2018

The Struggle Over the State: The History of Sunni and Shi'i Arab Identities in Iraq, 1861–2014

Emily Bader
ebader@wellesley.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.wellesley.edu/thesiscollection

Recommended Citation
https://repository.wellesley.edu/thesiscollection/516

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Wellesley College Digital Scholarship and Archive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Thesis Collection by an authorized administrator of Wellesley College Digital Scholarship and Archive. For more information, please contact ir@wellesley.edu.
The Struggle Over the State:
The History of Sunni and Shi‘i Arab Identities in Iraq, 1861–2014

Emily K. Bader

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the
Prerequisite for Honors
in International Relations–History
under the advisement of Lidwien Kapteijns

April 2018

© 2018 Emily K. Bader
Acknowledgments

I would not have been able to tackle this immense challenge if it were not for the countless people who have supported me along the way. I would like to start by thanking my parents, Wendy and Bruce, my brother, David (and of course, our beloved dog, Cassie) for their love, encouragement, and as always, humor. My family has taught me compassion, tenacity, and resilience—all of which were necessary to finish this thesis. Thank you for always supporting me, even when my ambitions involve words like “conflict” and “reporter.” Thank you to my mom, a Wellesley woman herself, who, when I called her several months ago in a state of panic that I would not be able to finish asked me, “well do you want to finish?” and when I answered of course said, “then finish it!” Thank you to my dad for always answering the phone with a joke, for sending me pictures of the dog, and for reminding me that I need to sleep. Funding my penchant for doing work at Starbucks did not hurt either.

Thank you to my friends, both near and far, without whom I would likely have ended up as a ball of stress by now. Thank you for the countless texts and phone calls cheering me on, for sending me pictures of the dog, and even offering to do my laundry (an offer that, while greatly appreciated, was not taken up on) and so much more. Your love and support mean the world to me.

Thank you to the F.A.O. Schwarz Foundation, for providing me with the financial freedom to take on this project.

Thank you to my readers—Professors Nina Tumarkin, Kim McLeod, and Pat Giersch—for accepting my request to be on my thesis panel and for teaching some of my favorite classes here at Wellesley.

And last, but most certainly not least, thank you to my advisor, Professor Lidwien Kapteijns. This thesis would not have even made it off the ground, nonetheless be finished, without the countless hours you have spent working on it with me. Thank you for your honest and insightful feedback, for your endless encouragement and trust in me, even when I sent you drafts at four a.m. several days after a deadline, and for supporting my endeavors beyond the classroom.
Map of Iraq

# Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE: The Invention of the Iraq State: From the Ottomans to the Ba’thists, 1861–1979

- **Introduction**
- Iraq under Ottoman rule: The Mesopotamia Province
- The British in Iraq
- Political and civil unrest: The era of coups
- The Ba’th Party and the rise of Saddam Hussein


- **Introduction**
- The Iran-Iraq War, 1980–8
- The war with Kuwait
- Iraq between the wars
- Saddam’s pillars of power

CHAPTER THREE: Iraq, the Occupied State; Iraq, the Failed State: The Iraq War, 2003–2008

- **Introduction**
- The occupation of Iraq
- The escalation into violence
- The Sunni insurgency
- The sectarian civil war
The U.S. troop surge and the subsiding of the civil war 117


Introduction 123

Nuri al-Maliki’s autocratic regime 123

The emergence of the Islamic State 130

CONCLUSION 135

BIBLIOGRAPHY 141
Introduction
My objective in writing this thesis was to trace the history of the group identities of Sunni and Shi‘i Arabs in Iraq from the late Ottoman period and the creation of the modern-state of Iraq through the British Mandate to the emergence of the Islamic State in 2014. My specific interest within this period of about 150 years is, first, in how the different governments over time shaped these communal identities and second, the impact that state-led violence and, especially, after the U.S. invasion of 2003, by non-state actors, had on their communal identities. In particular, this thesis traces the politicization of these identities by successive governments; the large-scale violence the government of Saddam Hussein unleashed against civilians on the basis of their ethno-religious identities; the discrimination and violence against Sunnis, especially, by the U.S. occupation; the calculated use of sectarian violence against civilians by different sectarian militias and, finally, the evolution towards communal violence in which ordinary Sunni and Shi‘i Iraqis become the perpetrators of violence against each other. Key to the approach followed in this thesis was to avoid, on the one hand, essentializing these identities as monolithic and static, and, on the other hand, ignoring their historical significance.

In conducting my research, some of the concepts that helped frame this thesis are:

(1) That of communal/group identity, an identity based on shared aspects such as geographic location, culture, religion, ethnicity, language, and historical experiences and memory. The two communal identities under study here are those of the Sunni Arabs and the Shi‘i Arabs of Iraq. Mahmood Mamdani gives a succinct definition of the politicization of group identities due to differential treatment by the state, in his case, “ethnic” identities, and in the case of this thesis, “religious” identities, as follows:
It is not that ethnicity did not exist in African societies prior to colonialism; it did. I want to distinguish between ethnicity as a cultural identity—an identity based on a shared culture—from ethnicity as a political identity. When the political authority and the law enforces identity subjects ethnically and discriminate between them, then ethnicity turns into a legal and political identity. Ethnicity as a cultural identity is consensual, but when ethnicity becomes a political identity it is enforced by the legal and administrative organs of the state.\(^2\)

(2) That of communal violence, violence against members of an identity group, perpetrated by members of another identity group, on the basis of their group identity. Communal violence is different than large-scale identity-based violence by the state, for example, because it is about civilians against civilians.

The history of the Sunni and Shi‘i Arabs of Iraq can only be understood against the background of the political history of Iraq from the mid-nineteenth century until today. This thesis is structured chronologically, beginning with the late Ottoman period and the creation of the modern state of Iraq, through the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, the collapse of the regime in 2003, and the U.S.-led occupation and nation-building project that ended with the emergence of a new autocrat—Nuri al-Maliki—and, to an important extent in response to his discriminatory and violent acts, that of the Islamic State. Each chapter discusses four periods of the political history of Sunni and Shi‘i Arabs in Iraq. A summary of each chapter is as follows:

(1) **Chapter One, 1861–1979**, traces the history of the region that would become Iraq from the late Ottoman period to the establishment of the state of Iraq under British authority, through quasi-independence in 1932, the end of the Hashemite Monarchy in 1958, the rise of the Ba’th Party

---

political figures in 1968, and ends with Saddam Hussein’s ascendancy to the presidency in 1979. The purpose of this chapter is to establish a historical foundation for the history of group relations and communal identities prior to the creation of the modern state and to analyze the degree of politicization of these identities over the first period of modern Iraqi history. During the Ottoman Empire, the Ottoman elite and high bureaucratic officials in the region that would become Iraq were almost exclusively Sunni Arabs. Not all Sunni Arabs were elite, however, but this subgroup by and large dominated the upper echelons of Iraqi government and society in this period. There is little evidence that within the Mesopotamia Province, as modern-day Iraq was known then, there was any active use of violent force against Shi‘i Arabs, though there certainly was exclusion from top positions and rank. It appears that Sunni and Shi‘i leaders—the latter primarily the mujtahidun, or top Shi‘i clerics—tried their best to interact with each other only for pragmatic and necessary matters. For the most part, Shi‘i Arabs were left to their own devices, which they preferred to involvement with the state, and local and imperial Ottoman officials only became involved when the actions of particular groups or individuals appeared to be a threat to the Empire.

Once the state had been created by the British, the latter not only appointed an outsider as king of Iraq—Faisal I, a Sunni Arab from the Hijaz—but also largely depended on existing hierarchies to create a new bureaucracy. Sunni Arabs mostly filled the top ranks of the new Iraqi government. Faisal, however, did make efforts to reach out to the Shi‘i Arab leadership of Iraq, but these efforts appear to have stopped with his death in 1933. The period between his death and the rise of the Ba‘th Party’s prominence within Iraqi politics is marked by a series of coup d’états and grabs for power,
mostly from within the ranks of the military. The Ba’th Party came to power in 1968 and this chapter ends with Saddam’s Hussein’s ascendancy to the presidency in 1979.

(2) **Chapter Two, 1979–2003**, traces the history of Iraq under Saddam Hussein. While Saddam was Sunni Arab, he was from the lower classes, born to a poor family in the small town of Tikrit, west of Baghdad. Saddam, therefore, reached the top ranks in spite of his low socioeconomic status and in defiance of elite dominance until then. Because of that, he created his own system of power that relied heavily on the B’ath Party, the military, and his extended kinship group from Tikrit, and within these institutions, loyalty to him personally. The Iran-Iraq War, which began in 1980, was the catalyzing moment that led to the emergence of state-led violence against civilians on the basis of their ethno-religious identities, namely against the Shi’i Arabs in the south and the Kurds in the north of the country. With the war against Iran, Saddam’s rhetoric shifted to include a new construction of “us against them:” the true Muslims, the (Sunni) Arabs, against the Shi’i “Persians” of Iran and by implication, of Iraq. Then, with the invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent anti-Saddam uprisings by the Shi’i Arabs in the south of the country, there was another instance of state-led violence in the course of the repression of the uprisings. These new levels of exclusion and violence shaped and hardened Shi’i (and Kurdish) group identities in new ways, as will be discussed further in the conclusion.

(3) **Chapter Three, 2003–2008**, traces the history of the Iraq War, starting with the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the occupation and nation-building effort that followed. The purpose in explaining these efforts and their effects is to show how the Iraq War eliminated the existing elite, which was Sunni, a subgroup that at this point had been in power for many decades, and replaced
them with a Shi’i Arab political elite. The de-Ba’thification order and the dissolution of the Iraqi armed forces had catastrophic consequences, including political and social chaos, the emergence of sectarian militias and shadow governments—such as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and its armed wing, the Badr Brigade, in Basrah, and Muqtada al-Sadr’s Sadrist movement and Mahdi Army in Baghdad and the southern marsh regions—and a steep rise in everyday violence. This chapter ends with the de-escalation of what much of the scholarly literature refers to as the “civil war,” which was a two-year explosion of violence between sectarian political factions, mainly in Baghdad.

(4) Chapter Four, 2008–2014, traces the history of Iraq after the civil war and after the U.S. withdrawal. While the roots of the Islamic State (IS) are not based in Iraq alone, this stage of communal violence perpetrated by the IS was in large part a reaction to the violent state-led repression of Sunni political elements in Iraq and of ordinary civilians. The violence led by Shi’i sectarian groups was also in response to the large-scale violence committed against Shi’i civilians that began in earnest in the 1980s. The fourth and final chapter, therefore, examines the emergence of IS and in the conclusion, I will reflect on the consequences of each stage of political history and the level of violence committed against the Sunni and Shi’i Arabs of Iraq.
Chapter One

The Invention of an Iraqi State:

From the Ottomans to the Ba’thists

1861–1979
Introduction

Before the creation of the modern Iraqi state under British mandate in 1921, the region was known as the Ottoman province of Mesopotamia. The province was made of three distinct wilayat, or states: Basrah in the south, on the Persian Gulf coast; Mosul in the north, equidistant from the borders of modern-day Syria, Turkey, and Iran; and Baghdad on the Tigris River, in the middle Euphrates region. The architects of the British Mandate brought these three regions—distinct in their social, economic, and religious makeup, though not isolated—under the singular “Iraq.” More than half of the population of Iraq identified as Shi‘i Muslim Arabs; about twenty percent as Sunni Kurds (ethnically different from Arabs); eight percent as Jewish, Christian, Yazidi, Sabaean, or Turkoman; and less than twenty percent as Sunni Arab, though some historians regard the proportion of Shi‘i to Sunni Muslims more about sixty to forty. The split of Islam into the denominations of Sunnism and Shi‘ism dates back to the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 and the initial emergence of the Shi‘i ‘Ali. This thesis will focus on the history of the particular uses of Sunni and Shi‘ite identities from the end of Ottoman rule in Iraq in 1918 through Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship from 1979 to the invasion of the United States-led coalition in Iraq in 2003. Specifically, this thesis will focus on the social, political, and economic developments of Sunni and Shi‘i Arabs and moments of communal

3. Wilayah is the singular, meaning “state;” wilayat is the plural, meaning “states.”
5. John L. Esposito, The Oxford Dictionary of Islam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780195125580.001.0001. While this thesis will not focus on the religious roots of Sunnism and Shi‘ism, it is worth giving a brief background on these two denominations. Sunni Islam describes the largest branch of Islam and derives its main source of knowledge from the Sunna, or the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, and places particular stress on the importance of the ijma’, or community consensus as determined by religious scholars. Shi‘i Islam describes the second largest branch of Islam and not only places emphasis on the religious guidance of the Prophet’s descendants, but restricts it to the Ahl al-Bayt, the Prophetic family.
violence during the Iraq War, in which group leaders co-opted these developments for particular aims. This chapter will discuss the development of new state institutions and the sociopolitical history from the end of the Ottoman period through the establishment of the British Mandate in Iraq and up to Saddam Hussein’s seizure of power in 1979.

IRAQ UNDER OTTOMAN RULE: THE MESOPOTAMIA PROVINCE

The role of tribal groups

During the time of the Ottoman Empire, modern-day Iraq was known as Mesopotamia and had been under the control of the Ottomans since late 1533. Mesopotamia consisted of three wilayat: Mosul, Baghdad, and Basrah, all of which were governed by individual governors who were under the auspices of the sultan in Istanbul. Though there was a formal government in the three wilayat, unofficially the region was governed by the various tribal groups. These tribal groups, in hierarchical order by size, were categorized into the following: qabila (confederation), ashira (tribe), fakhd (section), and bayt (house). The sheikhs—here meaning chiefs—or aghas in Turkish, of the ashiras were the most prominent figures within the tribal confederations, though often their duties were delegated to the sirkals, or deputies to the sheikh. The paramount sheikh of each tribe typically served as the mediator between the tribe and the government during the Ottoman period. The various groups in Mesopotamia were divided by socioeconomic status and were delineated by “people of the camel,”

---
“people of the sheep,” “cultivators,” and “buffalo-breeding marsh dwellers;” the most powerful of the confederations were the people of the camel.\textsuperscript{7}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{map1.png}
\caption{Map 1: The ethnoreligious demography of the Mesopotamia Province in the early-twentieth century.\textsuperscript{8}}
\end{figure}

\textit{The wilayat}

Mosul, in the northeast of Mesopotamia, along the Tigris River, was largely populated by Sunni Arabs and Sunni Kurds. In the far northern and eastern parts of the \textit{wilayah} were mostly

\setcounter{footnote}{7}
\footnote{Gökhan Çetinsaya, \textit{Ottoman Administration of Iraq, 1890–1908} (London: Routledge, 2006), 72.}
\footnote{William L. Cleveland and Martin Bunton, \textit{The History of the Modern Middle East} (Boulder: Westview Press, 2013), 145.}
Kurdish Sunni tribal groups that belonged to either the Qadiri or the Naqshbandi confederations. Prior to the 1830s, the Kurds in the north lived in a semi-autonomous emirate, or territory. In the 1830s, however, the emirate was destroyed by Sultan Mahmud II and consequently the tribal confederations’ influence and power expanded. In the Kirkuk-Sulaymaniyah region in southeastern Mosul lived the Barzinji sayyids, or lords, of the Qadiri order. Prior to the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–8, these sayyids controlled all of the Kurdish tribes of Sulaymaniyah with the exception of the Jaf tribe. Rivaling the Barzanjis in the region were the Talibanis, also of the Qadiri confederation. Following the Russo-Ottoman War, the Hamawand tribe rose to power and prominence. In the late 1800s the Hamawand and the Jaf tribe were intense regional rivals, which caused many problems for the Ottomans, who were unable to control these tribal groups.

Baghdad, which is in the mid-Euphrates region of Mesopotamia, had the most equal distribution of Sunni and Shi’i Muslims of the three wilayat. Baghdad was the least affected by tribal insurrections and caused the least amount of problems for the Ottoman government, due in large part to the reforms of the Tanzimat Period under Baghdad governors Mehmed Namik Paşa (1861–67) and Midhat Paşa (1869–72). During this period, the governors redistributed state lands in areas

---

10. Ibid., 75.
11. Ibid., 193. According to an 1894 census conducted by Vital Cuinet, a French geographer and orientalist, there were about 309,000 Sunni Muslims and 480,000 Shi’i Muslims in Baghdad.
12. Michiel Leezenberg and Mariwan Kanie, “Governing Islam by Tribes and Constitutions: British Mandate Rule in Iraq,” in *Colonial and Post-Colonial Governance of Islam: Continuities and Ruptures*, eds. Marcel Maussen, Viet Bader, and Annelies Moors, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 92–3. The Tanzimat Reforms were sweeping reforms instituted by the Sultans Abülmejid I (r. 1839–1861) and Abdülaziz (r. 1861–1876). Influenced by Western ideals of modernity, including sovereignty and constitutional monarchical power, the Reforms aimed to create a more centralized state in pan-Islamic terms. The Reforms themselves had little impact on the faraway Province of Mesopotamia, however, the ideology of the Reforms inspired other reforms and policies in the Province, notably the Land
controlled by various tribal confederations, granting land titles to paramount sheikhs, city merchants, and other notables. In addition to increasing private ownership of land, these efforts largely had the effect of eroding the pre-existing tribal system, especially in places such as Diyala, Karbala, and Baghdad. In Hilla-Diwaniyah, among other regions within the *wilayah*, the reforms had a less significant effect on the tribal system; the most important changes in these regions were the lessening power of the paramount sheikhs and the increasing power of the lesser sheikhs and the *sirkals*. Only in the Western desert region, where many tribal groups still remained nomadic tribes, did these reforms incite insurrections against the Ottoman government, especially among the tribal groups of the Aniza and the Shammar Jarba.\(^{13}\)

Basrah, the southernmost *wilayah* of Mesopotamia, was predominantly Shi‘i Muslim and Arabic-speaking. Basrah is located on the Persian Gulf, and following developments in international shipping technology, merchants in Basrah were able to enter into regional trade markets and the commercial sector became the main source of employment in the *wilayah*. The *wilayah* was a port of trade for the Mesopotamia regional market and for markets beyond the Ottoman borders. As will become important later, for much of Basrah’s landed and merchant class it was imperative to have the support—or to at least seek the support—of whomever would reinforce and cultivate the trade

---

\(^{13}\) Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*, 86.
Basrah, like Baghdad, was also greatly affected by the Tanzimat Period, though the tribal system still remained intact and significant throughout the late Ottoman period.15

Map 2:
The Mesopotamia Province at the end of the nineteenth century.16

Basrah was divided into two main regions, Muntafiq and ‘Amarrah, and unlike Baghdad, Basrah’s various tribal groups posed many problems for the Ottoman government. The Muntafiq tribal group, the largest in Basrah, controlled the Muntafiq region in the western part of the wilayab. Of the various sections of the tribal group, the Sadun was the ruling family. Though most of the

15. Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*, 87.
tribesmen of the Muntafiq were Shi‘i Muslims, the Sadun family was Sunni.17 The Sadun family’s power increased during the Tanzimat Period, when they were granted land titles for their tribe’s historically-held agricultural lands, or mukataa. In 1880, a conflict between the Sadun family and the Zuheyâde family led to Ottoman interference in the matter; as a result, many members of the Sadun family fled Iraq for the Syrian desert and the Ottoman government reduced Basrah’s status from wilayah to sançak, a lesser status than wilayah. A second crisis occurred when the exiled Sadun members returned to the Muntafiq region and demanded their former lands be returned to them.18

The ‘Amarrah region in eastern part of the wilayah was controlled by the Albu Muhammad, Banu Lam, and Banu Asad tribal groups.19 The Banu Lam constituted of a powerful tribal group situated on the modern-day border of Iran and Iraq, with a population of about 45,000 in the early 1900s. Given its position adjacent to Iran, since the seventeenth century the Banu Lam had often allied with their Shi‘i neighbors in Iran in its efforts to resist Ottoman control. In 1880, the Banu Lam rose up against the Ottomans in response to efforts to collect taxes. After the uprising had been suppressed, the Banu Lam remained relatively quiet for the remainder of the Ottoman period. Like the Banu Lam, the Albu Muhammad’s location put them between the modern-day states of Iran and Iraq. Unlike the Banu Lam, however, the Albu Muhammad posed a serious threat to their neighbors and to the Ottoman government due to the fact that they were well-armed with smuggled rifles from abroad and

17. Ibid., 88.
18. Ibid., 89.
19. Nakash, *The Shi‘is of Iraq*, 25–6. In addition to the Muntafiq, the Banu Lam, the Albu Muhammad, and the Banu Asad, Yitzhak Nakash includes the Zubayd, the Dulaym, the ‘Ubayd, the Khaz‘al, the Rabi‘a, and the Ka‘b among the main tribal groups in southern and central Iraq.
were well-positioned geographically, making them hard to attack or to control.\textsuperscript{20} South of ‘Amarrah in the marshy region between Qurnah and Suq ash-Shuyukh, lived the Shi’i tribe of the Banu Asad.

While under the control of Sheikh Hassan Khayyun, the Banu Asad became infamous for an incident on 24 August 1895, when the Ottoman government issued an imperial decree to banish Khayyun and the tribes of the al-Madina district for supposedly attacking an Ottoman steamer.\textsuperscript{21}

\textit{Socioeconomic changes in the tribal system}

As previously mentioned, the Tanzimat Period significantly affected the tribal system throughout Mesopotamia. Influenced by these reforms, the governor of Baghdad, Midhat Paşa, introduced the Land Code of 1869 throughout the \textit{wilayat}. Paşa sought to increase private ownership of agricultural lands by granting land titles to individuals. His objectives in doing so were to delegitimize communal land claims and lessen the power of tribes by privatizing the land, as prior to the Code, agricultural lands had been synonymous with tribal lands and had often been held by entire tribal groups.\textsuperscript{22} However, the Code worked contrary to Paşa’s objectives and, instead, the land policy created a powerful landed class by which the bulk of agricultural land was held by a small number of paramount sheikhs, ruling families, and other powerful individuals. As a result, tribesmen largely became tenant farmers, making tribal relations increasingly hierarchical.\textsuperscript{23}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{20} Çetinsaya, \textit{Ottoman Administration of Iraq}, 92–3.
\bibitem{21} Ibid., 97.
\bibitem{22} Nakash, \textit{The Shi’is of Iraq}, 34.
\end{thebibliography}
Following the changes in land ownership, several market forces, including Mesopotamia’s entrance into the world market, led to an increase in rural-to-urban migration. Not only were urban areas revived by the population growth and new industrialization, but the migration created what Eric Davis calls “crossecutting cleavages,” which is to say that the new social structures of the cities superseded the geographic- and ethnic-based identities of the tribal system.24 Another change that occurred in the cities was the rise in European-inspired nationalism and to counter it, which the Ottomans saw this as a threat to the viability of their control, the government sought to expand and update the military. Most of the new officers were Arabs who attended the Ottoman military academy in Istanbul and were Sunni Arabs from the “Sunni Arab triangle” from Baghdad north to Ramadi and Mosul. The development of the military during this time is significant not only for understanding later developments in the elite class of Mandatory Iraq, but also for the development of a political-military culture which would have long-lasting effects on the state bureaucracy throughout the period of monarchial rule.25

The Shi’i Arabs of Iraq

Prior to the nineteenth century, the Shi’i Arabs would never have become a threat to the Sunni majority in the Mesopotamia Province.26 In the nineteenth century, however, mass conversions from Sunnism to Shi’ism rapidly turned Shi’i Arabs into the majority ethnoreligious group in Iraq. Yitzhak

24. Ibid., 30–1.
25. Ibid., 33.
Nakash credits the conversion in the nineteenth century from nomadic to settled life, the rapid development of the Shi'i shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala, and Ottoman tribal settlement policy as the likely explanation for why the conversions happened at that point in time and with such speed. Notable though, were the often “incomplete” nature of the conversions within tribal groups; this meant that by the time the monarchy was formed, Sunnism and Shi‘ism could not be defined by tribal groups nor by geographic region. The process was uneven and tribal groups ended up with tribesmen who were both Sunni and Shi‘i.27 As with the policies of the Tanzimat Period, the disjointed nature of the conversions and changes to the tribal system decreased the power of the paramount sheikhs and instead increased the power of the sirkals and the sayyids.28 The sayyids, local ruling individuals, took control of the religious and administrative functions of the tribe, which further sped up the rate of conversion to Shi‘ism.29 In 1920, it was estimated that Shi‘i Muslims constituted of about fifty-six percent of the population of Iraq.30

Modern-day Iraq is home to several significant Shi‘i shrine cities, where historically the most prominent Shi‘i scholars resided and studied.31 These shrine cities, as Nakash describes them, were the “cultural-religious contact zone” between the Sunni Ottoman Empire, the Shi‘i Safavid Empire, and the Qajar Dynasty in Iran. Because of this, the shrine cities were a point of contention between the

27. Ibid., 27–8.
28. Ibid., 34. Upon realizing that his plan to undermine the power of tribes with the Land Code of 1969 had backfired, Midhat Paşa reversed the Code in 1881, banned any further granting of land deeds, and saw to it that the government repossess lands granted under the Code. This caused a major disruption to the tribal system and lessened the socioeconomic power of the paramount sheikhs, while increasing the power of the sirkals, and the religious and administrative power of the sayyids.
29. Ibid., 37.
30. Çetinsaya, Ottoman Administration of Iraq, 99.
Ottomans and Iranians from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, when both empires sought to control Shi‘i affairs in the region. As a result, the shrine cities were far more developed by the time of the establishment of the monarchy in Iraq, with Shi‘i institutions, such as religious madaris (schools), far exceeding those of the Sunni religious institutions. The prominent shrine cities were—and remain to this day—Najaf, Karbala, Samarra, and Kadhimiyyah.

Najaf was a semi-autonomous state on the Euphrates River in the northern region of the Basrah wilayah. It was often where the leading Shi‘i mujtabid of the day resided and practiced, and it is home to the tomb of Ali ibn Abi‘ Ta’lib, the first imam of Shi‘ism. The city was mostly Arab, with about a third Persian. Najaf sits on the edge of the western desert of Iraq, and tribal affairs long held a strong influence on the city. In April of 1915, the tribal confederations expelled the Ottomans from the city and divided Najaf into four quarters. Sayyid Mahid, Hajji ‘Atiyya and Kazim Subbi of the Zuqurt ruled the Huwayyish, the ‘Amarrah, and the Buraq quarters; and Hajji Sa‘d of the Shumurt ruled the Mishraq quarter. The sheikhs maintained this position of power until May 1918 when the British occupied Iraq. In 1803, the construction of the Hindiyyah canal by the Ottomans meant that Najaf was better able to sustain the huge numbers of pilgrims that came to the city each year and allow it to retain its position as the center of Shi‘ism in Iraq. Each year, so many pilgrims flocked to Najaf that at the beginning of the twentieth century, the regular influx of pilgrims often doubled its

32. Ibid., 14.
33. Ibid., 18. A mujtabid (plural, mujtabidun) is a Muslim jurist in the Shi‘i Muslim tradition.
34. Nakash, The Shi‘is of Iraq, 20. The tribal groups in Najaf were as follows: the Sashif al-Ghita family from the Al‘Ali section of the Bani Malik tribe of the Muntafiq confederation; the Zuqurt tribe, allied with the Kashif al-Ghita family; and the Shumurt, allied with the Milalis, who were the custodians of ‘Ali’s shrine from the sixteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century.
population of about 30,000.\textsuperscript{35} Along with Karbala, Najaf was powerful enough that the Ottomans were unable to assert true control over the city.\textsuperscript{36}

Karbala, about halfway between Najaf and Baghdad, is sacred in Shi’ism, as it is the location of the Battle of Karbala in the seventh century. It also contains the shrines of Hussein ibn ‘Ali, the son of ‘Ali and the third Shi’i imam—known as the Sayyid al-Shuhada, the Prince of Martyrs, for his martyrdom at the Battle of Karbala—and of ‘Abbas, Hussein’s half-brother. Though Najaf eventually emerged as the preeminent center of religious study, Karbala developed before Najaf, at around 1737 when the Husseiniyah canal was built.\textsuperscript{37} While Najaf acquiesced to Ottoman efforts to insert direct control (though as already mentioned, the Ottomans were never truly able to achieve this), the tribal groups of Karbala resisted the Ottomans and in retaliation, the Ottomans occupied the city and demoted Karbala from its semi-autonomous status. Karbala was home to a large Persian community and had strong connections with Iran, as is evidenced by the elite status of the Persianized Kammuna family.\textsuperscript{38} Kadhimiyah and Samarra did not hold the same paramount status as Najaf and Karbala but were important nonetheless. Kadhimiyah is just north of the city of Baghdad on the Tigris River and contains the shrines of Musa al-Kazim, the seventh imam, and his grandson, Muhammad al-Jawad, the ninth imam. Samarra contains the shrines of ‘Ali al-Hadi, the tenth imam, and his son, Hassan al-‘Askari, the eleventh imam. Samarra is also believed to be the birthplace of the twelfth imam,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 20–1.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 25.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 22.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 22–3.
\end{itemize}
Muhammad al-Mahdi, who is believed to return as the Mahdi.\textsuperscript{39} Despite Samarra’s status as a Shi’i shrine city, its population was almost entirely Sunni.\textsuperscript{40} By and large, Shi’i Arabs in Mesopotamia did not recognize the Ottoman Empire’s claim to the Great Islamic Caliphate, which Sultan Abdülhamid II consistently emphasized to give his regime religious legitimacy. Further, many Shi’i mujtabidun forbade participation in the Ottoman government, considering it heretical. In turn, the Ottoman government supported the idea that the Shi’i Arabs in Mesopotamia should be regarded with a sense of distrust and disloyalty, as they were unlikely to recognize the legitimacy of nor identify with the Sunni Ottoman state.\textsuperscript{41} The Shi’i tribes were often considered a “standing menace to law and order,” as they were often a source of frustration for the Ottoman government on matters such as taxation and conscription.\textsuperscript{42}

However, Mesopotamia was on the periphery of the Ottoman Empire, far from Istanbul, and therefore the sultan’s power was limited.\textsuperscript{43} Although control over land was a major source of conflict during Abdülhamid II’s sultanate, Abdülhamid was careful in how he dealt with the paramount sheikhs. This was different from the local governors’ approach to the sheikhs, which was not as cautious. The sultan would typically revert to force against the sheikhs only as a last option.\textsuperscript{44} There were certainly conflicts between the Ottoman government and the Shi’i tribal groups, but, in the late

\textsuperscript{39} Esposito, \textit{The Oxford Dictionary of Islam}. The Mahdi means the “divinely guided one;” the concept of the Mahdi is not written in the Qur’an, but rather was developed by Shi’i clerics sometime later. The Mahdi is said to be the eschatological, messianic figure who will bring justice and true belief at the end of days.
\textsuperscript{40} Nakash, 23–4.
\textsuperscript{41} Çetinsaya, \textit{Ottoman Administration of Iraq}, 99.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 72.
\textsuperscript{43} Nakash, \textit{The Shi’is of Iraq}, 14.
\textsuperscript{44} Çetinsaya, \textit{Ottoman Administration of Iraq}, 98.
Ottoman period there is a lack of evidence of active discrimination towards Shi‘i Arabs in Mesopotamia and generally speaking, both parties only interacted with the other out of necessity.\textsuperscript{45} Although there little to no proof of active conflict between the Shi‘i tribal groups and the Ottoman government, this does not mean that the Ottoman government did not harbor certain negative attitudes towards the Shi‘i Arabs. In a January 1908 report on the “Shi‘i problem” commissioned by the Ottoman government, the president of the commission, Mustafa Nâzîm Paşa, laid out four conclusions on the steady and growing power of the Shi‘i Arabs in Iraq: one, the political influence of the Shi‘i mujtahidun over the uneducated, poor masses; two, the strength of the Shi‘i establishments, compared to the decay of the Sunni establishments; three, the political power of the Shi‘i ‘ulama; and four, the high enrollment of Shi‘i religious students, compared to the dismal attendance at Sunni religious schools.\textsuperscript{46}

\textbf{The British in Iraq}

\textit{The creation of the Mandate}

With the knowledge that the Ottomans would likely enter the war on the side of the Central Powers in the impending world war and with the nascent threats from their forces in the Gulf, the British landed troops in al-Faw on 6 November 1914. By 22 November, the British troops had captured Basrah.\textsuperscript{47} On 11 March 1917, the British entered Baghdad and flew the Union Jack from the

\begin{flushright}
45. Allawi, \textit{Faisal I of Iraq}, 342. \\
46. Çetinsaya, \textit{Ottoman Administration of Iraq}, 125. \\
\end{flushright}
clock tower in Qishla Square, marking the occupation of the city and the end of Ottoman rule in Mesopotamia. By 1918, the British had reached Mosul. Britain had three main reasons for maintaining control over Iraq: it sought to maintain a strong front in the face of international pressures, specifically its rivalry with France; to maintain access to India and the Suez Canal for military and economic purposes; and to assert control over the oil reserves in Mosul.

It is important to note a few incidents at the beginning of the British occupation of Iraq which likely influenced the British’s decision for indirect over direct rule. At first, resistance to the British incursion was highly localized. Even when revolts spread across the Mesopotamia Province, the actual fighting remained local, with little inter-regional collaboration against the British. When the British invaded Basrah in 1914, the Shi‘i mujtabidun, led by Ayatollah al-Yazdi, declared a fatwa for jihad. In 1916, the mujtabidun declared another fatwa and launched the Najaf Revolt. While these actions certainly gained the attention of the British, they failed to end British control in Iraq. The Iraqi Revolt from June to October 1920, however, did significantly impact the future of British policy in Iraq. With the news in April 1920 that Iraq had been assigned a mandate at the San Remo Conference, various contingents within Iraq began to organize. The Revolt began on 30 June 1920 when a sheikh in Rumaitha was imprisoned for refusing to repay an agricultural debt and his tribesmen rose up in support of him. With the anti-British sentiment throughout Iraq already simmering under the surface, the uprising quickly spread, though it still remained largely localized and disorganized. The British

50. A fatwa is a legal opinion on Islamic law given by a jurist (mujtabid) or mufti, a Muslim religious leader who is a legal expert; jihad is a fight against threats to Islam and its followers, or holy war.
forces finally regained control in October, but only after hundreds of deaths on both sides. While the Revolt failed to reach its ultimate objectives of dispelling the British from Iraq, it did make a strong case for indirect British rule with an Arab, “native” leader.  

**Faisal I’s road to Iraq**

In order to understand how Mesopotamia became Mandatory Iraq under the British in 1921, it is first necessary to go back to the early days World War I, but from the level of British dealings with the Arab powers, primarily those from the Gulf. Faisal I’s, the soon-to-be first king of Iraq, road to Iraq began in July 1915, when Sharif Hussein ibn ‘Ali of Mecca sent a letter to Sir Henry McMahon, High Commissioner to Egypt, laying out the conditions by which Hussein would commit troops and resources to the British effort to overthrow the Ottoman government. Their exchange continued until March 1916, when the two reached an agreement. This correspondence is the source of contention over whether or not McMahon, as representative for the British government, promised Hussein an independent Arab state in exchange for Hussein’s commitment to the Arab Revolt.  

In May 1916, just months after the conclusion of the correspondence, representatives of the British and French government met in secret. The two imperial powers divided up most of the Arab Middle East into spheres of influence; this agreement—the Sykes-Picot Agreement—seems to contradict the terms of the agreement that McMahon made with Hussein.  

---

53. Ibid., 149–50.
On 10 June 1916, Hussein and his forces launched the Arab Revolt from Mecca. Over the next two years, the Sharifian Army led the revolt against the Ottoman Empire across the Middle East.\footnote{The Sharifian Army describes the military forces led by Sharif Hussein ibn ‘Ali during the Arab Revolt from 1916 to 1918.} The Revolt effectively ended with a British/Arab victory when Hussein’s son, Emir Faisal I, led troops into Damascus on 1 October 1918. Faisal’s forces included a number of Iraqi ex-Ottoman officers and British military advisors, including Captain T.E. Lawrence.\footnote{Cleveland, et al., \textit{The History of the Modern Middle East}, 148–9.} Unbeknownst to Hussein or Faisal, the British and the French had already decided upon the geographic boundaries of their respective spheres of influence in the Sykes-Picot Agreement, meaning that Faisal was violating the terms when he immediately began to set up an administration for an independent Arab state in Syria. In March 1920, a general Syrian congress met and declared Syria an independent Arab state with Faisal as its king.\footnote{Ibid., 154.} At the San Remo Conference in April 1920, the British and French assigned the Near Eastern Mandates, which included French-controlled Syria and British-controlled Iraq.\footnote{Peter Sluglett, \textit{Britain in Iraq: 1914–1932} (London, Ithaca Press, 1976), 35. The Near Eastern Mandates (a Mandate in this instance describing an assigned territory under the League of Nations) included: Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq to Britain; and Syria and Lebanon to France.} On 20 July 1920, French forces entered Damascus, ending the short-lived Arab state and driving Faisal into exile in Europe.\footnote{Cleveland, et al., \textit{The History of the Modern Middle East}, 154.}

Back in Iraq, the Civil Commissioner to Mesopotamia Sir Percy Cox wrote in “The Future of Mesopotamia” that in order for the people of Iraq to accept British rule, the British must ensure that any remnants of Ottoman rule in Mesopotamia be removed. He proposed British rule through a high commissioner with a figurehead “native” ruler. Before he could make significant strides in these
efforts, however, Cox was reassigned to Iran in July 1918 and his deputy, Arnold Talbot Wilson, was assigned to High Commissioner. At first, Wilson was resistant to the idea of an independent Iraq, but eventually conceded to conducting a plebiscite, authorized on 27 November 1918, to gauge Iraqi acceptance of British rule. Wilson sent officers to canvass for the plebiscite, and only in the shrine cities, according to Wilson, did they find any evidence of dissent against British rule.

Map 3:
The divisions of the Arab Middle East according to the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916.

60. Ibid., 347.
61. Ibid., 348.
On the Iraqi end, in January of 1919, a contingent of four Iraqi Hizb al-‘Ahd al-Iraqi members, representing 385 Iraqi officers and civil servants working in Syria and the Hijaz, sent a letter to the British government demanding that they end the occupation and form an independent Iraqi state with one of Sharif Hussein’s sons as king.\(^{63}\) Additionally, they wrote, the new Iraqi state would have diplomatic relations with the other independent Arab states and remain allied with Great Britain. On 23 April 1919, the members of al-‘Ahd sent another letter, this time to the Foreign Officer in Aleppo, by way of the Allied liaison officer. The letter included the signature of Ja’far al-‘Askari, who was serving as the military governor in Aleppo at the time.\(^{64}\) In April 1919, a different group consisting of Sayyid ‘Alwan, Sayyid Nour al-Yasiri, and Sheikh ‘Abd al-Wahid met secretly in Najaf to discuss approaching Sharif Hussein with the request that he install one of his sons as the king of an independent Iraq. Many months later, Muhammad Ridha al-Shibibi, the representative for the group, finally reached Mecca to deliver the message to Hussein. Hussein in his response was vague but nonetheless clearly offered his support for their cause.\(^{65}\)

On 8 March 1920, an Iraqi general congress led by al-‘Ahd met to coincide with the congress in Syria.\(^{66}\) The congress was supported from Syria by Faisal, who believed that the Iraqi congress would support his own monarchy in Syria and that his support would encourage the appointment of his brother, ‘Abdullah, as king of Iraq. At the congress, members openly called for an independent Iraqi state “from the north of Mosul wilayah to the Persian Gulf” with ‘Abdullah as king, and an end to the

---

63. Ibid. Hizb al-‘Ahd al-Iraqi was a political group of mostly young ex-Ottoman, ex-Sharifian Army officers.
64. Ibid., 354.
65. Ibid., 353.
66. Ibid., 353.
British occupation, though Iraq would maintain diplomatic relations with Britain. Concurrently, an Iraqi contingent attended the Syrian congress, which, with the exception of one individual, were all Sunni ex-Ottoman military officers or notables. The Iraqi contingent in Syria, upon hearing of the tenets from the Iraqi congress, were upset to hear that the independent Iraqi state would maintain diplomatic relations with Britain; they saw this as merely replacing one occupier (the Ottomans) with another (the British).  

Following the Iraqi Revolt that ended in October 1920, the British officers in Mesopotamia, who were mostly reassigned from the India Office, were largely discredited. Included in this was the High Commissioner A.T. Wilson, to be replaced by Sir Percy Cox, whom the British brought back from his posting in Iran. On 1 October 1920, Cox landed in Basra. Chief among his first responsibilities was to determine the structure of the new Iraqi state and the tenants of the Mandate to be laid out at the Cairo Conference. With the Revolt in recent memory, Cox knew that he had to cultivate a British policy that included Iraqi representation. The groups that would be included, he decided, were the urban elite from Baghdad and Basra, the landed classes and paramount sheikhs, and Iraq’s minority groups, especially Iraqi Jews. On 11 October, he arrived in Baghdad and a day later, began laying the groundwork for the formation of the first Arab government and offered the premiership to the naqib of Baghdad, ‘Abbād al-Rahman al-Kailānī. On 23 October 1920, al-Kailānī formed the first cabinet of the Iraqi government. Of its eight members, one was a Jewish notable and

67. Ibid., 355.
68. Ibid., 359.
70. Allawi, Faisal I of Iraq, 346.
another was the Shi‘i ex-Sharifian officer, Ja‘far al-‘Askari. Despite the fact that this cabinet was independent in name, it was entirely dependent on the British for nearly all of its resources.71

Cox’s other main concern was choosing an Arab king for Iraq. Quincy Wright, an American political scientist, wrote about the political decision behind indirect rule in an article published in 1926. He writes: “Stimulated by serious insurrection in 1920, by parliamentary complaints of expense, by the advice of Arab sympathizers like Colonel Lawrence and Miss Gertrude Bell, and by the need of a place for the Emir Feisal, just expelled from Damascus by the French...” the British decided that a system of indirect rule was in their best interest if it were to maintain control over Iraq without serious insurrections.72

At the Cairo Conference in March 1920, the British Mandatory powers decided what would become the three pillars of the Mandate would be the monarchy, the treaty, and the constitution. The first king of the monarchy would be Faisal I, the third son of the Sharif Hussein. The constitution would have democratic elements to incorporate Iraqi participation, specifically of the aforementioned groups that Cox laid out.73 Cox was keenly aware, just as he was before the Revolt, of the necessity of creating a positive public image for the British and for Faisal. Prior to Faisal’s arrival in Iraq, Cox ensured that any and all outspoken critics of the British and Faisal were removed from Iraq, including Sayyid Talib al-Naqib, who was arrested and deported to Ceylon (modern-day Sri Lanka) on 16 April 1921. Al-Naqib’s arrest and deportation seemed to have a calming effect on Iraq, and most of the dissent quieted down.

71. Ibid., 360.
Days before Faisal’s arrival on 16 June 1921, the cabinet decided that Faisal should receive an official welcome in Basra. Scrambling to form a welcoming party, the former assistant military governor of Aleppo and the governor of Baghdad, Naji al-Suwaidi, recruited sixty people in Baghdad to travel to Basra at their own expense. When Faisal disembarked from the Northbrook in Basra on 23 June, he was met by this welcoming party, which included Ja’far al-‘Askari, a friend of Faisal’s, and Jack Philby, a known opponent of Faisal’s. Like the welcoming party, this was another strategic move by Cox to create a sense of impartiality and acceptance.  

On his way from Basra to Baghdad, Faisal stopped by a number of other towns and cities, including Najaf and Karbala. His reception ranged from clearly staged to tepid. When he arrived in Baghdad on 29 June, he was met by huge crowds and was received by Sir Aylmer Haldane and a number of other officials. Despite all of the efforts that Cox made to create a warm welcome for Faisal in Iraq, the artificiality of it all was no more obvious than in the lack of infrastructure in the new capital of Baghdad. In the words of Ali A. Allawi:

“Baghdad had not been a true capital city since the collapse of the Abbasid Empire in 1258... Faisal’s new capital was to all intents and purposes a medieval city with a smattering of modernity superimposed on it.”

On 11 July 1921, the Iraqi cabinet passed a resolution that designated Faisal as king of Iraq. Cox, again aware of possible dissent and diligent in covering all of his bases, required that the resolution could only be approved following another plebiscite. The plebiscite took about two weeks

---

75. Ibid., 366.
76. Ibid., 367.
77. Ibid., 371.
and at the end of July, they had their answer: the Ministry of Interior announced that ninety-six percent had voted in favor of Faisal. This number, however, is misleading. Though the majority of the Iraqi elite approved of Faisal, the landslide number was also reflective of Cox flexing his power over the situation to ensure a positive outcome. On 23 August 1921, Faisal was enthroned. The date, chosen specially by Faisal, coincided with 18 Dhu’l-Hijja of the Hijri calendar, the Day of al-Ghadir. This was a strategic move by Faisal to show his support for the Shi’i Arabs of Iraq. Though Faisal was formally Sunni, he was adept in navigating the complexities of the Iraqi ethnoreligious makeup, and quickly made efforts to approach the Shi’i community. He was also keen to retain some semblance of independence from the British. Notably, he refused to announce his subordination to Britain in his accession speech; when the Colonial Office insisted upon this, Faisal nearly refused the throne and eventually compromised, agreeing that he would relent on his demands for a clear definition of his role as king in exchange for not declaring his subordination.

**Iraq under the Mandate**

The legal terms of the British Mandate in Iraq were established in the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1922. From early April through July 1922, Shi’i ‘ulama in Karbala led protests against the Treaty. These protests very nearly became a real threat to the Treaty were it not for Faisal falling ill with a bout

---

78. Ibid., 377–8.
79. The Day of al-Ghadir is an important holiday to Shi’i Muslims, believed to be the day that the Prophet Muhammad appointed ‘Ali as his successor.
81. 368–70.
83. Ibid., 75. ‘Ulama is a body of Muslim legal and theological scholars (consisting of mullahs).
of appendicitis on 24 August. With Faisal indisposed, Cox assumed full powers and saw to it that the leaders of the anti-Treaty protests were exiled to the island of Hajjam in the Persian Gulf, ending the opposition. On 10 October 1922, Cox persuaded the prime minister to sign the Treaty, which was ratified in June 1924. The treaty was to last 20 years.  

The government established by the British Mandatory powers was overwhelmingly Sunni Arab. Faisal was less familiar with the Iraqi officer corps than he was with Syria’s, and he largely created his officer corps from the ex-Ottoman and ex-Sharifian Army officers who served with him during the Arab Revolt and/or in Damascus. Despite the efforts Faisal made to reach out to the Shi’i communities, the cabinet’s official stance toward the Shi’i Arabs was that, until Iraq gained independence, there was no place for Shi’i voices in the government. Faisal actively pursued incorporating the Mosul wilayah into the Mandate not only for its oil reserves, but also for its predominantly Sunni Muslim population. Without its incorporation, it would be difficult for Faisal and his cabinet to retain its legitimacy as Sunni rulers over a majority Shi’i Arab population. With Mosul, at least, the demographics would even out slightly. The question of the wilayah was eventually handed off to the League of Nations, then to the Permanent Court of International Justice, which in 1925 decided that Mosul was to be incorporated into Mandatory Iraq.

Though the British idealized the rural population in Orientalist terms as the “unspoiled Arabs,” their image of the divisions between the rural and urban populations was not consistent with

84. Ibid., 77–9.
86. Sluglett, The British in Iraq, 84–5.
87. Allawi, Faisal I of Iraq, 386.
the historical developments of the nineteenth century which, as discussed earlier, included mass migration to the cities and interrupted the traditional geographical associations of tribal groups. Despite this rhetoric, though, the British ultimately depended and capitalized upon the vestiges of the administrative hierarchies of the Ottoman Empire, which were almost exclusively Sunni Arabs at the top and which actively excluded Shi‘i Arabs, especially the paramount sheikhs and the mujtahidun that had historically caused problems for the Ottoman government.\(^89\) For the Shi‘i Arabs themselves, the fatwas of the early days of the British occupation in Iraq left a lasting impression on the British officials.

A 1920 letter by Gertrude Bell, Oriental Secretary to Mandatory Iraq under Percy Cox, to her mother is indicative of the attitudes the British harbored against the Shi‘i Arab religious clergy: “There they sit with an atmosphere which reeks of antiquity and is so thick with the dust of ages that you can’t see through it—or can they. And for the most part they are very hostile to us, a feeling we can’t alter because it’s so difficult to get at them.”\(^90\) The rhetoric of the “unspoiled Arabs” is noticeably absent here as Bell reveals the private views toward the rural elite. While the mujtahidun and ‘ulama were constantly at odds with the powers that be, before the establishment of the Mandate, the various sheikhdoms often pandered to whichever power, be that British or Ottoman, they believed would best

---

90. Gertrude Bell, *The Letters of Gertrude Bell* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1927), 483. Though this thesis does not go into detail on Gertrude Bell’s (1868–1926) role in Mandatory Iraq, she is nonetheless a significant figure in Iraq’s history. Known by Iraqis as “Miss Bell,” she was an Oxford-educated Orientalist bureaucrat who served in the Middle East during World War I, and then oversaw the establishment of the Iraqi state under British auspices and the creation of the Hashemite Monarchy. Though figures such as T.E. Lawrence have much more clout in popular culture, Bell is undeniably the force behind much of the British policies and dealings in Iraq and the Middle East writ-large before her sudden death in 1926. Not only was she one of the most powerful women in the British government at the time, but it is unlikely that the history of the Middle East post-World War I would be the same without her influence.
secure their economic interests. In Basrah, for example, several prominent notables sent a letter to King George V calling for the establishment of Basrah as a British protectorate. Following the establishment of the Mandate, however, the voices and actions of the Shi'i mujtahidun overshadowed that of any Shi'i tribesmen, notables, or merchants partial to the British.

The second Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, signed in June 1930, laid the conditions for the relationship between Britain and Iraq following Iraq’s independence, which was set for 1932. Unlike the 1922 Treaty, which faced several protests and roadblocks, Nuri al-Sa’id, the prime minister, and the British contingent, were quick to negotiate the terms of the agreement. The terms were as follows: the king is responsible for the internal order of the country; Iraq is responsible for its own defense, which set up the establishment of the Iraqi Air Force; Britain retained the right to access Iraq’s military facilities and in the case of war, had the right to move troops through Iraq; Iraqi military equipment and advisers would come from Britain; Iraq’s two military bases would be in Habbaniyyah and Shu’aiba; and the Treaty would last 25 years.

**Independent Iraq**

On 3 October 1932, the Mandate ended, and Iraq became independent to little fanfare. Prior to Iraq’s (quasi-)independence, Faisal wrote an eight-page memorandum that he sent to leading politicians throughout Iraq. A document such as this was unprecedented in Iraq’s history, and likely

---

92. Ibid., 344.
elsewhere in the Arab world. In it, Faisal laid out his sincere thoughts on the primary issues of the country and its future.⁹⁵ He wrote that the years of exclusion and oppression under Ottoman rule created a division between the Sunnis and Shi’is. He states:

All of this has made this majority [the Shi’a], or at least certain individuals amongst them with personal ambitions, including religious leaders, and those who unworthily seek positions in government, or have not benefited materially from the new order, to appear as if they are still oppressed simply because they are Shi’a.⁹⁶

Faisal warns about the continuation of this practice in future Iraqi policies, fearing that it would only increase the power of the Shi’i leaders, whose power could potentially incite a popular insurrection against the Iraqi government. He continues, “They entice this majority to abandon the new state on the grounds that it is an unmitigated evil, and we must not ignore the effects that such people have on the simple but ignorant people.”⁹⁷

At the same time that Faisal wrote this memorandum, many of the former opposition leaders to the Treaty became officials in the cabinet. Among them was Rashid ‘Ali al-Kailani, who became prime minister in March 1933. Rashid ‘Ali and the other leaders were part of al-Ahali Group, a radical political group of mostly young elite from Iraq. Publicly, the members of al-Ahali supported the Treaty and its terms, but privately, they worked to undermine its legitimacy.⁹⁸ Many members of this group would play further roles in the period following the 1936 coup d’état. Faisal’s monarchy came to an end with his sudden death on 8 September 1933. Faisal had been sick for some time and it is

⁹⁵. Allawi, Faisal I of Iraq, 536.
⁹⁶. Ibid., 537–8.
⁹⁷. Ibid.
⁹⁸. Ibid., 551.
likely that the stress of the Assyrian Crisis in August led to his sudden heart attack the next month.\textsuperscript{99}

Faisal’s twenty-one-year-old son, Ghazi, assumed the throne. Unlike Faisal, Ghazi was far less charismatic and comfortable in navigating the ethnoreligious complexities of Iraq.\textsuperscript{100}

\textbf{Map 4:}
The borders of the newly-independent Iraq in 1932.\textsuperscript{101}

---

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 559–60. The Assyrian Crisis occurred on 11 August 1933, when an Iraqi army detachment under the command of Colonel Bakr Sidqi, alongside Arab and Kurdish tribesmen, carried out the systematic killing of Assyrian refugees in a village in the north of Iraq. Faisal was condemned by the global community and when he attempted to return to Switzerland on 14 August for medical treatment, the Counsellor to the Embassy in Baghdad advised him not to leave. Faisal finally left on 2 September and, eight days later, he died at the Bellevue Palace Hotel in Bern.

\textsuperscript{100} Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 31–2.

\textsuperscript{101} Allawi, \textit{Faisal I of Iraq}, 470.
**Political and civil unrest: The era of coups**

*Ghazi’s monarchy*

Tribal unrest continued after Faisal I’s death and Ghazi’s ascent to the throne. The roots of the tribal unrest were in the declining power of the paramount sheikhs that began with Britain’s incursion into Mesopotamia over fifteen years earlier.\(^2\) Much like the attitude towards the Ottoman Empire, the majority of the Shi‘i *mujtabidun* refused to recognize the Hashemite Monarchy as legitimate since it was officially secular, dominated by Sunni Arabs, and exercised by a foreign power: the British. A tribal rebellion in Daghghara, near the shrine city of Najaf forced King Ghazi’s hand in replacing his cabinet of mostly Sunni Arabs.\(^3\) As tribal unrest grew more acute, the control of the state and of the army also grew. By 1936, the armed forces grew to about 23,000 members, which was double its size in 1933. The Iraqi Air Force grew to an entire squadron. The military introduced a nationalist paramilitary training program called *futuwa*.\(^4\) The growth of the army occurred as Prime Minister Yasin al-Hashimi’s authoritarian regime rapidly became more akin to a dictatorship over a constitutional premiership.\(^5\)

\(^{102}\) Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 32.

\(^{103}\) Ibid. 33.

\(^{104}\) *Futuwa* is a Quranic term describing “youth” or “chivalry,” though the term does not exactly translate to English.

\(^{105}\) Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 34.
The 1936 coup d’état

With the deepening fractures of Yasin al-Hashimi’s regime, Bakr Sidqi and Hikmat Sulaiman planned a coup d’état. Though the coup came to be known as led by Sidqi, the coup was really the brainchild of Sulaiman, whose objectives in carrying out the coup were not only to seize power, but also to stimulate social and economic development, and adopt policies of secularism and modernization that were inspired by Kemal Atatürk’s government in Turkey. By 1935, Sulaiman and other major political players, such as Ja’far Abu al-Timman, had joined al-Ahali Group. The leaders of the coup obtained a pledge of support from the first division commander of the Iraqi Air Force and shortly thereafter on 29 October 1936, the army marched on Baghdad under Bakr Sidqi’s leadership and planes flew over the city, dropping leaflets demanding Hashimi’s resignation and the appointment of Sulaiman as prime minister. Once it was clear that the coup was only intended to replace the cabinet and not the monarchy, Ghazi conceded to their demands, al-Hashimi resigned, and Ghazi appointed Sulaiman as prime minister. The next day, al-Hashimi, Nuri al-Sa’id, and Rashid ‘Ali al-Kailani fled the country; Hashimi died of a heart attack in 1937 but the other two would soon return to Iraq.

The Bakr Sidqi coup only served to reinforce the growing power and influence of the armed forces. Sidqi, as commander of the armed forces, was possibly even more powerful than Sulaiman. He violently suppressed any tribal uprisings in the same manner than he handled the Assyrian Crisis in 1933. The Shi’i Arabs in Iraq detested him and his command. From his exile in Egypt, Nuri al-Sa’id

106. Ibid., 35.
107. Ibid., 36.
campaigned against the regime and on 11 August 1937, an Iraqi officer, following commands from the Arab nationalist officers in exile, assassinated Sidqi at a military airfield near Mosul. With Sidqi’s assassination, civil war between the two factions led by Sulaiman and by Sa’id seemed imminent, especially once most of the officer corps sided with the Arab nationalist officers led by Sa’id in exile. On 17 August 1937, Sulaiman and his cabinet resigned.\(^\text{108}\)

*The 1941 coup d’état and the second British occupation*

On 4 April 1939, King Ghazi died in a car crash while driving under the influence of alcohol. His death created a power vacuum as he left his infant son, Faisal II, as king. On 6 April, ‘Abd al-Ilah was appointed regent.\(^\text{109}\) Just a few months later World War II broke out. On 10 June 1940, the British requested that Iraq break off diplomatic relations with Italy. The Iraqi cabinet was highly divided on the issue, with the anti-British side led by the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Amin al-Husseini and the Golden Square officers.\(^\text{110}\) In November of 1940, the British presented Iraq with an ultimatum that essentially forced Rashid ‘Ali out as prime minister and gave Taha al-Hashimi the power to form a new government. On 1 April 1941, Rashid ‘Ali and the Golden Square staged a coup d’état and ‘Ali

---

108. Ibid., 38.
109. Ibid.
110. Ibid., 43. The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini, was a highly influential anti-British, anti-Zionist, pro-Nazi leader from Palestine, who, after taking part in a revolt against the British in Palestine, sought refuge in Mandatory Lebanon, then in Iraq. He eventually made his way to fascist Italy and then Nazi Germany. The Golden Square officers were the four most influential and powerful members of the “Circle of Seven,” a group of Sunni Arab nationalist military officers who were highly influenced by the German Ambassador to Iraq, Fritz Grobba. The Golden Square officers were Salah al-Din Sabbagh, Muhammad Fahmi Sa’id, Mahmud Salman, and Kamil Shabib.
became prime minister once again. Nine days later, ‘Ali’s government deposed of ‘Abd al-Ilah, Faisal II’s regent, and replaced him with a distant relative, Sharif Sharaf.\footnote{111}

Later that month, the British demanded to land troops in Iraq, which the British retained the right to do under the Anglo-Iraqi Agreement of 1930. ‘Ali agreed, and on 17 and 18 April, the British troops landed at Basrah.\footnote{112} On 2 May, while attempting to evacuate women and children in Habbaniyah, the British were told by the Iraqi armed forces that if a plane left the ground, they would be fired upon. The British took this as an act of war and a British commander led troops to attack local Iraqi forces. By 19 May, the British forces captured Fallujah, and on 29 May 1941, the British marched on Baghdad, marking the beginning of the second British occupation. The Golden Square fled to Iran and was soon followed by Rashid ‘Ali and the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem.\footnote{113} On 1 June 1941, the deposed ‘Abd al-Ilah and Nuri al-Sa’id returned to Baghdad and on 9 October, the British asked al-Sa’id to form a new government.\footnote{114}

Between 1941 and 1953, there were constant changes in the Iraqi government, as grabs for power led to a continuous stream of various premierships. On 24 May 1953, Faisal II came of age. The next year, Nuri al-Sa’id returned to power and began the systematic suppression of all political activity. Though the armed forces and military officers were largely absent from politics in the postwar years,

\footnote{111. Ibid.}
\footnote{112. Ibid.}
\footnote{113. Ibid., 44–5. On 6 January 1942, Rashid ‘Ali al-Kailani, three of the four Golden Square officers, and Yunis al-Sab’awi, the minister of economics, as well as a couple of others, were sentenced to death in absentia; all four of the officers and al-Sab’awi were eventually captured and hung; only Rashid ‘Ali and the Grand Mufti were able to escape.}
\footnote{114. Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq}, 104. In the chaos of the government’s collapse at the beginning of the second British occupation, many Iraqis took to the streets during the first few days of June and violently attacked the Jews of Baghdad in what came to be known as the \textit{Farhud}. About 200 were killed before the British troops stopped the mobs.}
the February 1955 Baghdad Pact, which was pro-Western and pro-British, ended the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930, incited Egyptian opposition and caused agitation among largely pro-Nasserist Iraqi army.\textsuperscript{115} This incited anti-regime sentiments among the armed forces and in February 1957, the anti-regime opposition parties cultivated ties to the armed forces and formed the United National Front, which included the \textit{Istiqlal} (Independence) Party, the National Democratic Party (NDP), the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), and the Ba‘th Party.\textsuperscript{116}

\textbf{The 1958 coup d’état: “The July 14 Revolution”}

The 1958 coup d’état was led by the Free Officers, which was founded by Rif‘at al-Hajj Sirri in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{117} The Free Officers was a secret military group that had pan-Arab objectives and consisted of mostly Sunni Arab officers.\textsuperscript{118} In 1957, Brigadier ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim was asked to join the Supreme Committee of the Free Officers as chairman, along with Colonel ‘Abd al-Salam ‘Arif.\textsuperscript{119} In early 1958, the Free Officers agreed that Iraq should become a republic and that the old elite should be purged from the government and put on trial for corroboration with the imperialist Western powers.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[115] Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 59. While considering the re-negotiations for the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, Nuri al-Sa‘id decided it was in Iraq’s best interest to join a bilateral agreement with Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and eventually Great Britain. The agreement, called the Baghdad Pact, was negotiated under the guidance of the United States, though the U.S. never signed the Pact. Egypt under Gamal Abdel Nasser’s leadership was highly anti-British and extremely wary of Western alliances. Nuri al-Sa‘id met with Nasser in Cairo to discuss the Pact, but mixed messages led al-Sa‘id to believe he was free to sign and Nasser to believe that he made his discontent clear. When al-Sa‘id signed on 24 February 1955, Egypt immediately rejected the Pact, which signaled the split between the pro-West (e.g., Iraq) and the anti-West/pro-U.S.S.R. (e.g., Egypt) in the region and bringing the Cold War to the Middle East.
\item[116] Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq}, 143. The United National Front was a political alliance of Iraqi nationalist groups, which in addition to political activity in Iraq, supported liberation movements across the Middle East and North Africa.
\item[117] Ibid., 144.
\item[118] Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 66.
\item[119] Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq}, 144.
\end{footnotes}
They also decided that the government should be controlled by the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) of the Supreme Committee. On 14 July 1958, Qasim and ‘Arif ordered their forces to occupy Baghdad and ‘Arif announced over Baghdadi radio that the Free Officers were forming an Iraqi republic. Troops then marched on the royal palace, the Royal Guard surrendered and King Faisal II, Crown Prince ‘Abd al-Ilah, and other members of the royal family were coerced from the building and shot and killed, thus ending the Hashemite Monarchy. The next day, Nuri al-Sa’id was captured and killed in the streets.120

THE BA’TH PARTY AND THE RISE OF SADDAm HUSSEIN

The Ba’th Party was founded in Syria in the 1940s, with a branch in Iraq. Since 1955, the Iraqi branch was led by Fu’ad al-Rikabi, a Shi’i Arab from Nasiriyyah.121 The Ba’th Party was founded on pan-Arab and secular ideals, with the motto “freedom, unity, socialism.”122 The Ba’thists were critical of socioeconomic inequalities in the Arab world and appealed to a younger generation of Shi’i Arabs who were critical of the Shi’i mujtahidun and landowners, and the Sunni Arab nationalist elite.123 In October 1959, the Ba’thists, including a young Saddam Hussein, attempted to assassinate ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim. The event resulted in a purge of the Ba’thists from political activity and in demonstrations in support of the “sole leader” of Iraq.124 The same year, ‘Ali Salih al-Sa’di returned to Iraq to rebuild the Ba’th Party, and by 1962, he effectively was the head of the Party in Iraq.125

120. Ibid., 146.
121. Ibid., 143.
122. Ibid., 172.
123. Ibid., 143.
124. Ibid., 158.
125. Ibid., 162.
**The 1963 coup d'état**

In 1962, the Ba’th Party established the Military Bureau, which was a tool it planned to use to overthrow the Qasim regime.\(^{126}\) During the winter of 1961–2, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) even offered a ceasefire to the pan-Arab groups and the Ba’th Party if they overthrew the Qasim regime.\(^{127}\) Upon hearing of this conspiracy to overthrow his government, Qasim arrested ‘Ali Salih al-Sa’di and Salih Mahdi ‘Ammash. For fear of a much larger purge, the remaining officers initiated the coup on 8 February 1963, and assassinated Brigadier Jalal al-Awqati, attacked and neutralized the Rashid military base, and marched on Baghdad. The next day, Qasim was captured and killed.\(^{128}\)

**The Ba’thist government, 1963–8**

With the Ba’thists in control of the government, ‘Abd al-Salam ‘Arif served as president of the armed forces, Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr as president of the Party, and ‘Ali Salih al-Sa’di as the head of the Party in Iraq, the deputy prime minister, and the minister of the interior. For the remainder of the year following the coup, the Ba’thists carried out ruthless purges of members of the ICP, killing or expelling about 3,000 people.\(^{129}\) Amid these purges, al-Bakr and al-Sa’di were sure to create a strong and powerful militia as a protection against any grabs for power by the Military Bureau. The purge

---

127. Ibid., 168.  
128. Ibid., 171.  
129. Ibid.
itself was primarily carried about by *al-Hars al-Qawami*, the Ba’thist National Guard, which was commanded by Colonel Mundhir Tawfiq al-Wandawi. Under al-Wandawi’s leadership, the National Guard grew to over 30,000 members and largely served as the armed militia for the Ba’thists, rather than as a national armed guard.\(^{130}\) In the summer of 1964, Hassan al-Bakr appointed Saddam Hussein as secretary to the RCC, where he was tasked with “reconstructing” the Party, ultimately giving Saddam the ability to command the Party as a whole by force.\(^{131}\) In April 1966, ‘Abd al-Salam ‘Arif died in a helicopter crash and General ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Arif, his brother, replaced him as president of the Party.\(^{132}\)

**The 1968 coup d’état: “The July 17 Revolution”**

On 17 July 1968, Brigadier Sa’id Slaibi of the Republican Guard, which was a mostly non-Ba’thist elite unit of the armed forces, left the country. In his absence, three senior officers, ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Najif, Ibrahim ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Da’ud, and Sa’dun Ghaidan carried out a coup, arresting most of the cabinet, including Prime Minister Tahir Yahya and President ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Arif. The new government appointed Hassan al-Bakr as president, ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Najif as prime minister, Hardan al-Tikriti as chief of staff and commander of the air force, and Sa’dun Ghaidan as commander of the Republican Guard. Just a couple of weeks later on 30 July, while under the command of al-Bakr, the commander of the Baghdad garrison and a kinsman of al-Bakr’s, Hammad Shihab al-Tikriti,
seized control of the government and exiled ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Da’ud, who was out of the country at the time, and ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Najif.  

The Ba’thist government, 1968–79

The Ba’thist regime rapidly came to be controlled by a relatively small group of Sunni Arab army officers from the same region in the north of Iraq. Even more so, in the years following the 1963 coup, more and more power was concentrated in the hands of officers from the small town of Tikrit, the hometown of Saddam Hussein and Hassan al-Bakr, who was then the president, prime minister, chairman of the RCC, and the secretary-general of the Ba’th Party. In 1968, al-Bakr and Saddam led the first of several more purges. In this instance, the purge was of ICP members, communists, and other suspected dissidents and critics of the regime. Saddam, then vice president, controlled Iraq through intimidation, often deploying the Ba’thist militia to patrol and control the streets. In 1970, Bakr and Saddam further consolidated power into their hands and into a tighter kinship network of the Albu Nasir tribe of Tikrit by dismissing Hardan al-Tikriti and Salih Mahdi ‘Ammash. Al-Hardan was exiled to Kuwait and was murdered in March of 1971. As historian Hanna Batatu remarks, “the Tikritis rule through the Ba’th Party, rather than the Ba’th Party through the Tikritis.”

133. Ibid., 191.
134. Ibid., 193–4.
135. Ibid., 196.
136. Ibid., 197.
137. Ibid., 198.
In February 1969, the shah of Iran reopened the question of the Shatt al-Arab, the waterway that runs along the border of Iran and Iraq. In April, al-Bakr attempted to persuade an influential Iraqi Shi’i mujtahid Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim to publicly condemn the Iranian government in order to gain an advantage in the negotiations over the Shatt al-‘Arab. When Hakim refused, Bakr took violent measures against the Shi’i population under the guise of a “discovered Iranian threat.” The following year, another supposed plot was discovered by al-Bakr’s government and more prominent Shi’i Arabs, in addition to any Sunni Arabs associated with the growing Islamic organizations in Iraq, were expelled from the country. The Iraqi Shi’ite Arabs saw these expulsions of the supposed “Iranians” in Iraq as a clear attack on the Shi’i population as a whole, but in particular, members of al-Da’wa. Around the same time, Ayatollah al-Hakim died and Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr filled his position. Many senior ‘ulama considered Sadr “dangerously radical.” Nevertheless, he obtained this highly influential and powerful position.

In addition to these purges, al-Bakr, Saddam, and the heads of the Ba’th Party attempted to undermine the Shi’i kinship networks throughout Iraq by creating a system of patronage and loyalty to the Ba’th Party. In June of 1972, Nadhim Kazar, the Shi’i Iraqi who, since 1969, had served as the head of the al-Amn al-‘Amm, the state security apparatus, attempted to stage a coup. The coup failed, and Saddam used the incident to incite yet another purge against supposed dissidents and ordered

139. Tripp, A History of Iraq, 201.
140. Al-Da’wa is an Iraqi Islamic political party formed in 1957 by Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and Muhammad Sadiq al-Qamousee that has historical ties to Iran. In Arabic, al-da’wa means the call to prayer.
141. Ibid., 202–3.
142. Ibid., 205.
Sa’dun Shakir and Barzan al-Tikriti to take over the al-Amn al-‘Amm.\textsuperscript{143} After some years as vice president (nominally, at least, but in reality, the head of the Party and the government), Saddam arranged to have al-Bakr confer the rank of general upon him in January of 1976. Saddam’s default to shows of force was again apparent in February of the following year, when rioting in Najaf and Karbala led to an al-Da’wa-led demonstration during the ‘Ashura, which grew to as large as 30,000 people.\textsuperscript{144} As Saddam’s power within the Party and throughout Iraq grew, so did the rumors surrounding al-Bakr’s health and ability to lead the Party. Saddam strategically began to cultivate and secure his loyalties within his own patronage network, Ahl al-Thiqa, or the People of Trust, since he was mistrusted not only by the general public but also in political circles at this time.\textsuperscript{145} From the winter of 1978 to the spring of 1979, Saddam carried out one final purge of the Ba’th Party before ascending to the presidency.\textsuperscript{146} On 16 July 1979, al-Bakr unexpectedly announced his resignation as president. Just hours later, Saddam was sworn in as president and appointed ‘Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri as his vice president, deputy chairman of the RCC, and assistant secretary-general of the Regional Command; and Taha Ramadan al-Jazrawi as first deputy prime minister.\textsuperscript{147}

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 209.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 216. In Shi’ism, ‘Ashura is the Day of Remembrance during the Mourning of Muharram. ‘Ashura commemorates the martyrdom of Hussein ibn ‘Ali, the third Shi’i imam, who was killed at the Battle of Karbala in 680.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 218.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 220.
\textsuperscript{147} Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 140.
Chapter Two

Power, Patronage, and Propaganda:

The Saddam Hussein Regime

1979–2003
INTRODUCTION

Formally, Saddam served as president from July of 1979, when Hassan al-Bakr suddenly resigned, to April of 2003, when the regime collapsed following the U.S.-led invasion. Informally, however, his influence and power extended beyond the years he was president. This chapter will first discuss the key events of his regime, specifically the Iran-Iraq War, the occupation of Kuwait and subsequent Gulf War, and finally, the interwar years leading up to the U.S. invasion. Second, this chapter will examine the pillars of power on which Saddam’s regime rested. These historical events, combined with Saddam’s pillars of power, had an undeniable influence and effect on the course of the Iraq War, which will be analyzed in the following chapter.

THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR, 1980–8

Consolidation of power

Four days before Hassan al-Bakr abruptly resigned and Saddam ascended to the presidency on 12 July 1979, a Shi‘i member of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) and the Regional Command by the name of Muhyi al-Din ‘Abd al-Hussein al-Mashhadi was arrested for alleged actions against the Ba‘th Party. On 22 July, Muhyi al-Din made a public confession (likely under coercion of torture) that was broadcasted on Iraqi television. In it, he said that he and others in the Party actively plotted against the al-Bakr/Hussein regime. Then, on 28 July, at a meeting of the Ba‘th Party, Saddam announced that he had discovered a plot against the Party of Syrian design and executed by high-ranking officials of the RCC, and named sixty-eight co-conspirators of Muhyi al-Din’s, most of whom
were in the room. One-by-one, these alleged co-conspirators were rounded up and arrested, and twenty-two eventually executed, including Muhyi al-Din. During this period, an estimated 500 Party members were executed, and more were pushed out of the Party or demoted from their ranking.\textsuperscript{148}

This event was Saddam’s final purge of the Ba’th Party before the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War less than a year later. This, along with the fact that when he ascended to the presidency, Saddam named himself the Secretary General of the Party Regional Command, chairman of the RCC, commander-in-chief of the armed forces and field marshal, signaled that he would create his “personal autocracy” at the expense of anyone who dared to show any sign of dissent.\textsuperscript{149}

\textit{Outbreak of the war}

After fifteen years of living in exile, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returned to Iran on 1 February 1979. Triumphant following the Iranian Revolution, Khomeini declared Iran an Islamic Republic. The Islamic Revolution in Iran was a clear threat to Iraq, though Iraq still formally recognized the new Islamic Republic of Iran. Saddam and Khomeini, however, were men at odds: in October of 1978, Saddam acquiesced to Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, the Iranian Shah’s request to expel Khomeini from Najaf, where he had been living in exile. Within Iraq, the Revolution mobilized Shi’i political groups that had been outlawed under Saddam, such as al-Da’wa. Saddam quickly moved to suppress the actions of these groups so as to prevent them from gaining traction within Iraq.\textsuperscript{150}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{148} Charles Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 214.
\textsuperscript{149} Phebe Marr and Ibrahim al-Marashi, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq} (Boulder: Westview Press, 2017), 140.
\textsuperscript{150} Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq}, 212–3.
\end{flushright}
threat from the East was amplified during the summer of 1979, when Iraqi security forces clashed with many of the same political groups and underground movements that the Islamic Revolution has resurrected.\(^{151}\) Saddam’s fears and Khomeini’s charges to the Shi’i Iraqis to bring the Revolution to Iraq came to a head when the KDP, led by the powerful Barzani tribe, crossed into Iraqi territory from Iran, directly violating the 1975 Algiers Agreement regarding the Shatt al-Arab. The Revolution sparked fear in Saddam, not only because of the long-held prejudices by Sunni Arabs in Iraq of the Shi’i Persians in Iran, but also because of concerns that the Revolution would spill over into Iraqi territory and create Iranian hegemony over Iraq.\(^{152}\)

Saddam capitalized on the rhetoric of an “Arab world” with Iraq at the forefront in an attempt to gain the support of the Sunni Arabs and the Arab world at large. Khomeini’s clear influence and power worried Saddam and in the time leading up to the war with Iran, Saddam presented himself as the protector for the Arab world against Iran, but also specifically for the Gulf states.\(^{153}\) Iraqi fears of Iranian hegemony did not begin with the 1979 Islamic Revolution, but rather went back to historical border disputes that erupted at the beginning of the twentieth century. In addition to the Shatt al-Arab—of which Iran had controlled half of since 1975—Iraq claimed to have the right to the “Arab land” of Khuzestan, a large swath of southern Iran on the border with Iraq that had access to the Shatt al-Arab and to the Persian Gulf via many miles of coastline. The province of Khuzestan had been under Iranian control since 1925. Specifically, Iraq zeroed in on the city of Khorramshahr, known in

\(^{151}\) Ibid., 221.
Iraq by its Arabic name, Muhammara, a key port city on the shores of the Shatt al-Arab that had been in Iran’s possession since 1937.\textsuperscript{154}

\textit{The first stage of the war: The war of provocation}

On 4 September 1980, Iran shelled the cities of Khanaqin and Mandali from the disputed region of Zain al-Qaws. When Iran shelled the two cities again on 17 September, Saddam announced that he was officially abrogating the 1975 Shatt al-Arab agreement and that the Shatt would return to Iraqi sovereignty. On 19 September, Iran attacked Iraq again. In addition to hitting residential areas along the Shatt, the attack also hit foreign merchant ships. In the first act of military retaliation, Saddam launched a bombing mission on 22 September that destroyed ten Iranian air bases and two early warning stations. This was the prelude to many “scorched earth” military strategies employed by Saddam that were intended to destroy Iran’s military capabilities. The next day, Iraq began its military advance into Iran. The Iraqi armed forces made quick territorial advances into Iran and by 28 September, Saddam announced a ceasefire, assuming that Iraq’s advances would coerce Khomeini to accept the ceasefire and make concessions. Khomeini, to Saddam’s surprise, refused the ceasefire, and the war continued. What Saddam had not anticipated was that the Iraqi attacks would mobilize Iranians, who saw the Iraqi assaults as threats to the Revolution.\textsuperscript{155} Further, Khomeini pushed the rhetoric that Iranians would be protecting the history of Iran itself by taking up arms in the fight

\textsuperscript{154} Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 142.
\textsuperscript{155} Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq}, 224.
against Iraq. Then, in June 1982, Saddam tried again to end the war by announcing that Iraq would withdraw to the internationally-determined borders, claiming that it had reached its objective in destroying Iran’s military structure—which few actually believed. When Iran refused to accept Iraq’s withdrawal, it launched the two countries into the next stage of the war.

**The second stage of the war: The war of attrition**

The second stage of the war lasted from 1982 to 1986. The most significant outcome for either side was the depletion of resources. This stage of the war is also significant for Iraq’s use of chemical weapons, which possibly began as early as August of 1983. Reports of Iraq’s use of chemical weapons, however, did not reach the outside world until 1984. These reports, from the battle for Majnun during Operation Kheibar, said that Iraq had launched a defensive assault against Iranian forces that used chemical weapons. Majnun is a series of artificial islands that Iraq built to support the Majnun oil fields near al-Qurnah in the south of the country. Capturing Majnun—or at least damaging it—was a strategic move by Iran to upset Iraq’s oil-based economy. This, again, was just a prelude to Saddam’s brutal use of chemical weapons.

Despite Iraq’s heavy use of chemical weapons in this stage of the war, Saddam still successfully campaigned for the support of the international community. In 1983, France loaned Iraq five Super Étendard war planes that were equipped with Exocet missiles. The Iraqis even repaired their

---

158. Ibid., 146.
159. Ibid., 148–9.
fractured relationships with the U.S.S.R. to receive shipments of Soviet arms, including Soviet Scud missiles.\textsuperscript{160} The U.S. became involved in the war when it launched Operation Staunch in the spring of 1983. In addition to receiving military support, the U.S.’s alliance with Iraq meant that it allowed—even turned a blind eye—to the flow of arm shipments into Iraq during the course of the war. With the exception of “Irangate,” the United States’ support lasted until the end of the war in 1988.\textsuperscript{161}

\textit{The third stage of the war: The war of terror}

The third stage of the war was arguably the most brutal stage of the war. Unlike previous Iraqi-led assaults, which focused mainly on Iran’s military installations, in this stage of the war Saddam focused the attacks on civilian populations. When Iran seized Majnun in 1986 and attempted to seize Basra in 1987, Iraq launched several attacks on the Kurdish-controlled Halabjah region of Iraq in May and June of 1987. The attacks used chemical weapons and killed upwards of 4,000 people, mostly civilians.\textsuperscript{162} Less than a year later, on 29 February 1988, Iraq launched the Anfal Campaign in Iraqi Kurdistan.\textsuperscript{163} The Anfal Campaign was an Iraqi offensive that focused on peshmerga-controlled areas

\textsuperscript{160} Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq}, 229. In 1985, Iraq also launched the “War of the Cities,” which was a sustained assault on major urban centers in Iran.

\textsuperscript{161} Marr, \textit{A Modern History of Iraq}, 148–9. “Irangate,” or the Iran-Contra Affair (1985–7), was the secret sale of American arms to Iran, which was under an international arms embargo at the time. This incident is notable not only for the actual sale of the weapons, but also because the U.S. had pledged its support to Iraq as per Operation Staunch. When an Iraqi missile hit a U.S. frigate on 17 May 1987, the Americans believed that it was likely in retaliation for Irangate. The Iraqis claimed it was only an unfortunate accident, though the American leadership thought that that was unlikely. Nonetheless, official support for Iraq continued. Then, the U.S. was brought into direct conflict with Iran when, on 16 October 1987, an Iranian silkworm missile hit a U.S.-reflagged ship.

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 148.

\textsuperscript{163} Mackey, \textit{The Reckoning}, 263.
in the Kurdish north of Iraq. The Campaign was first time that Iraq used chemical weapons for the intent purpose of attacking a civilian population. The pattern of the attacks were as follows: first, a focused assault on *peshmerga*-strongholds, primarily in the Balisan Valley, used a mix of chemical weapons and high-explosive air attacks; second, the remaining villagers were cleared out and men were separated from women, children, and the elderly, who were put in mass holding camps of horrific condition; the men were reportedly shot en masse and buried in mass graves; and third, the villages were destroyed, often following looting by the Fursan. The worst attack of the Campaign was on 16 March 1988, a day after Iran captured Halabjah, when Iraqi armed forces dropped a mixture of nerve and mustard gas on the city, killing between 3,500 and 5,000 people. According to some Kurdish sources, nearly 1,300 villages were destroyed. In total, the Anfal Campaign killed somewhere between 50,000 to 100,000 people.

At this point in the war, both sides were running out of money, material resources, and manpower. The next major offensive by Iran was in the February of 1986, when it captured al-Faw. In early 1987, Iranian forces attempted to seize Basrah, but were unsuccessful. In February of 1988, Iraq launched the “war of terror” on Iranian cities. Starting on 22 February, it launched over 200

164. Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 408. “Peshmerga” literally translates to “those who face death.” The term *peshmerga* is used to describe Kurdish militias, who are attached to a Kurdish political party. In Iraq, the *peshmerga* were (and remain to be) typically associated with the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

165. Ibid., 405. Fursan, meaning “knight” or “cavalry” in Arabic, was a collection of Kurdish irregular troops that were recruited by the Iraqi government to fight against the *peshmerga* in Iraqi Kurdistan. During the Iran-Iraq War, they were primarily mobilized to man frontier posts.

166. Ibid., 157–8.


169. Ibid., 147.
missiles into Iran, with 150 aimed at Tehran alone. On 15 March, Iran seized Halabjah, which was followed by the aforementioned counterattack by Iraq. In mid-April, at the beginning of Ramadan, Iraq launched a surprise attack on Iranian forces at al-Faw. Within four days, Iraqi forces had recaptured the city. By June, Iraq had recaptured Majnun and in July, advanced into Iranian territory while the U.S. increased their naval offensives against Iran. At this point in the war, United Nations Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar had already commissioned an investigation into the Iran-Iraq War. In July of 1987, the U.N. adopted U.N. Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 598. However, it was not until a year later, on 17 July 1988, that Iran delivered their letter of acceptance to the Secretary General in New York. The following day, Iraq also accepted the terms of the agreement, but not before Saddam gave a speech laying out his own version of a peace program. Negotiations regarding UNSC Resolution 598 continued into 1989, though the July 1988 acceptance of the resolution ended the war.

**Consequences of the war**

The raw toll of the Iran-Iraq War on human life was drastic. Over the eight years of the war, military causalities alone were upwards of 380,000 people, of which 125,000 were deaths. Iraqi POWs

170. Ibid., 149. UNSC Resolution 598 stated that Iran and Iraq must observe a ceasefire, withdraw to international borders, participate in a prisoner-of-war (POW) exchange, and submit to an investigation into the causes of the war. If these conditions were not accepted, the U.N. reserved the right to take action in order to end the war. The resolution also found that Iraq’s use of chemical weapons was in direct violation of the 1925 Geneva Protocol.

171. Ibid., 150. The conditions of Saddam’s five-point peace program were nearly identical to UNSC Resolution 598’s, with the exception of the investigation. Saddam’s program also included a peace treaty, a statement of noninterference, and a face-to-face meeting with Iran. It is likely that one of Saddam’s objectives in including a face-to-face meeting in the conditions was to demand an official recognition of the regime from Iran.
were estimated to be around 50,000. All causalities, including civilian, adding to over 500,000 people, which is a little less than three percent of Iraq’s entire population.\textsuperscript{172} After all of the death and destruction, the only success Iraq could perhaps reasonably claim was in staving the Iranian threat of hegemony. Much of Iraq’s infrastructure was damaged; the damage was particularly devastating in Basrah and in the surrounding regions, which were virtually destroyed.\textsuperscript{173} Apart from the human toll suffered by all, the middle class was severely weakened and bore the brunt of the economic damage sustained during the war. As the middle class suffered, a small, but growing, wealthy class of merchants, contractors, businessmen, and other profiteers emerged.\textsuperscript{174} Iraq was in a state of decay; its resources had begun to wear thin from the first day of the war.

\textbf{The war with Kuwait}

\textit{Iraq’s invasion}

The economic crisis in Iraq following the war with Iran was so great that Saddam could not afford to ignore it. Rather, he pushed the issue to the forefront of his rhetoric, focusing specifically on Kuwait’s role in the crisis.\textsuperscript{175} He bolstered his actions with talk of a “Kuwaiti conspiracy.” During the Iran-Iraq War, Iraq had borrowed money from Saudi Arabia and from Kuwait. While Saudi Arabia agreed to forgive Iraq’s debt, Kuwait did not. In response, Saddam propagated a full-blown conspiracy that Kuwait was responsible for Iraq’s severe economic crisis post-war and that in fact, the crisis was of

\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., 162.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 161.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 163.
\textsuperscript{175} Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq}, 241.
Kuwaiti-design. On 17 July 1990, on the twenty-second anniversary of the coup d’état that brought members of the Ba’th Party to power, Saddam claimed that “[The Kuwaiti conspiracy] is a conspiracy to make us live in famine.” Saddam also pushed a territorial agenda: Iraq had little geographical potential for ports; as a major exporter of oil in the global trade market, access to, and control of major waterways and ports of entry was a must for the economy, but Iraq had limited access to the coastline. With the Shatt al-Arab closed following the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam turned to Umm Qasr, a port on the border with Kuwait and on the Persian Gulf coast. While Iraq is a significantly larger country than Kuwait, it only has thirty-six miles of coastline, while Kuwait has 310. Saddam also looked to assert control over the islands of Warbah and Bubiyan, and the channel of Khawr ʿAbd Allah, which were off the coast near Umm Qasr and under Kuwaiti sovereignty. Saddam claimed that the decision to invade was to “rectify” the borders set by the British imperial powers, which unjustly separated Kuwait from Iraq.

Saddam was feeling the pressure of the international community amid the internal decline of the Iraqi state. By 1990, the Soviet Union, one of Iraq’s allies in the Iran-Iraq War, was in a state of collapse. Following a September 1988 announcement from the U.S. Department of State that it had found evidence of Iraq’s use of chemical weapons, the Western powers became acutely critical of Saddam’s regime. This criticism became even more focused when, in February of 1990, Iraq activated its first uranium enrichment plant at Tarmiyyah, about thirty-five miles north of Baghdad.

177. Mackey, The Reckoning, 279.
The U.S. and its allies, including Israel, immediately condemned the move and called for an end to Iraq’s nascent weapons-of-mass-destruction (WMD) program. Saddam was afraid that this condemnation would bring on the military ire of the Israeli armed forces, and that another strike was imminent.180

The order to invade Kuwait in 1990 likely only came from Saddam and a few close confidants. Much of the international community was shocked when Iraqi armed forces crossed the Kuwaiti border in the early days of August of 1990, having falsely believed that Saddam’s threats to invade were bluffs to coerce Kuwait into an agreement. The road to the invasion formally began on 15 July 1990, when Iraq presented its case against Kuwait at the Arab League, to no avail. The next day, Saddam mobilized the Republican Guard. By the end of July, Iraq’s armed forces were prepared for a full military invasion and had built up the capacity to occupy Kuwait. Several leaders in the Arab world were quick to try to dissuade Saddam from invading, including King Hussein of Jordan and Yasser Arafat, the chairman of the Palestinian Authority. On 24 July, Hosni Mubarak, the president of Egypt, went to Baghdad to speak with Saddam in person in an attempt to mediate the situation. Then, the next day, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, spoke to Saddam regarding the Kuwait situation and having determined that the situation had been diffused, left Baghdad a few days later. Saudi Arabia intervened next, organizing a negotiation between Iraqi and Kuwaiti delegates at Jeddah.

180. Ibid., 171–2. The Israelis had launched missiles at WMD-development sites in Iraq in 1981.
on 31 July. The Kuaitis left Jeddah under the impression that there would be another round of negotiations in the near future.

All of these efforts were unsuccessful and at 2 a.m. on the morning of 2 August 1990, 100,000 Iraqi troops crossed the border and entered Kuaiti territory. At 9:30 a.m., Baghdadi radio announced a coup d’état in Kuait, and that Iraq was establishing a provisional government. The next day, the UNSC adopted Resolution 660, which condemned Iraq’s invasion into Kuait and called for an immediate withdrawal. When Iraq failed to withdraw, the UNSC adopted Resolution 661, which put trade embargoes on all imports and exports, with the exception of basic goods for survival. On 7 August, Iraq declared Kuait a republic and the U.S. dispatched military personnel to the Gulf. Iraq was still not deterred and the next day, annexed Kuait. On 28 August, Iraq declared Kuait the nineteenth wilayah of Iraq.

The stalemate and the Gulf War

The stalemate in Kuait lasted from September of 1990 until January of 1991, when U.S.-led forces invaded Kuait. The U.S. and its allies, primarily the United Kingdom, prepared for war following the U.N.’s adoption of Resolution 678, which declared that Iraq’s deadline for withdrawal

---

181. Ibid., 173. Saddam’s decision to refocus military and political power on Kuait is evident in a 14 August agreement he made with Iranian President Akbar Hashimi Rafsanjani, in which he agreed to adhere to the 1975 Shatt al-Arab Agreement and relented on his claims that Iraq had sovereignty over the Shatt. This reversed a former statement he made to the president on 30 July, when he suggested that he might be willing to agree to Iran’s demands regarding the Shatt and withdraw troops from Iran so long as Iraq could maintain sovereignty over the Shatt.


184. Ibid., 176. The embargoes affected ninety percent of Iraq’s imports and ninety-seven percent of its exports, which was catastrophic for Iraq as an oil-exporting country.
from Kuwait was on 15 January 1991. As the day inched closer, Saddam held to his belief that he could push the international community to the edge with his brinkmanship and force concessions.\textsuperscript{185} He believed if the Coalition forces invaded, he could still manage a “survivable withdrawal.”\textsuperscript{186} However, he was still taken by surprise when the Coalition assault began by air on 17 January at 2:30 a.m., commencing the Gulf War. The bombing campaign in Iraq killed 2,280 people and injured about 8,000. The next day, Iraq launched missiles at Israel and Saudi Arabia, both U.S. allies, and launched a second attack on Saudi Arabia on 29 January.\textsuperscript{187}

With a Coalition invasion of Kuwait imminent, on 22 February, Saddam ordered Iraqi forces to set all of Kuwait’s oil fields on fire, destroying much of their oil reserves and creating an environmental crisis. The ground offensive, both U.S. Marines and Saudi troops, began two days later and by 25 February, Saddam ordered a withdrawal. The Coalition forces, however, stated that they would reject the withdrawal until Iraq accepted all of the UNSC resolutions. At that point, the potential for total devastation of Iraqi forces had become clear and to accept the UNSC resolutions became Saddam’s only option; on 27 February, he announced Iraq’s acceptance and began the retreat.\textsuperscript{188} By the next day, the Gulf War was over.\textsuperscript{189} At the end of the Gulf War, the estimated number

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{185} Mackey, \textit{The Reckoning}, 283.
  \item \textsuperscript{186} Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq}, 244.
  \item \textsuperscript{187} Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 177–8.
  \item \textsuperscript{188} Ibid., 178–9. UNSC Resolution 687 put most of Iraq’s economy and military under the auspices of the U.N. It also stated that Iraq was prohibited from crossing Kuwait’s borders, which would be determined by an international council, that it must agree to a U.N. Peacekeeping Mission on the Iraq-Kuwait border, and that it must end its WMD program, destroy all of its WMDs and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICMB), and submit to regular U.N. inspections for confirmation.
  \item \textsuperscript{189} Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq}, 250. The ceasefire was signed by Kuwaiti and Iraqi representatives in Safwan, Iraq, on 28 February 1991. On 12 April, the UNSC adopted the revised Resolution 687 and on 9 May, Iraq accepted the terms. The U.N. inspections by the U.N. Special Commission on Disarmament, or UNSCOM, began the same month.
\end{itemize}
of deaths was anywhere between 10,000 and 30,000 people. The number of Iraqi POWs and defectors was as high as 90,000. Amid the chaos of the retreat, the Republican Guard, Saddam’s loyalist security force, managed to escape mostly unscathed.190

Image 1:
A Kuwaiti oil field that was set on fire following Saddam’s orders, captured by photojournalist and documentarian, Sebastião Salgado.191

*The Shi’i uprisings, March 1991*

The retreating soldiers were demoralized and disgruntled at the regime. The Coalition bombing campaign in Iraq had further destroyed much of its infrastructure, which had already been

weakened by the Iran-Iraq War. The soldiers were aware that they were leaving the failure in Kuwait to return home to war-battered Iraq. The Shi’i uprisings began among the ranks of retreating soldiers in Basrah on 1 March 1991. The revolt was sparked by an angry soldier who abruptly stopped his tank, and, using the tank’s gun, shot a bullet through a portrait of Saddam in Sa’d Square.\(^{192}\) Almost immediately, the armed forces fell into disarray andrevolting soldiers turned on key buildings of the regime in the city, attacking and occupying them. Within a week, the revolt had spread throughout the southern region. At its peak, rebel forces controlled fourteen of Iraq’s eighteen *wilayat*. Most of the rebel forces sought to destroy any and all symbols of the regime, and to attack the loyalist armed forces, mainly the Republican Guard. The head of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, sent some of his Badr Brigade troops from Iran to aid Shi’i Arabs in the fight.\(^{193}\) The four *wilayat* that largely abstained from the revolt—all of which were predominately Sunni Arab—with most of its population choosing to stay loyal to Saddam, were called the “white provinces” by the regime. Though the revolt spread quickly to other areas in Iraq, by 17 March, the Republican Guard had regrouped and ended the uprising.\(^{194}\)

The repression of the uprising began eleven days earlier in Basrah, on 6 March 1991. The repression was absolutely brutal. The regime destroyed many sacred religious sites, primarily in the Shi’i shrine cities, in retaliation. In fact, the shrine cities were the center of some of the harshest repression by Saddam’s security forces.\(^{195}\) The regime’s forces killed upwards of 100,000 in the course

---

\(^{192}\) Mackey, *The Reckoning*, 287.  
\(^{193}\) Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 246.  
\(^{194}\) Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 181.  
\(^{195}\) Ibid., 183.
of the revolts alone, which was nearly twice as many as those killed during the war in Kuwait. The repression also created a refugee population of about two million people who flooded into Iran and Saudi Arabia.\textsuperscript{196} The UNSC adopted Resolution 688 on 5 April 1991, which condemned the repression of Shi'i Arabs and called for an end to the repression of all Iraqi civilians.\textsuperscript{197} By the next month, though, Saddam pardoned Iraqis who had participated in the revolt and lifted an international travel ban on them. This was all part of a larger regime reorganization effort in which elections were held and a new cabinet was formed under the auspices of Sa’dun Hammadi, a Shi'i Arab. This reorganization, however, was a guise for the harsher tactic of arrests and executions within the Party.\textsuperscript{198} These tactics—"the carrot and the stick"—will be discussed in further depth in the section on Saddam’s pillars of power.

\section*{IRAQ BETWEEN THE WARS}

\textit{Political and economic consequences of Iran and Kuwait}

When the war in Kuwait began in 1990, just two years had passed since the end of the Iran-Iraq War. The memory of the atrocities of the war with Iran—the use of chemical weapons, the scorched earth strategies, the Anfal Campaign, to name a few—were still fresh in the minds of the international community. The invasion brought further condemnation and scrutiny to Saddam’s

\textsuperscript{196} Ibid., 184.
\textsuperscript{198} Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 185–6.
In the brief interwar years, Iraq was at the mercy of the sanctions and UNSC resolutions, which crippled the economy, depleted the middle class, and caused agitation among the people. The two wars had brought so much death that by 1997, fifty-six percent of the population was under the age of nineteen. The decisions made largely by one man brought an era of chaos and despair onto an entire country.

In the north of Iraq, in the disputed Kurdish territories, intra-regional conflict broke out into a full-scale civil war in 1995. On 4 July 1992, a coalition of Kurdish political groups established the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). But the two most powerful groups, the KDP and the PUK, remained notably absent from the coalition. Soon after the formation of the KRG, tensions rose between the two groups for territorial acquisitions, access to international aid, and control over key oil deposits. The first clashes between them began in December of 1993. The disputes between the KDP, led by Mas'ud Barzani, and the PUK, led by Jalal Talabani, had severely weakened the strength of the KRG by May of 1994. A third party, the Islamic Movement of Iraqi Kurdistan (IMIK) seized the towns of Halabjah, Panjvin, and Khurmal, and the surrounding areas. In December, the PUK took control of Erbil. By the March of 1995, the KDP controlled about a third of the KRG, including the Turkish border, and the PUK controlled the remaining two thirds, including Erbil and Sulaimaniyyah. Soon after, the KRG collapsed and the PUK and KDP entered into a civil war for control over Iraqi Kurdistan. The collapse of the KRG and the civil war opened the way for a new

199. Ibid., 187.
200. Ibid., 202.
201. Tripp, A History of Iraq, 255.
203. Tripp, A History of Iraq, 255.
political group, the Kurdistan Workers Party (known more commonly as the PKK, the Partiya Karkari Kurdistan), a radical Kurdish movement from Turkey, to enter into Iraq and occupy strategic positions along the Turkish border.\footnote{Marr, The Modern History of Iraq, 194–5.}

**Shi‘i opposition in the south**

The center of Shi‘i opposition to the regime was in the southern marsh region of Iraq, the same region that was at the center of the Shi‘i uprisings in March of 1991. Following the Gulf War and the Shi‘i uprisings, opposition in the south grew increasingly organized as more Shi‘i Arabs joined its ranks.\footnote{Tripp, A History of Iraq, 265. Two influential Shi‘i leaders, Grand Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim al-Khu‘i and Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, were placed under house arrest in this period. Khu‘i, under house arrest since the Shi‘i uprisings in 1991, died in August of 1992 in Najaf. Sistani was placed under house arrest in 1994. Sistani had assumed Khu‘i’s position as Grand Ayatollah following his death in 1992 and was the preeminent Shi‘i cleric in Iraq at the time.} In response, the regime led a massive effort, the so-called “third river project,” to drain the marshes by diverting the water away from the region.\footnote{Ibid., 264.} By 1994, the marshes were almost completely destroyed in the second regime-led environmental disaster in five years. During this time, a Shi‘i cleric by the name of Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr was growing his anti-regime movement.\footnote{Marr, The Modern History of Iraq, 198.} His rhetoric primarily appealed to the poor urban Shi‘i Arabs in Saddam City—a predominantly Shi‘i Arab suburb of Baghdad—and in Basrah, and among the poor tribes and marsh dwellers in and around ‘Amarrah and Nasiriyyah.\footnote{Ibid., 407. In 1982, Saddam renamed the Baghdad suburb from Madinat al-Thawra (“City of the Revolution”) to Saddam City. In 2003, Muqtada al-Sadr, Muhammad Sadiq’s son and the successor to the Sadrist movement, renamed the city Sadr City to commemorate his father. Sadr City is the suburb’s current-day name.}
Muhammad Sadiq propagated an interpretation of Islam that was steeped in mysticism and Messianism, specifically in the belief of the Mahdi. He led his movement from his mosque in Kufa, which is a small town near Najaf, south of Baghdad. At his mosque, he delivered sermons that directly challenged the regime. When he was assassinated by regime forces in 1999, Muhammad Sadiq’s son, Muqtada, took over the movement. While Muhammad Sadiq had laid the groundwork for the Sadrists, it was not until Muqtada took control that the movement evolved into a power, influential, and violent insurgent organization.209

SADDAM’S PILLARS OF POWER

In the twenty-four years of Saddam’s regime, Saddam managed to maintain his power by institutions based on systems of loyalty, propaganda, and intimidation. He did so through a range of ideological and material means. Saddam undergirded his ideological regime with the apparatus of his material power. His demands for loyalty, for example, would not have been possible without the structure of the Ba’th Party, and vice-versa. This section will focus on the main ideological pillars of Saddam’s regime, and discuss the material powers where appropriate.

Loyalty

Saddam Hussein was born to a poor Sunni Arab family in the small town of Tikrit. While he was Sunni, the same denomination as many of the top-ranking officials in the Iraqi government, he

209. Ibid., 198.
was from a lower social class, and therefore, would likely have been unable to climb the sociopolitical ladder if the existing hierarchies had remained. Because of this and the fact that Saddam could not rely on the extant social structures as a source of power, he created a system of patronage based on loyalty to his person. For anyone to gain proximity to Saddam and, therefore, any semblance of power within the Ba’th Party, Saddam demanded absolute loyalty. To put it in the words of Tripp, underneath the surface of the official state structure, there was a “shadow state” composed of networks of patronage, loyalty, privilege, and exclusion.\textsuperscript{210}

When he ascended to the presidency in 1979, his power was already concentrated in the Ba’th Party itself. However, knowing full well that there were many Party members who suspected that he had been plotting to oust Hassan al-Bakr for some time, he carried out yet another purge of the Party. This event, discussed earlier in this chapter, occurred when just days after he assumed the presidency, Saddam announced that he had discovered traitors within the Party and had nearly seventy people arrested on the spot. Although Saddam, alongside other top members of the Ba’th Party, led other purges in the years leading up to his presidency, this differed in that it was of members of the Ba’th Party itself; past purges were of external political parties and opponents. With this move, Saddam established that he would tolerate only absolute loyalty and obedience to his rule.\textsuperscript{211} The Ba’th Party also became open to general membership, which communicated a sense of obligation to one leader—Saddam—rather than some nebulous group.\textsuperscript{212}

\textsuperscript{210} Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq}, 259. Those in direct contact with Saddam, his closest confidants, were often referred to as “umana Saddam,” or Saddam’s faithful.
\textsuperscript{211} Ibid., 215.
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., 195.
first years of his regime. In order to ensure loyalty within the ranks of the Ba’th Party, Saddam created a system of patronage in which membership in the Ba’th Party was essential to success in Iraqi society; it was next to impossible for any individual to reach high levels of success without also being a member of the Ba’th Party. However, the closer an individual grew to Saddam, the greater the risks. For these reasons, many historians have compared this pillar of Saddam’s regime to the tactics that Josef Stalin employed in the U.S.S.R.\

In addition to the Ba’th Party, the military was an essential material tool for intimidation and control. The military, just like the Ba’th Party, had to be controlled from within to avoid internal insurrections against Saddam’s rule, which was especially pertinent considering the armed forces’ historical role in Iraqi politics. One of the first major tests to the military’s loyalty came in the early years of the war with Iran. The 1982 retreat after Ayatollah Khomeini’s refusal to accept Saddam’s withdrawal caused soldiers to become disillusioned with Saddam and question his military strategies. As families were losing their sons, brothers, and fathers at unprecedented numbers, many Iraqis understood the war as a personal conflict between Saddam and Khomeini. Saddam, aware of this, tightened his grip on the military through the security apparatus that was operated by his closest

213. Wendell Steavenson, *The Weight of a Mustard Seed* (Harper: New York, 2010), 210. The journalist Wendell Steavenson wrote an in-depth account of the life of General Kamel Sachet under Saddam Hussein. Steavenson writes that Sachet’s great military prowess and expressed loyalty to Saddam made him one of Saddam’s favorite generals. Even so, Sachet and his family lived in constant fear that Saddam would turn on him. Sachet was suddenly assassinated by Saddam’s forces in December of 1998; it took his family months to find out what had happened to him after he did not come home one night.

214. Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 217. “Obedience to him was to be the common cause of Iraq’s heterogenous inhabitants.” Many sources make this equivalency and it is one that I agree with, having taken Professor Nina Tumarkin’s history course on the Soviet Union. While the size of the countries and their populations are different, use of loyalty is strikingly similar.
confidants and eventually even his own son. Even with this tightened control, some soldiers still attempted to start a coup, though none were successful.

The power of the Republican Guard, which in reality, was Saddam’s personal militia, grew tremendously over the years. It is likely that if the Republican Guard had not survived the Coalition assaults during the Gulf War and during the subsequent retreat, Saddam’s regime would not have survived until 2003. However, in the years following the crisis in the Kuwait and the Gulf War, the power of the military was severely weakened. By 2003, the military’s capacities were severely reduced. Its main purpose became—and really the extent of its abilities—was to protect Saddam, the Republican Palace, and other regime strongholds.215 The two wars had not only weakened the armed forces in manpower, but also in fiscal and material resources.

**Kinship**

In a country where familial ties and tribal relations were a foundational aspect of its social relations, it is perhaps not surprising that kinship was a key mean of power in the Saddam regime. What is surprising is that Saddam’s tribe, the Albu Nasser of Tikrit, was at the center of it all. Many of the people in top-ranking positions in the Ba’th Party were from Tikrit, a small town on the Tigris River, about forty miles northwest of Samarra and a little over one hundred miles from Baghdad. If it were not for the fact that this was the home town of Saddam Hussein and many powerful Ba’thists, it

---

would be a rather unremarkable place.\textsuperscript{216} By 1998, twenty-five percent of the RCC and the Regional Command were from Tikrit alone. Sixty-one percent were from the Sunni Arab triangle in the northwest region of Baghdad. These numbers reflect that control was largely clan-based, overwhelmingly Sunni, and concentrated in Tikrit.

As time went on, not only was power and control increasingly concentrated among Tikritis, but also in Saddam’s own tribe, the Albu Nasser. By 2003, Saddam’s tribal group occupied most key positions within the Party, the security apparatus, and in the military.\textsuperscript{217} In the interwar years, Saddam continued to narrow his power base, his Ahl al-Thiqa, into an exceedingly small number of individuals.\textsuperscript{218} His power base became so concatenated that the bulk of the power was in the hands of members of his own family. In 1993, Saddam appointed his son, Qusay, as head of the Special Security Organization (SSO). In December of 1996, Saddam’s eldest son, Uday, was attacked by a Shi‘i militia in Baghdad and subsequently forced to pass off some of his control to Qusay. There was a second attempt on one of Saddam’s sons, this time Qusay, the next year.\textsuperscript{219}

\textsuperscript{216} “Demographic Yearbook – 2015,” United Nations Statistics Division, https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/products/dyb/dyb_2015.cshtml. To give an idea of the significance of this, some pertinent statistics: the population of Tikrit in 2015 was 117,458. For comparison, Baghdad’s population was 1,211,934 and the population of nearby Samarra, the smallest population of the shrine cities, was 203,011. Though the 2015 population of Tikrit is likely much larger than in 1979, when Saddam took power, 2015 is the first year for which reliable demographic data exists for Tikrit. The estimated mid-year population of Iraq in 2015, according to the annual Demographic Yearbook published by the UN, was 36,659,000. The 1979 Demographic Yearbook states that the mid-year estimate of the population in Iraq was 12,770,000.

\textsuperscript{217} Marr, The Modern History of Iraq, 191–2.

\textsuperscript{218} Tripp, A History of Iraq, 216. “Ahl al-Thiqa,” meaning “people of the trust,” were those who demonstrated absolute loyalty to him over time and were some of his closest confidants.

\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., 263.
The increasingly small group of those in power is evident in the tensions within Saddam’s family.\textsuperscript{220} The struggle for power within Saddam’s family is most apparent in the incident between Saddam and his brother-in-law, Hussein Kamel of the al-Majid clan. Hussein Kamel, who was a key player in the development of Iraq’s WMD program, reportedly revealed crucial details of the WMD program to people he should not have. He was then demoted from his top position in Iraq’s oil-smuggling business and his control was transferred to Uday. Hussein Kamel’s father, ‘Ali Hasan, was also dismissed from his role as minister of defense. In August of 1995, Hussein Kamel, his brother, Saddam Kamel, and their wives, both of whom were Saddam’s daughters, defected to Jordan, abruptly fleeing from Baghdad to Amman.\textsuperscript{221} The brothers and their wives were allowed to return in 1996, when Saddam issued the brothers a pardon on the condition that they divorce their wives. Saddam then sent his security forces to kill them. To show that this was a matter of family, and not one of the state, Saddam sent members of the Kamels’ own tribe to assassinate them.\textsuperscript{222} One explanation for why Saddam created this system of patronage and kinship, besides it being a useful tool for control, is that Saddam, born into low social status, needed his own kinship network that existed outside of the traditional social hierarchies of Iraq. Within the historical social schema of Iraq, Saddam’s background as a poor Tikriti would have been an obstacle to his rise to power. But, by creating his own social hierarchy in which his home town and tribe were at the top, Saddam could control patronage networks and access to power.\textsuperscript{223}

\textsuperscript{220} Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 191–2.
\textsuperscript{221} Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq}, 261–2.
\textsuperscript{222} Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 191–2.
\textsuperscript{223} Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq}, 215–6.
Shi’i Arabs and “the carrot and the stick”

Saddam approached the Shi’i community with a dizzying mix of inclusion and harsh punishment. Within the government, he made moves to include Shi’i Arabs (and Iraqi Kurds) at higher levels. However, these moves were largely nominal in nature and in reality, Saddam created a system of institutional discrimination and exclusion. He made a point to include a diverse mix of representatives at the top levels of governance, but these were all purely symbolic and ultimately powerless positions.224 In the years following the wars with Iran and Kuwait, Saddam boasted a so-called diversity in the government that served as a guise for the systematic exclusion of Shi’i Arabs from key decision-making positions and opportunities for political power. In addition to positions in the government, Saddam took many public actions to create a sense that he supported the Shi’i Arabs of Iraq. For example, he approved several public funding projects in the south and made the birthday of ‘Ali, the central religious figure in Shi’ism, a national holiday. But, much like the moves he made within the government, these were surface-level actions made amid real persecution. By the end of the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam’s regime had deported about 200,000 Shi’i Arabs for reasons ranging from supposed corroboration with the Iranian government to lying to the government about one’s true identity as an Iranian. In the end, this move had the intended effect of dividing the opposition. Through the carrot and the stick, Saddam was able to ensure that the opposition was never able to gain enough traction to pose a significant threat to his regime.225

224. Ibid., 219.
Cult of personality

The cult of personality that surrounded Saddam was imperative not only as another tool to instill loyalty and admiration of him, but also to create an aura of singularity that made him distinct, placing him above all other Iraqis, but especially above all other Tikritis.226 This cult of personality exploded during the Iran-Iraq War. This was largely Saddam’s doing, rather than an organic development from among the people. The full-blown cult of personality began in the early days of the war with Iran, when Saddam led a propaganda campaign to describe the Iran-Iraq War in language steeped in myth. The propaganda was carefully designed to give Saddam legitimacy by way of founding myths and stories of great historical triumphs.227 Saddam referred to the war as “Qadisiyyat Saddam,” in reference to the seventh century battle between the Arab Islamic army and the Zoroastrian Sassanid Persian Empire.

The state-sponsored media described the Iran-Iraq War as the “second Qadissiyah,” that would be won by “the knights of the Arabs and their commander, Saddam Hussein.” This had the effect of promoting the idea that it was Iraqi Arabs’ moral duty to rise up as a common nation to fight against the “Zoroastrian,” non-Muslim, non-Arab enemy in Iran.228 By supporting the idea that the true protectors of Islam could only be Arabs, Saddam was attempting to divide the Iraqi Shi‘i Arabs from the Iranian Shi‘i Persians.229 Though the war ended in a stalemate, Saddam led a propaganda campaign

227. Mackey, The Reckoning, 239.
229. Ibid., 182.
of victory in which he continued the rhetoric of the war as a jihad against the threat from Iran. Saddam promoted his cult of personality within this framework and through the use of print media and symbolic imagery. In murals across the country, for example, Saddam was depicted alongside Sa’d ibn Abi Waqqas, a companion to the Prophet Muhammad and the commander in the first Battle of Qadissiyah and with the famous Qadissiyah general, al-Qa’qa ibn ‘Amr ibn Malik Tamimi. On the twenty-five-dinar note from 1986 Saddam was depicted in his field marshal’s uniform against the background of the Battle of Qadissiyah to suggest that he was the commander in both the first and second battles.

Alongside the development of this propaganda, Saddam began to purport himself as the symbol for the people and of the people. For instance, he named his birthday, 28 April, a national holiday. But he primarily did this by constructing a familial linage between him and the Prophet

---

Muhammad and to historical figures that were well-known in Iraqi lore. He described himself as the “modern-day Nebuchadnezzar,” likening himself to the ancient Babylonian king. He also created a lineage that linked himself to the Abbasid Caliphate, of which the Iraqi cities of Kufa, Baghdad, Raqqah, and Samarra all served as capitals in the eighth and ninth centuries. This rhetoric was largely successful among the youth of the country because, as mentioned earlier, by 1997, fifty-six percent of Iraq’s population was under the age of nineteen; over half of the population’s entire lives had been under Saddam’s regime. The mobilization of the youth from the late 1990s to the early 2000s occurred alongside the rise of fundamentalism and a stricter adherence to religious views in Iraq.

Religion

Following the Gulf War, the regime encouraged a turn to religion among the youth as part of Saddam’s “faith campaign.” This was a tool that Saddam used as he moved the country away from Arab nationalism—since the regime was at odds with much of the Arab world—and towards Iraqi nationalism. Saddam described himself as a “redeemer,” and encouraged a deeper sense of tribalism. In January of 1991, he added “God is great” to the Iraqi flag. Saddam used the rhetoric of jihad to describe the fight against foreign entities, which was especially acute in the time leading up to the 2003 invasion. In the years between the Gulf War and the Iraq War, Saddam shifted from the rhetoric of the Iran-Iraq War years, which was largely steeped in historical propaganda and Iraqi founding myths, to

---

232. Ibid., 165–66.
religious rhetoric based in Islamism. This is likely because of the continued threats from Khomeini in Iran and the influence he held over many Shi’i Arabs in Iraq, especially after the repression of the uprisings in 1991. He created a lineage that connected him directly with the Prophet Muhammad’s son-in-law, ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, and then to the Abbasid caliph of Baghdad, al-Mansur. Saddam’s so-called “faith campaign” attracted much of the country’s youth and served as a bulwark to his cult of personality.\textsuperscript{235}

Chapter Three

Iraq, the Occupied State; Iraq, the Failed State:

The Iraq War

2003–2008
INTRODUCTION

After the fall of the regime in April 2003, just three weeks after the invasion by U.S.-led coalition forces, signs of a failed state had already emerged. The state was in transition from the autocratic and authoritarian regime of Saddam Hussein by way of a provisional government under U.S. auspices, to presumably, a sovereign Iraqi state. However, the coalition powers that created and implemented the new state structure were ill-prepared for the actual work of state-building. Though this paper is not primarily on the U.S.’s impetus and reasoning specifically, this section will touch upon pertinent factors that contributed to the tumultuous period that was the Iraq War and the sectarian civil war in Baghdad.

THE OCCUPATION OF IRAQ

The U.S.'s objectives

In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in 2001, President George W. Bush and his administration refocused their attention on the supposed “war on terror” that it was fighting in the Middle East and Central Asia. U.S. conservatives in Congress pushed for a regime change in Iraq based on scant evidence of the existence of a weapons-of-mass-destruction (WMDs) program and Saddam’s links to Osama bin Laden, the head of the terrorist organization al-Qa’ida in Afghanistan and the orchestrator of the 9/11 attacks. Though there was no evidence, the U.S. claimed that Iraq still possessed WMDs, which meant that Iraq was in direct violation of UNSC Resolution 687. The Bush administration reacted by developing a military offensive strategy, called Operation Iraqi Freedom.
The objectives of Operation Iraqi Freedom were first, and foremost, to capture Baghdad, defeat Saddam’s forces (especially the Republican Guard, Saddam’s loyalist forces that were protecting Baghdad), and the fall of the regime. The coalition forces had expected it would appoint the key opposition leaders that were living in exile to replace Saddam and the Ba’th Party. These key opposition groups were the same groups that were designated to receive U.S. support under the U.S.-Iraq Liberation Act of 1998.\textsuperscript{236}

\textit{The invasion}

On 12 September 2002, President George W. Bush urged the U.N. General Assembly to take immediate action in Iraq that focused on Iraq’s WMD program. By November of the same year, some of Bush’s demands had been met when the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 1441, which stated that Iraq must immediately restore the WMD inspections. Though Iraq accepted the resolutions and inspections began, the U.S. and the U.K. began to deploy troops to its military bases in the Gulf in preparation for a possible invasion. The Bush Administration believed that UNSC Resolution 1441 was too little, too late. On 18 March 2003, Bush gave Saddam forty-eight hours to leave the country. In the early hours of 20 March, coalition forces began their “shock and awe” air campaign that targeted regime strongholds, command and control facilities, and Iraq’s military capacities, but avoided oil installations and electricity grids. By mid-morning, ground forces had crossed into Iraqi territory from Kuwait. Combined U.S. and U.K. forces immediately secured the

major oil fields in the south of the country. Then U.K. forces went on to secure Basrah and other key areas in the south. The bulk of the Coalition forces went north along the Euphrates River, towards Nasiriyah, Samawah, and Najaf, but did not anticipate the fight that Saddam’s Fedayeen guerilla forces put up in Nasiriyah and Samawah.\textsuperscript{237} The Coalition’s military plan was to put the majority of Iraq’s eighteen \textit{wilayat} under U.S. control, while the four southernmost \textit{wilayat}, including Basrah, would be controlled by the British, the four \textit{wilayat} north of Basrah would be under the control of ten of the other Coalition forces, led by Polish forces, and the three Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) provinces would mostly be left to \textit{peshmerga} control.\textsuperscript{238}

On 4 April, the first U.S. forces reached Baghdad’s airport. By the next day, they had defeated irregular forces, took over the Republican Palace, and set up headquarters there.\textsuperscript{239} In the north of the country, the fighting was going a little differently: Turkey, which opposed the invasion, refused to allow coalition forces to enter Iraq from Turkish territory. Instead of a ground assault, the U.S. was forced to rely on air attacks, special forces, and in particular, the Kurdish \textit{peshmerga}. The first region that coalition forces attacked in the north was the Panjvin district in the Sulaymaniyah region, on the Iranian border. The district was under the control of Ansar al-Islam, a radical Sunni group with a history of hostility toward the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). By the end of March, the PUK had taken over the area with help from the Coalition forces. The members of Ansar al-Islam fled the country but became critical figures when they returned to Iraq some time later to help found al-Qa’ida

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{237} Ibid., 206.
\item \textsuperscript{238} Charles Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 278.
\item \textsuperscript{239} Ibid., 285. The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and later, the Interim Governing Council (IGC), functioned from behind the anti-blast walls and military barricades of the “Green Zone,” which was in the center of Baghdad.
\end{itemize}
in Iraq (AQI). In Iraqi Kurdistan, the *peshmerga* took over many Kurdish-majority regions in addition to the major cities of Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah.

![Image 1:](image-url)

The well-documented moment when U.S. soldiers helped Iraqis pull down the statue of Saddam in Firdous Square, Baghdad, on 9 April 2003, captured by photojournalist James Nachtwey.  

By mid-April, coalition forces had managed to gain control over Basrah, Nasiriyah, Samawah, Najaf, Karbala, and Kut, though their control was weak. As forces continued to move throughout the country, their primary challenges were in the northern towns along the Tigris in the Sunni Arab triangle where they were unable to gain control; these towns, including Tikrit and Anbar, were Saddam’s former strongholds.  

---

house in Mosul; both were killed in the subsequent shootout. On 13 December 2003, Coalition forces captured Saddam Hussein in Tikrit.²⁴²

**The immediate aftermath**

Most of the planning by the U.S. and its allies focused on the invasion and military strategies, but little time was spent on creating a cohesive plan for Iraq post-invasion. The Pentagon was in control of most of the planning, and other departments had little say in the initial decisions.²⁴³ In the wake of the Coalition invasion, the country devolved into chaos. Looting became widespread, both in Baghdad and in the *peshmerga*-controlled areas in the north, where it went unchecked by the Coalition forces whose main concern was with protecting oil installations, not civilians or infrastructure. The looting virtually destroyed the country’s infrastructure, not to mention the destruction of cultural sites, such as the Baghdad National Museum, which housed priceless cultural artifacts. Yaphe argues that although much of the looting and the violence that erupted in the weeks after the invasion were perpetrated by individuals and small, non-insurgent groups, these events were the first signs of a nascent insurgent movement. The categorization of these incidents as “looting and random acts of violence” instead of a growing, organized insurgent movement was perhaps one of the first critical mistakes by the coalition forces.²⁴⁴

---

²⁴². Ibid., 216.
The fall of the regime created a power vacuum that, along with the lack of oversight by Coalition forces, led to the creation of shadow governments in major cities across the country. The most important shadow governments were in Basrah, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) led by Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, along with its armed wing, the Badr Brigade; in Nasiriyah, tribes associated with al-Da’wa; in Karbala, the Islamic Action Organization, and in Baghdad and the southern marsh regions, the Sadrists. On the other hand, a number of allies to the Coalition emerged. These groups were at first exclusively Shi’i groups who were willing to work within the formal political process in the hope that it would lead to a Shi’i majority. These groups were primarily the Iraqi National Congress (INC) and its divisive leader Ahmed Chalabi, and the Iraqi

---

National Alliance (INA), led by Ayad Allawi. Not only were these groups working with Coalition forces to work towards sovereignty, but, moreover, because they had no military force to back them and were forced to rely on foreign support to gain power.\textsuperscript{247}

\textit{The United States’ attempt at nation-building}

Operation Iraqi Freedom was likely doomed from the start. According to A. Heather Coyne, who participated in the reconstruction operation in Iraq as an Army Affairs Officer, then as the chief of party for the U.S. Institute of Peace, writes that at the core of Operation Iraqi Freedom’s problems was its fundamental inability to implement any of its programs.\textsuperscript{248} The core group of commanders in charge of the nation-building mission in Iraq were ill-prepared and unqualified to carry out a task as difficult, nuanced, and multidimensional as nation-building. Following the slow pace of the community development programs, the U.S. created the Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP), which provided as a pool of money for the commanding officers to use towards sustainable development programs. The problem, however, was that most of the commanders were inexperienced in such programs and in budgeting and contracting and failed to coordinate with other Coalition programs. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) programs faced similar problems.\textsuperscript{249} In short, Coalition forces defeated the Saddam regime and dissolved its bureaucratic

\textsuperscript{247} Ibid., 209.
\textsuperscript{249} Ibid., 227–8.
structures and other key state apparatuses, but failed to immediately implement a sustainable, well-functioning replacement, even if a temporary one.

The other main flaw of Operation Iraqi Freedom and the general approach by the Coalition forces was the fundamental misunderstanding of—or lack of effort made to understand—the crucial cultural and historical factors that contributed to Iraq at that point in time. Not only did the Coalition forces assume that they would be welcomed by the people of Iraq as liberators of the regime, but they also believed that the work of nation-building would be a short and mostly seamless process of transferring power from Saddam’s Ba’th Party to the opposition leaders who had been in exile.250 Further, the Coalition forces failed to recognize how their incursion might be seen as an occupation by a foreign aggressor, reminiscent of Britain’s first military incursion into the Mesopotamia Province in 1914. In both instances, in 2003 and 1914, foreign powers entered Iraq, established a nation-building program, and appointed outsiders to positions of power, excluding particular segments of the population, namely the Shi’is and the Sunnis, respectively.251

The Coalition Provisional Authority

The first and short-lived attempt at nation-building by the U.S. was in the form of the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), directed by the retired general Jay Garner, who had experience in Iraq post-Gulf War, mostly in Iraqi Kurdistan.252 The foundational assumption

252. Tripp, A History of Iraq, 279.
of the ORHA was that Coalition forces would withdraw by September. Its original plan was also to appoint key leadership positions Iraqis who had recently returned from exile, not Iraqis who had lived in Iraq during the Saddam years.²⁵³ The plan also included basics such as humanitarian aid and establishing law and order under ORHA auspices. But, significant problems, such as the destruction to infrastructure, looting, and the general chaos of the country after the invasion, severely limited Garner’s ability to implement this plan.²⁵⁴ The plan never came to fruition—at least not under the ORHA; Garner’s term in Baghdad only lasted from 21 April to 22 May 2003, when he was replaced by ambassador L. Paul Bremer III.²⁵⁵

On 6 May 2003, President Bush replaced Garner with Bremer and announced that the U.S. would seek a U.N. resolution to give the U.S. the status and privileges of an occupying power. Bremer arrived in Baghdad on 11 May and stayed in Iraq until 28 June 2004. Bremer’s first organizational action as director of the nation-building effort was to meet with key opposition leaders on 16 May to inform them that the U.S. had successfully obtained status as an occupying power as per UNSC Resolution 1483 and was now officially named the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). Under the resolution, the U.N. gave the CPA legal authority and the ability to spend Iraq’s funds. Bremer’s second major organizational action was in mid-July when he reorganized Coalition forces into the Combined Joint Task Force-7, headed by Lt. General Ricardo Sanchez.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Tripp, A History of Iraq, 279.
²⁵⁶ Ibid., 210.
In the first weeks of the CPA, it became clear that the heads of the U.S. nation-building operation did not have a clear plan for Iraq post-invasion and lacked an understanding of deeply-rooted sociopolitical structures. This is most evident in the first two CPA orders, which ordered the de-Ba’thification of Iraq and the dissolution of Iraq’s military. The same day that Bremer met with leaders to inform them of the CPA’s establishment, he adopted CPA Order One, which called for the disestablishment of the Ba’th Party and the elimination of all of its extant structures to ensure that it could never reestablish itself.\(^\text{257}\) CPA Order One also excluded the people making up the top four ranks of the Party—*al-firqah, al-shu’bah, al-far‘*, and the Regional Command—from entering the public sector, which in total affected about 30,000 people.\(^\text{258}\) Though the two million-plus members of the Ba’th Party were certainty not exclusively Sunni, by 2003, the top four ranks of the Party were Sunni; the de-Ba’thification order was seen by many Ba’th Party members and Sunni Iraqis as more of a “de-Sunnification” than a de-Ba’thification order.\(^\text{259}\)

This move was popular with the opposition leaders, especially Chalabi and the INC, as well as other Shi‘i and Kurdish opposition groups.\(^\text{260}\) The impetus behind the de-Ba’thification order was that, when Saddam had taken over the party as president in 1979, he had ostensibly turned the Party “bad.” In other words, the Party before Saddam’s influence was more akin to the average political party in Iraq at the time, rather than the tool of a totalitarian dictator. By characterizing the Party as

\(^{257}\) Ibid., 211.
\(^{259}\) Ibid., 152.
\(^{260}\) Ibid., 150.
such, Bremer and the CPA powers failed to recognize that Saddam was just as much a result of the Party as the Party was a result of Saddam.\textsuperscript{261}

The second CPA order was adopted on 23 May 2003 and called for the total dissolution of Iraq’s military and its intelligence and security divisions. According to Marr, CPA Order Two took most of the population by surprise and was not met as positively as Order One. The order also affected far more people than the first; with the dissolution of the military, about 400,000 Iraqis were out of a job.\textsuperscript{262} The second order affected the population at large in a much more significant way than the de-Ba’thification order because of the pervasive attitudes toward the Iraqi armed forces. The Iraqi population was never formally informed of the armed forces’ role in the atrocities committed against the Kurds, the Assyrians, and other minority groups throughout Iraq in the years since its formation. The armed forces were still seen as the “preserver of the nation’s core values,” and were steeped in heroic myths. Since its formation in the first years of the British Mandate, the military took a central role in the politics of the state, as is evidenced by the string of coup d’états from the 1930s to the 1970s that were led by army officers. Then, under the Ba’th Party, the armed forces became a critical tool of the Party for the control of the nation and the military’s presence in daily, public life became commonplace. The Iran-Iraq War and the invasion of Kuwait were strongly associated with founding myths dating back to the time of the Prophet Muhammmad.\textsuperscript{263} Though the order also called for the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{261} Ibid., 148.
\textsuperscript{262} Marr, The Modern History of Iraq, 211.
\textsuperscript{263} Allawi, The Occupation of Iraq, 155–6. The Iran-Iraq War, as discussed in the second chapter, was referred to as Qadisiyat Saddam, in reference to the Battle of Qadisiyah in the seventh century during the Islamic conquest of Persia, when the Arab Muslim army led by Sa’id Ibn Waqqas defeated the Persian Zoroastrian Sassanid army to acquire the land that is current-day Iraq. The war in Kuwait was referred to as Umm al-Maarak, or the “Mother of All Battles,” which is also a reference to the Battle of Qadisiyah.
\end{flushright}
creation of a new Iraqi corps for the purposes of self-defense, the plan was poorly implemented. In August, the recruitment for the new armed forces began, as did efforts to rebuild the police force. By the time the CPA was dissolved, the armed forces had grown to about 180,000 people. However, the recruitment of new officers was done extremely quickly, and the armed forces were rapidly filled with inexperienced Iraqis. The resulting military and police forces were unprofessional and chaotic.264

With the dissolution of Iraq’s armed forces, policing at local levels largely fell to U.S. troops. The troops quickly became infamous for their brutal and humiliating tactics used against locals.265 The lack of expertise in the CPA was further exacerbated by the overreliance on U.S. troops, most of whom did not have the necessary skills (for example, fluency in Arabic or cultural training).266 With the heightened tensions and animosity towards U.S. troops, militias emerged and essentially became the only security forces available for the local population (or rather, for protection against the U.S. troops). The creation of militias intensified as foreign insurgents continued to enter the country and join these militias. In May of 2003, the CPA forbade the creation of militias, with the notable exception of the U.S.-allied peshmerga in the north. Despite the CPA order, militias continued to function under the radar. The SCIRI’s militia, in particular, was adept in moving around this order and gradually became a large contingent of the new national police and security forces.267

265. Ibid.
266. Coyne, “Amateur Hour in Iraq,” 236.
The Interim Governing Council

The CPA created the Interim Governing Council (IGC) to replace the Ba’th Party and to function as a stepping stone for Iraqi governance on the way to full sovereignty. The groups invited to participate in the formation of the IGC were the groups identified under the U.S.-Iraq Liberation Act of 1998, in addition to al-Da’wa, led by Ibrahim al-Ja’fari, and the National Democratic Party (NDP), which later became the Iraq Liberation Council (ILC). Bremer wanted to expand the group to include insiders, since the identified groups consisted of mostly exiled leaders who had returned to Iraq after the fall of the regime. In May and June of 2003, Bremer sent teams to the Iraqi wilayat to recruit local representatives for the IGC. The teams returned with twelve local representatives, who, although they were not well-known except maybe in their highly-localized communities, came to form the foundation for the IGC.\(^{268}\) The KDP and the PUK, however, refused to join the IGC and, instead, on 12 June 2003, together formed a singular Kurdish government.\(^{269}\) Then on 1 July, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, a powerful Shi‘i cleric based in Najaf, issued a fatwa that rejected the CPA’s proposal that the new Iraqi constitution would be written by the IGC, which was filled with unelected officials.\(^{270}\)

Sistani is something of an enigmatic figure in the history of Iraq, especially during the course of the war. He was born in Mashhad, Iran, and trained under several revered Islamic religious scholars. He eventually settled in Najaf, where one of his mentors, Grand Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim al-Khu‘i, 

---

\(^{268}\) Ibid., 214–5.

\(^{269}\) Ibid., 209. The Kurds had already gained control over Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) strongholds in the north and had begun to move into disputed territories in the surrounding areas. \textit{Peshmerga} forces, who were backed by the U.S., had maintained their control over Mosul and Kirkuk, but agreed to hand over political power to the CPA/IGC if they were allowed to retain their military presence.

\(^{270}\) Allawi, \textit{The Occupation of Iraq}, 169. 206–7.
appointed him the imam of the famous Khadra Mosque. Sistani is known as a “quietist,” meaning that he likely believed in a separation of mosque and state, which would explain the mystery surrounding his political beliefs prior to the 2003 invasion. After the invasion, he took a more central role in the formation of a new Iraq to ensure that it emerged as an Islamic state.

On 13 July 2003, the IGC itself announced its creation, which was a strategic move by the CPA to give the appearance that the IGC was an Iraqi-led effort, and not an American one. However, most of the Arab world saw the IGC as just another tool of the American occupation. On 14 August, the UNSC recognized the IGC via Resolution 1500. The twenty-five members of the IGC were dominated by the Iraq Liberation Council (ILC). Of the twelve identifiable parties the council members belonged to, six were secular—eight if counting the KDP and the PUK—and four parties were considered religious or sectarian. The main tasks of the IGC were to advise the CPA, to function as the interim, nominal Iraqi government, and most importantly, to draft a new constitution.

**The 15 November Agreement and the Transitional Administrative Law**

UNSC Resolution 1511, adopted 16 October 2003, stated that by December of 2003, the U.S. must present a transition plan for the implementation of a new Iraqi government. On 15 November, the U.S. announced the plan for the transition, known as the 15 November Agreement. On 8 December, Bremer presented a plan for a constitution, a referendum to approve the constitution, and

---

271. Ibid., 206–7.
273. Ibid., 215. Of the twenty-five members, thirteen were Shi’i, five were Sunni, five were Kurds, one was Turkoman, and one was Assyrian Christian. Three of the members were women. The religious parties were SCIRI, al-Da’wa, and the Kurdish Islamic Union (KIU). There were no members from the Sadrists or Fadhila Party.
Iraq’s first post-war democratic election, and finally, the official transfer of authority to the Iraqis. The plan also created the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) as the provisional constitution until the Interim Iraqi Government (IIG) could write a new one. The TAL was negotiated behind closed doors over the course of a month, from 8 February to 8 March 2004. On 8 March, the CPA officially announced the TAL and its main provisions.274 As Coyne writes, the TAL had several major flaws, mostly that first, the writers of the constitution were not a representative sampling of the population of Iraq; second, the timeline for the turnover of authority limited the ability for full transparency and public input, and that third the constitutional process itself did not include any effective means for public participation.275

Sistani, who was a powerful and influential leader among Iraqi Shi’is, opposed this plan primarily for its timeline.276 Sistani took issue with the fact that the first election would not be until January of 2005. Bremer, however, rejected any of Sistani’s demands because he thought that an early election would favor the religious/Islamist factions over the secularists. On 2 June 2004, the CPA appointed the new IIG and on 28 June, Bremer handed over authority. On 30 June, the UNSC recognized Iraq’s full sovereignty, effective immediately. Bremer was then replaced as U.S. Ambassador to Iraq by John Negroponte, who served until 2005.277

274. Ibid., 220–2. The structure of the interim government included a presidency council with a rotating president, a national assembly, and a council of ministers. The president must be elected by a two-thirds majority of the National Assembly, while the prime minister and his cabinet could be elected by only a simple majority. Though affirmation of the prime minister only required a simple majority, the TAL’s design placed true power in the hands of the prime minister and his cabinet. The TAL forbade any recent member of the Ba’th Party from participating in the National Assembly. It also recognized the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in the north and gave it the power to continue its control of the region, to retain its police and security forces, and to tax KRG-designated areas.
The Allawi government, June 2004–May 2005

The first IIG government was led by Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, a secular Shi‘i Arab from the Iraqi National Accord (INA). The members of his cabinet were mostly secular, friendly to the U.S., and anti-Iranian. Though Bremer had turned authority over to the IIG, the Coalition armed forces, renamed the Multinational Forces-Iraq (MNF-I), under the command of General George W. Casey, were still in charge of security in Iraq.278 UNSC Resolution 1546 allowed for the continued military presence of the Coalition.279 Allawi’s government oversaw the highly anticipated first democratic elections, which took place on 30 January 2005. The elections were for a 275-seat national assembly, provincial assemblies, and a 111-seat Kurdish regional assembly. The election was run under the auspices of the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI). The major political groups that participated in the election were the religiously-oriented Shi‘i groups—the SCIRI, al-Da‘wa, and the INC; the secular Shi‘i groups—the INA, and other groups; the Kurdistan Alliance, which was dominated by the KDP and the PUK, and the Sunnis, which was primarily just the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP). Of the religiously-oriented Shi‘i parties, the newly formed (as of 8 December 2004) United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) dominated the Shi‘i ticket.280

278. Ibid., 224. Allawi’s president was Ghazi Ajil al-Yawar (Sunni), the vice-presidents (of which there were always two) were Ibrahim al-Ja‘fari (al-Da‘wa) and Rawsh Shaways (KDP), the deputy prime minister was Barham Salih (PUK), the minister of foreign affairs was Hushyar Zibari (KDP), the minister of finance was Adil ‘Abd al-Mahdi (SCIRI), the minister of defense was Hazim al-Sha‘lan (INC), the minister of interior was Falih Hassan al-Naqib (independent, but a supporter of Allawi), and the minister of oil was Thamir Ghadhban (also independent but was a known technocrat).
SCIRI was led by ‘Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim, Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim’s brother and the INC by Chalabi, which was severely weakened. Ayad Allawi was invited to join the religious Shi‘i groups, but he refused, opting to stay with the INA. The primary goal of these religiously-oriented groups was to keep a Shi‘i majority in the government so that they could continue to influence the direction of the new order. The INA, led by Allawi, ran under the Iraqi Nationalist List coalition, or as it was better known, al-Iraqiyyah. Finally, there was no significant participation of the Sunnis, religious or secular, on the election ticket, as many Sunnis boycotted the election in the wake of Fallujah II in November of 2004. As a result, they won very few seats.\textsuperscript{282} The results of the provincial assemblies were nearly the


\textsuperscript{282} Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 227–8. The results in the National Assembly were: 140 seats (fifty-one percent of the Assembly) to the UIA, seventy-five seats to the Kurdistan Alliance (twenty-seven percent), forty seats to al-Iraqiyyah (fourteen percent), and six seats to the Sunnis (two percent).
same as the National Assembly, though the localized power vacuums and growth of sectarian groups made it difficult for the newly-elected representatives to gain local recognition and influence over their constituents.  


The second IIG was led by Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Ja’fari of al-Da’wa. The process of forming this government took ninety-three days and it was not sworn in until 20 May 2005; the internal divisions in the IIG, primarily within the UIA over the Prime Minister, were at the root of the delay. Unlike the first IIG, the second had to adhere to ethnic and sectarian mubahasas, or quotas: of the thirty-eight cabinet positions, eighteen must be Shi’i, eight Kurdish, and six Sunni.  

Before the December 2005 election, the IIG passed the new constitution by referendum on 15 October. In the campaign period leading up to the election, there was a steep rise in the number of assassinations and armed attacks on political figures, mostly on Sunni politicians. Then, just a few days after the constitutional referendum had passed, on 19 October, Saddam Hussein’s trial for crimes against humanity began. The MNF increased the number of troops to 160,000 and an effort to eradicate insurgents from the Sunni cities along the Euphrates River began. The first election was conducted under the 15 June 2004 election law that established a single-district, nationwide, proportional system.

283. Ibid., 229.
284. Ibid., 230. Though there were quotas, the key positions within the cabinet were held primarily by Shi’i Islamists, or religious Shi’is. One of the two vice-presidents, Adil ‘Abd al-Mahdi, and the minister of the interior, Bayan Jabr, were both from SCIRI. Ja’fari’s president was Jalal Talabani of the PUK.
285. Ibid., 234.
286. Ibid., 234.
of representation. In other words, the first election was “closed list,” meaning that voters chose the party, and then the party chose the individual who would serve in the elected seat.\textsuperscript{287} The second election, however, was conducted on the basis of a two-tier system of representation, which was an open list system. Under this system, voters chose their representatives directly.\textsuperscript{288}

There was much controversy over who was to replace Ja’fari as prime minister. Eventually, a compromise was reached with the appointment of Nuri al-Maliki of al-Da’wa as the next Prime Minister. Maliki had fled to Syria from Iraq in 1979, as had many other members of al-Da’wa, and had returned after the regime fell. On 22 April 2006, the Council of Representatives (CoR) approved Jalal Talabani as president and Mahmoud al-Mashhadami of Tawafiq as chairman of the CoR. Talabani then nominated Maliki as Prime Minister, and on 20 May, Maliki and his thirty-seven-person cabinet were approved by parliament.\textsuperscript{289}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{footnotes}
\item[287] Ibid., 227.
\item[288] Ibid., 234–5. The results of the election were as follows: 128 seats to the UIA (forty-six and a half percent of the National Assembly); fifty-three seats to the Kurdistan Alliance (nineteen and one fifth percent); forty-four seats to Tawafiq, or the Iraqi Accord Front, which was a newly-created Sunni party; twenty-five seats to al-Iraqiyah (nine percent); and eleven seats to the Iraqi Front for National Dialogue, a coalition of Sunni political parties that was also created in the time leading up to the December 2005 elections, and led by Saleh al-Mutlaq.
\item[289] Ibid., 235–6.
\end{footnotes}
\end{footnotesize}
THE ESCALATION INTO VIOLENCE

Opposition to the occupation: Shi‘i elements

In order to understand the emergence and development of the opposition groups, it is necessary to go back to the first days of the U.S. The Shi‘i elements of the opposition to the occupation were primarily focused on highlighting the discrimination they had faced in the past and the need for a unified Shi‘i majority government. Though some of these Shi‘i groups did participate in the political process, many groups and some powerful individuals led significant opposition campaigns against the U.S. The four main sources of opposition were the SCIRI, al-Da‘wa, the Sadrists, and the Fadhila (Virtue) Party, which was a Sadrist offshoot. The SCIRI was led by Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim before his murder in August of 2003. He believed that SCIRI was at the forefront of the movement to create a Shi‘i-dominated Islamic republic as the “new Iraq” and likened himself to something of a “political marja.”

The Sadrists, led by Muqtada al-Sadr since his father’s assassination in 1999, emerged as a vitriolic force during the Iraq War. Muqtada’s father, Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr laid the foundation for the Sadrist movement, but it was not until Muqtada took over the movement that he was able to

---

290. In this instance, “opposition groups” is meant to refer to opposition to the U.S.’s occupation. In the previous section, “opposition groups/leaders” referred to the mostly Shi‘i contingent who opposed Saddam Hussein’s regime and primarily had lived in exile.

291. Marr, The Modern History of Iraq, 214. For “marja,” see John L. Esposito, “Marja al-Taqlid,” The Oxford Dictionary of Islam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195125580.001.0001/acref-9780195125580-e-1437. Marja al-taqlid is a term that means “an authority to be followed.” It is used among the Twelver Shi‘is (Shi‘i Muslims who believe that the last Imam was Muhammad al-Mahdi) to describe the highest-ranking authority who carries out the rules of Sharia law. When Hakim referred to himself as a “political marja,” it is likely he meant that he served as an enforcer of Islamic law in the political realm.
truly mobilize the masses against the occupation and other sectarian factions within Iraq. The Sadrist movement primarily appealed to the poorer tribes and marsh dwellers of ‘Amarrah and Nasiriyah, and to the poor Shi‘is in Saddam City (a densely-populated suburb of Baghdad) and Basrah. Despite the U.S.’s watchful eye, the first major act of aggression came just weeks after the invasion. On 3 April 2003, U.S. forces flew ‘Abd al-Majid al-Khu‘i, a Shi‘i cleric living in exile and the son of the influential Shi‘i cleric Grand Ayatollah ‘Abd al-Qasim al-Khu‘i, to Najaf to serve as a liaison between Shi‘i groups in the south. On 10 April, a mob attacked and brutally murdered Khu‘i in an assassination that the U.S. suspected Muqtada ordered. The next day, Muqtada gave his first post-war sermon at his mosque in Kufa, where he announced that he was renaming Saddam City Sadr City in honor of his father. A week later in his second post-war sermon, Muqtada declared his opposition to the occupation and spoke critically of other Shi‘i leaders who had been living in exile during the Saddam years, especially leaders from within SCIRI and al-Da‘wa.\(^\text{292}\) Over the summer of 2003, Muqtada announced the establishment of the Mahdi Army, the Sadrist militia; by the fall, the Mahdi Army had begun mounting attacks on Coalition forces.

On 11 October, amid clashes with SCIRI in Karbala, Muqtada proclaimed the formation of his own government. By early 2004, reports emerged that the Sadrists had begun taking over mosques and universities in Baghdad, established Sharia courts for the local population and enforced Islamic law. The reports also stated that the Sadrists had begun more formal military training and that their bomb-making abilities had increased.\(^\text{293}\) Soon after, Judge Ra‘id Juhi, the same young judge who later

\(^{293}\) Ibid., 219.
presided over Saddam’s trial, announced that he had found evidence of Muqtada’s involvement in the murder of Khu’i and the CPA issued an arrest warrant for him shortly after. In response to this announcement, thousands of Muqtada supporters from Baghdad occupied key CPA buildings in Najaf, Kufa, Nasiriyyah, and ‘Amarrah, and in Kut and Nasiriyyah, the Sadrists also occupied the CPA headquarters. Meanwhile, Muqtada took refuge in the shrine in Najaf.

Many other Shi‘i groups were concerned that the Sadrists’ hostility towards the U.S. would hamper their ability to participate in the political process and their ambitions to gain power in the new government. Because of this, these groups were willing to cooperate with the CPA and the coalition forces to combat Muqtada and the Sadrists. On 5 May 2004, U.S. forces began an assault on the Mahdi Army in Najaf. The Mahdi Army, though it had begun to formally train, was still a paramilitary group with little expertise and was quickly decimated by U.S. forces. In August, an MNF patrol was attacked by Sadrists forces near Muqtada’s house in Najaf and violent fighting broke out between the two groups, resulting in hundreds of deaths, mostly of Sadrists and civilians caught in the crossfire. On 26 August, Muqtada realized the likelihood that his forces would be unable to stave off serious attacks by the MNF and struck a deal with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. The meant that al-Sistani would take over the shrine in Najaf in exchange for the Mahdi Army’s retreat. As a result of the deal, Muqtada’s position was severely weakened.

Opposition to the occupation: Sunni elements

The center of the Sunni opposition to the occupation was in the Sunni Arab triangle that included Baghdad, Anbar, Salahaldin, and other former Saddam strongholds. Of the groups that opposed the occupation, Hayat al-‘Ulama al-Muslimin, or the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS) was particularly hostile. AMS was founded in the wake of the invasion in April 2003 and led by Harith al-Dhari. The group emphasized its sectarian identity as a religious Sunni group, had nationalist elements reminiscent of the Ba’th Party, and developed a governing principle they called fiqh al-muqawama (“the jurisprudence of resistance”). The AMS’s chief ideologue, Muhammad ‘Ayash al-Kubaisi, proclaimed a jihad and fard al-‘ayn, which is the obligatory duty of all believers to take part in jihad. Eventually the AMS developed into an insurgent group, headquartered at the Umm al-Maarik mosque in Baghdad, which it renamed Umm al-Qura, “The Mother of All Cities,” in reference to the Qur’anic name for Mecca.297

Former Ba’thists increasingly emphasized their sectarian identity as Shi‘i and Kurdish-led sectarian groups in Iraq grew in power. At the height of the Ba’th Party under Saddam Hussein, most political Sunni actors avoided identifying with any sort of sectarian characterization. Most of the Ba’thists elements of the insurgency were former Republican Guard or Fedayeen Saddam members.298 These were the type of groups the CPA mistakenly thought that the de-Ba’thification order would eradicate, not empower. These groups were also strengthened by the fairly recent training they had received before the fall of the regime. In the fall of 2002, the Ba’thists had trained about 1,000

intelligence officers in guerilla warfare and terrorist tactics. Jaysh Muhammad, or the Army of
Muhammad, for example, was supposedly led by the ex-Republican Guard chief of staff and ran a
deadly campaign against Coalition forces.

The majority of Sunnis refused to participate in the political process and opted instead to join
the growing and active insurgency. Of the ten or so most prominent insurgent groups that could be
identified, the most important were, in addition to the Army of Muhammad: Jaysh al-Islami al-Iraqi
(The Islamic Party of Iraq), Jaysh ‘Umar (The Army of Omar), and Kataib Thawrat al-‘Ashrin (The
Battalions of the 1920 Uprising). The few Western-oriented Sunni groups were all secular and were
generally willing to join the political process as the route to gaining power. The most prominent of
these groups was the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), one of the few Sunni groups on the election ticket in
2005.

THE SUNNI INSURGENCY

The first stage: The development of the insurgency

The social and political elite of Iraq up until 2003 was overwhelming Sunni Arabs. This
position of power and influence dated back to before the creation of the modern-state of Iraq, when
the Mesopotamia Province was under the control of the Ottoman Empire. The U.S.-led invasion in

299. Allawi, The Occupation of Iraq, 175.
300. Ibid., 181–2. The Army of Muhammad was successful in recruiting a large following vis-à-vis the young
people who grew up during Saddam’s faith campaign and who were largely unemployed. The Army of Muhammad
referred to themselves as mujabideen, or faith warriors.
301. Ibid.
2003 ended the dominance of the Sunni elite over the state. Not all Sunni Arabs were in the upper echelons of Iraqi society, but most, if not all, of the most powerful individuals and groups in Iraq were Sunni Arabs. In particular, the de-Ba’thification order ended centuries of Sunni Arab hegemony in Iraq. The Sunni insurgency was a rejection of the foreign occupation and rule that cut Sunni Arabs from official positions in the government, and a reaction to the increasingly sectarian basis of rule. These grievances were further exacerbated by violent clashes with U.S. forces. The incident that was particularly galvanizing for the insurgency was on 28 April 2003, when U.S. forces shot at demonstrators in city of Fallujah, killing seventeen people and wounding about seventy more.\textsuperscript{303}

The most important elements of the insurgency were found in mosques (which is to say, religiously-oriented Sunni groups based out of mosques), in former Ba’thists and military officers, and in foreign elements, primarily those associated with al-Qa’ida. Among the former, the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS) rapidly developed into a network of Sunni imams and clerics. The AMS grew into an insurgent group when it began to urge Sunnis to resist the occupation and object to any form of participation in the occupying powers’ government. The other major player within the mosques’ network were the Salafist fundamentalist groups, primarily the Army of Muhammad. Groups such as these were conservative, generally with a religiously-imbued militant ideology that was heavily influenced by Wahhabi ideas from Saudi Arabia. The Ba’thist contingent of the insurgents functioned primarily within tribal networks and included Ba’thists from the military, intelligence, and police

\textsuperscript{303} Ibid., 216–7.
forces. With the high rates of unemployment as a result of CPA Orders One and Two, this sector of the insurgency was highly successful in recruiting the young and unemployed into their ranks.\textsuperscript{304}

The third group making up the Sunni insurgency was foreigners that were primarily associated with al-Qa’ida. These groups capitalized upon the local opposition to the occupation to grow their forces. The most powerful and influential of these groups was led by Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian-born jihadist who had already been linked to terrorist activities in his home country, had ran a paramilitary training camp in Afghanistan at the end of the Soviet-Afghan War, and had a strong association with al-Qa’ida. He was joined by the Ansar al-Islam members who had fled Iraqi Kurdistan at the beginning of the war and returned, along with other foreign Islamists, most of whom were from Syria. This group, which eventually developed into al-Qa’ida in Iraq (AQI), was known for its “highly puritan” interpretation of Islam that was distinctly foreign from any Islamic movement Iraq had ever experienced before.\textsuperscript{305} Unlike the other Sunni insurgent groups, AQI’s objective was not only to overthrow the U.S. regime in Iraq, but to establish a transnational Islamic emirate.\textsuperscript{306}

\textit{The second stage: The intensification of the insurgency}

By the summer of 2003, reports from Iraq indicated that as many as 30,000 men were part of underground militias. At the time, however, these militias were still largely unorganized, and their actions were sporadic. It was not until a series of bombings orchestrated by AQI that the insurgency

\textsuperscript{304} Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 217. Wahhabism is ultraconservative Sunni movement that is concentrated in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The movement was founded by Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab in the eighteenth century and was adopted by the al-Saud family soon after.

\textsuperscript{305} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{306} Ibid.
was truly set on its violent course, in the first stage of the escalation. The first bombing was on 7 August, at the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad and killed eighteen people. The second car bombing was on 19 August, at the U.N. mission headquarters at the Canal Hotel in Bagdad.\textsuperscript{307} The bomb killed twenty-two people, including the U.N. envoy, Sergio de Mello. Witnesses of the bombing said that a truck drove directly below de Mello’s office and then detonated; the attack was the worst in U.N. history. Then, on 24 August, Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Sa’id al-Hakim was injured by a bomb that detonated as he was leaving evening prayers at his mosque in Najaf. A second explosion went off later that night that killed three guards. The perpetrator(s) of the attack never claimed responsibility—which is often the case after such events—but the Sadrists were suspected to be responsible.\textsuperscript{308}

The fourth and most catastrophic in this series of bombings was on 29 August, when an AQI bomb detonated as worshipers were leaving the Imam ‘Ali Mosque in Najaf. The attack killed one hundred people, including Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, the head of SCIRI. The death of al-Hakim was a huge hit to the SCIRI, which had placed its hopes in him to lead the way to Iraqi sovereignty. Hakim had returned to Najaf only four months earlier, after living in exile in Iran. According to Engel, a journalist who lived in Baghdad for the majority of the Iraq War, the violence against Shi’is was in reaction to the belief that Shi’i groups were waiting in the wings to take control as soon as the U.S. left Iraq.\textsuperscript{309} While Hakim had formally opposed the occupation, he was still willing to cooperate with the CPA in the hope that SCIRI would be influential in the new Iraqi government.

\textsuperscript{307} Ibi\textsuperscript{d.}, 218.  
\textsuperscript{308} Allawi, The Occupation of Iraq, 170–1.  
\textsuperscript{309} Richard Engel, A Fist in the Hornet’s Nest: On the Ground in Baghdad Before, During, and After the War (Hyperion: New York, 2004), 233.
Hakim was not only influential within political circles but was highly revered among Shi‘i Iraqis; nearly half a million people attended his funeral procession in Najaf. After the bombing, members of the Badr Brigade flooded into the streets of Najaf with assault rifles, set up checkpoints, and made threats to foreign journalists in the city. The U.S. made not abject efforts to curb this. The final attack that fully propelled Iraq into the insurgency was on 22 September, when another bomb detonated at the U.N. headquarters. The bomb was placed in the parking lot of the Canal Hotel and killed several Iraqi policemen. The U.N. directors in Baghdad unanimously recommended to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan that all U.N. staff in Iraq be evacuated from the country immediately. The directors had seriously considered pulling U.N. staff from Iraq after the August bombing, but were still undecided when the September bombing cemented their decision. Annan accepted, but left thirty U.N. staffers in the country. Nevertheless, the evacuation of U.N. staff meant that the U.N. had effectively withdrawn from Iraq.

The second stage in the escalation of the insurgency came in October of 2003, when photos from within the Abu Ghraib prison were leaked to the press. The photographs of the torture and humiliating treatment of Iraqi detainees by U.S. military police forces incensed not only anti-war advocates in the West but also the bulk of Iraqis. Sunni Arabs in Iraq saw this as damning evidence of a hostile occupation and further galvanized elements of the insurgency. By the next month, attacks by insurgent groups had increased. The groups mostly carried out political assassinations and attacks on Coalition forces, using improvised explosive devices (IEDs) aimed at convoys. Attacks on water and oil

312. Allawi, The Occupation of Iraq, 171.
installations, which would be crucial to any nation-building mission, also increased.\textsuperscript{313} Kurdish elements were forced to face the insurgency when, on 1 February 2004, suicide bombers attacked the KDP and PUK headquarters in Erbil, killing many high officials, including Sami ʿAbd al-Rahman, the deputy director of the KRG and a member of the KDP. The bombing propelled the Kurds towards Kurdish efforts to gain autonomy from the rest of Iraq. The final escalation toward a total outbreak of the insurgency came on 1 March, when four Blackwater mercenaries, contracted by the U.S., were ambushed in Fallujah after making a wrong turn on a routine patrol. The four men were brutally murdered; the absolute brutality of their murder is best exemplified in the highly-published photograph of Iraqis cheering with the Americans’ charred remains hanging from a bridge in the background.\textsuperscript{314}

\textbf{The third stage: Fallujah I \& II}

A day before the U.S. assaults in Fallujah began, the Mahdi Army in Sadr City ambushed U.S. troops on a patrol on one of the bloodiest days of the War. The Siege of Sadr City, which began on “Black Sunday,” lasted for four years.\textsuperscript{315} The Coalition forces’ assault on the insurgent elements began in full force on 5 April 2004 when U.S. Marines launched their siege of Fallujah. The assault on Fallujah was not only a reaction to the insurgency at large, but a direct retaliation for the murder of the Blackwater mercenaries.\textsuperscript{316} The move incensed most Sunnis and created tension within the IGC; soon

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{313} Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 218.
  \item \textsuperscript{314} Ibid., 218.
  \item \textsuperscript{315} Martha Raddatz, \textit{The Long Road Home: A Story of War and Family} (New York: Berkley Books, 2008).
  \item \textsuperscript{316} Allawi, \textit{The Occupation of Iraq}, 276.
\end{itemize}
after the launch of Fallujah I, two Sunni members of the IGC resigned. The U.S. Marines were joined by the newly created Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), but the ISF’s lack of experience became obvious when the first unit that was deployed to join the fight deserted and the second unit refused to even entertain the thought of joining the Marines. The fighting that ensued caught many civilians in the crossfire. The images of the city in the midst of the assault were captured by an Al-Jazeera correspondent and were seen on television across the Arab World. Bremer and the CPA forces were forced to confront the fact that Fallujah I had done more to encourage the insurgents than it had to weaken the insurgency. By 9 April 2004, the CPA announced a unilateral ceasefire and General Muhammad Shahwani, the director of the new Iraqi security and intelligence services (INIS)—which was funded by the U.S. and had direct ties to the CIA—began secret negotiations on behalf of the Coalition forces. Though the ceasefire had been announced, General James Conway, the Marines’ commander for western Iraq, met with senior Iraqi officials regarding a humanitarian plan, which suggested that the U.S. forces were planning more assaults.

Fallujah I led to a high number of civilian casualties, incredible damage of the city’s infrastructure, and served as a “rallying cry” for the Sunni opposition groups. Although the most intense fighting of the insurgency was in Fallujah, fighting quickly spread to the other cities in the Sunni Arab triangle around Baghdad, including Ramadi, Haditha, and Mosul. The religiously-oriented Sunni groups, which were soon joined by the fighters that had flooded in from Jordan, Saudi

318. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 276
319. Ibid., 279.
Arabia, and Yemen, enforced “draconian religious measures” onto the local population in Fallujah.\footnote{Ibid., 226.} When the violence increased, Prime Minister Ayad Allawi agreed—albeit reluctantly—to allow Coalition forces to mount another assault on Fallujah. On 7 November 2004, MNF forces reentered the city in what came to be known as “Fallujah II.”\footnote{Ibid., 226.}

Fallujah II was incredibly bloody: ninety-two U.S. soldiers, about 1,200 insurgents, and about 6,000 civilian were killed; and about 200,000 people fled the city in a massive internal displacement. The battle also destroyed much of the city’s infrastructure. Sixty of the city’s 200 mosques and twenty percent of the buildings in the city were destroyed. Fallujah II stirred tensions within Allawi’s government and the members of the IIP, the only significant Sunni party represented in the cabinet, resigned. The resigned members and other Sunni opposition groups led a campaign to boycott the upcoming election of January of 2005 to a high degree of success. As a result, Sunni representation within the government was further weakened. The government of Allawi as a whole was also weakened greatly as internal divisions within the cabinet deepened and both Sunni and Shi‘i militias grew in size and power.\footnote{Ibid.}
THE SECTARIAN CIVIL WAR

Roots of the civil war: Towards communal violence

The assaults in Fallujah in April and November 2004 began a new phase of the insurgency. Sunni attacks on Shi‘i sites in Najaf, mostly perpetrated by AQI, heightened tensions further. The elections in 2005 were of no help, as they appeared to confirm Sunni fears that they would be completely pushed out of the political process in favor of the U.S.-backed Shi‘i groups (in particular, religiously-oriented Shi‘i groups). This led to anxiety and urgency among Sunni opposition groups to take immediate action against the occupation and prominent Shi‘i leaders, resorting to violence and terrorist tactics if need be. These fears were well justified: not only did Shi‘i leaders hold power in the IGC and then in the IIG, but most of the security apparatus was under Shi‘i control, specifically, the Badr Brigade of SCIRI. Prior to his assassination, Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim had even called for a separate regional government in the south and center of the country. Sunni Arabs who had long been in power clearly saw their position of power slipping from their grip. 324

Shi‘i groups immediately felt the impact of the Sunni backlash against their growing power. Zarqawi’s al-Qa’ida-associated network rebranded itself as al-Qa’ida in Iraq (AQI). While coalition forces were able to control Muqtada’s Mahdi Army with the help of Ali al-Sistani, AQI was a powerful and destructive force that no one appeared to be able to control. Then following the Fallujah campaigns of 2004, a massive outpouring of civilians from Fallujah fled to the western suburbs of Baghdad, including Ghazaliyah and Abu Ghraib, and to Sunni neighborhoods in Baghdad, such as

324. , 236–7.
Adamiyah. By 2005, Shi’i families were being driven out of the Sunni-majority neighborhoods in Baghdad en masse. Violence quickly erupted between the Sunni fundamentalist groups and the Shi’i militias, sweeping up the civilian population into the mix.\textsuperscript{325}

\textit{Course of the civil war}

In January of 2006 alone, 700 murders were reported in Baghdad, the highest number in a single month up until that point.\textsuperscript{326} On 22 February 2006, Amid the chaos in the government and attempts to create some semblance of unity, an AQI bomb destroyed the al-‘Askari shrine in Samarra. The shrine, where the tombs of the tenth and eleventh Imams are located and where Shi’is believe that the twelfth Imam went into occultation, was an incredibly important site for Shi’i Muslims. Within hours, Shi’i militias took to the streets and in a sudden burst of violence, about 1,300 civilians, mostly Sunnis, were killed. The violence continued over the next week as Shi’i militias continued to turn on Sunnis, despite calls from Shi’i clerics to refrain from responding violently to the bombing.\textsuperscript{327} Tensions between Sunnis and Shi’is had been growing since the first days of the insurgency, spurred forward by deadly instances of violence, but this particular moment seems to have been the catalyzing moment for a full-blown civil war between Sunni and Shi’i civilians in Iraq, primarily centered in Baghdad.\textsuperscript{328}

\textsuperscript{325} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{326} Ibid., 237.
\textsuperscript{327} Allawi, \textit{The Occupation of Iraq}, 443–4.
\textsuperscript{328} Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 236.
Zarqawi, the leader of AQI, reportedly described in a February 2004 letter to Osama bin Laden, published in *The New York Times*, his specific anti-Shi'i objectives for AQI. In this letter and in other communications from AQI, it became clear that AQI’s express objective was to stir up a civil war between Sunni and Shi'i Iraqis that would cause the collapse of the occupation and the new Iraqi regime, preparing the way for a complete takeover by AQI. On 7 June 2006, Zarqawi was killed in Ba’qua by MNF and ISF strikes, but the group continued to grow in strength and influence.\(^{329}\) By mid-2006, Shi'i groups had the clear upper hand in the fight against Sunni insurgents. The Mahdi Army and the Badr Brigade, in particular, took over mixed neighborhoods in Baghdad, attacking mosques and markets, and launched brutal assaults on civilians, nearly cleansing entire neighborhoods of all Sunnis. These actions led to the outbreak of a full-scale sectarian civil war. This stage of the violence was different than the previous stages in that it can be defined by the communal violence by civilians against civilians.\(^{330}\)

The civil war in Baghdad left civilians with the choice to either affiliate with a militia for their own protection or to leave Baghdad or even the country. The flow of refugees from the country and internally displaced people from Baghdad was estimated to be in the millions; an end-of-the-year U.N. estimate for 2006 placed the death toll at 34,400.\(^{331}\) In October of 2006, a report in a respected British medical journal estimated that between March 2003 and July 2006, the death toll may have been more than 650,000 people.\(^{332}\) In the same journal, *The Lancet*, a report estimated that an estimated one

---

329. Ibid., 238.
330. Ibid., 236–7.
331. Ibid., 238.
hundred Iraqi civilians were killed every day between 2006 and 2007. By 2007, entire neighborhoods were reduced to rubble. Perhaps the only solace in this time of great violence was for victims of the Saddam regime: on 5 November 2006, an Iraqi judge sentenced Saddam Hussein to death for crimes against humanity and on 30 December, prime minister Nuri al-Maliki signed the execution order.

According to Tripp, seldom few Iraqis, if any, felt sympathy for Saddam as they watched the televised hearings. Saddam apparently believed that he could mobilize the masses to support him, but none did. As officials were preparing for the execution, Muqtada al-Sadr loyalists and Saddam exchanged insults at each other, the former mostly military guards standing among the crowd and the latter atop the scaffolding.

THE U.S. TROOP SURGE AND THE SUBSIDING OF THE CIVIL WAR

On 10 January 2007, President Bush ordered a “surge” of 50,000 more U.S. troops that would primarily deploy to Baghdad. In March, the new U.S. ambassador, Ryan Crocker, arrived in Baghdad. Crocker, unlike previous ambassadors, spoke fluent Arabic and had experience in the Arab World, including Iraq, prior to his appointment. Crocker’s arrival came at a turning point in the civil war

333. Tripp, A History of Iraq, 208.
335. Tripp, A History of Iraq, 314. The trial itself may not have captured the attention of Iraqis as the Americans and Iraqi officials thought it might, but Iraqi Sunnis did take of the day of his execution, which was on the Sunni Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha.
when splits were emerging on both the Sunni and Shi‘i side. The internal divisions were a sign that the end of the civil war could be soon.337

**Changes on the Sunni front**

In October of 2006, AQI announced the establishment of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) in the Anbar and Ninawa provinces. Its stated objectives were to establish the Islamic Caliphate in Iraq, not as a singular, independent state, but rather as a transnational empire. The majority of the other Sunni groups had no desire for a transnational caliphate and were focused on achieving a Sunni majority within Iraq only. Moreover, AQI’s activities were not only violent but also disrupted Iraq’s major black market, of which many tribal leaders were a part. However, the primary reason for Sunni groups’ total denunciation of AQI was the absolute outrage at its brutal tactics. The Sunni groups were never in favor of the AQI, but the type of violence the AQI used against both Sunni and Shi‘i civilians pushed them to make a public renouncement of the group. Some of these tribal groups were so incensed with AQI that they were willing to work with U.S. forces to push the group out of their cities and towns.338

A Sunni-born movement to push AQI out of key regions in Iraq began in September 2005, when the chief of the Albu Risha clan in Ramadi, ‘Abd al-Sattar Abu Risha, began enlisting tribesmen into a local force to combat the AQI and encouraged others to join the local police force. This effort was initiated by the Sahwa (Awakening) movement, developing into the Anbar Salvation Council, a

338. Ibid., 242.
coalition of anti-AQI tribal groups. By the spring of 2007, more than forty tribal groups had joined the Anbar Salvation Council and had managed to push AQI out of the region. By May, after its success in pushing AQI out of Amiriya and Diyala, Sahwa began its move into Baghdad with the help of the MNF. A couple of months later, the MNF had gained the cooperation of four tribal groups and by September, the MNF turned over control of the city to those groups. Local councils emerged, which called themselves Sons of Iraq (SOI) or Concerned Local Citizens. These councils were put on the U.S.’s payroll, which was a major boost to the local economy and lowered unemployment.339

Changes on the Shi’i front

Since Muqtada al-Sadr had made a deal with Sistani back in August of 2004, the power of the Mahdi Army and the Sadrists had significantly subsided, as had the violence emanating from their ranks. Shi’i groups that had formerly been associated with Muqtada began to peel off and form Iranian-backed militia groups called “Special Groups.” Some of the groups operated independently, but the majority of these Special Groups eventually developed into a militia called the Asa’ib Ahl al-Haqq, or “The League of the Righteous.” In early 2007, the Sadrists’ position was further weakened when they withdrew from Nuri al-Maliki’s cabinet following a disagreement with the Prime Minster over the timeline for the U.S. troops’ withdrawal. Without the Sadrists, Maliki turned to SCIRI as a key ally among the religious Shi’i groups.340

339. Ibid., 243.
340. Ibid., 244.
The religiously-oriented Shi‘i groups began to fracture as well. In May of 2007, SCIRI renamed itself to the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI). Splits within ISCI led to the creation of a separate group, called the Badr Organization. On 27 August 2007, the Sadrists provoked the ISCI in Karbala during the Shi‘i holiday of the ‘Ashura, when the city was packed to the brim with pilgrims; the ensuing two-day battle killed fifty civilians. Following the incident in Karbala, Maliki visited the city and gave the police chief the full power to take action against the Sadrists and the Mahdi Army. Muqtada’s reputation was even more dampened as a result. Two days after the first fighting broke out, Muqtada announced a ceasefire, ordered that the Mahdi Army to refrain from firing at MNF forces, signed a pact with the ISCI, and announced that he would remain in Iran, where he had traveled to Iran for religious training.\(^3^{41}\)

**The outcome of the civil war**

By the end of 2007, violence had declined by ninety percent and the end of the civil war was in sight. Only the Special Groups had continued violent activities in Baghdad. The ISF had grown to about 140,000 troops and were now much better trained and managed than when the ISF was established. The ISF, together with the designated 50,000 U.S. troops and 103,000 SOI members, contributed in significantly lowering the prevalence of violence.\(^3^{42}\) In Baghdad, walls and military barriers were erected to separate neighborhoods by their ethnosectarian identity, a physically startling but effective method to curb violence. Though the civil war seemed to be coming to an end, the years

\(^{341}\) Ibid.
\(^{342}\) Ibid.
of the Iraq War and the civil war in Baghdad had created a refugee population of two million people and by 2008 1.6 million had been internally displaced. Although violence had subsided in Baghdad, its population had developed a deep sense of distrust and anxiety towards each other in a city whose mixed population had been historically tolerant.\(^3\)\(^4\)\(^3\)

343. Ibid., 245.
Chapter 4

The New Iraq:

The End of the Iraq War and the Emergence of the Islamic State

2008–2014
INTRODUCTION

While the roots of the Islamic State (IS) lie in non-state actors from outside of Iraq, the growth of the insurgent, terrorist movement is inextricable from the post-2003 development of the Iraqi state. With that being said, the roots of IS are not confined to just the post-2003 era, but rather harken back to the generations of sectarian politics, exclusion, and repression discussed in previous chapters. This chapter will look at the development of IS in Iraq from the point of view of the Iraqi state, rather than from the point of view of the non-state actors within IS itself. This chapter will examine how the actions of the state, primarily by orders of the Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, are crucial factors to understanding how the Islamic State evolved from al-Qa’ida in Iraq (AQI) to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and finally, the so-called Islamic Caliphate.

NURI AL-MALIKI’S AUTOCRATIC REGIME

The civil war, which was particularly acute in Baghdad’s mixed neighborhoods, but certainly not confined to the city, technically came to an end in the last months of 2007, as indicated by the substantial reduction of violence. However, bombings targeted at civilians remained commonplace. To discuss each and every incident would take this chapter far beyond its objectives, and therefore, it will only focus on key moments of violence that spurred state action or furthered communal violence in a significant way. This section will examine how the Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki, consolidated his power in the period following the civil war, how his repression of both Sunni and Shi’i actors led to
increased ethnosectarian tensions, and how the exclusion of Sunnis in particular played a key role in the emergence of the Islamic State.

**Maliki’s consolidation of power: The Shi‘i front**

Muqtada al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army and Sadrist movement experienced a resurgence at the end of the civil war and reemerged as a powerful player in the southern wilayat. As discussed in the previous chapter, Muqtada al-Sadr’s movement took a serious hit in 2004 when he struck a deal with the powerful Shi‘i cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. During the course of the civil war the Sadrist movement reemerged as a threat even to other Shi‘i parties such as the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq (ISCI). Following a bout of violence between the Mahdi Army and the ISCI in Karbala, Muqtada called a ceasefire and announced that he would remain in Iran, where he had traveled to for religious study. However, after the civil war it became clear to Maliki and other state actors that Muqtada was aggressively attempting to incorporate members of the Mahdi Army and other Sadrists into the local police forces and into the interior ministry in Basrah and Sadr City. 344 Maliki planned a military intervention in Basrah and Sadr City in order to—at least publicly—curb the control of the militias that posed a threat to the government and to civilians. Privately, it was clear that the military action was directed exclusively at Muqtada and his Mahdi Army. 345

---

The incursion began on 25 March 2008 in Basrah, when Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) entered the neighborhood of al-Ta’imiyyah, which was a Sadrist stronghold. According to reports on the events, there were nearly 30,000 combined forces, 16,000 of which were local police forces and the rest of which were the ISF. The fighting between the Sadrists and the Iraqi forces spread to other neighborhoods and erupted in Sadr City as well, but the ISF was weakened by the high number of deserters and defectors. The incident devolved into a stalemate within days and on 30 March 2008, Muqtada announced a ceasefire after negotiations with Iraqi officials in Iran. On 24 April, Maliki announced that the government had regained control over Basrah, but fighting continued in both the city and in Sadr City until 11 May. Reports from Basrah indicated that the armed incursion into Basrah was highly unpopular among Iraqis—at least among high officials—and was seen as unnecessary for national security, considering violence had decreased, and more as Maliki taking personal revenge against Muqtada.

**Maliki’s consolidation of power: The Sunni front**

In the time since Maliki had first become Prime Minister in 2005, he had made it increasingly clear that he was not keen on incorporating Sunni representation into his government, or to even on entertaining the idea. One clear example of this was his explicit exclusion of the Sahwa and the Sons of

Iraq (SOI) from the Iraqi security forces. Before handing over military control to the Iraqis, the Americans had put the Sahwa and the SOI on the U.S. payroll in an attempt to quell the AQI. Most of the fighters in the Sahwa and the SOI had participated in the Sunni insurgency in 2004 and Maliki regarded them as no more than a non-state militia to be controlled, and, as the ICG put it, “thugs at best and Sunni terrorists at worst, a potential fifth column ensconced in state security forces.” Not only did Maliki refuse to incorporate the Sahwa and the SOI into the security forces, but he began to order the arrests of various key leaders in the Sahwa and the SOI, all of whom were Sunni. One of the key leaders arrested was Saif Sa’ad Ahmad al-Ubaidi (or Abu Abid), the SOI leader in Amiriyyah. Ubaidi’s growing power and influence extended beyond Amiriyyah to Baghdad and the Sunni Arab triangle and posed a threat to Maliki. In mid-2008, Ubaidi was charged with murder while he was out of the country; his property was confiscated, and he was forced to remain in exile outside of Iraq. Later that year, Maliki began to order the arrests of other leaders, mostly in Diyalah, and froze the program that U.S. had set up for the inclusion of these Sunni fighters.

Maliki was also disproportionally brutal in his repression of Sunni protestors against his premiership. Security forces were deployed to Sunni neighborhoods in Baghdad, as well as in the Sunni-majority wilayat of Anbar, Salah al-Din, Ninawa, Kirkuk, and Diyalah, in far higher numbers than they were anywhere else. In a Frontline documentary on the rise of the Islamic State, several people, from former cabinet members to British intelligence officers, confirmed Maliki’s use of his

---

353. International Crisis Group, “Make or Break: Iraq’s Sunnis and the State,” Middle East Report No. 144 (Brussels: ICG, 14 August 2013), i.
own Golden Division militia to violently repress the Sunni Arab protest movements. Richard Barrett, a former British intelligence officer posted to Iraq, observed that, “the Shi’i militia were very, very violent. There were many, many instances in Baghdad, and in many other parts of Iraq, of Sunnis turning up with a bullet in the back of their head and their hands bound behind them.”

The Maliki government not only deployed militias and security forces to repress rivals in Sunni areas, but it also restricted the power of the local police forces and cut funding for public works and infrastructure projects.

**The 2009 provincial elections**

The provincial elections of 2009 were the first nationwide elections in which there was a significant number of Sunnis on the election ticket and Sunni voter turnout since Sunni Arabs had largely boycotted the December 2005 election. Though this was an important factor in the political landscape, perhaps more important were the results. These results, both nationwide and within the provinces, were highly fragmented; no single list obtained anything close to a majority of seats. Further, local incumbent parties lost their positions: in fourteen out of Iraq’s eighteen wilayat voters voted out the incumbent party. Maliki, the incumbent Prime Minister, ran as part of his own State of Law list, rather than on al-Da’wa’s list, the religiously-oriented Shi’i party under which he had

---

354. Frontline, “The Rise of ISIS,” PBS and WGBH, October 28, 2014, written by Martin Smith, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/rise-of-isis/. Maliki’s Golden Division was a militia that he formed under the auspices of his office, rather than under the general security forces. The Golden Division evolved into Maliki’s personal militia that was loyal to only him, more akin to a party’s armed wing than a part of the national armed forces.

355. ICG, Middle East Report No. 144, 10.

previously run. If there was any one group that did obtain a success, then it was certainty the State of Law, which won seats nationwide. A report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) postulated that the State of Law and Maliki’s success likely stemmed from the fact that many Shi’i Arabs were discontent and incensed with the increasingly violent tactics that the Sadrists—and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), by association—employed.\footnote{ICG, “Iraq’s Uncertain Future,” 5.} The results of the provincial elections in 2009 was to create an even more fragmented sociopolitical landscape based on ethnosectarian identities.

**The 2010 elections**

In the months leading up to the early-2010 elections, daily bombings became so commonplace that they became normalized. Observations from on the ground showed how Iraqis tried their best to go on with their daily routines despite the violence on the streets. But there were three bombings in particular, likely all perpetrated by AQI, that severely undercut Maliki’s rule and his claims to lead an era of “law and order” in Iraq.\footnote{Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 266.} The first was on 19 August 2009, when coordinated truck bombs exploded at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance, killing 100 civilians and injuring nearly 600 more. This was the worst bombing since the Americans had handed over military control (in the cities) to the Iraqis in June 2009.\footnote{Sam Dagher, “2 Blasts Expose Security Flaws in Heart of Iraq,” *The New York Times*, August 19, 2009, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/20/world/middleeast/20iraq.html.} The second was on 25 October 2009, when suicide car bombs exploded at the Ministry of Justice, the Baghdad Provincial Council building, and the
Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works. These explosions killed 155 people and wounded over 700 in the worst attack since the summer of 2007 and took place just a few blocks away from the location of the August attacks.\(^{360}\) The final event was on 8 December 2009, when coordinated car bombs in at least four locations around Baghdad killed more than 127 people and injured 448. These attacks came just days after the new election date—which was originally scheduled for January 2010—had been announced. This was the only set of attacks, however, for which AQI expressly claimed responsibility.\(^{361}\)

In January of 2010, just months before the election, the Supreme National Commission for Accountability and Justice had disqualified 511 candidates from running based on supposed affiliation with the Ba’th Party. The specific details of these politicians’ elimination were never disclosed to the public and it was widely held that the Shi‘i-majority government used the Commission as a way to eliminate potential threats from prominent, influential Sunni politicians.\(^{362}\) Violence once again broke out and between 12 February and 7 March 2010, the day of the election, nearly 250 people were killed.\(^{363}\) The results of the 2010 election were nearly identical to the 2009 provincial elections, with the exception that Ayad Allawi’s secular Shi‘i coalition, al-Iraqiyah, gained more seats. Still, the elections revealed the highly fragmented nature of Iraq at that moment, since most voters voted along ethnosectarian lines.\(^{364}\)


\(^{362}\) ICG, Middle East Report No. 144, 9.


\(^{364}\) Ibid., 272.
THE EMERGENCE OF THE ISLAMIC STATE

The emergence of the Islamic State (IS) and its foothold in Iraq, which continues until this day, is a complicated subject with many interweaving and complex factors. This section will focus on the emergence of IS in relation to Iraqi state actions and key regional events, such as the Arab Spring and the civil war in Syria. The development of IS is a study within itself, so in order to keep the focus on IS within Iraq, this section will necessarily ignore other details.

The U.S. troop withdrawal and weaknesses in the ISF

In November of 2008, the Council of Representatives (CoR) adopted the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), which laid the groundwork for U.S. troop withdrawal in 2011. The SOFA stipulated that the last of the U.S. troops would leave Iraq by the end of 2011 and that, in the meantime, there would be a gradual shift of power to the ISF.\(^{365}\) On 1 September 2010, U.S. President Barack Obama declared that the U.S. combat mission in Iraq was over.\(^{366}\) Once the U.S. troops withdrew, the ISF would no longer have access to the U.S.’s intelligence apparatus nor U.S. air support in the fight against the extremist elements, mainly AQI. Since the end of the civil war, groups such as

\(^{365}\) Ibid., 259. The exact terms of the SOFA were in three parts: first, by 30 June 2009, all U.S. troops would withdraw from urban centers; second, by 31 December 2011, all U.S. troops would withdraw from Iraqi territory; and third, that U.S. troops would continue to aid the ISF in operations against threats to national security, such as AQI and “remnants of the former regime,” and would continue to provide training, equipment, and supplies.

\(^{366}\) ICG, Middle East Report No. 99, 1.
AQI had posed the biggest threat to Iraq’s stability and security and it was unclear at the time of the U.S. withdrawal whether or not the ISF would be able to handle the fight against them.\textsuperscript{367}

The ISF was plagued with problems. From the beginning, its ranks had been filled with largely inexperienced recruits. The de-Ba‘thification order discussed in the previous chapter wiped out an entire echelon of mid-level military personnel who had experience.\textsuperscript{368} Further, Maliki seemed more interested in cultivating armed forces that were loyal to him than a skilled and seasoned military and he allowed oversight of the military to go by the wayside.\textsuperscript{369} Widespread corruption, distrust, and lack of cohesion throughout the security forces added to the growing list of problems.\textsuperscript{370} Major General Najim Abed al-Jabouri, quoted in an International Crisis Group report, noted that, “the ISF itself is the battleground in the larger communal struggle for power and survival. Middle Eastern concepts of civil-military relations are fundamentally different than Western concepts.”\textsuperscript{371}

\textit{Sunni grievances}

Just one day after the last U.S. troops left Iraqi territory, accusations emerged that the Vice President, Tariq al-Hashimi, a Sunni Arab, was running a “death squad” through his bodyguards. Maliki was in Washington, D.C. when he received the news of this supposed treason, though critics of

\textsuperscript{367} Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 279.
\textsuperscript{368} ICG, Middle East Report No. 99, 17.
\textsuperscript{369} Ibid., ii.
\textsuperscript{370} Ibid., 34. The ISF was notorious for the phenomenon known as the \textit{fidbāiyeen} (“those who exist in a void”) or \textit{tayyarāb} (“those who fly in and out”). These were “ghost soldiers,” or personnel that were on Iraqi state payroll but who either did not actually exist, or only showed up intermittently or on payday. This severely undercut a sense of coherence among ISF units.
\textsuperscript{371} Quoted in ICG, Middle East Report No. 99, 18.
Maliki thought that this was likely a conspiracy of his own doing to further consolidate his power and push any remaining Sunnis out of high-ranking positions.\textsuperscript{372} Hashimi fled the country and was tried in absentia and sentenced to death.\textsuperscript{373} In a \textit{New York Times} article, a Sunni Arab from Baghdad was quoted as saying, “Why are they only targeting Hashimi? Why don’t they target Sadr or the Mahdi Army?”\textsuperscript{374} This man’s comments reflect the anger and suspicion felt among many Sunni Arabs in Iraq that Maliki did not have the country’s best interest in mind, but rather, was only interested in growing his own personal (and thus also Shi‘i) power.

Then, just over a year later, the bodyguards of another prominent Sunni minister, Rafi al-Essawi, were arrested on terrorism charges. Again, Essawi vehemently denied the charges that he or his bodyguards were involved in any sort of nefarious plot against the Iraqi state. About 2,000 Sunni Arabs, mostly in Anbar, took to the streets in protest with the belief that Maliki was purposefully targeting Sunni Arabs and feared that if he went unchecked, the attacks would not stop.\textsuperscript{375} In 2013, when the protests continued to grow, state-led violent repression began. On 23 April 2013, an ISF raid of a protest camp in Hawijah in Kirkuk killed more than fifty people and injured 110. This moment

\begin{flushright}


\textsuperscript{375} Adnan, “Arrest of a Sunni Minister’s Bodyguards Prompts Protests in Iraq,” \textit{The New York Times}.
\end{flushright}
galvanized opposition into violence. By May of the same year, political violence had grown exponentially, matching the violence of the civil war of 2006 to 2007.\textsuperscript{376}

\textit{The Syrian civil war and the move into Iraq}

In late 2010, the Arab Spring broke out in Tunisia and spread to Syria on 20 March 2011. Due to the brutal response by the Assad regime, the initially peaceful protests rapidly devolved into violence and eventually, into a bloody civil war that is still raging today. One of the key factions that emerged in the first months of the civil war was the group of extremist Sunni jihadists from abroad, specifically Jabhat Nusra, an al-Qa’ida-affiliated group, and the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). These combined forces quickly gained territory in Syria and were joined by former Ba’thists from Iraq and other Sunni Arab dissidents from Iraq. Once it gained a stronghold in Syria, the ISI attacked what it referred to as the “Sykes-Picot border,” and began its move into Iraq. Soon after, ISI renamed itself the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).\textsuperscript{377} The spread of the Arab Spring to Iraq occurred just as U.S. troops were preparing for their December withdrawal and as discussed earlier, the ISF was ill prepared for what was to come.\textsuperscript{378}

As the ISI spread across the borders between the two countries, it began to network with Sunni tribes in the west of Iraq. As noted in an ICG report, ISI “reactivated the long dormant” tribal ties in the Anbar, Ninawa, and Dokuk wilayat, capitalizing upon Sunni anger and disillusionment

\textsuperscript{376} ICG, Middle East Report No. 144, i–1.  
\textsuperscript{378} Marr, The Modern History of Iraq, 278–9.
with the Maliki government to draw recruits.\textsuperscript{379} Unemployed, young, Sunni Arab men became a key demographic for the recruitment efforts. About 500 prisoners from Abu Ghraib and another Baghdad-area prison, freed by ISIS, also added to their ranks.\textsuperscript{380} Many of the ISI fighters who went to Syria were originally from AQI. However, ISIS’ violent strategies—beheadings, rape, and other terrorist tactics—led to al-Qa’ida itself disowning it.\textsuperscript{381}

In 2014, ISIS began to make significant incursions into Iraqi territory. By 10 June 2014, ISIS had gained control over Mosul’s airport, police stations, and central bank. ISIS fighters took control over the prison in Mosul and killed 670 Shi’i inmates. About 500,000 of Mosul’s 1.8 million people fled the city. The same day on which ISIS gained control over key positions in Mosul, the ISF fell apart. 30,000 ISF troops were helpless against a mere 1,500 ISIS fighters. On 11 June 2013, ISIS took control of Tikrit and Camp Speicher, where they killed 1,700 Shi’i military cadets. The next day, they entered the \textit{wilayat} of Salah al-Din and Diyalah, moving towards Kirkuk. On 13 June, the same day that \textit{peshmerga} forces took control of Kirkuk, ISIS reached the outskirts of the sacred Shi’i shrine city of Samarra. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the influential Shi’i cleric, issued a fatwa for the defense of Baghdad and other sacred Shi’i sites, but the popular defense against ISIS was insufficient. On 29 June 2014, in Mosul, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISIS, declared the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate, with himself as Caliph, adopting the name “al-Dawlah al-Islamiyyah,” or the Islamic State.\textsuperscript{382}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{379} ICG, Middle East Report No. 144, 13.
\item \textsuperscript{380} Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 284.
\item \textsuperscript{381} Isakhan, “Conclusion,” \textit{The Legacy of Iraq}, 232–3.
\item \textsuperscript{382} Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 289–90.
\end{itemize}
Conclusion
My primary goal in piecing together this puzzle was to create a cohesive picture of the history of Sunni and Shi‘i Arab identities within the framework of the modern state of Iraq. This is based on the crucial understanding that communal identities are not rigid and unchanging phenomena, but rather, historical ones that change over time in accordance to social, political, and economic contexts, often related to the state. This thesis has traced four main periods of political history in Iraq. In each period, state- and (especially after 2003) non-state-led violence helped shape and harden the group identities of Sunni and Shi‘i Iraqis alike.

During the period from the mid- to late-nineteenth century up to Saddam Hussein’s rise as president in 1979, there were many changes in the formal political makeup of the state. However, the level of group discrimination and/or violence remained fairly static throughout this period. At this point in time, political discrimination against Shi‘i Arabs was passively and actively punished by the Sunni Arab elite in Iraq against the Shi‘i Arabs of Iraq.383 This discrimination was primarily in the form of exclusion from governance and key decision-making positions, but it did not amount to sustained group violence against Shi‘is or express itself in violence between these two groups. The end of the Hashemite Dynasty came at the same time as the rise of a military-political machine, in which the power and control over the state often lay with the armed forces. This was the period in which coups were commonplace and grabs for power left Iraq in a period of confusion and politically-motivated violence. The leaders, still, were primarily Sunni Arabs.

383. The Sunni Arab elite were not always of Iraq since the Ottomans ruled from Istanbul and the British appointed several outsiders.
Under Saddam Hussein Iraq became a state ruled by a military and authoritarian dictatorship. However, Saddam Hussein’s state, including the top echelons of the Ba’th Party and the military, as well as the dictator’s group of Tikriti confidants, continued to be a Sunni-dominated affair. The wars with Iran and Kuwait served as catalysts for moments of state-led, large-scale and identity-based violence against civilians: first, during the Iran-Iraq War, the use of chemical weapons on civilian populations primarily in the north of Iraq in Kurdistan (including but not limited to the Anfal Campaign, a genocidal-like massacre of Iraqi Kurds), and second, the violent repression of Shi’i Arabs during the 1991 uprisings that spread from Basrah to fourteen out of the country’s eighteen wilayat. This stage is therefore characterized by the first use of large-scale, state-led and identity-based violence against civilians.

The collapse of the regime and the misguided nation-building project that followed led to a very different stage in group discrimination and violence in Iraq. The new government of American creation excluded virtually all Sunni Arabs from most political and civic positions of power, to a large extent as the result of the almost immediate decisions to disband the Ba’th Party and the military. The result of this was the rise of militias, both Sunni and Shi’i, vying for power and control. This created a stage of violence characterized by the violence by non-state actors against civilians. Whereas in the previous stage the perpetrators of violence against civilians had consisted of a singular, state-led entity, the perpetrators of such violence during this stage were to a large extent militia formed by former civilians, now mobilized by a wide-range of Sunni and Shi’i politico-religious leaders to attack civilians of the opposite identity group in a struggle to dominate the new state under Coalition auspices. This
kind of violence was perpetrated by al-Qa’ida (which soon became al-Qa’ida in Iraq, or AQI), Muqtada al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army, and other groups, such as the Badr Organization.

One might visualize the difference as follows. During the era of Saddam, a person could step outside of his/her house and see the armed forces targeted his/her village, perhaps a known Kurdish peshmerga-stronghold or, later, a Shi’i community. The perpetrator was the state and no other actor. In the post-Saddam era, someone could wear a rigged vest under the layers of their abaya and detonate it in the market. In this case, the perpetrator, probably an individual deployed by a militia or armed front trying to weaken the state in a bid for power, intended maximum impact on civilians and used this violence towards a political goal. These attacks were not the air campaigns and scorched earth tactics of Saddam, but rather suicide bombings and improvised explosive devices (IEDs), which are much more difficult to detect and impossible to avoid. During this period, it can be argued that while the attacks were against civilians, they constituted a strategic move to weaken the state or the occupying power, being the U.S. During the “civil war,” which began in earnest in 2006, this shifted further. It was far less likely that the intent of an attack on civilians was to weaken the state. The street-by-street fighting in sectarian neighborhoods in Baghdad was not focused on dominating the state but had evolved into civilian-on-civilian communal violence, with limited, local, and sometimes very intimate motivations and at other times, no rationale at all. This level of violence was no longer mainly about the state.

In the months leading up to the 2009 provincial elections, Nuri al-Maliki’s rule as Prime Minister became increasingly autocratic. He increased de-Ba’thification efforts that targeted the underlying structures of the Party and sought to exclude Sunni Arabs from government positions and
the military. Maliki assembled a militia that took orders from him and him only and deployed them against Sunni civilians in the streets, killing thousands of protestors. In retaliation, many of the same groups that emerged during the Sunni insurgency reemerged angry and violent. In this time, AQI morphed into the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) and many of its fighters went to Syria during the outbreak of its civil war, where it recruited many other Sunni jihadists. These fighters crossed back into Iraq and unleashed a new period of non-state-led communal violence against Iraqis, though somewhat indiscriminately, considering they attacked both Sunnis and Shi‘is. The (then-called) Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) also developed into a powerful insurgent movement, seizing huge swaths of land and quickly creeping in on Baghdad. This chapter ends with the moment at which Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, ISIS’s leader, speaking in a mosque in Mosul in 2014, declared the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate with himself as Caliph. ISIS fighters crossing the Syrian border in the march towards Mosul, in a moment hawked by the group into a spectacle, claimed the destruction of the “Sykes-Picot border.”

The years of identity-based violence has led to a “hardening” of these group identities, inextricably tying them to the communal memory of these periods of violence and/or discrimination. This thesis has analyzed the political contexts that shaped Shi‘i and Sunni group identities; documenting Iraqis’ personal experiences and self-views would require the writing of another thesis. However, it is worth ending on this note: in his novel, The Corpse Washer, Sinan Antoon brilliantly juxtaposes the cosmopolitan atmosphere and relative ease of everyday life, even under Saddam, and the

grim life after the U.S. invasion, when a seemingly never-ending stream of bodies piled into the protagonist, Jawad’s morgue that he inherited from his father to be washed. Although the book is fictional, the hardening of Sunni and Shi’i identities lies at the very core of the book. Antoon remarks how,

One of the few sources of joy for me during these short visits [to Iraq] were the encounters with Iraqis who had read my novels and were moved by them. These were novels I had written from afar, and through them, I tried to grapple with the painful disintegration of an entire country and the destruction of its social fabric.

Donald L. Donham, in his article “Staring at Suffering,” reflects on the hardening of group identities in the wake of violence perpetrated against civilians because of their group identities. He writes how the perceptions of the past are altered in the wake of violence against civilians:

This tendency to read the present (after violence) into the past necessarily overemphasizes and overplays the role of hatred of the other as an explanation of violence. Nothing “primordializes” identity more efficiently than the personal experience of violence, especially violence that appears to be directed at one’s group as a group.

In other words, identity-based violence has the ability to create hardened political identities and destroy the communally-held memories of coexistence and tolerance. In tracing the history of Sunni and Shi’i group identities, this thesis attempts to point to a future that draws inspiration from earlier times in breaking down these hardened identities.


Bibliography


