Sunni or Shi'i or hailed from a region perceived to be one or the other played an important part in determining one's position within the political elite as well as share in economic development and the state's services. In other words, the political valorization of Shi'ism and Sunnism in the post-2003 period and the resultant armed violence, is not *solely* the outcome of foreign, i.e., American, intervention. It is important to highlight that this is not an argument for the primordialism of sectarian identities. Across the decades, different Iraqi regimes and governments calculated the sectarian identities into the treatment

of their citizens in different ways, and not always necessarily for the worst. Neither does it mean that Sunnis and Shi'is consistently saw their identities as mutually exclusive and antagonistic. As will be shown, there has been always strong political and social ties binding the two communities together, ranging from Arab and Iraqi nationalisms that saw them as one, untied Arabic-speaking nation, to inter-sectarian marriages. This chapter will explore the history of Sunni-Shi'i dynamics, as well as Sunni-Kurdish, throughout the different periods of Iraq's history in the 20th century. By doing so, it aims to answer the following questions: What were the historical developments in Iraqi state and society that shaped Sunni and Shi'i identities and dynamics in pre-2003 Iraq? How did pre-2003 Iraqi regimes deal with the internal diversity of Iraq society? How did Iraq Shi'i and Kurdish communities deal with Sunni political supremacy? What were the political and administrative tactics Iraqi regimes used to deal with the Shi'i and Kurdish opposition, and how did that shape the way the communities this opposition stems from view themselves in relations to Iraq dominate Sunni community?

Iraq on the Eve of British Conquest

The late Ottoman era is considered the tentative beginnings of modern Iraq. It is during this period that the Ottoman provinces of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra were integrated economically and politically in a form that foreshadows Iraq's present borders.[54] Political identities during this period were determined and influenced by a variety of factors. The main line bisecting the population was the one separating sedentary communities from nomadic ones. In cities and towns religious affiliation, gender, social class, and economic role were the main factors shaping one's life and determined how one would interact with the state. In the countryside, where tribal costumes and laws reigned supreme and state power was weak and tenuous at best, tribal identities and one's position within the tribal system was the main

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[54] Fattah and Caso, *A Brief History of Iraq*, 117.

determinant for one's place in local political systems. On the regional and international level, life in Ottoman Iraq was influenced by the same economic and political trends that shaped the development of the waning Ottoman state. Penetration by European markets had a significant impact on the economic production of the population, especially in Mosul and its environs, which were more connected with Aleppo and other Syrian cities that saw major trade with Europe.[55] Although, nationalism did not yet cultivate the same popularity it had in the empire's Christian provinces in Europe, sentiments that can be describe as proto-nationalist were slowly emerging among the burgeoning middle-classes.[56]

In the 19th century the Ottoman Empire initiated the *Tanzimat* reforms, which had led to important developments in the social, economic, and political structure of Iraq. The *Tanzimat* officially lasted from 1839 to 1876; they were the culmination of a series of reforms that started at the end of the 18th century that hoped to combat the disintegration of the Ottoman realms in front of growing European economic and military penetration and threats of secessionism and ethnic nationalism from non-Muslim and non-Turkish subjects.[57] Thus, the reforms entailed the building of a modern standing military, central bureaucracy, the dissolution of feudal and local rulers and governments, and the replacement of Islamic law with a secular French-based civil code (except in private matters like marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc.), and the declaration of political and social equality of Muslims and non-Muslims.[58]

As part of the *Tanzimat*, the Ottomans created the vilayets of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra to administer lands that up to that point were more or less ruled indirectly through various local dignitaries, tribal sheiks, and hereditary governors. These local rulers were mostly independent,

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[55] For more information on these ties and the Mosul region in general on the eve on the *Tanzimat*, see Dina Rizk Khoury, *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul, 1540-1834* (Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[56] For a quick overview of these developments, see Courtney Hunt, *The History of Iraq* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2005), pp. 55-56.

[57] William L. Cleveland and Martin P. Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 4th ed (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), 82.

[58] Cleveland and Bunton, *A History*, 82-84.

even if in theory they owned their allegiance to the sultan in Constantinople. The three vilayets would often be administered from Baghdad, which was chosen by the Ottomans as the regional capital. Aside from administratively creating a proto-Iraq of sort, the *Tanzimat* also introduced state-run schools in major cities. These schools' aim was twofold: to develop and promote an Ottoman identity among the empire's subjects to counter separatist nationalism, and to train a new cadre of bureaucrat to staff the expanding state ministries and institutes.[59] Notably, the spread of literacy provided the provinces' communities the tools to conceive of a common identity that emphasized their social and ethnic communalities, in other words a national identity.[60] Thus, in the aftermath of these reforms, one can see the glimpses of an articulated proto-Iraqi national identity among Arabs.[61]

Aside from economic and administrative changes related to Ottoman reforms, another crucial development in Iraq took place in the 19th century: the conversion of the bulk of the southern population to Shi'ism. Iraq always had sizeable Shi'i communities since the early Muslim period, but before the 19th century these were mostly urban in character. Shi'is congregated in significant numbers around their imams' shrines in the cities of Baghdad, Samara, Karbala and Najaf. During the 1800s, however, the Shi'i clerical establishment in Najaf and Karbala, the two holiest cities in Shi'ism and centuries-old hubs for seminaries that train Shi'i clergymen, campaigned to convert the nomadic and peasant populations of the surrounding countryside areas to Shi'ism. Their campaign was motivated and facilitated by several factors. The most important of which were the Shi'i clerics need to protect against destructive raids from Wahabist Arab tribes coming out of what is now Saudi Arabia and

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[59] For a detailed history of late Ottoman administrative practices in Iraq, see Gökhan Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq, 1890-1908* (SOAS/Routledge Studies on the Middle East. London ; Routledge, 2006).
[60] The relationship between literacy and the development of a national identity is heavily studied in political science literature. See, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed (London ; New York: Verso, 2006), 37-47.
[61] Nahar Muhammed Nuri, "Iraq Is Not Artificial: Iraqi Trends and the Refutation of the Artificial State Hypothesis." *AlMuntaqa* 1, no. 3 (2018): 9-39.

Ottoman policies of forced tribal settlement starting from 1831.[62] The conversion of the restive Arab nomads of southern Iraq to Shi'ism was a great concern to the reigning Ottoman state of the time, which saw this development as conducive to Iranian interference in Ottoman affairs.[63] Consequently, the Ottoman state followed a deliberate policy of keeping Shi'is outside of state apparatus, whether in the army, bureaucracy, or school. This policy was often facilitated by Shi'is themselves, especially the clergy. Many of them obliged the faithful to avoid contact with the state for fears of sunnification (ar. *tasannun*), and, later on, conscription of men.

On the local level, however, shi'iization (ar. *tashayyu'*) was experienced differently. The change from nomadism to sedentarism shock the centuries-old tribes and their tribal system to their core, "forcing them to reconstruct their identity and relocate themselves on the socioreligious map of their surrounding environment."[64] Tribalism itself seemed to be heading towards obsoletion due to massive social and economic transformation that accompanied the entrance of the Middle East region into the global capitalist system. Thus, the conversion to Shi'ism seemed to have provided a community in crisis with a much-needed new sense of moral purpose and direction. In any case, Iraqi Shi'is' avoidance of the state and its institutions would have a lasting effect on their fortunes once Iraq was established as a sovereign state. Suddenly, they found themselves lacking the necessary skills needed to qualify for the bureaucracy and the army of the new Arab government, closing the door for the most promising way of social climbing at the time.

Under the Mandate and the Monarchy

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[62] For a study of the near century-long conversion of southern Iraq to Shi'ism and the status of Iraqi Shi'is at the eve of Iraqi independence, see Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

[63] Deringil, "The Struggle against Shiism in Hamidian Iraq" 49–56.

[64] Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq,* 28.

The British conquest of Ottoman Iraq set the stage for the development of sectarian relations in monarchical Iraq. Under a mandate system, the British Empire gave Iraq its present form and established the first Iraqi regime, the Hashemite monarchy (1920-1958). Hashemite kings, foreign Sunnis from central Arabia, would continue to rule Iraq until 1958, when most of the royal family were massacred in a coup d'état by disgruntled, nationalist army officers. The Hashemite largely continued the informal Ottoman policy of Shi'i exclusion from the state's upper bureaucracy and army, and they inherited many of the anti-Shi'i biases of their predecessors. However, the Hashemites were engaging in state-building under very different conditions than the Ottoman. While the Shi'is were a small minority in the Ottoman realms as a whole, they comprised the majority, or at the least the plurality, of the Hashemites' subjects. Hence, they had to be incorporated into the new Iraqi political and social fold lest they grow rebellious and the new state is undermined before it's born. Consequently, as their rule progressed, the Hashemites increasingly prompted Iraqi and Arab nationalism to bind Shi'is to the new Iraqi state through introducing public education to Shi'i lands and coopting their tribal leadership.

The monarchical era saw an initial wave of unprecedent cooperation across sectarian lines followed by an apparent decline in the relevancy of sectarian identities - and religiosity in general - in urban centers as a result of the rise of secular, nationalist, and leftist movements. National politics became "secularized" in the sense that issues related to nationalism, leftist activism, and colonial interference dominated the political landscapes. Even the articulation of sect-based communal grievances in political discourses, regardless of their validity, became a sociopolitical taboo and a symbol of a bygone era. This had the effect of denying marginalized communities the power to protest against their discrimination by the state and the ruling elite through democratic channels. That being said, outside of major cities, however, several Shi'i and Kurdish revolts continued to happen well into the late 1930s, undermining the mostly,

Sunni Arab monarchy and its claim of representing all of Iraq. Moreover, even among the purportedly secular and educated middle classes semi-veiled discrimination against non-Arabs and non-Sunnis flourished, and it manifested most clearly in state employment discriminatory policies towards Shi'is in particular and pressure on Kurds and other non-Arabs to Arabize in language and culture.[65] Lastly, this period is notable for another reason. A regime tactic developed during monarchical rule wherein state-sponsored propaganda accused Kurds calling for autonomy and Shi'is campaigning for proportional representation of "sectarianism" to delegitimatize their rights and derail cross-ethnic and cross-sectarian cooperation. This trend continued throughout the republican and Baathist periods, and well into the post-2003 period too, as this was seen as a threat to the state's monopoly on determining the acceptable parameters of social and political identities.

When British forces conquered Iraq from the Ottomans in 1917, they established their rule with an orientalist understanding of local society. The British assumed religion was the sole basis for identity. Thus, they expected the Shi'is of the land to welcome them with open arms because they were oppressed by the Sunni Ottomans, a mistaken assumption that would be repeated by the Americans near a century later.[66] After several years of direct occupation, a major revolt erupted in 1920. The revolt saw large-scale cooperation across both sectarian and tribal-urban lines.[67] Most of the fighting was done by tribesmen from the Middle Euphrates region who were mostly Shi'is, but they included some Sunnis too.[68] Proto-nationalist Sunni and Shi'i urbanites in cities and towns, especially Baghdad, provided economic and public support for the rebels. Aside from resisting the heavy-handed treatment of British authorities

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[65] Hala Fattah, "What Did It Mean to Be an Iraqi During the Monarchy?," in *Writing the Modern History of Iraq*, ed. Jordi Tejel et al. (Singapore: World Scientific, 2012), 95–103.

[66] Abbas Kadhim, "Efforts at Cross-Ethic Cooperation: The 1920 Revolution and Sectarian Identities in Iraq." *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 4, no. 3 (2010), 276.

[67] But not ethnic, or at least not at the same level, as Kurdish revolts against the British in the early 1920s had a clear aim of achieving Kurdistan's independence. See, Kerim Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iraq: The Past, Present and Future*, Rev. ed (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 10-14.

[68] Kadhim, "Efforts at Cross-Ethic Cooperation", 282-284.

and their excessive taxation, the rebels and their supporters, Sunni and Shi'i alike, were motivated by a newly awakened patriotic fervor; they saw themselves as Iraqis fighting an undesired foreign occupier and wished for an elected, representative government.[69]

Nevertheless, this bout of committed mutual support between the two communities was short lived. The revolt was eventually suppressed by British, but at an unacceptable heavy cost. In the aftermath of World War I the British Empire was "beset by upheaval and strapped for cash," so coercive resources in the form of soldiers could not be committed to a secondary colony like Iraq.[70] Thus, imperial authorities were forced to abandon direct rule of Iraq in favor of installing an autonomous Arab monarchy with British control under the guise of the mandate system approved by the League of Nations.[71] The new elite chosen by the British to comprise the local government was largely drawn from the former Ottoman Officer Corps, who were all Sunnis, and most of whom were further of foreign, Arab extraction.[72] Partially because of their large-scale participation in the 1920 revolt and partially because of their own long-standing ambivalence towards the state, by the late 1920s/early 1930s a clear policy of informally barring Iraqi Shi'is from high-level positions within the government and state apparatus was established.

Throughout the monarchical period, the monarchy and its British patrons continued to be concerned with the possibility of political agitation coming from the Shi'i population. They saw the Shi'is, especially the tribesmen and peasants of the south, as largely unreliable, uncivilized, and a possible Iranian fifth column. Thus, while compromising the majority of the

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[69] Abbas K. Kadhim, *Reclaiming Iraq: The 1920 Revolution and the Founding of the Modern State* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012): 162.

[70] See Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*: *The Failure of Nation-Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 131.

[71] Initially, British occupation authorities aimed to annex Iraq to their Indian colony and administer the country directly through the Mandate of Mesopotamia. These plans were cancelled after the revolt, and indirect rule was established. Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 9-10.

[72] Of course, the new king, Faysal, himself was foreign, hailing from Hijazi royalty displaced by Saudis conquerors what is now western Saudi Arabia. Kadhim, *Reclaiming Iraq,* 164.

population in the early 20th century - around 53% - throughout the 58 governments that were formed during the monarchical period, only four were led by a Shi'i Prime Minister, and the percentage of Shi'i ministers never surpassed 27%.[73] They were also systematically barred from entering the officer corps.[74] To compare, the lack of proportional representation was even more dismal during the Republican and Baathist eras, where from 1958 to 2003, only one government was led by a Shi'i.[75]

Although sectarian identities started to take their present political salience during the Ba'athist period, the monarchical period saw the Iraqi state's initial attempts to develop a solution to "Shia Question" and the "Kurdish Problem" in a serious manner. The techniques developed by the Iraqi state to deal with these two communities were economic, political and administrative. Their outcomes would contribute to transforming Shi'i and Kurdish communities into "national problems" and securitize their lives in the provinces where they form majorities in ways that presages the Baathist genocide in Kurdistan and its brutal suppression of opposition in the south for most of its reign.

State capacity and power were fragile most of the monarchical period. The Hashemites inherited little in terms of modern state infrastructure from the Ottomans. The Ottomans neglected Iraq for various reasons that left it unstable; its status as a frontier area, lack of productive agricultural land, intermittent wars with Persia over it, and predatory taxation policies of local governors and pashas, had all left it poor.[76] Furthermore, the tribal population, the majority of society at the time, was heavily armed, while the building of a national army took several years to begin and was reliant on cheap arms imported from Britian.[77] Thus,

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[73] Ali Babakhan, "The Deportations of Shi'is During the Iraq-Iran War: Causes and Consequences," in *Ayatollahs, Sufis, and Ideologues: State, Religion, and Social Movements*, ed. Abdul-Jabar Faleh (London: Saqi Books, 2002), 187-88.

[74] Saouli, "Sectarianism and Political Order in Iraq and Lebanon", 71.

[75] Saouli, "Sectarianism and Political Order in Iraq and Lebanon", 76.

[76] Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, "The Transformation of Land Tenure and Rural Social Structure in Central and Southern Iraq, C. 1870-1958." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40, no. 1 (2008): 491.

[77] Fattah and Caso, *A Brief History of Iraq*, 163.

lacking resources and strong state capacity, the monarchy relied on tribal chiefs and rich merchants to control the peasant populations that formed the majority of the Iraqis at the time.[78] To better control these populations, furthermore, the monarchy revived, if not introduced a new form, of feudal lordships that radically transformed economic life and social bonds in the Iraqi countryside. During the late Ottoman period after the *Tanzimat* reforms, feudalism declined rapidly since feudal lords, whether tribal chiefs or provincial Sheikhs, lost much of their powers and authority to an increasingly centralizing Ottoman state.[79] However, this breakdown of feudalism was halted soon after the arrival of the British. Reapplying colonial policies from India on Iraq, British authorities bestowed upon tribal chiefs and provincial sheikhs unprecedented powers over their people, making them tax-collectors and offering them the unconditional support of the state's coercive apparatuses when suppressing native resistance.[80] Suffice it to say that the Shi'is of the south and Kurds of the north, mostly peasantry, were hit the hardest by this policy.[81] These British and monarchical economic policies made sure issues of sectarianism would be intertwined with class-based struggles and political activism. In Baghdad, for example, while the middle classes were mixed, lower classes were overwhelming Shi'i and of rural immigrant background, explaining the preponderance of Shi'is, Kurds and other minority communities in the Communist Party and leftist activism in general. In Kurdistan too, the revival of feudalism and its power over economic production in the countryside contributed to the leftist turn of Kurdish activism, nationalist or otherwise.[82]

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[78] State capacity is difficult to define consistently and across the board, however, there are three common theoretical aspects that are found in most treatments of the subject: military power, bureaucratic/administrative capacity, and coherence and quality of political institution. When using state capacity as a term in this paper, these three aspects are meant. See Cullen S Hendrix, "Measuring State Capacity: Theoretical and Empirical Implications for the Study of Civil Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 3 (May 1, 2010): 273–85, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343310361838.

[79] Sluglett and Farouk-Sluglett, "Some Reflections", 81–82.

[80] Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, "The Transformation of Land Tenure", 497–502.

[81] Sunni peasants in many parts of central, northern and western Iraq were affected by these too.

[82] For example, the grandfather of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq, Mulla Mustafa Barzani, who was originally a feudal lord himself, developed a reputation for opposing feudalism by the mid-40s after adopted leftist ideas. For a general analysis of economic transformations in Greater Kurdistan, including Iraqi Kurdistan, and their impact

Administratively, both the British and the Hashemites were vested in attaching the Sunni-majority Ottoman vilayet of Mosul to the new Iraq to weigh off the Shi'is numerical supremacy, in addition to taking possession of the recently discovered oilfields of Kirkuk.[83] Although included in Iraq by the British from the outset, Mosul's incorporation was contested internationally by Turkey, and by Kurds and other non-Arabs who formed the majority of the province's population. With diplomacy the British won Turkish acquiescence of Mosul's incorporation into Iraq, and with brute forced they crushed any native opposition from Kurds and others who opposed this decision.[84] By the 1930s, Iraq's borders were secured and opposition to Iraqi monarchy and Sunni Arab political hegemony was largely pacified.

Important as it was, British influence on the development of sectarian politics during this era shouldn't be overstated. Sectarian tensions and prejudices organically found their way into Iraqi politics in all periods. In fact, the existence of a strong anti-Shi'i current among the urban, Sunni political elite of Iraq since the monarchical period has been documented.[85] Modern Sunni anti-Shi'ism manifested itself differently from its pre-modern varieties, which were typically polemical and attacked Shi'ism as a religious heresy. Urban Arab Sunnis views of their Shi'i countrymen were informed by notions of civilization and progress, propriety, and national authenticity. The Shi'is were stereotyped as an uncivilized, ignorant, superstitious, untrustworthy mob not only because of their religious difference, but also because they were of peasant background, working class, illiterate or uneducated, and practiced communal rituals like self-flagellation improper to modern sensibilities.[86] Equally documented was the political

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on nationalist activity and thought, see Martin van. Bruinessen, *Kurdish Ethno-Nationalism versus Nation-Building States: Collected Articles*, Analecta Isisiana 47 (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2000), 43-66.

[83] The Ottoman Mosul Vilayet included present-day Iraqi Kurdistan and the governorate of Nineveh, as well as parts of the governorates of Kirkuk, Diyala, and Salah al-Din. Its population was very mixed, with a slight Kurdish majority. For Britain's goals in annexing Mosul to Iraq, see Liora Lukitz, *Iraq: The Search for National Identity* (London: F. Cass, 1995), pp. 16-18.

[84] Lukitz, *The Search for National Identity*, 32-33.

[85] Kedourie, "Anti-Shiism in Iraq under the Monarchy," 249–53; Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, 48.

[86] This perception is persistent up until and throughout the Baathist period, if not beyond that too. The most vivid example is found in seven articles containing most of these stereotypes and believed to be written be Saddam Hussein and published in the aftermath of the 1991 Uprising. See Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, 118- 127.

elite's concern regarding a Shi'i-specific insurrection. Thus, to placate the Shia public, the monarchy would often appoint a Shi'a as prime minister when they wanted to pass a deeply unpopular law or agreement, such as the Portsmouth Treaty with Britain.[87]

Indeed, the anti-Shi'ism - sometimes mild, sometimes fierce - expressed by the Iraqi state was often subtel and showed itself just as much in rhetoric and ideology associated with the elite's own narrative of nationhood and state as in discriminatory policies.[88] So Othered were Shi'i identity, myth, and symbol from the vision of Iraq espoused by the monarchy that if any Shi'i called for fairer communal rights or increased electoral representation, they would have been met with charges of holding 'sectarian' agendas.[89] This near-phobia of any expression of Shi'ism in politics would continue to be the norm in Iraqi national politics up until 2003.

From the '58 Revolution until The Iraq-Iran War

The 1958 coup d'état in Iraq put a bloody end to the monarchy and signaled the conclusion of the flawed constitutional regime that characterized the country's political system until that point. For the next decade a series of coups and countercoups culminated in the second Baathist coup d'état of 1968. It was followed by another decade of Baathist consolidation and armed struggle with and repression of the three major opposition groups in mid-20th century Iraq: The Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), the Kurdish nationalist Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), and the Shi'i Islamist Da'wa Party. By 1979, the year Saddam Hussein emerged as the unquestioned leader of the Baath Party and Iraq, the regime was comfortably safe in its hegemony of the country. Moreover, this period saw an economic golden age, starting in the early 1970s and lasting up until the mid 1980s, that transformed life

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[87] Kedourie, "Anti-Shiism in Iraq," 249.
[88] Subtlety was sometimes ignored, though. For example, Abdul-Rahman al-Naqib, the head of the first Iraqi government, expressed his intense dislike for Shi'is in an infamous line, "Three I hate more than the devil: the Jew, the Shi'i, and the French". Quoted in Babakhan, "The Deportations of Shi'is", 186.
[89] Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, 49.

for large sectors of the Iraqi populace, above all middle class urbanites. Economic improvements and Baathists' policies of state socialism had positive ramifications for sectarian relations on the social level for certain sectors. Intermarriage across ethnic and sectarian lines normalized in major cities and mixed areas.[90] Conversely, throughout this period sectarian politics gradually took a more and more concrete shape, particularly with rising Baathist hegemony and concurrent Shi'i Islamist and Kurdish nationalist agitation in face of state repression alongside the decline of pan-Iraqi alternatives such as the ICP. Finally, trends in regional politics, namely the Iranian Revolution, increased American influence at the expense of the Soviets', and lose of prestige for leftist and Arab nationalist groups, all contributed to strengthening Islamist movements.

On the eve of the monarchy's downfall, Iraq was in perpetual crisis due to the monarchy's corruption and deference to the British, a hated imperialist enemy for most Iraqis. Sectarian relations were affected by the general political instability. Since expressions that deviated from the normative Sunnism and Arabism of the monarchy's political elite was unacceptable, Shi'is and Kurds pointing out their communities' dismal rights found themselves accused of harboring sectarian sentiments. Thus, those hailing from marginalized communities could only protest against policies hurting them through explicitly non-sectarian political parties. The most common party of choice during those times was undoubtedly the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP).

In the 1950s and 1960s, the ICP was one of the most powerful and influential political parties in Iraq in terms of popular support, membership, and organization. While other parties, mostly one flavor or another of Arab nationalist, had decent membership rates among the urban middle and upper classes in Baghdad and other major metropoles like Mosul, the ICP enjoyed

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[90] That is not to say that this process was not sometimes influenced by the Baath Party's racist, sectarian and nationalistic views. For example, one policy used by the regime in order to deal with Kurdish opposition was to encourage marriages between Arab men and Kurdish women specifically to break Kurds' social and familial bounds and Arabize them. See Blaydes, *State of Repression*, 71.

the widest support among the lower classes, the vast majority of Iraqis. Peasants, working-class people of various professions (most importantly workers in docks, oil refineries and drilling plants), and, most critically, disenfranchised Shi'i migrants from the south escaping feudalism in the Baghdad slums, all made up the rank and file of the ICP. Indeed, the popularity of communism was especially visible in Najaf, the heartland of the Shi'i clerical world, and amongst the Shi'i masses and intelligentsia in general. This fact alone would influence the development of later Shi'i Islamist parties and movements in the 70s and 80s, which would be a throne in the side of the Baathist regime until its fall and the most important component in the new political elite after 2003.[91] Equally important is their popularity amongst non-Sunni Arab sectors. The ICP found a fertile ground for recruitment among urban and nonurban Kurds, Christians, Jews, and all other groups that have been pushed to the margins of politics by the Sunni, Arab nationalist elite in Baghdad.[92]

The first autocrat to rule Revolutionary Iraq was Abd al-Karim Qasim (1958-1963).[93] Qassim rule was initially popular, and he enjoyed wide support from most of the former opposition, especially the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), which served as Qassim's main pillar of support in the political arena. The revolution was received warmly by Shi'i and Kurdish groups for several reasons. Most importantly, Qasim dismantled the feudal system that caused much misery to Iraqi peasantry, disproportionally Shi'i and Kurdish. He also started negotiation with the KDP and its leader, Mulla Mustafa Barzani, to find an acceptable solution to Kurdish demands for more cultural and political rights in Iraq. Indeed, his general political,

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[91] For more on the influence of communist activism on the early Shi'i Islamists in Iraq during the mid-20th century, see Rula Jurdi Abisaab and Malek Abisaab, *The Shi'ites of Lebanon: Modernism, Communism, and Hizbullah's Islamists* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2014). pp. 76-102.

[92] Kurds and Shi'is together formed the majority of the party's members. See Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of Its Communists, Ba'thists, and Free Officers* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 649-652.

[93] A Brigadier General of the Iraqi Army of working class, mixed Sunni Arab-Shi'i Kurdish background who led the '58 Revolution, see Fattah and Caso, *A Brief History of Iraq*, 186-187.

social, and economic reforms attracted Iraqis from all religions, classes and ethnic groups.[94] For instance, his decision to establish a three-member Sunni-Shi'i-Kurdish Sovereignty Council to act as the ceremonial head of state for Iraq was a tacit admission of Iraq's communal plurality.[95]

However, Qasim slowly turned more authoritarian as his reign progressed, and much of his reforms were either shelved or failed to be implemented due to resistance from conservative elements within Iraq, especially the Shi'i clerical institution.[96] In 1963, a coalition between the Baath Party and former high-ranking army men who planned the anti-monarchy coup with Qasim assassinated the later and declared a new government. The new alliance was highly unstable from the beginning, and mere eight months after Qasim's death, the most prominent of the officers, colonel 'Abd al-Salam 'Aref, took advantage of Baathist factionalism and declared himself President of Iraq with the backing of a faction of right-wing leaning Baathists led by Ahmed Hasan al-Bakr, the future first Baathist president of Iraq.

The first 'Aref presidency (1963-1966) was an important period for the development of sectarianism within Iraq. For the first time the country was ruled by a leader with explicit anti-Shia prejudices. Prior to 'Aref, anti-Shi'ism expressed by the state was usually subtle, and policies that attempted to limit Shi'i participation did so in indirect means and avoided naming them. Soon after he took over the presidency, 'Aref led a campaign to expunge Shi'is, regardless of their ideological and political stances, from high or important positions within the government and army.[97] This trend continued throughout the second 'Aref period too, which began when 'Abd al-Rahman 'Aref (1966-1968), 'Abd al-Salam's brother, took over the

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[94] Fattah and Caso, *A Brief History of Iraq,* 189.
[95] Fattah and Caso, *A Brief History of Iraq,* 189.
[96] Abisaab and Abisaab, *The Shi'ites of Lebanon,* xvii.
[97] For example, 'Aref had no qualms about calling even Shi'i politicians within his circle *rawafiḍ* (a derogatory term used in religious Sunni literature to describe Shi'is) to their face, something that is considered a major social taboo in Iraq even today. See, Ḥassan al-Alawi, *al-Shī'ah wa al-Dawlah al-Qawmiyyah fī al-'irāq 1914–1990* (Landan: Dar al-Zura, 1990) pp. 224-225.

latter's position after his death in a helicopter crash. Much less competent and charismatic than his late brother, 'Abd al-Rahman 'Aref was forced into exile in less than two years by the Baath Party under Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, who promptly took over the country's presidency.[98] Al-Bakr would rule Iraq officially until 1979, when he was forced into house arrest for the rest of his life by his righthand-man and kinsman, Saddam Hussein.

During the turbulent period between the monarchy's downfall and Saddam's rise to power, society in Iraq was radically transformed by two interrelated developments: increased state capacity as a result of Iraq's complete nationalization of the oil industry in 1975, and the rocketing of oil prices and concomitant revenue from its sale in the international market during the 1970s. During this decade the amount of money under the control of the Baath regime is calculated to have increased from around $521 million in 1970 to a staggering $26 billion in 1980.[99] The Baathist regime used a sizable portion of this newfound wealth to consolidate its rule by investing in the service sector to engender complacency in the population, especially the middle-classes of large cities like Baghdad, which were the main source of political opposition in previous eras.[100] The regime established new developmental policies to encourage economic expansion in foreign trade, domestic production, and education. As a result, social trends that started during the Qasim period saw a rapid growth. Sunnis and Shi'i, along with Iraqis of all ethnic and religious backgrounds, increasingly lived side by side in new neighborhoods and interacted more and more in new economic and business venues. Most notably, social trends like mixed marriages between Sunnis and Shi'is, rare during the Ottoman period but began to happen at an increasing rate during the late monarchical period, saw a rise

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[98] Fattah and Caso, *A Brief History of Iraq,* 207.
[99] Fattah and Caso, *A Brief History of Iraq,* 211.
[100] Which was a largely successful endeavor for a time. See Nadje Sadig Al-Ali, *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present* (London: Zed Books, 2007), pp. 127-128

as a result of reform in family law based on " a relatively liberal reading of Islamic Law" that facilitated such marriages.[101]

That being said, in many areas of Iraq the picture was less rosy. In Kurdistan, the Peshmerga rebels continued to wage an armed resistance against the Baathist state.[102] By the early 1960s, it became obvious to the Kurds that the post-monarchical Iraqi regime was uninterested in reaching a fair settlement regarding Kurdistan's autonomy and the rights of Kurds in disputed territories like the oil-rich Kirkuk governorate. In 1961 the Iraqi army began major military operations against the Peshmerga after an ill-advised intervention into an intertribal Kurdish conflict, causing a war that would continue on for the rest of the decade and up until 1975.[103] In the same time, Arabization gradually increased in pace during these two decades, and Kurds and other communities were ethnically cleansed from many of their lands and replaced with Arabs.[104]

Similarly, Shi'i Islamist parties, the most notable of whom was the militant Da'wa Party, were largely pacified during the same period. After several assassination attempts of major Baathist officials, alongside alarming protests by Shi'is, both lay and clerical, in the holy cities of Karbala and Najaf, the Baath Party arrested Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, one of the founders of the Da'wa Party. Al-Sadr, alongside his activist sister, was executed in the lead-up to the war with Iran, which also saw the Iraqi government denaturalizing, deporting, and confiscating the property of tens of thousands of Shi'is Iraqis for having "foreign Persian" ancestry.[105] During the same period, the ICP, historically the Baathists' biggest rival, gradually

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[101] Al-Ali, *Iraqi Women*, 245.
[102] Peshmerga (in Kurdish, *those who face death*) was an umbrella term for anti-regime Kurdish resistance members. Today, it refers specifically to the Kurdistan Region's official armed forces.
[103] Fattah and Caso, *A Brief History of Iraq,* 201, 207-08.
[104] It should be noted that Arabization started early in the republican era during the 60s, but it increased exponentially in reach and scale under the Baath Party. For overview and analysis of the Arabization of Kirkuk during the Baathist era. See, Bet-Shlimon, *City of Black Gold*, 165-189; Fattah and Caso, *A Brief History of Iraq,* 201, 214-15.
[105] Babakhan, "The Deportations of Shi'is", 183–210.

went into terminal decline. During the 'Aref brothers' presidencies, the party's leadership escaped to Kurdistan where it began an uneasy alliance with Mulla Barzani's Peshmerga. Its exile outside of Baghdad, opened the door for the Baathists to slowly infiltrate the ICP's strongholds of student and labor unions, undermining that latter's power on the ground. The continuous defeats of Arab nationalist regimes in Egypt and Syria at the hands of the Israelis, as well as the decline of Soviets' international influence and prestige contributed to the wanning of leftism in general in Iraq. By the time of the Iranian Revolution, the ICP was further discredited after its ill-advised alliance with the Baath Party earlier in the 1970s, which ended when the Baathists banned the ICP (after absorbing much of its organizational infrastructure and membership), and Shi'i Islamist parties were placed to be the new channels of Shi'i discontent in the country.[106]

The Saddam Hussein Era

The reign of Saddam Hussein (1979-2003) was the most transformative in modern Iraqi history. This tumultuous period, including the eight-years long war with Iran (1980-1988), invasion of Kuwait (1991), the subsequent First Gulf War and anti-Baath uprising in southern Iraq and Kurdistan (1991), reified sectarian differences in Iraq in the shape we know them in today. In fact, the seeds for the violence that erupted in the post-2003 period were planted under Hussein's rule, and the main opposition parties to the Baath that were active during this period would constitute the post-invasion government.[107]

Hussein political career in the upper echelon of power began in earnest after the second Baathist coup in 1968. A trusted ally of his relative, Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr, Saddam took

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[106] The ICP is one of the best studied Communist Parties in the Middle East and the Arab World. For detailed histories and analyses of the party during this period see, Ilario Salucci, *A People's History of Iraq: The Iraqi Communist Party, Workers' Movements and the Left, 1924-2004* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005); Tareq Y Ismael, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq* (Cambridge: New York : Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[107] Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, pp. 3

control of key party and state intelligence services after proving himself in rounding up many of the Baathists' enemies during the street gang wars in Baghdad in the chaotic weeks following the '68 coup.[108] In the following decade al-Bakr and Saddam, with the support of their extended Tikriti clan members and other allies, slowly exiled, forced underground, coopted, jailed, or killed their opposition, including in the ICP, various Islamist factions, the Kurdish resistance, non-Baathist high-rank army figures, and rival Baathist factions, among others.[109] Saddam and his allies were able to consolidate power in no small part due to certain policies inherited from previous eras that served to strengthen state power at the expense of democracy and citizens' rights, including cultivating patronage networks, communal mistrust of Shi'is and Kurds, disproportioned use of state violence with impunity, and an extensive propaganda machine to normalize dictatorship in the name of social discipline and achieving national destiny. The major difference from previous periods being the obscene amount of wealth derived from oil rent that allowed the Baathists to turn the Iraqi state and its apparatuses into a fearsome power independent of the populace's approval or backing. By 1979, the Baathist regime was consolidated, and after Saddam forced al-Bakr to abdicate in his favor, he cleansed the Baath Party from all internal opposition. The stage was set of him to declare war against Iran and commit Iraq to the war effort completely. The beginning of the Iran-Iraq War had major impact on all Iraqis as the state mobilized the population, conscripted hundreds of thousands of men, and reoriented economic production towards sustaining the war effort. The Kurdish north and the Shi'i south were irrevocably transformed as the war progressed. In fact, what it means to be Kurdish and to be Shi'i in Iraq itself transformed.

In Kurdistan, an alliance between the KDP, which came under the leadership of Mulla Mustafa's son Massoud after the former died in 1979, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

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[108] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, UK; Cambridge University Press, 2007), 188.
[109] An excellent overview and analysis of the rise and consolidation of Baathist power under al-Bakr/Saddam during the 1970s and the factors enabling it is found in Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 187-214.

(PUK), under Jalal Talabani (future president of Iraq), developed into a united insurgency against the Baathist regime. The Kurdish resistance was further strengthened by Iranian financial and logistical support, which was reinstated by the Islamic regime after the Shah cut it in 1975 as per the ill-fated Treaty of Algiers with the Baathists. The effectiveness of the Kurds in resisting the regime and virtually expelling it from much of the Kurdish countryside increased the ferocity of Baathist repression in Kurdistan. By the mid-80s, Hussein ordered a series of genocidal campaigns to be conducted by the Iraqi army in Kurdistan to subdue the Peshmerga once and for all. During these campaigns, collectively named al-Anfal, the regime decimated Kurdistan's villages, colonized strategic parts of the region with Arab settlers, and murdered between 80,000 to 120,000 civilians, often through chemical gas attacks.[110] By the end of the war, the Kurdish resistance lost much of its vigor and Kurdistan was pacified, albeit heavily destroyed.

Most of Iraq's Shi'is faired little better. The fact that the new Iranian regime under Ayatollah Khomeini (1979-1989) was explicitly Shi'i Islamist in character and made no pretenses of its desire to "export" its revolution to neighboring countries exacerbated the Baathist regime's paranoia about the possibility of Shi'i insurrections in Iraq. Most of the rank and file of the Iraqi army were conscripts from poor or rural southern Shi'i backgrounds. Like the Kurdish parties, Shi'i Islamist parties were desperate for aid after being nearly decimated by the Baathists in the previous decade, so they decided to join the Iranian side. Khomeini backed Iraqi Shi'i Islamists both financially and ideologically, as his idea of *Wilāyat al-Faqīh* (guardianship of the jurisconsult) became a mainstay in Islamist ideology in Iraq for much of the late 20th century.[111]

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[110] Craig Douglas Albert, "A History of Violence: Ethnic Group Identity and the Iraqi Kurds," *Iran & the Caucasus* 17, no. 2 (2013), 219.

[111] At the basic level, this idea holds that political authority in Shi'i society should be held by the 'ulama', the class of Islamic scholars. During the Iran-Iraq War, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), a major Shi'i Islamist and pro-Iran party in Iraq, was the main proponent of this idea, see Laith Kubba,

Saddam Hussein's policies during this period irrevocably transformed ethnic and sectarian identities. The resultant normalization of authoritarian politics in the country weakened traditional politics of competing parties and ideologies. It also strengthened group-specific identities at the expense of national movements that aimed to incorporate Iraqis of all strips.[112] For example, by the early the 80s, the Baath Party dismantled or coopted most of the activist networks of the ICP, which was up until that point the only major vehicle of political participation for marginalized, lower-class and southern Shi'is, and replaced its members and affiliates in unions across Iraq with its own. In addition to the aforementioned instances of indiscriminate violence inflected on the communities as a whole, the Baath's brand of Arab nationalism alienated many Shi'is and, especially, Kurds, whose religious and ethnic identities put them outside of the fold of "authentic Iraqi citizens", i.e. Arab and Sunni. Baathist ideology was disseminated through the state's cultural, educational, and propaganda apparatuses. Conspiratorial narratives vilifying no-Arabs and non-Sunnis, were common throughout the Baathist period, and were sometimes written by no less of an authority than Saddam Hussein himself. In his monograph on historiography in Iraq, *Memories of State*, Eric Davis notes that Saddam wrote a book on Iraqi history in which he claims a millennia-old conspiracy by Jews, Persians, and other "inauthentic" elements in Iraqi society is the reason behind all cultural and economic backwardness in contemporary Iraq.[113] Davis argues that by locating an eternal source for all disloyalty and treason in the (Shi'i) Persian neighbor to the east, Saddam extends the accusation to Iraq's own Shi'is. In turn, the Shi'is', "only escape from these allegations is to become more Ba'thist than the Ba'thists to prove their loyalty to Iraq."[114]

"Iraqi Shi'i Politics", in *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War,* edited by Lawrence G. Potter and Gary Sick (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 145, 148.

[112] Kubba, "Iraqi Shi'i Politics", 141-150.

[113] Davis, *Memories of State,* 186-88.

[114] Baathists always accused their rivals and enemies of treasons through connecting them with vilified figures from the Islamic past by way of fabricated readings of history. See Davis, *Memories of State*, 184-85,188.

Joining the Baath Party was also the only recourse for Kurds and other ethnic minorities when accused of "inauthenticity", and thus treason, by the Baathists. Ideologically pan-Arabist, the Baath Party envisioned Iraq as the heartland of the Arab World, and Iraqis as paragons of modern Arabs: educated, modern, militant, and (Sunni) Muslim. Aside from portraying the Iraq-centered medieval Abbasid Caliphate as the pinnacle of Islamic civilization, the Baathists Arabized ancient Mesopotamian cultures, while erasing references to the role of non-Arabs, in particular the Persians, from the historical narrative reproduced by the state. Consequently, the party could not tolerant the existence of non-Arabs within the country. Kurds, Turkomens, and Assyrians were singled out for Arabization either through cultural assimilation, or political repression.[115] The regime's policies wreaked material destruction on these communities. In addition, they alienated the bulk of Kurds from Iraqi identity, and engendered a feeling of victimhood amongst many of the Shi'i Arabs that would color the their parties' behavior and relations with other parties and communities after 2003.

Violence and Identity

The Iraqi Baathist regime was by no means the only autocratic government in the Middle East, yet its violence, as well as its longevity, seems unique in some way (even its less resourceful cousin in Syria seems to share these qualities). Lisa Blaydes, in her monograph on Baathist Iraq, *State of Repression*, argues that two major factors steered the historical trajectory of Iraq toward authoritarianism in the 70s and 80s. The first factor is the obvious culprit: Iraq's oil fortune.[116] The explosion in Iraq's oil revenues in the mid 70s was perceived as a great boon

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[115] Ethnic cleansing and engineering were some of the favorite methods of Baathist to achieve this. Throughout the 70s and 80s, and aside from deportations and denaturalization, the regime moved thousands of Shi'i Arabs into Kurdistan and thousands of Kurds into the south to break their communal social ties. See Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 203-06.

[116] Political science literature has long pointed out the detrimental influence of oil, and other rent-producing natural resources, on democratization and analyzed it under the theoretical rubric of the "resource curse". For example, see Michael Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

for the majority of Iraqis at the time, as it allowed the country to be one of the most wealthy and developed in the region. However, it also, "contributed to the curse of raised societal expectations, a heightening of regime hubris vis-à-vis other regional actors, and a profound vulnerability to shocks in the world market for oil."[117] The regime acutely felt the deleterious side effects of oil-dependence by the mid-80s, when oil prices crashed globally and Iranian attacks became more ferocious. This had the effect of emboldening the opposition, and in turn the regime grew even more repressive. The second factor was the regime's inability to effectively monitor and administer populations in geographically inaccessible terrains, in both mountainous Kurdistan and the paludal south. This, and also partially due to cultural factors, i.e. Shi'is difference in religion and Kurds in language, according to Blaydes, "decreased the legibility of [the] state's citizenry".[118] Since the state could not effectively monitor suspect populations and accurately pinpoint dissident individuals and organizations, mass punishment became the only viable method of control for the regime. Thus, in addition to cultural and social violence, Kurds and Shi'i also took the brunt of the state's physical violence during the 70s and 80s.

Furthermore, one of Blaydes's main arguments is that the excessive violence meted out on Shi'is and Kurds by the Baath influenced the shape taken by their political identities. For instance, Kurdish nationalism, which co-exited with other political identities that bonded Kurds with the rest of Iraq, was augmented among Kurds under the Baathists' Arab-centric rule. The trauma of al-Anfal Genocide in particular created a sense of collective experience and strengthened communal identification among Kurds. So, a new Kurdish political identity developed, one that is centered around the idea of suffering at the hands of Arabs. When Kurdish parties could finally join the Iraqi government as equals after 2003, they were so far

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[117] Blaydes, *State of Repression*, 305-06.
[118] Blaydes, *State of Repression*, 306.

removed from an Iraqi identity that their main intension was Kurdistan's eventual independence. In the Shi'is' case, Baathist repression did not engender a wish to separate from Iraq, instead it increased identification with their communal religious identity. Punishment of an individual's political transgression was often extended to his or her social network (family, clan, coreligionists of a certain political figure), which in turn increased identification at the group level, undermining the regime's efforts at controlling Shi'is. Indeed, the regime's policy was so short-sighted that by the eve of the 1991 revolt, Shi'is wishing to effectively protest the regime had no alternative but to do so through emphasizing their identity as Shi'is.[119]

1991: Sectarianism Enters the Public Sphere

The anti-regime uprising of 1991 was a turning point for the politicization of social identities in Iraq, both sectarian and ethnic. The revolt largely unfolded in the south and Kurdistan. The immediate causes of the revolt were external. As a response for the Iraqi invasion and annexation of Kuwait in 1990, an UN-sanctioned and US-led coalition expelled Iraq from Kuwait in the 1991 Gulf War, and in the process destroyed much of the Iraqi army and state infrastructure. This external shock weakened the regime to such an extent that it emboldened organized resistance and facilitated spontaneous popular protests across the country in what became known as the 1991 Iraqi Uprisings. The Internal factors that inspired these revolts were numerous. Most of the fighting in both the Iran-Iraq war and the 1991 Gulf War took place in the mostly-Shi'i southern provinces. The material, economic, and ecological destruction brought about by the wars disrupted life to a great extent, creating a simmering popular anger towards the regime. Furthermore, southern Shi'is from poor and marginalized backgrounds constituted most of the rank and fill in the Iraqi army, and thus most of the causalities, adding another layer of destruction to Shi'i communities from these regions. In

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[119] Blaydes, *State of Repression*, 311; Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, 80-84.

Kurdistan, the memory of the Anfal genocide was still fresh, and the Peshmerga, though defeated, still managed to maintain an underground presence in the region. As soon as the regime's weakness became clear, they came down from their mountain strongholds to conquer most of the Kurdish cities from the regime.

In the south, the uprising began on March 1991, and it was centered mostly in the Shi'i-majority cities of Nasiriyya, Basra, 'Amara, Najaf and Karbala. In each of the cities the revolts were mostly spontaneous and unplanned. Local leaderships quickly emerged as the regime forces were expelled. Some of the new leading rebels were associated with pre-exiting Shi'i Islamist parties, like a the Da'wa Party and Aytollah Baqir al-Hakim's SCIRI, others were local independent elements. For a variety of reasons, including, among others, lack of direction and coordination between rebels and their failure to bring on board many neutral tribes and localities in the south, the uprising was short-lived. The regime managed to squash it in few weeks after destroying much of the rebellious cities and killing thousands of rebels, suspected rebels, and civilians, and causing additional tens of thousands to become refugees.[120]

In Kurdistan, the uprising began simultaneous to the one in the south in early March. It was motivated and facilitated by the same internal and external factors, while the main difference was its relative success. Initially spontaneous, the KDP and PUK coordinated to quickly take advantage and assume control of the uprising and its direction. Notably, the crumbling of the same regime apparatuses that conducted the brutal Anfal Campaign was so thorough and jarring that it inspired the *Jash* militias, pro-regime Kurdish militias, to switch side and join the rebellion.[121] Although very successful in the beginning, for example the Peshmerga conquered Kirkuk by March 10th, as soon as it crushed the southerners, the regime turned its gaze to the north.

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[120] Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 246-47.
[121] Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 248.

Within around a week the regime reconquered Kirkuk, divided rebel areas, and inflected heavy causalities on the Kurds. As it advanced deeper into Kurdistan, the fresh memory of the Al-Anfal caused around two million of Kurdistan's population - the majority - to leave their homes in the direction of Turkey. The humanitarian disaster caused by this eventually led to the implementation of UN Security Resolution 688, which established a No-Fly zone over much of Kurdistan, causing the Iraqi army to halt its advances.[122] The No-Fly zone curtailed the regime's corrosive power on most of Kurdistan, and soon it chose to withdraw its presence to refocus on holding the more important southern region. The KDP and PUK filled the vacuum and established a virtually independent government over the three Kurdish governorates vacated by the regime. Saddam hoped that without governmental resources and monies, the Kurdish parties would collapse and beg Baghdad to return (which it nearly did in the Kurdish civil war in the mid 1990s). However, with American mediation, the KDP and PUK reached a settlement by which they divided administrating Kurdistan between each other, which allowed the region to slowly return to normalcy. By 2003, Kurdistan served as haven for the Arab opposition, and a close ally of the American forces about to invade Iraq and topple Saddam's regime.

The uprising in the south and its effect on the historical trajectory of the development of political identities in Arab Iraq began to be understood few years after the fact. Several factors influenced this process at the time, and led to a lasting perception that it was solely a Shi'i affair: The heavy Shi'i symbology marshalled by most of the rebels, Shi'i fatwas that were perceived to be in support of the uprising, Iranian interference, and anti-rebels regime disinformation and propaganda.[123] In Shi'i communal memory the uprising holds a defining place in their sense of collective identity. The state response was the major element influencing

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[122] Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 248.
[123] An excellent critical and detailed review of these factors and of the 1991 Uprising in general is found in Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, 65-86.

the shaping of this sectarian identity. The uprising was an existential threat for the regime, more so than any Kurdish rebellion could possibly be. The Kurdish wars with the regime were always localized affairs, rarely felt outside of Kurdistan, and had no chance of threating the central state in Baghdad. The southerners were not only fellow Arabs, they also formed the majority of the population, and personified the greatest fear of the Iraqi state since its inception (a mass Shi'i rebellion).

Few weeks after the suppression of the uprising, the Baathist regime began to propagate official accounts of the uprising that portrayed it as a nefarious Iranian plot. The leaders of the uprising were condemned as traitor Iraqis and agents of Tehran. State discourses also began to refer to the (mostly) Sunni western provinces, who didn't rebel, as the white governorates (*al-muḥāfaẓāt al-bayḍā'*), and to the whole event as the mob's rebellion (*thawrat al-ghawghā'*). In a series of infamous articles believed to be written by Saddam Hussein himself, and published in Al-Thawra newspaper, the Baath Party's official publication, the regime broke a longstanding state policy and attacked the Shi'is as a whole by name. Their unique religious rituals were lambasted as savage and backward, and the whole of their religious institutions and central theological tenets were portrayed as Iranian fabrications to Islam.[124] The main target of this propaganda were Sunnis, as well as secular Shi'is (mostly middle-class and urban) who treated their Shi'ism as a purely ancestral/social identity. The majority of Shi'is, religious, southern, and poor, were so othered by this unprecedented attack, that by the mid-1990s their victimization and the demonization of their holy symbols and sect at the hands of the state, and the Sunnis by extensions, became a main referent to their communal experience.[125]

Lastly, the economic damage incurred by UN-imposed sanctions contributed significantly to expediting this process and sharping sectarian identities. Indeed, during this

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[124] Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, 118-127.
[125] Ibid.

period the unfolding of sectarianism was informed and shaped by economic collapse, decimation of the middle-class, breakdown of the education system, humanitarian crises, and isolation of the country and its population. While state-building was the priority for the regime in previous decades, the sanctions forced a change in this, and state-survival became the primary goal. The state became increasingly weak outside of its Baghdad center, and its ability to monitor Iraqi governorates was curtailed. As a result, it had to rely on local elements to act as its enforcers. Tribal sheiks and tribalism, vilified by the Baathists before as socially regressive forces and relics of unmodern times, became its favorite channels to extend its influence in the countryside, with terrible consequence for the peasantry and women especially.[126] The weakness of the state had a paradoxical effect on the population. On the one hand, sanctions forced Iraqis to rely on the regime for substance, which the latter distributed to them based on perceived loyalty, e.g. if they are not relatives of known rebels, members of the Baath Party, have no "foreign" backgrounds, etc.[127] Naturally, southern Shi'is and other groups with a reputation for resisting the regime were disproportionally affected by this. Yet, as Lisa Blaydes argues, during these times even the Sunni community, historically the main beneficiary of state largess, received the bare minimum aide afforded to all other Iraqis; nothing but a personal connection with Saddam Hussein or his family and clan could guarantee a decent life during the 1990s.[128] No matter how hard the regime fought to maintain its façade of a strong state, it was clear to most Iraq its power is mere a shadow of its former self. For example, even in the traditional heartland of Baathist power in the Sunni governorates of Anbar and Salah al-Din, membership in the Baath Party reached a nadir (even lower than in the south), reflecting the lose of prestige incurred by the regime.

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[126] For the process of re-tribalization of Iraqi society during the 1990s, see Amatzia Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies 1991–96," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 1 (February 1997), 1–31.
[127] Blaydes, *State of Repression*, 117.
[128] Blaydes, *State of Repression*, 128-129.

Conclusion

This chapter overviewed Iraq's history to highlight the relationship between the state on the one hand and Shi'is and Kurds on the other throughout the different eras of pre-2003 Iraq. By doing this, it aimed to showcase the continuities and changes between the different eras when it came to sectarian identities. Its main finding is that historical developments dating from the Ottoman period and up put Iraq's Shi'is and Kurds in opposition to successive Iraqi regimes dominated by Sunnis. While this fact remained constant, regime methods of dealing with Shi'i and Kurds and the way these two communities expressed their discontent with the unfair status quo was dynamic and influenced by a variety of internal and external factors depending on the period in question.

At the eve of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the Baathist regime was a very different animal from the picture portrayed outside of the country. The cumulative fallout of Saddam Hussein destructive wars had reduced all of Iraq, politically, economically, and socially, to a shell of its former self. Authoritarianism was the norm, as the near four decades of single party rule made democracy and representative politics an ideal found only in foreign lands. Under the Baathists, most major opposition parties were reduced to clan-like institutiona built on patronage politics and nepotism, with their leaders paying lip service to vaguely-defined ideologies and increasingly dependent on sectarian or ethnic identities to mobilize their bases.

How did this situation come to be? An answer is found in the historical development of the century-long political process in Iraq. Starting from its very foundation, the Iraqi state was unrepresentative of the country's communities and social groups. The British-installed monarchical government was composed of foreigners who relied a class of Sunni Arabs bureaucrats to enforce their rule. Jealous of their power, this elite was very hesitant to allow democratic practices to flourish in Iraq and to allow non-Arab and non-Sunni Iraqis a channel to peacefully participate in national politics. Perhaps even more ruinous in the long run, they

inherited their Ottoman predecessors' paranoia of the Shi'is and diligently banned them from most influential posts within the new country, in spite of the fact they composed the majority of the population.

These two policies (the barring of the Shi'is, and the unwillingness to allow real opposition a seat at the table), were often challenged and faced serious sociopolitical opposition, in particular in mid-20th century during the early revolutionary period. Two phenomena can attest to this fact; intermarriage and the blurring of lines between Iraqis of all ethnicities and religions was on the increase for most of the 20th century, and all-inclusive and anti-authoritarian, pro-democratic political parties and social movements saw great success in different periods. Nonetheless, by the early 70s, the ascendency of the Baath Party under the acumen of Saddam Hussein reinstated authoritarianism as the unequivocal principle of rule in Iraq.

The Baathist regime was the inheritor of the anti-democratic practices of the monarchy and the early republican strongmen in many ways. Yet, the international oil price boom of the early 70s and regional dynamics related to the decline of the Soviet Union in favor of America and the rise of Islamism, allowed the regime to deal with the opposition in an unprecedently brutal way. Something like the al-Anfal campaign or the mass punishment of Shi'is after the 1991 Uprising was unthinkable for previous regimes because they simply lacked the wherewithal to deal effectively with restive populations. The massive attacks that targeted Shi'is and Kurds, their societies, symbol and ways of life, irrevocable transformed their political identities. While Kurdish parties became increasingly distant from other Iraqi groups and their calls for autonomy gradually drew closer to outright independence, Shi'is developed a victimhood narrative as the main referent for their political identities. This ensured that when they came to the negotiation table after the invasion, they would accept nothing less than the complete recognition that they alone must be the main holder of power in the new Iraq.

Chapter Three

Paving the Road to Violence: The Dangers of Forced Democratization

The explosion of violence in Iraq in the aftermath of the American invasion in 2003 was the outcome of a combination of immediate factors informed by structural and historical elements that shaped the development of the Iraqi state until 2003. Yet, the invasion and subsequent occupation were more than simply a trigger for the sectarianism that impeded Iraq's democratization. This it did through strengthening parochial Islamist parties and allowing them to dominate political life by exploiting intercommunal tensions and segmenting the Iraqi state into nepotistic fiefdoms.[129] Aside from the considerable human and economic loss incurred, the American occupation of the Iraq introduced a fundamental structural change in the country that was little understood at the time but had major far-reaching consequence on the long term, namely the centering of ethnic and sectarian identities at the heart of politics in Iraq. Thus, some important questions arise out of this observation; How did the American occupation's policies alter sectarian politics in Iraq in ways that encouraged inter-sectarian violence? How did the introduction of democracy in the form of electoral and multiparty competition change and harden sectarian identities? And what was the new elites' role, who were brought to power by the Americans, in this process?

In this chapter I argue that the American invasion of Iraq and its occupation was informed by a neocon ideology that understood Iraq solely as composite of inherently antagonistic ethnic and religious communities, i.e., Shi'is, Sunni, Kurds, Christians, and Turkomans (and other smaller minorities). Neocons believed that Iraq can only be democratized through a power-sharing system that divided governmental posts according to the demographic weight of each

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[129] Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael, "The Sectarian State in Iraq and the New Political Class," *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 4, no. 3 (December 2010): 339–56.

component community. Thus, occupation authorities only empowered Iraqi actors in the new state with explicit religious (Shi'i and Sunni Islamists) or ethnic (Kurdish nationalist) character. Furthermore, the US occupation government's failure at maintaining security for and providing essential services to Iraqis, as well as its policy of dismantling the Iraqi army and state bureaucracy, contributed to the proliferation of sect-centered militias and infiltration of foreign Jihadists. Lastly, I argue that the elections of 2005 directly led to the explosion of sectarian violence in 2006-2008 because it was held in a context of heightened sectarian tensions and were organized by both the American occupation and the Iraqi political elites to exclude non-sectarian, national, or secular alternatives. The result was that the Iraqi elections of 2005 (two parliamentary elections in January and December and one constitutional referendum in October) were a bona fide sectarian affair, with Shi'i Arabs and Kurds coming out of it as victors and Sunni Arabs as the losers. This in turn, I argue, caused a large increase of support for a violent insurgency against both the American presence and the new Iraqi government that by 2007 developed into a civil war between Sunni and Shi'i Arabs in Baghdad and surrounding areas.

As argued in the previous chapter, the Iraqi state and its politics were historically construed with imbedded anti-democratizing and sectarianizing tendencies that reached their peak during the Baathist era under Saddam Hussein (1979-2003). After 2003, however, sectarianism was reformulated in three new ways that make it fundamentally different as a political phenomenon before the invasion. Firstly, sectarianism was enshrined in the heart of the political process in Iraq in the form of sect-based tripartite division of power. In this new division government posts and share of ministerial positions were split between Shi'is, Kurds and Sunnis. This is in contrast to before 2003, when legally and officially Sunni and Shi'i identities were largely confined to the private spheres of marriage, divorce, religious education, and inheritance. Secondly, sectarian representation - here meaning proportional share of Shi'is,

Sunnis and other communities in government - became the sole axis around which electoral coalitions and political alliances can be formed. Before 2003, issues of sectarian allotments and representation took secondary place to pan-national issues. Economic inequality between social classes, political independence from Western influence, party and ideological rivalries between Arab nationalists, Baathists, and communists, and modernization of cultural and economic life of the country, were the core issues in Iraqi politics for most of the 20th century. Thirdly, Sectarianism in the post-2003 era is decidedly more violent than in the pre-invasion period. Only once, during largely-Shi'i Iraqi uprising of 1991, was there an explicit sectarian motive to mass violence, that of the Baathist regime targeting of Shi'i civilians and some Shi'i Islamist rebels attacking the regime for its "anti-religious/non-Shi'i" character.

In the weeks following the fall of Baghdad to the US army on April 12th, 2003 Iraq began a rapid political, social, and administrative disintegration that has so far led to two major armed conflicts primarily between Arab Sunni and Shi'i factions (2006-2008 and 2014-2017), alongside a continuing multipronged insurgency (2003-present). This disintegration was the result of factors both internal to Iraqi dynamics and US occupation polices. The socio-economic conditions that the Americans found Iraq in when they entered the country were shaped by nearly four decades of authoritarianism. Iraqi economy was radically transformed during the 70s after the state became one of the biggest exporters of oil in the world. The state's revenue from oil sales increased 40 folds between 1970 and 1980.[130] Such an extreme increase in profit from a dependable rent-producing natural resource like oil allowed the Baathist regime to maintain a great deal of autonomy from both the will of the Iraqi people and from larger regional and international pressures. Notably, it provided enough financial capabilities for the regime to abandon reconciliatory policies with internal opposition in favor of the more cost-

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[130] Toby Dodge, *Iraq: From War to a New Authoritarianism*, Adelphi 434–435 (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2012), 24.

effective policy - from the point of view of the regime - of military repression, and to embark on reckless military adventures abroad. Society, in turn, became increasingly dependent on the state for a living, as the latter became the largest employer of the population in the country. Naturally, when the state collapsed as the Americans conquered Baghdad, the biggest provider of substance was removed, creating intense economic insecurity that allowed sectarian parties and criminal gangs to flourish instead.

The sanctions regime imposed by the UN and the US that lasted from 1991 to 2003 exacerbated the situation on a massive scale once breakdown began. The sanctions were imposed with the purported aim of stopping the regionally destabilizing aggression of the Baathist regime. The goal was achieved, but at the cost of decimating Iraqi society. In previous decades Iraq has become dependent on foreign imports of food, medicine, technology, and industrial and consumer goods to maintain its complex economy and state infrastructure, including hospitals and educational institutes. The sanctions cut this lifeline off and effectively plunged Iraqis into a virtually pre-modern way of living.[131] It was in this context that the United States invaded Iraq and, "turned the 1921 British-built centralised unitary state model, embedded in market economy ... upside down [and] attempted to reconstruct a market-embedded democracy within a federal decentralised and consociational order, under violent political conditions, and a full-fledged rentier economy."[132]

In the following section, the background behind the United States' decision to invade Iraq will be explored to highlight the assumptions about Iraqi society and culture informing its behavior during the occupation period. The section following that will enumerate the specific

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[131] The destruction and suffering inflected on Iraqis and their society by the sanctions is well-documented, see Joy Gordon, *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010); for their consequence on the deterioration of women rights in Iraq during the 1990s, see Zahra Ali, *Women and Gender in Iraq: Between Nation-Building and Fragmentation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); for the destruction of Iraq's hospitals and medical industry, see Omar Al-Dewachi, *Ungovernable Life: Mandatory Medicine and Statecraft in Iraq* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2017).
[132] Renad Mansour and Faleh Jabar, "Inter- and Intra-Ethnic Relations and Power Sharing in Post-Conflict Iraq," *European Yearbook of Minority Issues Online* 11, no. 1 (2014): 187–209, https://doi.org/10.1163/22116117-90110044.

major steps taken by the American occupation government in Iraq that exacerbated sectarianization. These steps are: justifying the invasion on the incorrect premise of destroying WMDs, allowing mass looting and anarchy to spread in the country after the invasion, disbanding Iraqi security forces and failing to replace them quickly, empowering Shi'i Islamists and Kurdish nationalist while marginalizing Sunnis, and finally failing at rebuilding state bureaucracy and institutions; all of these contributed to the spread of sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shi'is in Iraq once elections in 2005 made it clear the former were the losers of the new order and the latter the winners. Finally, it will be argued that the nature of the new Iraqi political elite that rose after the invasion, that is their ideological commitment to Shi'i, Sunni, and Kurdish particularistic identities, played an essential role in enabling the process of sectarianization.

The Road to Invasion

Much has been written on the causes that led the United States to invade and occupy Iraq, as well as the rationale and justifications it marshalled in support of this decision.[133] Although separated from the earlier invasion of Afghanistan by less than two years, the invasion of Iraq couldn't be more different. From the very beginning resistance to the invasion was widespread and strong, partly because the brief spell of international pro-American sentiment that added some legitimacy to the war in Afghanistan had dissipated by then, and partly because the Bush government failed to provide a convincing rational for the new war.[134] Nothing like the

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[133] To give a few examples, see Keith L Shimko, *The Iraq Wars and America's Military Revolution* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Alexander Thompson, *Channels of Power: The UN Security Council and U.S. Statecraft in Iraq* (Cornell University Press, 2015). Michael F. Cairo, *The Gulf: The Bush Presidencies and the Middle East* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012); Joseph M Siracusa and Laurens J Visser, *Going to War with Iraq: A Comparative History of the Bush Presidencies* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2020).

[134] In presenting the case for the invasion of Afghanistan to the UN Security Council, the official American position was self-defense, which was implicitly approved by the council and the international community in general. When asking for the Council's approval of the invasion of Iraq for the same reason, the council rejected the United States' reasoning and refused its demand. See Ramses Amer, "Non-Authorized Military Interventions and Legitimization by the United Nations," in *The Democratization Project: Opportunities and Challenges*, ed. Ashok Swain, Ramses Amer, and Joakim Öjendal (London: Anthem Press, 2012), 17-38. https://doi.org/10.7135/UPO9781843313250.003.

persuasive and rallying cause of capturing the mastermind behind the September 11 attacks could be used as pretext for invading Iraq and toppling Saddam Hussein. Although the George W. Bush administration insisted on the latter's culpability in supporting al-Qaeda and building WMDs in front of the United Nations and the International Community, the UN own investigation found no proof of these allegations.[135]

In spite of significant resistance abroad, not to mention internal one from the Democratic Party and other anti-invasion elements within the US's political, educational, social and cultural institutions, the Bush administration was unbending in its desire to invade Iraq, topple its regime, and occupy the country.[136] Knowing what we know now of America's administrative ineptness, i.e., inability to provide basic services like electricity, water, and security to Iraqis, and lack of long-term vision in occupying Iraq, this desire seems even more irrational and misguided. It follows that some words need to be said about the rationale behind Bush's choice to invade, since it would inform many of the decisions that politicized sectarian identities in the county, led to armed conflict, and the hampering of democratization.

First, ideological rather than practical considerations played a more prominent role in the calculations of the Bush administration. Specifically, the expansionist and bellicose ideology of the neocon political elite that came to dominate Washington in the wake of Bush's victory in the 2000 American elections played a significant role in facilitating and encouraging the decision to invade. The neocons first showed signs of their desire to invade Iraq as early as 1992, during the presidency of George H.W. Bush; their desire was the byproduct of the

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[135] The US disregard for diplomacy and the international consensus was alarming even before the war. The United Nations Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), established by a Security Council resolution in 1999 to confirm Iraq's cooperation with the disarmament mandated by the 1991 ceasefire treaty, conducted a comprehensive final round of inspections in November 2002 and were allowed full access to all Iraqi facilities by the regime. However, the US ignored this gesture and made clear its intent to invade regardless of the commission's conclusions. See Hans Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 1st ed (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004).

[136] Britain was the only major American ally to participate with significant forces in the war, and the strong cross-continental diplomatic resistance to the idea of the invasion is well-documented, see Muhammad Idrees Ahmad, *The Road to Iraq: The Making of a Neoconservative War*, 1 online resource vols., Edinburgh Scholarship Online (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 28-30.

imperative of maintaining America's global hegemony as the world's sole superpower after the collapse of the Soviet Union. They hoped to do this by preventing the rise of competitors on the global stage through the use of localized small wars and weakening international institutions like the UN that may allow anti-American coalitions to develop.[137] For the rest of the decade neoconservatives cultivated strong relations with Iraqi opposition forces exiled abroad, and advocated the necessity of removing Saddam Hussein and his regime from power to politicians, journalists, and policy analysts in Washington.[138] Their efforts paid out when the beginning of the American "War on Terror" campaign in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks provided a fertile ground for the crystallization of concrete plans to remove the Baathist regime, which started to be drawn the very next day after the attacks.[139] The question remains as to why neocons chose Iraq as target for invasion and regime change in the Middle East in first place. Popular theories posited as cause for invasion are usually, "mono-causal: oil, imperialism, militarism, Israel, democracy promotion and the demonstrative use of power."[140] The answer is most likely all of these to different degrees depending on the neocon in question. As Muhammad Idriss Ahmed argues, the neocons were not so much an organized, coherent group as a collection of individuals with a shared goal and strategically placed within American institutions of power.[141] Thus, for Bush the invasion seemed to have been the product of a

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[137] This plan came to light in March 8, 1992, in a scandal that involved a leaked internal document from the Pentagon that outlined it. The document, called the Defense Planning Guidance, was penned by Zalmay Khalilzad (US ambassador to Iraq from 2005 to 2007) and Abram Shulsky, both of whom would be involved in planning the invasion and running the occupation. It was also commissioned by Dick Cheney and supervised by Paul Wolfowitz, two of the most senior figures associated with the pro-invasion camp a decade later, See George Packer, *The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq*, 1st ed (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005); "Excerpts From Pentagon's Plan: 'Prevent the Re-Emergence of a New Rival,'" *New York Times*, March 8, 1992, https://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/08/world/excerpts-from-pentagon-s-plan-prevent-the-re-emergence-of-a-new-rival.html.

[138] For example, their advocacy was rewarded as early as 1998 under Bill Clinton's presidency, when US Congress passed the Iraq Liberation Act, which declared, "it should be the policy of the United States to support efforts to remove the regime headed by Saddam Hussein from power." Quoted in James Fallows, "Blind Into Baghdad," *The Atlantic*, January 1, 2004, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2004/01/blind-into-baghdad/302860/.

[139] Fallows, "Blind Into Baghdad".

[140] Ahmad, *The Road to Iraq*, 18.

[141] Ahmad, *The Road to Iraq*, 6-13. For a list of neocons and descriptions of their positions and contribution to the efforts of encouraging the invasion, see 7-9.

simplistic desire to fight an "evil regime", while his vice president, Dick Cheney, and then-Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, it was "a sanguine assertion of US military power."[142] Informed by orientalist conception of the Middle East and Islam, the neocons were also the main proponent of the principle of ethnic and sectarian political allotment as the basis for a post-Saddam Iraqi government. This view was understandably backed by many within the Shi'i and Kurdish opposition.[143] The former wished an end to their historical marginalization by Sunni elites, and the latter a say in the Baghdad government to guarantee Kurdish autonomy and rights.

Important as the neocons' influence was, pure geopolitical factors were also at play and they contributed to leading the US towards launching an invasion. Although Iraq was largely defanged after its disastrous defeat in the 1991 Gulf War, many in Washington still believed Saddam Hussein was credible threat to America's allies in the Middle East, if not to America itself. Indeed, along with North Korean and (ironically, the Baathist regime's archnemesis) Islamic Iran, Iraq was counted in the "Axis of Evil" mentioned by Bush in his famous speech after 9/11.[144] Thus, the introduction of democracy to Iraq, that is to transform it to a demilitarized, politically pro-West and economically capitalist government - i.e., open to American economic penetration - became one of the main pillars of the Bush administration's foreign policy.

Finally, it must be noted that the idea of an invasion was also strongly encouraged by many Iraqis themselves. Political exiles involved in anti-regime activism abroad spent decades cultivating relationships with senior US officials, politicians, and journalists to convince them that a full-scale military intervention was the only feasible way to introduce democratic

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[142] Ahmed, 167.
[143] Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq,* 148.
[144] "President Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address," *The Washington Post*, January 29, 2002, https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/onpolitics/transcripts/sou012902.htm.

governance in Iraq.[145] A famous example of such Iraqis is Ahmed Chalabi, the leader of the Iraqi National Congress (INC).[146] Hailing from a rich Baghdadi family of bankers, Chalabi fled Iraq as a boy with his family in the aftermath of the 1958 Revolution as they were one of the monarchy's most prominent supporters; he did not return until 2003.[147] He was instrumental in propagating evidence and fabricating testimonies supporting the claim that the Baathist regime was developing WMDs, the moral clutch for pro-invasion arguments of the Bush government.[148] In addition, he pushed the idea that Iraqis would welcome the Americans as liberators, a spurious claim that later turned out to be false. More destructively, Chalabi and other returning exiles similar to him were firm supporters of applying the de-Baathification law – discussed in more detail in chapter 4 - as comprehensively as possible, supporting the occupation authorities' decision to implement it, and maintaining it was essential for democratization. The implementation of this controversial law was instrumental in fanning sectarian discord as it was widely interpreted to target only Sunni former Baathists, and thus was a major force for the developing of a Sunni victimhood narrative that framed Shi'is as their oppressors.[149]

The Occupation Government's Role in Sectarianizing Iraq

The same day Baghdad fell to the American army, news channels worldwide circulated videos of jubilant Iraqis helping American soldiers tearing down statues of Saddam and other public symbols of the ousted regime. Such America-friendly actions disappeared very soon, as the occupation army disbanded Iraqi police forces and allowed mass lotting of governmental

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[145] Patrick Cockburn, *The Occupation* (London; New York: Verso, 2006). 26-32.
[146] The INC was founded by Chalabi in 1992. Although it was one of the main exiled opposition groups, the party failed to gain a single seat in the 2005 federal Iraqi elections, and since then it virtually disappeared from the country's political stage.
[147] Aram Roston, *The Man Who Pushed America to War: The Extraordinary Life, Adventures, and Obsessions of Ahmad Chalabi* (New York: Nation Books, 2009), 13-15.
[148] By the end of 2004 it became clear to most that there were no WMDs in Iraq, much to the embarrassment of Bush and his administration. See Roston, *The Extraordinary Life of Ahmad Chalabi*, 318-322.
[149] Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq,* 150

offices and public places (hospitals, museums, etc.) for several days.[150] This act was a foreboding sign of the priorities of the United States during its occupation of the country for the next year and a half.

As the most capable power on the ground and official occupier of the country, the United States was the main shaper of politics in the early years of post-2003 Iraq.[151] From the first days of the occupation several interrelated factors would undermine American efforts to rule the country, namely general incompetence in handling the enormous task of fixing Iraq's economic woes, the corruption and nepotism of the occupation's bureaucratic machine, and the mounting dissatisfaction of large segments of the Iraqi populace with the performance of the occupation government and, indeed, its very existence.

Imperial arrogance brought about by the relatively easy invasion of Afghanistan, in addition to the need to drum up nationalist sentiment at home to win the popular vote in the presidential elections of 2004, made sure the Bush government was willfully blind to the realities of administrating a brutalized country like Iraq.[152] From the very beginning it showcased a lack of preparedness to deal with the post-invasion phase of occupying the country.[153] This has caused a series of political blunders that reduced the legitimacy of the new democratic Iraqi order at every turn, and it had the effect of providing fertile ground for sectarian violence to be unleashed later on. Initially the Bush Administration declared its

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[150] Tellingly, the only buildings and offices protected by the American army belonged to the ministries of oil and interior, which included the infamous Baathist Secret Service Agency (ar. *Mukhābarāt*). Cockburn, *The Occupation*, 75-76.

[151] Baghdad fell to US force on April 9, 2003, and the US continued to officially rule Iraq directly as its occupying power until June 28, 2004, when it handed sovereignty to an interim Iraqi government. The transfer was largely ceremonial since over 160,000 American and allied troops (the last of which left only in 2011) remained to ostensibly handle security. Dexter Filkins, "TRANSITION IN IRAQ: THE TURNOVER; U.S. TRANSFERS POWER TO IRAQ 2 DAYS EARLY (Published 2004)," *The New York Times*, June 29, 2004, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/29/world/transition-in-iraq-the-turnover-us-transfers-power-to-iraq-2-days-early.html.

[152] Cockburn, *The Occupation*, 85-86.

[153] Years after the fact it is still hard to determine when and by whom the decision to occupy was made, and major American politicians and state departments involved in preparing for the occupation phase of the war were still exchanging blame for its disastrous conduct. James Dobbins et al., *Occupying Iraq: A History of the Coalition Provisional Authority* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp, 2009), 47-49.

intention to allow most of Iraq's state institutions to resume their work in administrating the country. However, seemingly arbitrarily and with little prior notice, it sent American diplomat L. Paul Bremer to Baghdad to act as supreme civilian authority in the country and establish the Coalition Provincial Authority (CPA) on May 12, 2003, few weeks after the capture of the city.[154]

The American occupation contributed to the burgeoning of sectarian violence in the country in three significant ways. Administratively, the CPA suffered from deep issues of corruption and nepotism that was inherited by the new Iraqi government and undermined the rebuilding process and public trust in it. The massive corruption (millions of dollars reserved for the reconstruction of Iraq disappeared without a trace) deprived most Iraqis from basic services like electricity and running water, further eroding hope in the promises of democracy for the average Iraqi.[155] Governmental malpractice had another debilitating effect, namely the pervasive lack of security across much of Arab Iraq. Bremer first act as highest authority in Iraq was ordering the de-Baathification of Iraqi society, which entailed removing any and all senior Baath Party members from their positions within Iraqi state apparatuses and banning them permanently from working in the country's public sector again .[156] Since the Baathist regime made it mandatory to be a member of the Baath Party for most of the essential positions in the security forces, de-Baathification deprived the Iraqi army and police force of most of its members, leaving the country completely reliant on the American army and its allies.[157]

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[154] The fact that Bremer and the CPA replaced Army Lieutenant General Jay Garner, the head of Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), a mere day after the latter's arrival to Baghdad is a testament to the chaos and indecisiveness of the Bush government, see Dobbins et al., *Occupying Iraq*, xiv-xv.

[155] Frank and Casco, *A Brief History*, 268-269; for a firsthand account of the massive corruption of the American occupation forces and the causes that facilitated it, see Cockburn, *The Occupation*, 174-175.

[156] Coalition Provisional Authority, "Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 1: De-Baathification of Iraqi Society," May 16, 2003. https://permanent.fdlp.gov/lps44094/cpaord1.pdf.

[157] As late as 2009, a team made up of former high-ranking American senior military officers was commissioned by the US Congress to assess the capability of Iraqi security forces to fulfill their basic functions of holding the country's territorial sovereignty, maintaining security across its governorates, and bringing an end to sectarian violence before the withdrawal of American troops. The commission found Iraqi security forces incapable of effectively achieving any of these responsibilities and more. See James L. Jones, Jennifer. Elsea, and Nina M.

Officially, the CPA claimed only 20,000 people would be affected by de-Baathification, mounting to around 1 per cent or all Baath Party members, but the actual number surmounted to much more, and it included doctors and teachers too.[158] In the end around half a million state employees lost their jobs (close to 7 per cent of the labor force) due to de-Baathification and the disbanding of the army.[159] More problematic for the long term, Sunni Arabs were disproportionally represented among those sacked.

The CPA polices had the effect of depriving future Iraqi governments from the ability to affectively maintain order and exert any semblance of just power. Thus, militias and gangs, often associated with political parties with explicitly sect-specific identities, proliferated and gained real power among the public by providing serviced that were previously provided by the state.[160] The disbanding of Iraqi security forces, moreover, gave these militia a fertile pool of young men to recruit from, roughly 400,000 men trained with weapons. The CPA economic policy of abrupt market liberalization, which was "more radical" than even the famous cases of post-Soviet Eastern Europe, exacerbated this situation.[161] As Bassam Yousif argues:

> "The intent of [Iraq's] market liberalization was to allow resources, including labour, to flow where it is most highly valued … Ironically, in creating a poor section of the population that was willing to engage in violence for money, the dissolution of the army allowed two things to happen. It provided proficient workers to sectarian militias. And, it allowed these same militias to present

Serafino, *Security in Iraq*, Defense, Security and Strategy Series (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2010), http://site.ebrary.com/id/10686356.

[158] Cockburn, *The Occupation,* 70-71.

[159] Bassam Yousif, "The Political Economy of Sectarianism in Iraq," *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 4, no. 3 (2010), 363.

[160] For example, the Mahdi Army (Ar. *jaysh al-mahdī*), the personal militia of the Shi'i leader Muqtada al-Sadr and the militant arm of his Sadrist Movement (Ar. *at-tayyār aṣ-ṣadrī*), is such a militia. They provided many services from armed security against al-Qaeda attacks to legal aid to the inhabitants of Shi'i slums in eastern Baghdad. For the Mahdi's army role in the sectarian violence in Baghdad (2006-2008), see Dodge, *From Invasion to Authoritarianism,* 65-68.

[161] Yousif, "The Political Economy of Sectarianism in Iraq," 362.

themselves as defending the civilian population against criminality and disorder, although often they demanded money in return for this protection." [162]

As Sunnis were overrepresented in the disbanded army and Shi'i Islamist parties (unlike most of the Shi'i public) came strongly in support of it, the militarization of Iraqi society took shape along sectarian lines. In Baghdad Sunni militias gradually took control of Sunni-majority neighborhoods with Shi'i militias doing the same in Shi'i-majority ones, expelling the other from their territories and preparing to fight over mixed area.

Forced Democratization in the Aftermath of Authoritarianism

Democratization, that is the transformation of a state into a multiparty system characterized by free and representative elections with enshrined freedoms of opinion, press and gathering among others, is rarely a straightforward matter. In fact, it can be a quite risky and fragile process, especially when done in post-authoritarian states like Iraq. In his influential book, *From Voting to Violence*, political theorist Jack Snyder argues that holding elections in recently liberalized authoritarian states often leads to nationalist violence along ethnic or religious cleavages.[163] Using case studies from interwar European and Post-Soviet states, Snyder holds that democratization is at its highest risk of slipping into nationalist conflict during transitional periods towards democracy. Depending on the strength of the state institutions, elites in transitioning states would attempt to, "harness popular energies …without surrendering real political authority to the average citizen," with varying degrees of success.[164]

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[162] Yousif, "The Political Economy of Sectarianism in Iraq," 363.
[163] Jack L. Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict*, 1st ed (New York: Norton, 2000), 27-31.
[164] Snyder, *From Voting to Violence*, 36.

Snyder's conclusion is corroborated in other influential studies in field, which further point out that the risk of lapsing into violence is highest in post-conflict societies.[165]

When the United States was establishing the basis for the new Iraqi government, it erred in three significant ways. First, it had no comprehensive model similar to ones used in their regime change plans for post-World War II Germany and Japan. Indeed, the centralized rentier economy, which has historically enabled and encouraged the despotism of the Iraqi state, was left intact, and the state's power structures were dismantled, resulting in chronic state weakness in front of the power of various ethnic and sectarian non-state actors.[166] Second, it transformed religious and ethnic identities into the main vehicles of political representation and participation. The CPA under Bremer intended all of Iraq's communal groups to receive a fair and proportional representation in the post-Baathist government, which is a laudable goal considering the historical marginalization of all non-Sunni Arab communities in the country. So, the members of the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), created by Bremer in 2003 as the first governing body for future governments to model on, were all selected on the principles of power-sharing, with each member chosen based on which ethno-sectarian they belonged to.[167] However, regardless of the intention, basing the political processes around identity politics was only destined to fail due to the United States' third and gravest mistake in Iraq. Americans hoped to introduce a liberal order to Iraq, with what that entails of democratic elections and market economy, without providing any institutional state capacity and legitimizing bodies necessary for such a feat aside from power-sharing.

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[165] Most notably Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis, "Understanding Civil War: A New Agenda," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 1 (2002): 3–12; Barry R. Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," *Survival* 35, no. 1 (March 1, 1993): 27–47, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396339308442672.

[166] Mansour and Jabar, "Inter- and Intra-Ethnic Relations", 189.

[167] The council included 13 Shi'is, 5 Sunnis, 5 Kurds, 1 Turkmen, and 1 Assyrian, and their numbers reflected their supposed demographic weight in the country. See, Mansour and Jabar, "Power Sharing in Post-Conflict Iraq", 191; Toby Dodge and Renad Mansour, "Sectarianization and De-Sectarianization in the Struggle for Iraq's Political Field," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 18, no. 1 (January 2, 2020), 61, https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2020.1729513.

As Snyder argues, communal power-sharing in divided societies is a dangerous gamble that often end up solidifying the very same inimical social tensions it supposed to diminish and furthermore locking them to the political process.[168] The result of this was that the new Iraqi state was created with two contradictory principles, extreme centralization and federal devolution, informing its executive branch from the one side, and the legislative and judicial from the other, respectively.[169] With the institutional constraints that facilitated sectarianism established, the rest of this chapter will explore how the behavior of the new political class gradually led to the breakout of violence.

Elites and Elections: The Drawbacks of Flawed Democracy

This section will review the role of the new Iraqi political elite that rose in the aftermath of the invasion in setting the stage for sectarian violence and loss of legitimacy for the Iraqi state. In 2003, the political elite that represented the new order had two important traits that influenced their political behavior during the immediate post-invasion period. First, they were ideologically diverse and thus had few common grounds to build inter-party trust on aside from their opposition to the now-defunct Baathist regime. Second, Shi'i Islamists and Kurdish nationalists were the two largest and most influential groups within the new elite with actual power on the ground and popular base among numerically significant segments of Iraqis. These two groups, by definition, based their legitimacy and popular support on appealing to and organization around particularistic sect-centric and ethnocentric identities. This centering by itself is not necessarily anti-democratic or even the result of anti-Sunnism and anti-Arab sentiments among Shi'is and Kurds, respectively. As argued in the previous chapter, it was the natural result of decades of Baathist repression based on ethnic and religious identities that Shi'i and Kurds groups would band together and galvanize around their besieged social

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[168] Snyder, *From Voting to Violence*, 40.
[169] Mansour and Jabar, "Power Sharing in Post-Conflict Iraq", 208-209.

identities. In fact, this was also the reason why they agreed on ethnic and sectarian allotment as the basis of post-Baathist Iraq years before the invasion.[170] Nonetheless, in the context of post-2003 Iraq, that is of a centralized authoritarian state forced to transition to democracy by an outside force, basing politics around particularistic social identities was a sure way of "creating fertile conditions for nationalism [in this case sectarianism] and ethnic conflict, which not only raises the cost of the transition but may also redirect popular political participation into a lengthy antidemocratic detour."[171]

Among the new parties the Shi'i Islamists were the most equipped to run for the elections.[172] Their anti-Baathist credentials, appeals to a resurging Shi'i identity, and extensive networks of support among the majority community of Iraq, gave them important advantages and all but guaranteed that they would dominate any free elections.[173] This posed a deep problem for the CPA because both it and the Bush government wanted secular and pro-West Iraqi figures to be the dominant parties in the new Iraq, most notably Ahmed Chalabi and his ING. However, politicians like Chalabi had no actual recognized standing, popularity, or power on the ground, at least nothing compared to the those enjoyed by Shi'i Islamists. Moreover, while the Kurdish parties were generally secular and pro-American, they were constrained solely to their homeland in the north and northeast of the country. The dominance of the Islamists presented a deep problem for the CPA. One of the main premises of the invasion was the introduction of representative democracy to Iraq to replace Baathist dictatorship. Such a feat naturally entails holding meaningful elections in the country, to both improve the United States' international image (which took a major hit during the course of the invasion) and to provide local legitimacy to the new Iraqi political order. Although, the CPA had promised

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[170] Dodge and Mansour, "Sectarianization and De-Sectarianization", 61.
[171] Snyder, *From Voting to Violence*, 20.
[172] Dobbins et al., *Occupying Iraq*, 43.
[173] The fall of the Baathist regime caused a documented widespread resurgence in public expressions of Shi'i religious and pietistic symbols and identity, long considered suppressed, in Baghdad and much of the south. See Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, 143-145.

Iraqis elections as soon as possible, months after the occupation started, Bremer had demurred to give a timeframe for them.[174] The reason was it had become clear early on during the occupation that if national elections are held, pro-Iran Islamist parties would win the most votes and dominate any new popular government.[175] Further combined with the knowledge from previous experiences in Bosnia that elections too soon after conflict usually hardens social divisions and empowers radicals, the CPA shelved the idea of an early elections, hoping that with time secularist like Ahmed al-Chalabi and Iyad Allawi can muster more support.[176]

This proved fruitless in the end. Delaying elections was extremely unpopular among Iraqis, and it gave ammunition to insurgents and other anti-occupation groups to attack the legitimacy of the CPA.[177] Just as bad, Bremer envisioned a caucus-based voting system for Iraq instead of one-person, one-vote, which all the Shi'i parties rejected out of hand as undemocratic and threatened withdrawal from the political process if insisted upon.[178] Moreover, the rise of the Islamists was inevitable because the conditions for their dominance in any post-Baathist Iraq had already developed earlier. It was under Baathist rule that Shi'i Islamist parties became the strongest and the most well-organized political opposition force in Arab Iraq. If for no other reason than the fact that they were the only opposition force that had the capacity to survive Baathist hegemony and continue to militarily resist the regime during most of its rule.[179] In the years leading up to the invasion the Bush Administration denied this fact, and grossly overestimated the influence of Chalabi and his ilk.

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[174] Tripp, *A History of Iraq,* 283-285.

[175] As then American Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld noted, "We need to lay a foundation for self-government. The way to get a nontheocratic (*sic*) system is to go slowly. That suggests we should not rush to have elections . . . Otherwise, the fundamentalists will very likely sweep." Quoted in Dobbins et al., *Occupying Iraq*, 42.

[176] Dobbins et al., 41-43.

[177] Around the same time Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the most popular Shi'i religious authority in Iraq, broke his usual silence to demand the CPA to allow immediate elections for both constitution drafters and new government or risk a mass uprising against the occupation. Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 283.

[178] Juan R.I Cole, *The Ayatollahs and Democracy in Iraq* (Leiden: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 12-15, https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048504275.

[179] While communists, nationalists and other secular forces in Iraq that enjoyed popularity prior to the Baathist period declined to near extinction, Shi'i Islamists, most notably al-Da'wa party, the Supreme Council for the

The new elite officially formed a new Iraqi government in the two parliamentary elections of 2005, one in January to elect a transitional Iraqi National Assembly to draft a new constitution and another in December to elect the country's first parliamentary government of the post-Baathist era.[180] The elections of 2005 were the first concrete results of the new rules of sectarian allotment in Iraqi politics first seen with creations of IGC. The elections were problematic for several reasons, first of which was its very system, which favored large coalitions based around ethnic and sectarian identities only. More specifically, for the December elections a closed list system in which all of Iraq was treated as one single electoral district was chosen. [181] The logic behind such a choice was to secure better representation to communities victimized by the former regime. However, this system guaranteed the complete domination of big party interests, inevitably centered around exclusivist communal grievances and demands, at the expense of "local personalities and issues".[182] In practice, this meant that the amount of votes a candidate receives, regardless of the number, didn't determine whether he will acquire a seat in the parliament or not. Only a candidate's ranked position in the list he is part of could determine their chance of winning. Such a system automatically benefits larger and better organized parties and coalitions (in Iraq's case the former opposition groups). It also encourages favoritism and nepotism within the parties themselves as well, since it is party leaders who decide the ranking of individual candidates in their lists, giving them ultimate control over who is elected to the parliament.[183]

Islamic Revolution in Iraq, and the Sadrist Movement, maintained an active underground presence on the ground in Baghdad and most of the south on the eve of the invasion. See Mahan Abedin, "Dossier: Hezb al-Daawa al-Islamiyya: Islamic Call Party," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 6 (June 2003); Mahan Abedin, "the Sadrist Movement," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 7 (July 2003).

[180] In October of the same year, a popular referendum was held to approve the new constitution. Shi'is and Kurds overwhelmingly voted to pass it, while Sunnis voted against. Osman, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, 144.

[181] Dodge and Mansour, "Sectarianization and De-Sectarianization", 61.

[182] Ibid.

[183] Haider Ala Hamoudi, *Negotiating in Civil Conflict: Constitutional Construction and Imperfect Bargaining in Iraq* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 50-51.

Iraq's two elections in January and December 2005 were a highly sectarianized affair. On the one hand, Kurds and Shi'is voted en masse in both elections to coalitions formed around the idea of being the *only* legitimate representatives of Iraqi Kurds and Shi'is, meaning voting for other group was presented as tantamount to communal treason. On the other hand, Sunnis refused to participate in the January elections, which made sure they were barely represented in the transitional government. However, by December's elections they realized their mistake and voted mainly to a Sunni Islamist-led coalition. Kurds were represented by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) headed by Masoud Barzani and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) headed by Jalal Talabani; both parties had been ruling the Kurdistan region independently since 1991 and ran as one electoral list, the Kurdistan Alliance, in both elections. The Shi'is were dominated by the al-Da'wa Party, led by Ibrahim al-Jaafari, and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), led by Ammar al-Hakim. Together with Ahmed Chalabi's INC, all Shi'i Islamists parties united in one list, The United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), which enjoyed the spiritual backing of the clerical establishment in Najaf.[184] As the INC failed to produce enough votes to win a single seat, they were not included in the December elections. Instead, the anti-American Sadrist movement joined the alliance.[185]

Political Party/Coalition	Number of Seats	Percentage of Votes	Main Associated ethnicity/sect
United Iraqi Alliance	140	50.91	Shi'is
Kurdistan Alliance	75	27.27	Kurds (nationalists)
The Iraqi List	40	14.55	Sunnis/non-sectarian

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[184] It's well document that Ayatollah al-Sistani, the most recognized Shi'i religious authority in Iraq (if not the world), was the main behind-the-scenes figure of the Shi'i coalition and acted as mediator between its different factions. He saw in the 2005 elections a historic a chance to right historical injustices committed against the Shi'i by having a Shi'i-led government enshrine the sect's majority position within the new Iraq. For the role of the Shi'i clerical establishment in post-invasion Iraqi politics, see Cole, *The Ayatollahs and Democracy*.

[185] Dodge and Mansour, "Sectarianization and De-Sectarianization", 192.

Iraqis (Iraqiyyun)	5	1.82	Sunnis
National Cadres and Elites	3	1.09	Shi'is (Sadrists)
Iraqi Turkoman Front	3	1.09	Turkomans
People's Unity (Iraqi Community Party)	2	0.73	Non-sectarian
Kurdistan Islamic Group	2	0.73	Kurds (Islamists)
Islamic Action	2	0.73	Shi'is
Reconciliation and Liberation Bloc	1	0.36	Sunni
National Democratic Alliance	1	0.36	Non-sectarian/Secular
Mesopotamia List	1	0.36	Christian

Table 2.1

Results for the Transnational National Assembly Elections, January 2005.[186]

Finally, a third group of politicians and parties ran as simply the Iraqi List electoral list, and was led by Ayad Allawi, a former Baathist who defected during the 1980s. This list was officially pan-Iraqi, but in practice, it ended up being the main vehicle for Sunni participation. It comprised of a mishmash of secularists, Arab nationalists, Iraqi nationalists, Sunni Islamists,

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[186] Table taken and modified from Osman, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, 143. Data is produced from the results published by the Independent Higher Electoral Commission of Iraq (IHEC), available in Arabic at: http://ihec.iq/Attachment/uploadar/election2004/other/name2.pdf

and others who did not find a place in the Shi'i or Kurdish camps. The minority of Sunnis who voted in the January elections overwhelmingly voted for this list. In the December elections however, a new list led by the Islamic Party of Iraq, a Sunni Islamist group, ran for elections and won a sizeable portion of the Sunni vote. In addition to these major parties, smaller parties ran as their own lists, such as Kurdistan Islamic Union (Kurdish Islamists), or as junior partners in the big three coalitions, like the Islamic Virtue Party (part of the UIA).[187]

Political Party/Coalition	Number of Seats	Percentage of Votes	Associated Sect/Ethnicity
United Iraqi Alliance	128	46.55	Shi'is (Islamists)
Kurdistan Alliance	53	19.27	Kurds (nationalists)
Iraqi Accord Front	44	16.00	Sunnis (Islamists/nationalists)
The Iraqi List	25	9.09	Anti-Islamists/nationalists/ Sunnis
Iraqi Front for National Dialogue	11	4.00	Sunnis (Secular-leaning)
Kurdistan Islamic Union	5	1.82	Kurds (Islamists)
Reconciliation and Liberation Bloc	3	1.09	Sunnis (nationalists)
Messengers (Risāliyyūn)	3	1.09	Shi'is (Sadrists)

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[187] For a list of the major and minor political parties and coalitions that won in the parliamentary elections of 2005, See Dodge and Mansour, "Sectarianization and De-Sectarianization", 191-193.

List for the Iraqi Nation	1	0.36	Non-sectarian
Iraqi Turkmen Front	1	0.36	Turkmen interests
Yazidi Movement for Reform and Progress	1	0.36	Yezidi interests
Mesopotamia List	1	0.36	Christian interests

Table 2.2

Elections Results for the Parliamentary Elections, December 2005.[188]

As Tables 1 and 2 show, the Shi'i Islamist alliance received the highest number of votes in both elections, nearly the double of the Kurdish group, which came second. The Iraqi List, combining various Sunni groups with secularists, leftists and all sorts of anti-Islamists, came third in the January elections, only to be pushed to fourth place in December by the Iraqi Accord Front. The latter was a Sunni list formed in the ten months separating the two elections to compensate for the drastic underrepresentation of Sunnis in the first elections. Only a minority of Sunnis voted in the first elections, and although more turned out to vote in the second one, the majority of Sunnis did not participate in either elections.[189]

The double elections of 2005 exacerbated sectarian violence in Iraq between Sunnis and Shi'is. By the end of the year, the dominant view among Sunnis was that the new Iraqi government was illegitimate and don't represent them due to the supremacy of Shi'is and Kurds

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[188] Table taken and modified from Osman, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, 145. Data is produced from the results published by the Independent Higher Electoral Commission of Iraq (IHEC), available in Arabic at: http://ihec.iq/Attachment/uploadar/regulation2005/other/The_names_of_the_members_of_the_House_of_Repre sentatives_ar.pdf

[189] Distrust of the new political parties for their overtly Shi'i and Kurdish character was a main reason in discouraging Sunni Arabs from voting in 2005. However, the pervasive violence targeting Sunni communities across the country, from both Sunni Jihadists and Shi'i radicals, was also a factor preventing Sunni participation in elections that year. See Dodge, *From Invasion to Authoritarianism*, 61-69.

in it. Similarly, Shi'is increasingly saw their Sunni compatriots as hellbent on restoring minority autocracy at the expense of their democratic right to rule as the majority community in the country for their refusal to participate in the new political process.

Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the role of the American occupation authorities and the former Iraqi opposition in setting the political stage for the outbreak of communal violence between Shi'i and Sunni Arabs in post-2003 invasion Iraq. Invading largely due to domestic and ideological reasons, the United States was ill-prepared for the task of administrating an occupied Iraq. Furthermore, policies like de-Baathification, disbanding the army, and radical economic liberalization, weakened Iraqi state capacity and empowered sectarian militias to replace it by providing them a large pool of idle military men to recruit from. The George Bush government, moreover, envisioned Iraq through orientalist lenses that positioned religion and ethnicity at the heart of Iraqi society and politics. Thus, the CPA saw positioning religious sect and ethnic group at the heart of the new political system as the only reasonable and just way to move forward in Iraq. As a result, it introduced the principle of communal proportionality into the Iraqi state, the idea that a democratic Iraqi government must be comprised of representatives of the country's ethnic and religious groups in numbers that corresponds to the demographic weight of each group.

In theory, this principle was prescribed largely to prevent the rise of authoritarian minority rule similar to the Baathist regime and also to compensate for the historical marginalization of the Shi'i majority and Kurdish minority. In practice, however, the outcome of emphasizing communal identity in post-authoritarian contexts like Iraq's is often detrimental to the integrity of the country and is a main trigger of communal violence. In Iraq, the former opposition to the Baathist regime facilitated this process greatly. The groups comprising the former opposition were largely made up of sect-centric Shi'is and ethnocentric Kurds, since

they formed as result of Baathist oppression that singled out these two groups specifically due to their distinctness from the Sunni Arab elite. As they were the most well-organized and armed, the two groups were posited to have an influence in post-Baathist Iraq disproportionate to that of other Iraqi parties espousing non-sectarian or pan-national identities. More worryingly, they were perceived by the Sunnis in the country as alien and hostile, causing a Sunni boycott of the political process of the immediate post-invasion period and undermining the new Iraqi state before it was even born. Lastly, the fact that the CPA chose for the 2005 elections a voting system favoring big coalitions centered around communal identities made sure that Shi'i Islamists would dominate the first elected Iraqi government in decades, solidifying the estrangement of Sunnis from the political process.

Chapter Four

From Voting to Violence: The Evolution of Sectarianism in Post-Invasion

Iraq

In the early morning hours of February 22nd, 2006, the Shi'i mosque-shrine complex of al-Askari, in the city of Samarra north of Baghdad, was bombed. The bombing signaled a shift to a new stage of intercommunal violence in central Iraq that would last two years and claim thousands of lives. Though the attack on the shrine caused no causalities, it led to such popular fury among Shi'i Arabs that within few hours of the attacks an estimated 1300 Sunni Arabs were murdered by the Mahdi Army, a Sadrist-linked paramilitary forces.[190] The explosion in violence in 2006, only couple of months after the country's first elections for a permanent government, was to a large extent the result of failure in the state-building efforts of the Iraqi political elite and shortsightedness of American policy in Iraq.

The 2005 federal elections proved the centrality of sectarian allotment to the post-Baathist Iraqi political system. Yet, and though it was enshrined now, this principle was still far from being uncontested. In the two years following the elections intercommunal violence between Sunni and Shi'i armed factions, ethnic cleansing of mix areas, and attacks on civilians increased at an alarming rate, reaching a climax in the summer of 2006 with 3,298 violent civilian deaths in July of the same year only.[191] The worst of the violence was confined to Baghdad and the capital's environs. It began tapering off in December of 2007, and causalities scaled from the thousands to the hundreds per month only in December 2008.[192] Armed attacks became a mainstay of Iraqi politics and daily life as early as summer 2003, initially in the form

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[190] This was the first largescale attack on Sunnis by a Shi'i group. Prior to this, victims of sectarian violence were overwhelmingly Shi'i Arabs, and perpetrators usually fundamentalist Sunni groups, see Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 443-444.
[191] See https://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/.
[192] Ibid.

of an anti-occupation insurgency. But by fall of the same year insurgent attacks gained a sectarian bent as attacks against non-armed Shi'i targets began occurring. The question remains as to why relations between Sunnis and Shi'is took such an extremely violent form. The previous chapter discussed how American occupation policies and sectarian allotment and voting patterns in the 2005 elections led to heightened sectarian tensions between Sunnis and Shi'is. This chapter will discuss the process by which new trends in the politicization of sectarian identities led to violence and the breakdown of intercommunal relations between Sunni and Shi'i Arabs. This will be done through first asking the following questions: What were the factors that allowed violence to explode to such an extent in 2006? In what ways did the American occupation alter sectarian balance and aggravate inter-sectarian conflict? Why did the country's first democratic elections in more than half a century fail to alleviate, or worse, facilitate, Sunni-Shi'i communal violence? Finally, what did violence between the two communities mean for the political process of the country?

In this chapter I argue that sectarian violence developed into a geographically limited civil war in 2006-2007 due to three interlinked reasons. First, the new Iraqi political elite failed to politically incorporate a substantive number of Sunni Arab communities of Iraq and give them a voice in the political developments of 2005, namely the two parliamentary elections and the referendum for the new constitution. During the months leading up to the elections, Shi'i and Kurdish parties did seriously attempt to include representative Sunni elements in the new political process, and this contributed to the disillusionment of the latter with the new political status quo. This disillusionment was enforced by the sectarian voting of most Iraqis. Shi'is and Kurds overwhelmingly voted for Shi'i Islamist and Kurdish nationalist coalitions, while Sunnis split their votes on small parties that lacked the ability to compete with the larger coalitions. Thus, only few Sunni parties and individual politicians came out of 2005 as minor partners in a Shi'i-Kurdish government (after being the major political power in the country

for a century). Seeing no incentives for participating in electoral competition, and with Kurds and Shi'is unwilling to compromise their new political supremacy, Sunnis increasingly began to support the only alternative left, the armed insurgency.

Second, the de-Baathification law, originally designed to prevent a resurgence of the collapsed regime, implemented by both the CPA and the Interim Iraqi Government contributed to the breakdown of communal relations by undermining state-building efforts of the new Iraqi government. Sunnis overwhelmingly saw de-Baathification as an unjust punishment of their community since most of those affected by it were Sunnis, and this added to their distrust of the new political order. Just as important, de-Baathification denied the new Iraqi state from human resources need to for state-building efforts in the aftermath of the invasion. Naturally, as it was the most heavily filled with Baathists, internal security service was the one branch of the government most affected by the removal of former Baathists.[193] Instead of applying it selectively to neuter apparatuses that comprised the main force of Baathist repression, for example the Republican Guard and the Fedayeen Saddam, the new elites applied de-Baathification in the most comprehensive sense possible to dismantle all of Iraqi security forces, including the police force and the army. Consequently, as result of the security vacuum created by the dismantling of Iraq's security forces, violent Islamist militias, Sunni and Shi'i alike, had ample space to organize in and a large pool of unemployed armed men to recruit from. This vastly contributed to the ferocity of violence once Sunni and Shi'i militias clashed.

Lastly, the third factor that contributed to sectarian violence was the logic of the violence itself. Just as al-Qaeda in Iraq under Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and its allies had hoped, increasingly brutal attacks on Shi'i civilians and Sunni political intransigence eventually

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[193] Under Saddam Hussein, the Baathist regime filled all essential posts within the Iraqi internal security apparatus with Sunnis from his home region of Tikrit or clan, Albu Nasir, especially the Republic Guard, Special Security Organization, and the Intelligence Service. For a detailed overview of the position of Tikritis within the Baathist regime's core security institutions, see Amatzia Baram, "Saddam's Power Structure: The Tikritis Before, During and After the War," in *Iraq at the Crossroads: State and Society in the Shadow of Regime Change*, vol. 43, Adelphi Series 354 (Routledge, 2003), 93–114, https://doi.org/10.1080/714027860.

engendered a similar reaction from Shi'i armed factions. In other words, violence begot more violence. Shi'i militias, namely the SCIRI-linked Badr Brigades and the Sadrist Mahdi Army, began conducting extrajudicial killings of Sunni civilians in Baghdad and surrounding towns in 2005, often under the flag of the new Iraqi governmental security forces. This created a vicious cycle of Sunni attacks and Shi'i counterattacks with civilians trapped in the crosshairs, eroding the country's social communal ties and plunging the capital into civil war.

There rest of this chapter will explain these interconnected processes in greater detail.

A Status Quo of Violence and Militancy

The period from 2006 to 2007 saw a multipronged civil war drawn along sectarian lines. Sunni and Shi'is fundamentalist militias fought each other, US forces and their allies, and security forces of the new Iraqi government.[194] It must be noted that although sectarian violence reached its peak during 2006-2007, it was very much alive and present in the years preceding it, especially in Baghdad and other mixed areas like the Diyala governorate northeast of it.[195] Attacks of sectarian nature targeting civilians on a mass scale began to happen as early as summer 2003. On the 29th of August of that year a car bombing targeted worshipers at the Imam Ali Mosque in the Shi'i holy city of Najaf, southwest of Baghdad, killing 85 Shi'is including Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, then leader of SCIRI and one of the most powerful Shi'i figures.[196] For the next year and half attacks against Shi'i civilian targets continued unabated and turned increasingly ferocious, with victims ranging from clergymen and pilgrims to schoolteachers. The Shi'i public was incensed by the brutality and seeming

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[194] In spite of the mass violence (suicide attacks, car bombings, and gunfire become quotidian in Baghdad for years) and the self-professed motivations of the actors involved, many within the American government refused to name the Sunni-Shi'i communal violence a civil war well into 2007. See James D. Fearon, "Iraq's Civil War," *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 2 (2007): 2–15. For a discussion of this refusal and on the limitations of categorizing and defining civil wars in general, See Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, 179-182.

[195] For accounts of the sectarian violence from 2003 to 2005, see Cockburn, *The Occupation*, 166-177; Allawi, *The Occupation*, 447-450; International Crisis Group, "The Next Iraqi War? Sectarianism and Civil Conflict," *Middle East Report* no. 52 (February 27, 2006): 1–38.

[196] International Crisis Group, "The Next Iraqi War?", 1; Allawi, *The Occupation*, 172.

senselessness of these attacks (targets included such utterly nonpolitical civilians as queuers in bakeries and bus stops). However, calls for restraint against vengeance by the Shi'i religious establishment and the expectation of a Shi'i ascendency in the new government through democratic elections made sure no major violent Shi'i counterattacks befell Sunni civilians for some time.[197]

Nevertheless, such efforts were a temporary remedy at best since the environment conducive to violence of an identarian nature was present already. Iraq was poised to fall militant religious violence prior to the invasion. As show in previous chapters, in the decade preceding the American invasion in 2003 Iraq underwent intense socio-economic transformations, mainly the decimation of the middle class, massive destruction of sizeable parts of public infrastructure and the shrinking of the rest, near collapse of the medical and educational systems, and the rise of religious conservativism. The last of which in turn came hand in hand with increased identification with sectarian identities. These trends continued after the invasion, as the CPA political and administrative policies added much to this explosive mix by first failing to preserve most of the pre-invasion state structure, and then failing again at rebuilding it.[198] All these elements converged to create a class of desperate men ready to pick arms to fight for any group offering them a modicum of a living stipend.[199] Simultaneously, a hyper form of Muslim religiosity and ideological conservativeness, of both Sunni and Shi'i varieties, was increasing annually in both number of adherents and public visibility.[200] Added to that is the hyper militarization of Iraqi society. After the fall of the

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[197] International Crisis Group, "The Next Iraqi War?", 2.
[198] Ahmed S Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq* (Cornell University Press, 2011), 17, https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801459986.
[199] On the eve of the invasion in early 2003, according to the Iraqi Ministry of Labor (pre-invasion) around 70% of the country's labor force was unemployed, i.e., 12 millions out of 23 Iraqi were jobless. Cockburn, *The Occupation,* 71.
[200] The increase in religiosity and social conservativism in Iraq during the 90s is widely documented. It is attributed to the severe economic decline and increase in poverty levels, as well as the Baathist government's policies of empowering and coopting traditional tribal and religious authorities. These policies were introduced to compensate for the regime's weakened power and to control rising religious sentiments. It should be noted that at the same time the regime was propagating religiosity, it was trying to stay faithful to its secular origins, leading it

regime and as late as 2004, for example, hundreds of thousands of tons of weaponry belonging to the former regime disappeared and ended up in the hands of private groups and militias.[201]

Thus, at the eve of 2003, state weakness, hyper religiosity, high unemployment of young men, economic deprivation, and preponderances of weaponry among civilians, had primed Iraqi society to turn to armed conflict though two factors. First, increased identification with exclusivist Sunni and Shi'i religious identities reinforced each community's distrust of the other side. Once it became clear that the post-Baathist Iraqi state would be based on power-sharing between communal groups, Sunnis began perceiving Shi'is not as fellow Iraqis but as political rivals for positions and resources in the state and vice versa. Second, the militarization of society and the weakness of state power and institutions increased the cost-effectiveness of armed violence as legitimate method of making gains in post-2003 Iraq. To simply put, the incentive to try and achieve political power through recruiting and arming a militia was higher than that of organizing a party and participating in elections.

The Role of Elections and Shi'i Militarization in Encouraging Sectarian Enmities

The victory of Shi'i and Kurdish parties in the first free elections in post-invasion Iraq, dispelled any notions of a return to the old, thinly veiled system of Sunni supremacy within the government. Sunnis resisted the loss of their former privileges and the new political elite, made up of former Shi'i and Kurdish opposition forces, did little to try to include them in the new political deal.

Communal interests shaped the behavior of the former Iraqi opposition once it came to power just as they were the basis of their organization and campaigning during election times.

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to act contradictorily sometimes by encouraging religious behaviors while expecting the population to eschew religious identity. See Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq", 1–31; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion*, 131-146; Blaydes, *State of Repression*, 249-255.

[201] It is estimated that at least one-third of Iraq's weaponry ended up in private hands. Allawi, *The Occupation*, 140.

Their behavior was further informed by near four decades of Baathist authoritarianism that normalized nepotism, patronage, and identarianism as legitimate methods of conducting politics in the country. The Iraqis who formed the new political elite in the post-invasion period was ill-suited for the challenging task of rebuilding Iraq as a representative democracy. Many of them were far removed from the contemporary realities of the country due to the fact that they were living in exile for decades.[202] Moreover, unlike the Kurdish parties that gained experience from forming and running a government in Kurdistan since 1991, Arab parties only knew how to be an opposition and had no experience in conducting politics through multiparty, democratic, and representative platforms. Thus, mistrust and lack of communication hindered the development of a stable government and bureaucracy since parties would compete over ministries just to staff them with their own loyalists, or to use their budgets to fund their patronage networks to strengthen their positions in their communities.[203]

Furthermore, and as early as the days of the Iraqi Interim Government (IIG), signs of persistent authoritarianism surfaced. Veteran politician Iyad Allawi was chosen as the head of the government and he immediately began cultivating a strong man persona with deleterious consequences. Allawi created a new intelligence agency staffed by select former Baathists acceptable to him while continuing banning others through de-Baathification law.[204] He also began the process of creating military and paramilitaries forces in the form of different police and military commandos with "obscure lines of responsibilities, led by people trusted by him alone".[205] Ostensibly, these forces were supposed to help curb the tide of bombings and suicide attacks against civilians that were becoming disconcertingly commonplace from late 2003

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[202] Some even since the fall of the monarchy in 1958, like the aforementioned Ahmed Chalabi and the returnee Hashemite nephew of Iraq's last King, Faisal II.

[203] The administrative incompetence, corruption, and disunity of the Iraqi Interim Government is documented heavily. See Cockurn, *The Occupation*, 172-177; Osman, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, 89-91; Allawi, *The Occupation*, 348-370.

[204] Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 293.

[205] Ibid.

onwards. Instead, however, they increasingly became gateways for party-linked militias to infiltrate the government and use its resources to commit their own atrocities.

Moreover, Shi'i and Kurdish parties did little to appease Sunni concerns regarding the rules of the new political process and to include them in it. For example, during 2005 a heated debate regarding the suitability of federalism as the basis of the new Iraqi Constitution saw Sunnis (in addition to the Shi'i Sadrists) overwhelmingly rejecting federalism.[206] The official Sunni concern was that it could lead to the balkanization of Iraq into smaller feuding statelets. However, it was widely understood that a deeper concern was that if Iraq was to be divided into federal regions, the region encompassing Sunni-majority areas west and northwest of the country would be the poorest, since oil would be concentrated in the Shi'i-majority south and Kurdistan.[207] Yet, the united Shi'i Islamist and Kurdish stance was to disregard any serious discussion of these concerns and rely on their numerical advantage to win the vote on the new constitution in October instead of finding common grounds with Sunnis.[208] Not only were the Sunnis concerns were not seriously addressed, but when it became clear that Sunnis would vote against the passing of the new constitution, the Interim Iraqi Government attempted to change voting rules to disadvantage Sunnis, much to the chagrin of the Sunni political leadership.[209]

Lastly, the victory of the Shi'i Islamists in the January 2005 elections encouraged sectarian violence in another way. It opened the door for the sectarianization of official security

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[206] Allawi, *The Occupation*, 458.

[207] Allawi, *The Occupation*, 410; Fanar Haddad, "Sectarian Relations and Sunni Identity in Post-Civil War Iraq," in *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf*, ed. Lawrence G. Potter (London: Hurst & Company, 2013), 105. For an introduction to the topic of Iraqi federalism, see Visser, "Introduction," 1–26.

[208] Kurds naturally were the staunchest defenders of federalism, as they wanted to safeguard their hard-earned autonomy from Arab rule. Among the Shi'i Islamists, only the SCIRI supported the model for their own reasons (they flirted with the idea of establishing a Shi'i region in the south). The Shi'i alliance in the 2005 elections came to support Kurdish demands for federalism in return for the latter agreeing to install Islam as Iraq's official religion and a source of lawmaking in the constitution. For an informative overview and analysis of the politics that underpinned the formation of the Iraqi constitution in 2005, see Istrabadi, "A Constitution Without Constitutionalism",1628–55.

[209] Specifically, it attempted to have the tally No vote be based on the number of registered voters rather than actual voters. This change did not pass in the end. Allawi, *The Occupation.,* 416; Istrabadi, "A Constitution Without Constitutionalism", 1628.

forces by anti-Sunni militias. In other words, the political marginalization of Sunnis was now complemented by their physical marginalization. Specifically, as part of the victorious Shi'i-Kurdish alliance, the SCIRI was awarded the Ministry of Interior.[210] The ministry was responsible for internal security in the country, and SCIRI's acquisition signaled a new stage in sectarian warfare. The SCIRI was one of the most controversial of the new Shi'i parties for two reasons: it's deep historical connections to the Iranian regime, and the viciousness of its militant branch, the Badr Brigades.

Along with al-Da'wa Party, the SCIRI was the most prominent and powerful organized group in the anti-Baathist Shi'i Islamist opposition. It was officially created in 1982 under the auspices of Ayatollah Khomeini, who was hoping to use the Shi'i Iraqi opposition as a proxy to fight the Iraqi army during the Iran-Iraq war.[211] Thus, the SCIRI espoused the same Shi'i Islamist ideology of the Iranian revolution.[212] Naturally, such a heavy association with a former enemy state like Iran and their emphasis on Shi'ism, Shi'i symbols, and Shi'i communal uniqueness within Iraq seemed like a proof of their anti-Sunnism for many Sunnis. This suspicion was confirmed by the Badr Brigades heavy militarization and its increased penetration of Sunnis areas in and around Baghdad, where it had a hand in ethnically cleansing Sunnis from mixed Sunni-Shi'i areas.[213]

The SCIRI and other Shi'i Islamist were paranoid about the possibility of a Baathist resurgence. Ultimately, this translated into an apathy against Sunni participation in the government, which was vindicated when attacks by Sunni fundamentalists against Shi'i civilians intensified in 2004.[214] Thus, Shi'i powers began to perceive Sunnis as whole to be a

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[210] International Crisis Group, "Shiite Politics in Iraq: The Role of the Supreme Council," *Middle East Report* no. 70 (November 15, 2007), 13.

[211] International Crisis Group, "Shiite Politics in Iraq", 2-4.

[212] For an informative overview of the role of Iran in internal Iraqi Shi'i politics and its relationship with the SCIRI and other political parties, See Allawi, *The Occupation.*, 303-313.

[213] The SCIRI militia, the Badr Brigade, was one of the better armed and organized militias in the 2003-2008 period. It was one of the principal militia's responsible of the ethnic cleansing of Sunnis in Baghdad. See, International Crisis Group, "Shiite Politics in Iraq", 13-14.

[214] Allawi, *The Occupation*, 237-238.

fifth column supporting their fundamentalist coreligionists killing Shi'i innocents and Baathists trying to undermine Shi'i political victories post-2003. By mid-2005, when the SCIRI officially took control of the Ministry of Interior and much of Iraq's state police and security forces, it began a process of cleansing the ministry and its forces from Sunnis.[215] Such behaviors from the now Shi'i-dominated government fueled Sunni support for armed violence in return and confirmed their fears that they were the biggest losers of the new deal.

The Sunni Reaction: Disunited and Violent

Sunni rejection of the new political process manifested in an armed insurgency. Although Sunnis couldn't prevent the ascendancy of Shi'is in politics and government, they could still undermine the new government in their own territories in the form of a resistance movement against the American occupation, and later on, against Iraqi government forces and Shi'i militias. The Iraqi insurgency after 2003 was a mostly Sunni affair. Aside from Muqtada al-Sadr's Mehdi Army, there was no large, organized Shi'i resistance to the occupation.[216] Most of the Shi'i leadership, political and clerical - and the lines between the two can be blurry - judged the American occupation not by what it was, but by what it could lead to. For the Shi'is, aware of how Sunni amenability to the British occupation after World War I won them political hegemony after the latter vacated, cooperation with the Americans was acceptable as long as it led to popular elections that they were sure to win.[217]

On the Sunni side, the perception was quite different. In the political arena, Sunni participation was lukewarm. Several Sunni parties declared their intention to run for the

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[215] International Crisis Group, "Shiite Politics in Iraq", 14-15.

[216] In part, al-Sadr's hostility to the Americans was due to CPA's unwillingness to allow his Sadrist Movement into the interim government. The Sadrists were the only non-returnee organized Shi'i group in the county at the time and were on unfriendly terms with both al-Da'wa and SCIRI, the two largest Shi'i parties in the former opposition. See Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 280.

[217] The idea that Shi'i resistance in 1920 to the British caused the latter to award the Iraqi state to the Sunnis is popular among Shi'i intellectuals and public alike. See, Haddad, *Understanding "Sectarianism"*, 156-157; Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, 43; International Crisis Group, "Shiite Politics in Iraq", 10.

January 2005 only to withdraw at the elections' cusp. The exception was a coalition of Sunni Islamists that ran as the Iraqi Accord Front and gained 44 seats, which a modest number in comparison to the 128 seats of the Shi'i United Iraqi Alliance.[218] Although unequivocally anti-occupation, these parties' actual power based among Sunnis were constantly threatened by the insurgency, whose more extremist elements often tried to assassinate their members for their willingness to work within the post-invasion political process. Aside from official parties, another group, the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS), became a prominent Sunni power in the political scene, in spite of the fact it wasn't an official political party.[219] The AMS was established in 2003 as an association of Iraqi Sunni religious scholars of all ethnicities to specifically deal with the lack of political and religious Sunni leadership in the new status quo.[220] Espousing a mix of Islamism and Iraqi nationalism, the AMS refused to compromise with the occupation forces in the country, and starting in summer 2003 they publicly supported armed resistance against American troops.[221] For the same reasons it called a boycott of all of the 2005 elections, including the referendum on the constitution, due to the continued American military presence. It also maintained close links to the more nationalist factions within the insurgency. The AMS called for the abolishment of the IGC and refused even to admit that Sunnis were a numerical minority in the country, insisting that any legitimate Iraqi government must be made up of at least 50 percent Sunnis.[222] While it condemned attacks on Shi'i civilians, AMS contributed to sectarian violence due to its excessive antagonism towards Shi'i and Kurdish elites in the government.[223]

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[218] This Sunni coalition included the Iraqi Islamic Party, the Iraqi People's Conference, and the National Iraqi Dialogue Council. See Roel Meijer, "Muslim Politics Under Occupation: The Assocation of Muslim Scholars and the Politics of Resistance in Iraq," *The Arab Studies Journal* 13/14, no. 2/1 (2005), 92.

[219] Meijer, "Muslim Politics Under Occupation", 93.

[220] However, it effectively became an Arab Sunni group with few token Kurdish or Turkoman members. Sunni Kurdish and Turcoman religious scholars mostly organized in their own separate groups. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency*, 23.

[221] Meijer, "Muslim Politics Under Occupation", 94; Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency*, 23.

[222] Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency*, 75.

[223] Allawi, *The Occupation*, 177.

As the few Sunnis politicians willing to participate in the new government failed to gain a significant power base among the constituents they claimed to represent, Sunni insurgents gain ground. As early as June 2003, attacks from insurgent Sunni groups targeting the occupation forces began to take place.[224] The first organized groups that attacked American and Iraqi military and civilian targets were Salafist-Jihadists. They organized most notably under al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad, led by Jordanian veteran Jihadist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and the Kurdish fundamentalist group Ansar al-Islam.[225] Using the collapse of the Baathist regime as an opportunity, al-Zarqawi moved to Arab Iraq and began building his organization in anticipation of raising an armed resistance against the American occupation. He launched in 2004 his Jihadist group al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad, which in 2006 became an al-Qaeda franchise under the name al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).[226]

Capitalizing on Sunni fears of marginalization, AQI established links and alliances with various Sunni groups and tribes in Sunni areas in Baghdad and in the west and northwest of the country.[227] The Iraqi Sunni-foreign Jihadist alliance was partly the product of the policies of the CPA and their Iraqi allies. In particular, the heavy-handedness of the occupation troops when dealing with Sunnis was an important factor that helped the insurgency gain traction.[228] Americans largely assumed that Sunnis were the one community in Iraq the most connected to the Baathist regime and most privileged during its era, and thus most resistant to its fall and

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[224] Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency*, 75

[225] Al- Zarqawi originally arrived in the country in 2001 couple of years before the invasion to join Ansar al-Islam. The Ansar had managed to occupy some border territories in Kurdistan due to the weakness and division of the Kurdish regional government at the time, but they were expelled by a joint American-Kurdish operation in March 2003, see Craig Whiteside, "A Pedigree of Terror: The Myth of the Ba'athist Influence in the Islamic State Movement," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no. 3 (2017): 2–18.

[226] International Crisis Group, "In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency" Middle East Report, no. 50 (February 15, 2006), 1-2. https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/their-own-words-reading-iraqi-insurgency

[227] For a list of the known Sunni insurgent groups active in 2003-2006, see International Crisis Group, "In Their Own Words", 1-3.

[228] Allawi, *The Occupation*, 185-189.

any new order that would come after it.[229] This perpetuated among the CPA the idea that Sunnis were spoilers of peace and stability through identifying the community as whole with Baathists and foreign Jihadists.[230] The truth of such assumptions is nuanced. As explored in the first chapter, while Sunni political hegemony was a given throughout the Baathist era, Sunni Arabs as a whole had a complex relationship with the regime. While they weren't targeted by the regime or seen as a threat in the same way Shi'is and Kurds were, just like the latter Sunni relations with the regime ran the gamut from eager collaboration to armed resistance.[231] This fact was not recognized by neither the American occupation authorities nor the new Iraqi political elite, who encouraged Sunni resistance to the new Iraqi democracy, both political and military, by seemingly confirming the Sunnis' worst fears about their new status in post-invasion Iraq.

American antagonistic policies towards Sunnis manifested most clearly in the debacle around the city of Fallujah. The heavy resistance to the American presence in Fallujah from 2003 to 2004, a Sunni Arab city west of Baghdad, became emblematic Sunni hostility to the American presence in the country. Fallujah became the site of intense fighting between the American army and Iraqi insurgents. A revolt broke out against the occupation after US troops shot and killed 14 protesters and injured 70 in April 2003.[232] As a result, a spiral of violence gradually engulfed the city until March 2004. By then American authority in the town was so

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[229] The CPA's unwillingness to consider all insurgents anything but Baathist helped the latter organize and establish links with Sunnis quite a bit in the early period of the insurgency (2003-2004), see Allawi, *The Occupation*, 186. For the history of and problems with the thesis of the inherent Sunnism of the Baathist regime in Iraq, see Nikolaos van Dam, "Minorities and Political Elites in Iraq and Syria," in *The Middle East*, ed. Talal Asad and Roger Owen (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1983), 127–44, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-17282-5_14; Visser, "The Western Imposition", 83–99.

[230] Foreign Arab and Muslim fighters were the most ideologically committed in the insurgency. Even before the occupation, when volunteer Arabs from neighboring countries joined the regime's forces and along with Saddam Hussein's private militia, the Republican Guard, put up more of a resistance than the Iraqi army itself. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency*, 12-13.

[231] Blaydes, *State of Repression*, 310; Toby Dodge, "Iraq at the Crossroads: State and Society in the Shadow of Regime Change," in *Iraq at the Crossroads: State and Society in the Shadow of Regime Change*, ed. Toby Dodge and Steven Simon (London: Routledge, 2003), 66.

[232] Jonathan Steele, "To the US Troops It Was Self-Defence. To the Iraqis It Was Murder," *The Guardian*, April 30, 2003. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/apr/30/iraq.jonathansteele.

threatened that it led to a month-long bloody siege by US Marines and culminating in an all-out air and ground assault on the city, which was finally captured it in October 2004.[233] The price for this victory was catastrophic for the town's inhabitants, the majority of the city's 300,000 strong population became displaced, and the city's infrastructure was destroyed.[234]

Aside from Sunni fundamentalism and pro-Baathism, no other possible causes for resisting the occupation were considered. Middle Eastern security and counter-insurgency expert Ahmed S. Hashim holds that anti-American sentiments had multiple sources in Fallujah, most not related to the city's Sunni character. During the 90s and up until 2003, most of the town's economy was centered around state-sponsored smuggling of commodities from Jordan and Syria, which was put to an end by the invasion.[235] Additionally, bombing campaigns by the US-led coalition during the 1991 Gulf War left over a hundred civilians dead in this one town only; understandably, this created much distrust towards the United States and its army.[236] The routine violation of social mores and taboos by the American troops stationed in Fallujah during the early months of the occupation and instances of rough treatment of locals by them exacerbated hostility further.[237] All of these contextual factors were ignored when the US made its intention to bring the city under the CPA once and for all clear. The fact that Fallujah's inhabitants were Sunnis determined that they were automatically former Baathists and Jihadists that can only be delt with by brute force.

Lastly, the aforementioned de-Baathification law contributed to flaming Sunni-Shi'i violence through the way it was implemented. De-Baathification was part and parcel of American short-sighted policies towards Iraq. In the years leading up to the invasion, how to

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[233] Dodge, *From Dictatorship to Authoritarianism*, 57.
[234] Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 294-295.
[235] Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency*, 25-26.
[236] Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency*, 27.
[237] For an analysis of the influence of values like "honor" and "dignity" on the conceptualizing of the idea of "resistance" by insurgents in Fallujah in 2004, see Roel Meijer, "'Defending Our Honor': Authenticity and the Framing of Resistance in the Iraqi Sunni Town of Falluja," *Etnofoor* 17, no. 1/2 (2004): 23–43.

deal with the remnants of the regime once Saddam Hussein was dealt with was a topic of heated discussions in both the Bush government and among Iraqi exiles. There were two camps in the debate: One, the opinion of the US State Department and the CIA, favored controlled de-Baathification limited to the party's top brass and personnel at the regime's intelligence services. The other camp, taking a stricter position, favored a broader approach à la de-Nazification that aimed to cleanse the country's civil service of all Baathist influence and presence; it was supported by the Pentagon and Ahmed Chalabi.[238] Eventually, the latter camp triumphed, and Chalabi became the main Iraqi power behind de-Baathification when he was appointed the head of the Higher National De-Baathification Committee (HNDC) in September 2003.[239]

Undoubtedly, the moral rationale behind de-Baathification is just; the Baathist regime was one of the worst human right violators in the region. Yet, the way the law was imposed was set to create much division and distrust between Iraq's communities. Most notably, it caused the dismissal of the entirety of Iraqi security forces without providing an alternative method of maintaining security for the population. In addition, once the CPA handed control of the process to an Iraqi body, the HNDC, it became a tool for communal punishment and exercise of personal power. Chalabi increasingly staffed the HNDC with Shi'i allies from the leading Islamist parties, took control of the appeal process, and set no appeal criteria, leaving thousands of affected Iraqis, disproportionately Sunnis, at the whims of the committee's personnel.[240]

Soon, Sunnis came to perceive de-Baathification to be implemented to exclude them specifically from power in the new government, since they were overrepresented in the Baath

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[238] For a comprehensive history of De-Baathification from 2003 to 2013, see Miranda Sissons and Abdulrazzaq Al-Saieid, "A Bitter Legacy: Lessons of De-Baathification in Iraq" (International Center for Transitional Justice, March 2013), 10, https://www.ictj.org/publication/bitter-legacy-lessons-de-baathification-iraq.
[239] Sissons and Al-Saieid, "A Bitter Legacy", 12.
[240] Sissons and Al-Saieid, "A Bitter Legacy", 12-13.

Party. Certainly, there is much to indicate that this perception was not unwarranted. The de-Baathification law was frequently used to marginalize political opponents (most clearly in the 2010 elections, some time after the worst of the communal violence had abated) and Shi'i former Baathists often received more lenient treatment than others.[241] Furthermore, the law was problematic at its very core. The main criterion for exclusion was solely rank in the Baath Party. All members belonging to the four highest ranks in the party were dismissed and barred from entering civil service again.[242] Whether these members, or members of lower ranks, actually participated in human rights violations or had any redeeming qualities, was not considered.[243] That being said it must be noted that the driver for its misuse is usually political and targeting specific Sunni groups and individuals, and Shi'is too, rather than sectarian.[244]

It is important to emphasize that in spite of the sectarian conflict between them after 2003, most Iraqi Sunnis and Shi'is do not question the sovereignty of Iraq, its territorial integrity, or the unity of its Arab people.[245] Unlike Kurds, neither Sunni nor Shi'i Arabs supported secession.[246] The conflict was, and remains, essentially over political power and privileges in a shared country that neither of the two sides has a desire in breaking away from. Both communities perceive themselves not as simply Sunnis or Shi'is, but rather specifically as *Iraqi* Sunnis and *Iraqi* Shi'is, with them being the same Iraqi people in spite of religious

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[241] Fanar Haddad, "A Sectarian Awaking: The Reinvention of Sunni Identity, 2003-2014," in *Iraq Since the Invasion: People and Politics in a State of Conflict*, ed. Keiko Sakai and Philip Marfleet (Abingdon, Oxon : New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 96.

[242] Sissons and Al-Saieid, "A Bitter Legacy", 9.

[243] The Iraqi government passed a new law in 2008 in an attempt to ameliorate some of problems of de-Baathification, but most criticisms continued. See, "al-Hay'a al-Wataniyyah al-'ulyah li-Ijtithath al-Ba'th wa Qanun al-Masa'lah wa al-'adalah," *Aljazeera*, January 1, 2008, https://www.aljazeera.net/2008/04/01/الهيئة-الوطنية-العليا-لاجتثاث-البعث; Sissons and Al-Saieid, "A Bitter Legacy", 9.

[244] For example, the HNDC attempted to ban around 170 candidates for the parliamentary elections in 2005, while its leader, Chalabi, and another prominent member ran for the elections, leading to accusations of corruption and a publicized conflict with the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq over the HNDC political purviews. See Sissons and Al-Saieid, "A Bitter Legacy", 15.

[245] For a detailed analysis of the overlap and the deep link between sectarian identities and Iraqi identity in Iraq before and after 2003, see Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, 31-64.

[246] Aside from a relatively small movement for independence in Basra in southern Iraq during the 1930s, there was never any organized separatist or irredentist movement among Iraqi Arabs prior to 2014. For an account of Basra's independent movement in early 20th century Iraq, see Reidar Visser, *Basra, the Failed Gulf State: Separatism and Nationalism in Southern Iraq*, Politik, Forschung Und Wissenschaft ; Bd. 22 (Münster: Lit, 2005).

differences. Thus, for example, Harth al-Dhari, the head of the AMS, and one if the most prominent Sunni personalities in the post-2003 period, described the Sunni perspective in the post-invasion Iraq as the following:

"We have said from the start: the problem was not actually sectarian, but political, and we still say this because it is the truth…violent discord [*fitnah*] was not general [among people] but restricted to specific elements among certain groups… our people, Shi'is and Sunnis both, agree on fighting the occupation and its agents and resisting its plans; especially the occupation itself. And they resist Iran's plans and its interreference in Iraq even more so. Today, the sons of Iraq from both the Shi'i and Sunni communities meet, shake hands, and talk in the name of Iraq, and carry together the difficult tasks of liberating and unifying it. They are the salvation of from the occupation and its agents."[247]

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to explain why Iraq was posited to descend into violence after its first democratic elections in 2005. The communal bloodshed that plagued Baghdad from 2006 until 2008 is the result of compounded failures. These failures were the result of attempting to externally impose a democratic system on a society lacking the most basic political infrastructure necessary for democratization. Instead of offering Iraqis from all communities a shared political space, the post-2003 confessional system worsened communal relations by transforming Sunni Arabs into a political class marginalized from power in opposition to a Shi'i-dominated government. This had the effect of incentivizing Sunnis to pick

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[247] Harth al-Dhari, "Ḥiwār ma'a Fadhīlat al-Shaykh Ḥārth al-Dharī", interview by Khabab Bin Marwan al-Hamd, *Albayan*, June 26, 2013, https://www.albayan.co.uk/article2.aspx?ID=2956.

up arms themselves and form militias or join the insurgency and ally with Jihadists and former Baathists, since joining the Iraqi political process became an unappealing alternative.

Much of the groundwork for this process was the outcome of American policies in the country. The United States was excessively heavy-handed in its treatment of Sunni opposition in the country. This was most clear in its army's brutal treatment of civilians in Fallujah and destruction of the city. In addition, the imprudent implementation of de-Baathification, done by both the United States and the Iraqi government, served to deny Iraq of much of its last competent bureaucrats and signaled to the Iraqi Sunni community that their place within the new system would be precarious. All of these decisions did much to convince Sunnis they are the losers of the new Iraq.

The Kurdish and Shi'i parties that comprised the ICG and Iraqi Interim Government continued the unwise path of the American occupation authorities. They refused to acknowledge, never mind address, Sunni concerns with the new constitution, and they clearly attempted to undermine Sunni performance in elections. Furthermore, they expanded the scope of de-Baathification to deny many Sunnis from a chance to be employed by the state, which was and still is the main source of employment for the majority of Iraqis. Lastly, the new political elite, the Shi'i Islamists in particular, failed to translate their electoral successes into a long-lasting victory. Instead of attempting to revive Iraqi state institutions weakened by decades of war and authoritarianism, they appropriated government resources and manpower to fund their patronage networks and legitimatize their violent militias.

To sum up, specific dynamics of US occupation policies (de-Baathification and violent suppression of Sunni resistance) with changes in the balance of power among sectarian elites and their behavior (rise of Shi'i Islamists and marginalization of Sunnis) caused a situation that was essentially a prisoner's dilemma. Unsure of each other's intentions, Sunnis and Shi'is increasingly militarized until they clashed in armed conflict between 2006 and 2008. Thus,

these factors determined not only the trajectory of new sectarian politics of Iraq, i.e., communal power-sharing through representative elections, they also caused the rise of ever more severe forms of inter-sectarian violence.

Research Conclusion

The goal of thesis was to explain how armed violence broke out between Iraqi Sunnis and Shi'i from 2006 to 2008 in spite of the introduction of free and competitive democratic elections to Iraq. From the preceding discussion I argued that the explosion of violence was caused by series of immediate interconnected political developments following the American-led invasion of 2003 that after the 2005 series of elections incentivized Sunni and Shi'i to militarize and attack each other. That being said, more structural factors inherent to the Iraqi state since its inception also contributed by increasing communal enmities between Sunnis and Shi'is.

Geopolitical dynamics and economic and social transformations beginning from the late Ottoman period posited the Iraqi Shi'i community in a precarious place in relation to the local Ottoman state structure, shunning it and being shunned by it. Due to this, when Britain invaded Ottoman Iraq and established it as a nation-state, the Shi'is found themselves marginalized from real political power in favor of the Iraqi Sunni, who would continue to hold the reins of the state and its bureaucratic and army institution until the 2003 invasion. Throughout the 20th century and in spite of the massive political, economic, and social changes that Iraq underwent, the political supremacy of Sunnis and political marginalization of Shi'is remained constant. During the Baathist era under the reign of Saddam Hussein this dynamic continued but with a difference in degree. Supported by tremendous oil wealth, the Baathist regime eschewed previous governments' more careful approaches when dealing with Shi'i political opposition in favor of violent repression. Its approach reached its apex in the repression of the 1991 Iraqi Uprising, when entire Shi'i communities were subjected to communal punishments and Saddam himself attacked Shi'i religious identity itself.[248] Thus, after these events Shi'i were

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[248] Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, 118-127.

hyperaware of their institutional marginalization, and on the eve of the invasion communal tensions between Shi'is and Sunnis were at all-time high.

In spite of the heightened tensions, communal relations weren't necessarily predestined to deteriorate into violence after 2003. However, certain American policies during the occupation phase of the invasion became the tipping point for violence. The first of these polices was the US choice to implement sectarian allotment as the basis for the new political system for democratic Iraq. This choice may have seemed fair at the time, as Shi'is and Kurds were historically disenfranchised politically since Iraq's foundation. Yet, as political science literature shows and the behavior of the new Iraqi elite during the 2005 elections show proves, such systems that enshrines differences instead highlighting commonalities in post-conflict states have a high chance of derailing democratization phases into civil wars.[249] Two other policies were related to the US antagonistic treatment of Sunnis. The first was the expansive application of de-Baathification law, which Sunnis perceived to target them unfairly, and the second was the heavy-handedness with which the US suppressed Sunni resistance in Falluja and elsewhere in Iraq. These policies, and the general conduct of the occupation, had the effect of incentivizing Sunnis to distrust the US and refuse to join the new democratic process it was sponsoring in favor of militant resistance, either through forming their own armed groups or through joining the Jihadist groups like al-Qaeda in Iraq.

Finally, the last major factor that led to the breakout of violence was the behavior of the elites that rose after 2003. The former opposition to the Baathist regime was made up mostly of Shi'i Islamist and Kurdish nationalist parties that ran for the 2005 elections based on identitarian ideologies concerned with righting communal grievances. These parties capitalized on communal issues like Kurdish autonomy and Shi'i political rights to galvanize their voter base and dominate elections. In turn, this incentivized Sunni to reject of the political process

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[249] Snyder, *From Voting to Violence*; Collier and Sambanis, "Understanding Civil War: A New Agenda."

(seen with their boycott of the elections), who were already distrustful of the new elites due to their dismissal of Sunni concerns in the leadup to the elections. The electoral victories of the Shi'i Islamist coalition meant that their more radical elements, like the SCIRI, could now back their militias with state resources and answer jihadist attacks on Shi'i civilians likewise on Sunnis.[250] In the end, increasing attacks and counterattacks reached a critical mass in 2006 and descended into an all-out civil war.

In the aftermath of the 2006-2008 war Iraq continued to undergo one crisis after another to this day, from multiple mass anti-government protest movements to a conventional war with the Islamic State.[251] At the heart of this persistent violence is an American-sponsored constitutional system based on sectarian allotment that has institutionalized sectarian competition, in turn incentivizing violence along sectarian lines among Iraqi communities and parties. This process is exacerbated by the authoritarian policies and institutions pursued by the country's current leading political parties. The only path towards sustainable peace and stability in the country is therefore the reformation of the political system to institutionalize non-sectarian constitutional and electoral frameworks in order to ensure accountability and genuine legitimacy across the sectarian and ethnic divides in the country.

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[250] International Crisis Group, "Shiite Politics in Iraq: The Role of the Supreme Council."
[251] With the latest and largest protests in 2019. Sinan Antoon, "A Cruel and Crucial October in Iraq," *Aljazeera*, accessed April 8, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/10/24/a-cruel-and-crucial-october-in-iraq.

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