# The Rise of Muqtada al-Sadr:

*A study on the insertion of one of Iraqi most influential politicians*

Joost Hendrikse

S1486977

Master Middle Eastern Studies

Leiden University

January 2021

Supervisor:

Dr. Marina Calculli

Table of contents:

# Chapter I

## I.I Introduction

In April 2004, shortly after the Friday prayer, followers of Muqtada al-Sadr descended the streets of Iraq. They demanded a free Iraq and the execution of Saddam Hussein and chanted: 'Muqtada, Muqtada' while holding portraits of Muqtada al-Sadr with the title: 'Their power beneath your feet'. The protests escalated in August, when protesters and Spanish troops clashed in the holy city of Najaf. At least 20 protesters were killed and over a hundred injured. Also in Bagdad and other, predominantly Shia cities in the South of Iraq, protests and gunfights erupted.[1] With the outbreak of the protests, tensions between the US-led coalition forces and the Shia movement of Muqtada al-Sadr reached its boiling point. The outbreak of the protests marked the beginning of an intense conflict which would hold Iraq's society and politics in its grip in the upcoming years. These events also marked the rise of the relatively unknown and young Muqtada al-Sadr as a politician and military leader, who embodied the hope of a fragmented Shia population to gain
power.

The removal of Saddam Hussein from office in 2003, created a power vacuum that sparked competition amongst different religious and ethnic factions and parties. Since 1930, tensions between the nationalistic government and Shia factions which contested Arab nationalism, meant that the Shia population of Iraq, which make up around 60% of the entire population, did not reach high levels of control or power within the republic. With the start of Ba'athist rule under Hussein, the Shi'ites were politically and economically further marginalized and subordinated. Although different Shi'ite parties and movements tried to take matters into their own hands, they never succeeded in overthrowing the regime or to maintain high levels of political power in Iraq. Moreover, the absence of cooperation and the presence of rivalry between the different Shia parties and movements, and the executions of prominent Shi'ite figures by the Ba'ath regime further weakened their vigour. Therefore, an opportunity to establish Shia power in Iraq needed to come from external factors. This opportunity arrived in

[1] Unknown, "Iraq protests end in 20 deaths," *BBC News*, April 4, 2004. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3597887.stm & Yahya Al Kubaisi, "The Double Game: The Sadr Strategy in Iraq," *Al-Jazeera centre for studies*, March 13, 2013. https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2013/03/201331384858751104.html

the aftermath of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. The US-led coalition forces quickly occupied Iraq and removed Ba'ath rule. However, the coalition forces lacked a plan to insert a new and sustainable government. Various parties and movements sought to take advantage of this power. For the Shia, the young and ambiguous Muqtada al-Sadr captured the spotlight. While the Shi'ites were highly fragmented in the run-up to 2003, al-Sadr managed to get widespread support from the Shia population for his mission to take power and give Iraq back to its Shi'ite inhabitants.

This research focuses on the quick rise of Muqtada al-Sadr as a politician and military leader in Iraq. It aims to answer the research question:

*What explains the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr after the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq?*

This question is particularly interesting due to different factors. As mentioned, al-Sadr was relatively unknown before the outbreak of the Iraq war. He was young, politically inexperienced and did not hold a high clerical rank. Additionally, In the run-up to 2003, the Shia population was characterized as being highly fragmented with different Shi'ite parties fighting each other. Even though these ingredients did not seem favourable, Al-Sadr managed to attract large-scale support among the Shi'ites to establish his powerful Sadrist movement and Mahdi Army, which was able to successfully oppose the US-led coalition forces and other political and military parties in Iraq. Besides, the fragmentation and the existence of other prominent figures among the Shia, Muqtada al-Sadr ascent to power took not just his rivals, but also the Shia elite by surprise.

The research question contains two different questions which benefit the analysis of al-Sadr's rise to power. Firstly, by asking what explains the rise of al-Sadr, the overall phenomenon of his rise can be analysed. This includes the analysis of different factors that could explain the rise to power by al-Sadr after 2003. Secondly, by analysing what al-Sadr's rise to power could explain, the question of how he managed to execute this can be answered as well. As the analyses of the what question implicates the analyses of the factors which provided al-Sadr to seize power.

The introduction is structured into five parts. Firstly, it discusses the relevance of this research. Secondly, the family background of Muqtada al-Sadr is being discussed. This provides background information that benefits the later analysis of al-Sadr's rise to power. Thirdly, the definitions which are used throughout this research are clarified. Fourthly, the

methodology adopted to construct this research is explained. Lastly, the outline of this thesis will be presented

## I.II Relevance

In the existing academic and non-academic literature which concentrates on the developments in Iraq, the majority of literature is written about the Iraq war and its aftermath. The lion's share of this literature is written through a lens of international relations, political violence, sectarianism and (military) intelligence.[2] Most often, scholars emphasize the operations of the US-led coalition forces and its results. Furthermore, a large body of literature focuses on how the political landscape of Iraq altered after 2003, with the accent on the contrast between Hussein's regime and Iraq's society during and after the occupation. However, while the majority of researches focuses on the period after 2003, little is written about Muqtada al-Sadr specifically. When he, his movement, or his militia is mentioned, it is mostly very briefly or combined with the Shia movement as a whole. Because of this, al-Sadr's importance within Iraq's society and politics is buried underneath the extensive number of different events and changes of other figures, parties and, movements. Moreover, the small amount of literature that concentrates on al-Sadr, analyses his actions and ideology from the moment he became an influential figure in Iraq. While this provides us with a good insight of al-Sadr in the spotlights, it fails to deliver a coherent story of al-Sadr before and after 2003. His popularity did not erupt suddenly so what explains the rise of al-Sadr after the US-led invasion? This research bridges the existing gap by analysing al-Sadr before and after 2003 to provide an overall picture of the rise of al-Sadr in Iraq and answer the research question: What explains the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr after the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq?

[2] For example: Dina Rizk Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime: Soldiering, Martyrdom, and Remembrance*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), Frederic M. Wehrey, *The Iraq Effect: The Middle East After the Iraq War*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2010), Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) & Chad C. Serena, *A Revolution in Military Adaptation: The US Army in the Iraq War*, (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2011).

## I.III Muqtada al-Sadr's Family Background

In order to analyse the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr after 2003 and the factors which have contributed to his rise, it is important to first discuss his family history. Muqtada comes from a long lineage of political activist Shi'ite clerics who were involved in Iraqi politics and religious activities since the beginning of the Republic of Iraq.

After the coup d'état in 1958, which changed Iraq from a kingdom to a republic, political turmoil began. General Abd al-Karim Qasim took power and started to divide the nation against secularist lines and denounced religious establishments because they could pose an obstacle to the new era of modernization in Iraq.[3] The Shi'ite establishment saw this as a threat to Islam as a whole and Shi'ism in Iraq in particular. Moreover, the influence of communism in Iraq became more apparent, increasing the need for the Shi'ites to counter these developments by organizing a political and religious movement.[4] However, the Shi'ite establishment, also called *al-hawza al-'ilmiyya* (The religious academy) was divided into two camps. One camp of traditional scholars advocated for political detachment and ignorance, while another camp of scholars advocated for political activism.[5] The Grand Ayatollah Muhammed Baqir al-Sadr, the father-in-law of Muqtada al-Sadr, was a young scholar and no official member of the *al-hawza al-'ilmiyya*, he quickly made name for himself among the Shia population by spreading his way of thought through editorials in the only approved Shi'ite paper and by publishing his philosophical work.[6] In his works, al-Sadr expressed critique on communism, materialism and the secular forces. Baqir al-Sadr was not only a thorn in the side of the Iraqi regime by publishing his critique, but he also established the Da'wa party together with other clerics such as Mahdi al-Hakim and al-Rifa'i. With the establishment of the Da'wa party, al-Sadr had an organization to fight the corrupt regime, indoctrinate revolutionaries, and establish an Islamic state.[7]

Although the exact role of al-Sadr within the Da'wa party since its establishment remains unclear, different scholars demonstrated that the learnings and line of thought of Baqir al-Sadr outlined the activities of the party.[8] With the establishment of the Da'wa Party,

---

[3] Talib. M. Aziz, "The Role of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr in Shi'i Political Activism in Iraq from 1958 to 1980," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 2 (May 1993): 208.
[4] Ranj Alaaldin," The Islamic Da'wa Party and the Mobilization of Iraq's Shi'i Community, 1958–1965, " *The Middle East Journal* 71, no. 1 (Winter 2017): 47.
[5] Aziz, "The Role," 208.
[6] In: Al-adwa' (montly paper) and Falsafatuna (own work): Aziz, "The Role," 208.
[7] Ibid, 209.
[8] This statement is made in: Rodger Shanahan, "Shia political development in Iraq: the case of the

the split between traditional Shi'ite clerics and the new group of *Mujtahids* that wanted to change the future of Shi'ism and their marginalization in Iraq became more clear.[9] Traditional Shi'ism is based around the *Hawza* and did not interfere with politics or social issues.[10] In contrast, the Da'wa Party and its followers saw the political course of Iraq and its social changes since the coup d'état as a threat for Shi'ism and its population. Because of this, the party tried to achieve their goal of Islamic dominance in Iraq through political and social involvement. Although this course of action caused a troubled relationship with the traditional clerics, the popularity of the Da'wa Party and al-Sadr increased in the years following its establishment.[11] Especially, the lower Shi'ite classes and youth saw the ideologies and goals of the party as a way to climb the social and economic ladder. To achieve a great following, the charismatic al-Sadr portrayed himself as an ordinary Shi'ite, created new religious universities that opened their doors for students coming from the lower classes, and made Shi'ism more appealing to the masses by handing out books and making religious texts easier to read.[12]

Since the establishment of the Da'wa Party, the popularity and support among the Shia population grew rapidly, the party was allowed to organize gatherings, religious festivals, and publish newspapers which contributed to the enhancement of followers. As scholar Ranj Alaaldin argues in his work, the creation of the Da'wa Party marked the beginning of a new era in which the Shia population was enabled to operate collectively in trying to reach their goals. Furthermore, with the establishment of this new movement, the Shi'ites became more politicized and as argued, more relevant within Iraq's society.[13]

Nevertheless, the popularity of al-Sadr and the Da'wa Party in particular, in combination with the Ba'ath party's rise to power in 1968, initiated a battle among sectarian lines in the upcoming decades. The Ba'ath party saw the political activism of the Shia population, most notably through al-Sadr and the Da'wa party, as a threat to the stability of the regime. From 1968 onwards, Shia newspapers and educational institutions were shut down. The sanctions were being followed by a hunt on Da'wa members, causing the Da'wa

---

Islamic Dawa Party," Third World Quarterly 25, no. 5 (July 2004) Leslie Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35, no. 2 (February 2012), Kenneth Katzman, *Iraq: Post-Saddam Governance and Security,* (New York: Nova Sciene Publishers, 2009), Aziz, "The Role," & Alaaldin, "The Islamic Da'wa Party,". The *hawza* are religious seminars constituted by Grand Ayatollahs.

[9] Alaaldin, "The Islamic Da'wa Party" 50. A *Mujtahid* is someone who exercises independent reasoning in the interpretation of Islamic law, a *Mujtahid* is mostly seen as an jurist: John Esposito, *Mujtahid,* The Oxford Dictionary of Islam, September 1, 2004.

[10] Alaaldin, "The Islamic Da'wa Party," 51.

[11] Shanahan, "Shia," 945.

[12] Alaaldin, "The Islamic Da'wa Party," 56.

[13] Ibid, 64.

party to marginalize due to the long imprisonment of their members. During the 1970s the prosecution and imprisonment of Da'wa members and other political activists continued and became more intense, ultimately leading to the execution of high ranking members of the Da'wa Party.[14] Although Muhammed Baqir al-Sadr's role in the Da'wa party was unclear, the Ba'ath regime saw him as the leader of the party and exerted pressure on him to dismantle the movement.[15] Yet, tensions only started to reach its boiling point in 1979 when the revolution in Iran took place, causing the country's transition into an Islamic Shi'ite republic. Al-Sadr saw the Iranian revolution as the perfect opportunity to change Iraq into an Islamic state. Al-Sadr started to praise the people in Iran in his sermons, cooperated with Grand-Ayatollah Khomeini, and published six essays where he outlined the structure and foundation of the Islamic state. But most notably, al-Sadr issued a *fatwa* that prohibited Muslims to join the Ba'ath party or institutions linked to the party.[16] The Ba'ath regime feared the spreading of the Iranian revolution among Iraq's population and started to enhance the repression of the Shia community. Thousands of Da'wa members were being imprisoned or executed and al-Sadr was kept under house arrest.[17] However, against the rules of his house arrest, al-Sadr kept sending messages to his followers saying they need to resist the regime in any way possible.[18] Al-Sadr's resistance against the regime and his activism to overthrow the government could no longer be tolerated by the Ba'ath party. In April 1980, al-Sadr and his sister were being detained in Bagdad and executed.[19] In the aftermath of the al-Sadr's execution, thousands of Da'wa members fled to Iran in fear of prosecution in Iraq. In combination with the loss of its leadership, the power of the party within Iraq's society started to shrink rapidly.[20]

Noteworthy, after his execution, al-Sadr was given the powerful title of martyr by his followers. The title of martyr in Shi'ism is used as a way to portray and propagate the pursuing of religious and even political beliefs, mostly with dead as its consequence.[21] The title of martyr which was given to al-Sadr after his death resulted in the continuation of his activism and line of thought. If not, al-Sadr's efforts and dead would be meaningless for the

[14] Shanahan, "Shia," 945. & Aziz, "The Role," 212.
[15] Muhammed Baqir al-Sadr was detained two times, in 1973 and 1977, but was both times quickly released due to the fear of political consequences and mass protests: Aziz, "The Role,".
[16] Aziz, "The Role," 215.
[17] Ibid, 216.
[18] Ibid, 217.
[19] Shanahan, "Shia," 946. & Aziz, "The Role," 218.
[20] Aziz, "The Role," 218.
[21] David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 53.

future of Shi'ism.[22]

Although Muhammed Baqir al-Sadr was executed and his Da'wa party marginalized, the seed of resistance against the Ba'athist in power had been planted. In the years after 1980, a small but motivated group of Da'wa members continued to resist the regime, mostly through the use of violence. Reports claim that the party which was mostly constructed by members who flew to Tehran, Damascus, and London organised different (unsuccessful) assassination attempts on prominent Ba'ath figures and Saddam Hussein in 1982 and 1987, although these claims were never verified.[23] The further marginalization of the Da'wa in the 1980s was not only caused by the suppression of the Ba'ath regime but also caused by the activities within the Shia camp. In 1982 the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) was formed by the two brothers Sayyid Mohammed Baqir al-Hakimi and Sayyid Abdul Azis al-Hakimi. The SCIRI was founded on the objective to remove Ba'ath dominance and establish an Islamic state in Iraq. The SCIRI is a political umbrella organization that had close ties with the Iranian Khomeini government and included not only Shi'ite parties such as the Da'wa party but also Sunni and Kurdish parties and scholars.[24] The growth in popularity of the SCIRI was not only the result of the inclusion of all these different religious and political parties, but they also profited from the Iran-Iraq war which enhanced the aversion to Hussein and the Ba'ath regime.[25] Even though the Da'wa party became a part of the SCIRI, the relationship between the two organizations was difficult. The SCIRI argued that power within their advertised Islamic state should be held by a group of Shi'ite clerics ('Ulama) who will operate along the lines set out by Grand Ayatollah Khomeini in constructing an Islamic state. Contrary, the lion's share of members of the Da'wa party followed the philosophy of Baqir al-Sadr and placed the power of the state into the hands of the Shia community.[26] The disagreement about how the Islamic revolution and the Iraqi state should be governed not only side-lined the Da'wa party from influence in the SCIRI but also caused organizational difficulties within the party itself. Members who emphasized with the philosophy of the SCIRI tried to convince other members which, resulted in their removal from the party.[27] This contributed to an even less decisively and influential Da'wa party.

---

[22] Shi'ite martyrs are referred to as figures of which their heritage should be continued: David Cook, Martyrdom in Islam, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[23] Shanahan, "Shia," 946.
[24] Hamid al-Bayati, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: An Insider's Account of the Iraqi Opposition to Saddam*, (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2014), 21.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Shanahan, "Shia," 947.
[27] Ibid, 948.

In summary, with the execution of Baqir al-Sadr and the repression and prosecution of Da'wa members, Hussein's Ba'ath party was partly successful in marginalizing the Shia population in the 1980s. Because the Shia community was on the back-foot regarding political and social influence in Iraq, the SCIRI was established and their popularity became the new threat to the dominance of the Ba'ath party among Iraq's population. Moreover, the long-lasting Iran-Iraq war, which ended in 1988 with a ceasefire, had demoralized Iraq's soldiers and population.[28] Resistance against the regime was thriving, particularly from the Shia community.[29] Hussein needed a plan to stop the growing Shi'ite resistance and came up with Muhammed Muhammed Sadiq al-Sadr.

The relatively unknown Shi'ite cleric Muhammed Muhammed Sadiq al-Sadr was the cousin of Baqir al-Sadr and could accommodate Hussein by marginalizing and silencing the Shia population.[30] Baqir al-Sadr was trained by the traditional clergy and kept the title of *Marja'* 'a source of following' in Shi'ism.[31] Although Sadiq al-Sadr avoided attention and kept himself under the radar of the Iraqi regime, Hussein saw him as the perfect candidate to incorporate into his governmental apparatus. The bloodline of Sadiq al-Sadr and his leading role within the Shia community could help to restrain Shi'ite activism against the Ba'ath regime. By cooperating with Sadiq al-Sadr, Hussein could potentially suppress the displeasure of the Shia community.[32] Al-Sadr reacted positively to Hussein's offer of cooperation and started to win other members of the Ba'ath party for him by propagating nationalism. With state support, Sadiq al-Sadr managed to acquire control over Shi'ite schools, courts and social institutions.[33] Although this seemed beneficial for both Hussein and al-Sadr, their collaboration started to become more problematic during the late 1990s. In the aftermath of the Iraqi annexation of Kuwait, the regime was unable to provide basic services to its population, allowing al-Sadr to enhance his popularity among the population. Sadiq al-Sadr took over basic services and established different charity institutions in mostly poor Shi'ite areas. Additionally, the cleric became increasingly confrontational and started to give the Shi'ites a voice by advocating Islam, claiming political and religious authority at forbidden

[28] Williamson Murray, *The Iran-Iraq War: A Military and Strategic History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 338.
[29] Because the Shia community sympathized with Iranian Shi'ite leader Khomeini.
[30] Eli Berman, *Radical, Religious, and Violent: The New Economics of Terrorism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 56.
[31] Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 138.
[32] Ibid, 139.
[33] Hussein blamed the troubles of the Iraqi Shia on the Shi'ite leaders outside Iraq: Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 138.

Friday sermons, and assembling secret underground Shia movements.[34] Hussein was forced to stop Sadiq al-Sadr from creating a new wave of Shia resistance and confronted him with his disobedience. However, al-Sadr did not listen and continued to give his sermons in which he undermined the power of the Iraqi regime. In 1999, Sadiq al-Sadr was shot dead in his car alongside two of his sons when he left one of the Friday prayers, presumably by orders of Hussein.[35]

When news of the execution of al-Sadr spread, people took the streets and demanded the reassignment of Saddam Hussein. While the protests were quickly and brutally forced down, it showed that the Shia community under the leadership of Sadiq al-Sadr had regained their hope and activism after the execution of Baqir al-Sadr and their marginalization in the 1980s and 1990s, As well as his Baqir al-Sadr, Sadiq al-Sadr was given the powerful title of martyr, giving him legendary status.[36] Although Hussein managed to repress resistance and activism from the Shi'ite community throughout his years in power, the developments of the Shi'ite community, especially that of the al-Sadr family, in the decades dominated by the Ba'ath regime, could arguably be seen as beneficial for the later leader Muqtada al-Sadr in becoming one of the most influential figures in Iraq after 2003. As mentioned above, his father and father in law unintentionally provided Muqtada with their legacy and resources which seemed to benefit his enhancement of power in Iraq.

## I.IV Definitions

In the existing literature, the Mahdi Army of Muqtada al-Sadr is often referred to as a militia, paramilitary organization, insurgency, and even a counterinsurgency. Although these definitions have similar meanings, it is important to discuss which definition is going to be used throughout this thesis. Moreover, by analysing the literature that focuses on militias as a whole and the Mahdi Army in particular, a description of this phenomenon can be made.

Amar Taha argues that the definition which is mostly used to describe the Mahdi Army, namely that of a paramilitary organization, does not suit al-Sadr's armed force. Although the Mahdi Army clashed with the Iraqi government and US-led forces, they were not just a group of armed actors that illegally commit violence against civilians in service or

[34] Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 143.
[35] Ibid. & Berman, *Economics of Terrorism*, 56.
[36] Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 142.

state interest, as the definition of paramilitary organizations describes.[37] Contrary, the Mahdi Army provided public services such as security, health services and charity. Additionally, the Mahdi Army did not only fight against the Iraqi government and US-led coalition forces but were strongly characterised by its cooperation with its enemies, depending on political fluctuations.[38] Furthermore, Amar Taha argues that paramilitary organizations are mostly constructed through a top-down mechanism wherein a leader, mostly a political leader, recruits soldiers and gunmen to fight for certain goals. In the case of the Mahdi Army, the organization is created through a bottom-up mechanism where actors outside the state where more important in its establishment.[39] The soldiers of the Mahdi Army saw themselves not as a militia, but as and army, with the goal to establishing a shadow government with its own institutions. Furthermore, the soldiers saw themselves as the defenders of Iraq which could only be done through the use of an army.[40] Although this was partially true because they had ministries and even an embassy, Cockburn and Taha argue that the Mahdi Army should be defined as a militia instead of an army.[41] The definition of a militia is described in the Encyclopædia Britannica as follows: Militia, the military organization of citizens with limited military training, which is available for emergency service, usually for local defence.[42] Because the militants of the Mahdi Army had no noteworthy military experience and did only rule over specific locations, such as Najaf, Sadr City, and other smaller cities and villages, Taha argues that the definition of militia when referring to Al-Sadr's armed group fits its purpose and actions best.[43] In different (military) reports, the term militia is also mostly used to refer to the Mahdi Army.[44] Because of the reasons which are mentioned above, when referring to Muqtada al-Sadr's armed group, the Mahdi Army, I will use the term militia in this thesis.

---

[37] Amir Taha, "Turning ex-combatants into Sadrist: explaining the emergence of the Mahdi Army," *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 3, (May 2019): 358.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid, 359.
[40] Ibid, 365.
[41] Ibid, 369 & Patrick Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr and the Fall of Iraq*, (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2008), 7.
[42] "Militia," Encyclopædia Britannica Online, Accessed October 10, 2020. https://www.britannica.com/topic/militia.
[43] Taha, "Turning ex-combatants into Sadrist," 369.
[44] In for example: International Crisis Group. "Iraq's Civil War, the Sadrists, and the Surge," Middle East Report No. 72. Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2008. https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/iraq-s-civil-war-sadrists-and-surge, Marissa Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12: The Fragmentation of the Sadrist movement," *Institute for the Study of War* (2009) & The Iraq Study Group, "The Iraq Study Group Report," United States Institute for Peace (2008). https://www.usip.org/publications/2006/12/iraq-study-group-report.

Besides the term militia, there are no other definitions used throughout this thesis which need clarification.

## I.V Methodology

To make a clear and coherent analysis of the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr and to answer the research question: What explains the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr after the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq?, this thesis used the process-tracing method. The process-tracing method is used because it utilizes evidence from within a case to make inferences about causal explanations of that case. In other words, the method captures casual mechanisms for a specific outcome, in this case, the rise of al-Sadr in Iraq.[45]

To fully exploit the process-tracing method, a comparison between two periods was made to identify developments and factors which have contributed to the rise of al-Sadr. The first period runs from 1999 to 2003 and covers the years in which the Shi'ites were not represented due to the execution of Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr in 1999 and the house arrest of Muqtada al-Sadr. From 1999, the Shi'ites were further marginalized by the Ba'ath regime until 2003. The second period that has been analysed runs from 2003 to 2005. In 2003 the US-led coalition forces removed Ba'ath rule and pathed the way for different factions and political parties to gain power. From 2003 onwards, the Sadrist movement re-emerged with Muqtada al-Sadr as its leader and quickly seized power within Iraqi politics and society. The decision to end the second period at 2005 comes on the basis that in this year al-Sadr called on his militiamen to lay down their weapons, transforming his movement into a purely political force. The Mahdi Army was in decay and there were no prospects of restoring al-Sadr's military wing. The disarming of his militia marked the beginning of al-Sadr waning influence in Iraq's society and politics and simultaneously his loss of power as a politician and military leader.[46]

Nevertheless, using the process-tracing method on its own is not enough to fully analyse the rise of al-Sadr. For that reason, this research is built upon the process-tracing method in combination with content analyses. By combining these methods, the analysis of the rise of al-Sadr could be made more thoroughly. As explained by George and Bennet, the

[45] Andre Bennett & Jeffrey T. Checkel, "Process tracing From philosophical roots to best practices," in *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*, ed, Andrew Bennett & Jeffrey T. Checkel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 4,9.
[46] Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12,".

process-tracing method enables the researcher to make strong within case interferences about the causal process whereby outcomes are produced, which enables academic researchers to update the degree of confidence in the validity of a theorized causal mechanism.[47]

Although the description by George and Bennet gives an overall picture of the use of process-tracing, Beach and Pedersen argue that the method of process tracing can be divided into three different uses. By using one of these three different research purposes, which differ from each other depending on the research goals, the crafting of an explanation to the given case can be made more precise.[48] The three methods are theory-testing process-tracing, theory-building process-tracing, and explaining-outcome process-tracing, where scholars want to explain a certain puzzling historical outcome. As explained by the authors, the explaining-outcome process-tracing method tries to craft a sufficient explanation for a certain outcome. Instead of studying mechanisms that cause, for example, war (X), the analyses focus on explaining a particular outcome such as World War I.[49] Furthermore, by using this method, the resemblance of historical events through the use of a deductive path, which uses casual mechanisms to study case-specific outcomes, can be analysed more precisely.[50] Moreover, the authors argue that the explaining-outcome method has a case-centric ambition to identify certain mechanisms within the context of process-tracing, instead of a theory-based ambition to empirically test a certain theory by systematically looking at generalizable mechanisms.[51]

Because this research tried to identify why Muqtada al-Sadr quickly seized power after the US-led invasion and which factors have contributed to this, the explaining-outcome process-tracing method was most suitable within this research. By looking at specific factors in combination with their outcomes, I was able to determine which factor and to which grade this factor has contributed to its outcome. For example, the casual relationship between Muqtada al-Sadr's family background and his popularity. Throughout this research, I analysed certain aspects or factors through the explaining-outcome process-tracing method as follows. First, I analysed the outcome and looked for explanations for the given outcome in different sources. Secondly, if there was a coherent explanation for the given outcome, I tried to trace this explanation back to the casual connection related to the outcome. By doing so, I was able to determine which explanation contributed to its outcome. Moreover, by using this method

[47] Alexander Bennet and George Andrew, *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005): 224.
[48] Derek Beach and Rasmus Brun Pedersen, *Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013) Chapter 2: 9.
[49] Ibid, 11.
[50] Ibid, 20, 22.
[51] Ibid, 21.

the level of influence or importance of the explanation or factor could be analysed. This in combination with content analyses enabled me to make a clear and coherent comparison between the two time periods and analyse which events, factors, or developments contributed to Muqtada al-Sadr's rise to power.

In this research, content analysis is used to reinforce the process-tracing method. Although the term 'content analyses' almost speaks for itself, it is beneficial within this research to clarify the exact definition of content analysis and specify which form of content analysis is going to be used. As Kimberley A. Neuendorf argues in her content analysis guidebook: 'content analysis can briefly be defined as the systematic, objective, and quantitative analysis of message characteristics'.[52] Because the use of content analysis has rapidly expanded in academics in the last couple of years, there are multiple applications and interpretations constructed around the use of content analysis.[53] Although these different uses and interpretations differ from each other, the core of conducting content analysis remains the same. By systematic interpretation of words and media outlets, a certain pattern can be found and analysed. Within this research, critical content analyses will be used. Critical content analysis differs from other forms of content analysis because it focuses more on the qualitative method of interpreting messages and media outlets. Although there is a thin line between quantitative and qualitative content analyses because scholars are bound to their interpretation of numbers and dependent on their natural language, the use of critical content analyses suits this research better.[54] Within critical content analyses, the emphasis lies on the qualitative interpretation of the researcher to describe a certain phenomenon. Because this research uses different sources that do not overlap with each other, the use of critical content analysis is more suitable to analyse the different sources and from there, analyse the general or overlapping findings. Moreover, by conducting critical qualitative content analysis, a certain finding can support or deepen-out the process-tracing method.

## I.VI Chapter Overview

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter covered the introduction, literature review and methodology. In the following three chapters, factors and evidence for the quick rise of Muqtada al-Sadr in Iraq will be presented. The second chapter discusses the theoretical

[52] Kimberley A Neuendorf, *The Content Analysis Guidebook*, (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2017): 2.
[53] Ibid, 5.
[54] Ibid, 10.

framework of this research. The first part of the third chapter discusses the fragmentation and marginalization among Shi'ites from the beginning of Ba'ath rule followed by the discussion of Shi'ite resistance under Ba'ath rule. The last part of the third chapter focuses on the US-Led invasion of 2003 which led to a dramatic change in Iraq's society and politics. The fourth chapter continues to elaborate upon the US-Led invasion in 2003 and discusses the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr during the political power vacuum created by the invasion. It further analyses al-Sadr's underground networks, The Sadrist movement, his support, and mobilization concerning his rise in Iraq. The last part of the fourth chapter discusses al-Sadr's Mahdi Army. The last chapter will also discuss the concluding remarks.

# Chapter II: Theoretical Framework

To analyse the quick rise of Muqtada al-Sadr in Iraq after the US-led invasion in 2003, this chapter provides not only an overview of the ongoing discourse concerning rebel governance, the Sadrist movement and the Mahdi Army, it also outlines the theoretical framework that is going to be employed when analysing why Muqtada al-Sadr quickly seized power in Iraq after the US-led invasion of 2003.

## II.I Rebel Governance

In academic literature, the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr after the US-led occupation in 2003 is often referred to as a form of rebel governance. However, the term rebel governance is used as an umbrella wherein a wide variety of different developments of rebellion organisations are analysed. For this research purpose, it is important to clarify which exact form of rebel governance is being researched. By doing so, the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr, his Mahdi Army, and the Sadrist movement can be analysed more thoroughly. Moreover, by clarifying the form of rebel governance, it becomes clear which phenomenon is being analysed throughout this thesis.

The umbrella term rebel governance implies the establishment of governance by a rebel organisation within certain borders. This can be within state borders or social borders. Rebel governances mainly operate within recognised sovereign states where they challenge the dominance of the existing authority by seeking to enhance support for achieving their goals, mostly through the use of violence.[55]

As argued by Nelson Kasfir, a rebel movement can only be described as a rebel government when the movement meets three distinctive features. Firstly and most importantly, rebels should construct a firm base of support to achieve their goals. Although enhancing support does not necessarily mean that a certain social movement is a rebel government, support enables rebel governments to mobilize civilians, politically or militarily.[56] Secondly, rebels can only govern in areas they control. This means that the rebel

[55] Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir, and Zachariah Mampilly, *Rebel Governance in Civil War*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 3.
[56] Ibid, 22,23.

group creates institutions in an area independently from the ruling government to achieve short or long-term goals.[57] Thirdly, Kasfir argues that rebel governance can only occur during a civil war and always involves coercion of civilians. During a civil war, the existing authority fails to provide basic needs and security for its inhabitants, which sprouts the establishment of rebel organisations. In turn, these rebel organisations construct forms of governance within a certain area to counter the existing authority. Because populations are heterogeneous, the establishment of rebel governance automatically involves coercion of civilians.[58]

In the case of the Mahdi Army and the Sadrist movement of Muqtada al-Sadr, I will argue that they match the features of rebel governance imposed by Kasfir. Although the Mahdi Army and Sadrist movement are two distinctive movements lead by Muqtada al-Sadr, they are heavily intertwined with each other. This means that by framing rebel governance by Muqtada al-Sadr, both the Sadrist movement and the Mahdi Army are being incorporated into the analysis. Later, the Sadrist movement and Mahdi Army are being framed independently from each other, this enhances the analysis and conceptualisation of the movements within the framework of the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr.

Firstly, the movements constructed a firm base of support to achieve their goals. Not only was Sadr city constructed, a big neighbourhood in Bagdad with mostly Shia residents, but also other areas/cities wherein the movements recruited followers such as Najaf, Kufa and Basra. Through the use of these bases, the movements propagated their ideology and enhanced their support, which eventually created political and military mobilisation.[59] Secondly, the Mahdi Army and the Sadrist movement established different sorts of institutions to provide healthcare, economic enhancement, and control over the predominantly Shi'ite areas. As Tamir Taha argued in his work, this was done to install and operate a state within a state, where the necessities of the Shi'ite community are being heard and fulfilled and existing authority or revival movements are being countered.[60] Thirdly, Kasfir argued that rebel governance can only occur during a civil war. Although the Iraq War is often portrayed as a war instead of a civil war because foreign powers invaded Iraq, it was factious a civil war as internal military conflicts rouse. Moreover, Kasfir argues that internal movements that govern civilians and oppose foreign occupation also qualify to be called rebel governance.[61]

---

[57] Ibid, 22.
[58] Ibid.
[59] David E. Johnson, M. Wade Markel, and Brian Shannon, *The 2008 Battle of Sadr City: Reimagining Urban Combat*, (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2013) & Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr*.
[60] Taha, "Turning ex-combatants into Sadrist," 360.
[61] Arjona, Kasfir, and Mampilly, *Rebel Governance*, 24.

The movements of Muqtada al-Sadr not only fought against the US-led coalition forces but also other Iraqi factions such as al-Qaeda, the Iraqi security forces, and Sunni military wings.[62] Furthermore, by fighting other powers and movements, the movements of al-Sadr extend the borders of areas over which they held control. This has the consequence that civilians within these borders and who did not support the movements were constraint to follow orders.

Within the field of rebel governance, Keister and Slantchev focused on different strategies of rebel governance and how these strategies influenced the relation with civilians. Hereby the accent of analysis was constructed around ideology and material gain and how this effects coercion and/or support from civilians.[63] As argued in their work, rebel governments use different methods of governance to achieve long or short-term goals. This can vary from the coercion of civilians to service provision and ideological positioning. In the case of coercion, Keister and Slantchev argue that rebel governance always uses direct or indirect forms of coercion but always with the direct threat of the use of violence. Hereby the notion of the use of violence can be seen as a powerful tool of civilian coercion.[64] Nevertheless, the use of coercion by rebels has its limitations. Coercion brings personal risks and can be counterproductive if it sparks civilian opposition.[65] Opposite to coercion is the use of service provision for civilians by rebel governments. Service provision increases civilian compliance with their rule and enhances authority. By providing services which civilians demand such as healthcare, education and economical enhancement rebels can increase support and maintain higher levels of coercion.[66] Although service provision and coercions seem to enhance simultaneously, Keister and Slantchev argue that the increase of services provisions only have a marginal impact on the effectiveness of coercion enhancement.[67]

The third strategy that is deployed when rebels construct governance is ideology. Although academic literature often describes the ideology of rebels as a curtain to cover material gain, Keister and Slantchev conclude that ideology plays an important role in the lives of both rebels and civilians.[68] For rebels, ideology is a tool to gain support among civilians, they create ideological platforms that resonate with the preferences of civilians

---

[62] In: Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12,", Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr*, & The Iraq Study Group, "The Iraq Study Group Report," 10.
[63] Jeninifer Keister and Branislav L. Slantchev, "Statebreakers to Statemakers: Strategies of Rebel Governance," (unknown, 2014).
[64] Ibid, 6.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid, 8.
[67] Ibid, 7.
[68] Ibid, 9.

which in turn, enhances obedience and support. In this mechanism, the distance between ideology and civilian preferences is of great importance. If ideological distance between these two actors occurs, civilians become more sceptical and less enthusiastic about rebel policies.[69] As argued by Keister and Slantchev, ideology is of greater importance for the establishment of rebel governance when compared with coercion and service provision. When rebels shift their ideology, it almost instantly affects the amount of support by civilians, while a change in their level of coercion and service provision can only have a delayed effect on civilian support. This can pose a threat to the authority of rebels.[70]

In conclusion, the Sadrist movement and Mahdi Army of Muqtada al-Sadr are both movements which can be identified as rebel governance. Within the conceptualisation of rebel governance, three separate strategies are identified which have an impact on the relationship between non-state actors and civilians. However, ideology can be seen as the main aspect of rebel governance because it heavily influences the relationship between the non-state actor and civilians. But how should the Sadrist movement and Mahdi Army be framed separately from each other within the concept of rebel governance, and how should these phenomena be analysed?

## II.II Framing the Sadrist movement

In academic literature that focuses on the Sadrist movement, there is an ongoing debate on how this phenomenon should be approached. Some scholars see the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr after 2003 as a predetermined continuation of the Sadrist movement which was created by his father and father-in-law, Sadiq al-Sadr and Baqir al-Sadr, while other scholars analyse the Sadrist movement as a social movement independently from pre-2003 development. Despite this ongoing debate, I will argue that it is important to look at aspects of the Sadrist movement before and after 2003. By doing this, the Sadrist movement as a whole and the Sadrist movement of Muqtada al-Sadr specifically can be framed.

Despite the wide variety of existing literature regarding the Sadrist movement, its origins remain unclear. Patrick Cockburn and Marisa Cochrane argue that the movement originated in the 1990s under the leadership of Sadiq al-Sadr. With resources provided by the Iraqi regime, Sadiq al-Sadr was able to enhance popularity among the Shi'ite community while secretly

[69] Ibid, 10.
[70] Ibid, 11.

establishing an organization that, when the time was right, could surface and battle the political powers in place.[71] Leslie Bayles goes one step further and argues that the Sadrist movement was already established by Baqir al-Sadr in the 1960s and that when the Sadrist movement started to expand, the movement was quickly marginalized by the Iraqi regime, leaving its followers to temporarily cease their operations to later resurface.[72] While the exact origins of the movement remain to be unclear, Baqir al-Sadr is seen as the spiritual father of the movement and Sadiq al-Sadr as the figure who resurrected the movement after he was incorporated into the governmental apparatus of Saddam Hussein.[73]

Additionally, the exact characteristics of the Sadrist movement before 2003 remain relatively imprecise due to the lens through which the literature is written. Nearly all the written literature about the Sadrist movement dates from the post-2003 period in which the Sadrist movement resurrected under Muqtada al-Sadr. This not only changes the approach of scholars towards the Sadrist movement before 2003 due to their renewed information of the movement after 2003 but also, overshadows the intentional goals and characteristics of the movement before 2003. Hereby linkages between the 'original' and renewed movement are easier made than focusing specifically on the movement before 2003, making research on characteristics of the 'original' movement heavily biased by the Sadrist movement under Muqtada al-Sadr. However, the pillars which provided the movement with support from clerics and ordinary Shi'ite citizens remained intact throughout political turmoil in the 1990s and 2000s, and can therefore analysed.

As Bayless argues, the Sadrist movement was created to rouse a following which could help to guide Iraq back to Islam. Sadiq al-Sadr and Baqir al-Sadr wanted to establish an Islamic society that would incorporate Islamic beliefs into everyday life.[74] To accomplish this aim, the use of violence was discarded. The use of violence was simply too dangerous for the continuity of the movement. The Ba'ath policy of maintaining their dominance builds upon eliminating all their political opponents. Opponents were executed or imprisoned in secret places, without a perspective of release. If the Sadrist movement used violence to influence the political landscape, the risk of total elimination of the movement was too realistic.

---

[71] Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12," 9 & Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 160.
[72] Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 142.
[73] This statement is made in nearly all the literature regarding the Sadrist movement: Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 142, International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Civil War, The Sadrist and the Surge," *ICG Middle East report* 72 (February 2008): 1-22, Taha, "Turning ex-combatants into Sadrist,", Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12," Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr* & Benedict Robin-D'Cruz and Renad Mansour, "Making sense of the Sadrists: Fragmentation and Unstable Politics," *The Foreign Policy Research Institute* (March 2020). https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/iraq-chapter-1.pdf.
[74] Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 143.

Moreover, the Sadrist movement was particularly successful in spreading its political and social messages whereby the use of violence could undermine its success.[75] Additionally, the aim to lead Iraq back to Islam did not include the overthrow of the Ba'ath regime to install an Islamic government. The purpose of the Sadrist movement was to create an Islamic society that could exist parallel to the Ba'ath regime or other political parties in power.[76] As mentioned earlier, this phenomenon is described by Amir Taha as installing and operating a state within a state, where the necessities of the Shi'ite community are fulfilled by providing healthcare and economic enhancement.[77]

The second ideology of the Sadrist movement was to follow the speaking *Hawza*.[78] The *Hawza*, also called the *al-hawza al-'ilmiyya* (the enclosure of learning), refers to an institution of religious learnings which is based around the principle of individual and independent judgment carried out by a religious scholar, also called the *mujtahid*.[79] By following this religious concept, the Sadrist movement propagated the promotion and defending of Shi'ite rights.[80] Although following the traditional *Hawza* does not encourage its followers to participate in political activism, Baqir al-Sadr generated a following which was willing to participate in activism, while simultaneously following the Hawza of Baqir al-Sadr himself. Sadiq al-Sadr continued the ideology of his predecessor and with his leadership over formal and informal networks and institutions such as schools and charities, Sadiq al-Sadr was able to mobilize a strong and massive following. Not only enabled this support Sadiq al-Sadr to become the leading figure in activism against the Iraqi government, but it also enhanced the political and influential weight of the Sadrist movement. The movement became well known among Shi'ites and the number of followers quickly increased.[81]

With the assassination of Sadiq al-Sadr in 1999, the movement lost its source of direction and needed a new figure who could represent the speaking *Hawza*. As Leslie Bayless discusses, the death of Sadiq al-Sadr caused a division of Sadrist members into two camps. Some members chose the side of the more traditional and conservative Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, while others followed Ayatollah Kazem Al-Haeri. Al-Haeri was also

---

[75] Aqeel Abood, "The Sadrist movement: Success in Mobilizing People in Iraq," *Kufa Review* 2, no. 2. (2013): 95.
[76] Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 143.
[77] Taha, "Turning ex-combatants into Sadrist," 360.
[78] Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 143, Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12," 14 & Abood, "The Sadrist movement," 83.
[79] Khalid Sindawi, "Ḥawza Instruction and its Role in Shaping Modern Shī'ite Identity: The Ḥawzas of al-Najaf and Qumm as a Case Study," *Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 6 (November 2007): 834, 836.
[80] Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 143.
[81] Abood, "The Sadrist movement," 86.

an activist and continued to lead the Sadrist movement underground following Sadiq al-Sadr's philosophy.[82]

Unfortunately, the information and sources concerning the organisation and structure of the Sadrist movement before 2003 are limited, contrary to the movement after 2003. This brings up two problems when analysing the movement. Firstly, what is exactly meant by the Sadrist movement? Was it an organisation that was based around a certain structure, or was it just a movement led by a small group of clerics with one of the two al-Sadr as its prime leader, and finally, can the Sadrist movement be defined as rebel governance?

When interpreting the existing literature on the Sadrist movement it becomes clear that the Sadrist movement cannot simply be called a movement or an organization. On the one hand, the Sadrists used a certain form of hierarchy in their movement, which points to the bundle of powers to reach a collective aim, also referred to as an organisation.[83] On the other hand, as argued by scholar Amir Taha, the notion that the Sadrist movement did not operate through the use of violence characterizes the lack of internal organisation. When an activist movement is well organized they should be capable to combat against their aggressor, mostly through operations which include the use of violence.[84] In this regard, the term movement suits the Sadrist better. Although the term movement or social movement implicates a loose and unstructured bundle of people who try to achieve a collective goal, while the Sadrist movement was partly structured.[85] The Sadrist movement before 2003 can therefore be defined as a movement instead of an organisation.

Secondly, because there is a limited amount of information about the Sadrist movement before 2003, it is difficult to analyse the number of members or followers of the movement. Although the literature defines the followers of the movement as members, it remains unclear if these followers were indeed members of the Sadrist movement. There is no information about a procedure to become a member, nor that they were just followers who, when the time was right, would join forces to propagate Shia rights. This unclearness has presumably to do with the lack of structure and organisation of the movement.

Despite the absence of information regarding the structure of the movement, the

---

[82] Al-Haeri continued on the same foot as Baqir al-Sadr, spreading the *Fatwa* and maintaining secret undergound networks: Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 143 & Robin-D'Cruz and Renad Mansour, "Making sense of the Sadrists," 5.

[83] The definition of an organisation: The Oxford Dictionary, "organization," Accessed October 15, 2020. https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/organization#.

[84] Taha, "Turning ex-combatants into Sadrist," 361.

[85] Karl-Dieter Opp, *Theories of political protest and social movements: A multidisciplinary introduction, critique, and synthesis*, (London: Routledge, 2009), 37.

question of how the Sadrist movement was capable of generating a following throughout the years under Ba'ath rule can be analysed. As mentioned above, the Sadrist movement surfaced under the leadership of Sadiq al-Sadr, who tried to accomplish an Islamic society within the Iraqi state. Due to decades of marginalization and ignorance of the Ba'ath regime towards Shi'ite society, the Shi'ites emphasized the return of an Islamic laws and prosperity.[86] With resources provided by the Iraqi regime, Sadiq al-Sadr increased his grip over mosques and religious institutions while simultaneously establishing charity centres and schools in the name of the Sadrist movement.[87] Through the use of these different institutions, the Sadrists could spread their line of thought and cater to the needs of predominantly the Shia poor. In these institutions, the Sadrist propagated the revival of an Islamic Shi'ite society and provided the Shi'ites with health services, charities, and education. This was most notable in the period in which the United Nations imposed economic sanctions after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Iraq was heading into an economic collapse which affected the Shia population more than the Sunni population. The Sadrists build an apparatus of services for those in need, which enhanced their popularity [88] Moreover, in the years after 1991, al-Sadr became more outspoken regarding the social and economic backwardness of the Shia society and started to employ the concept of cultural framing. As discussed by Aqeel Abood, the concept of cultural framing refers to the appealing of religious and/or cultural sentiments which enables, in this case, the Sadrists, to mobilize people against their opponents.[89] Al-Sadr used this concept of cultural framing by emphasizing nationalism, Islamic devotion and opposing foreign influence. Cultural framing proved to be particularly successful in mobilizing the poor Iraqi Shi'ite youth in rural and urban areas such as Bagdad, Najaf, and Karbala.[90]

Furthermore, Sadiq al-Sadr established a network of mostly low-ranked clerics who distributed the philosophy of the Sadrist movement without opposing a threat against the more traditional hegemony.[91] The creation of these networks was beneficial for the Sadrist movement in two ways. Firstly, through the integration of clerics, the Sadrists were able to enhance popularity on religious bases. This meant that they could propagate their line of thought politically and religiously. Secondly, the integration of clerics in the rural south of

[86] Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12," 9.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Abood, "The Sadrist movement," 84.
[89] Ibid, 85.
[90] Ibid, 88.
[91] Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12," 9.

Iraq provided the Sadrist movement with a following not only in urban areas such as Bagdad and Basra but also, with a following in the southern rural areas of Iraq.[92]

When analysing the Sadrist movement before 2003, it becomes clear that the movement can best be framed as a movement instead of rebel governance or an organisation. Although the movement constructed a firm base of support, provided services, and spread an ideology that resonated with the Shia community, they intentionally or unintentionally did not govern within a certain area in which they held control.[93] Foremost, because they had no control over a certain area within Iraq. The lack of sources caused a problem when analysing the structure of the movement, therefore it remains unclear if the Sadrist movement can be defined as an organisation or a movement. The analyses suggest that there was no apparent internal structure and organisation which indicates that the Sadrist movement was a (social) movement instead of an organisation. However, the characteristics of the Sadrist movement changed after 2003 which forces to frame the Sadrist movement differently.

After the US-led invasion in 2003, the political landscape of Iraq changed drastically. Different movements and political parties tried to cooperate with Coalition forces or tried to counter their presence. For the predominantly Shi'ite population, it was Muqtada al-Sadr who fought against the presence of the Coalition forces by resurrecting the Sadrist movement. However, the resurrection of the movement and their activities shows a discontinuity with the pre-2003 movement. This raises the question of how the post-2003 Sadrist movement should be framed.

Not long after the US-led invasion in March 2003, it became clear that the actions and characteristics of the resurrected Sadrist movement can be framed within the concept of rebel governance. In the chaos caused by the presence of the Coalition forces, al-Haeri, who was exiled in Iran, appointed Muqtada al-Sadr as the leader of the Sadrist movement in Iraq and issued a *fatwa* encouraging the Shi'ites to seize power.[94] The Sadrist started to organise themselves and reopened mosques, offices and held Friday prayers to provide services and security within Shia areas in which they were able to gain control such as Sadr City and Najaf. As argued by Marissa Cochrane, they even established religious courts to enhance control over these areas.[95] Muqtada al-Sadr started to give speeches in which he demanded the

[92] Ibid, 10.
[93] The characteristics of the Sadrist movement are compared with the characteristics of rebel governance as argued by: Keister and Slantchev, *Statebreakers to Statemakers.*
[94] Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12," 11. & Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 168.
[95] Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12," 12.

immediate withdrawal of the 'occupiers' and motivated the growing Sadrist following to take matters into their own hands. As argued by Cochrane, these calls became the unified objective of the movement in the years after 2003.[96] Moreover, al-Sadr highlighted populist and nationalist religious sentiments to enhance support and the image of the Sadrist movement as a social movement build around ideology.[97]

As events unravelled, it became clear that the resurrected Sadrist movement under the leadership of al-Sadr operated differently in comparison to the pre-2003 movement. Whereas the pre-2003 movement rejected the use of violence, the 'new' movement used violence to gain dominance and control over the areas in which they operated. Moreover, the use of violence was used to battle influence from other parties and movements. The foremost event which underlines the use of violence is the attack on Najaf's clerical establishment. A group of Sadrists followers attacked and killed the influential Sheik Abdel Majid al-Khoei to gain control over Imam Ali's tomb. As argued by Cochrane, this event showed that the Sadrist movement was willing to use violence to combat groups who did not cooperate with the movement.[98]

The Sadrist movement quickly gained control and support in various predominantly Shia areas, mainly through the use of violence. But the use of violence in combination with the lack of structure and obedience created a threat to the effectiveness of the movement. Followers of the Sadrist movement started to loot from people within their own communities. Moreover, these masses of mainly young men used excessive violence when looting.[99] Additionally, al-Sadr announced on 10 October 2003 the establishment of a shadow government with ministries of foreign affairs, finance, justice and interior. To be able to finance this project, followers tried to take over the holy shrines in Kerbala because they received large donations from the faithful. However, they were unsuccessful and dozens of civilians were killed.[100]

These two developments not only caused a decline in support for the Sadrist movement, but it also threatened the authority and governance of the Sadrists. This was mainly visible in the decline of gifts and taxes in the areas in which they established an apparatus of governance.[101] As argued by Cochrane and Cockburn, the excessive use of

[96] Ibid.
[97] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 162.
[98] Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12," 13.
[99] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 164.
[100] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 170.
[101] Ibid, 164.

violence by the Sadrist movement and their goal to establish a government, caused the exclusion of al-Sadr into the Iraqi Governing Council initiated by the Coalition forces.[102] To maintain his role in the political arena, al-Sadr established a military wing that could control the governmental apparatus established by the Sadrist movement and battle opposition groups. This Mahdi Army (Jash al-Mahdi) started to take shape in the second half of 2003 and proved to be extremely helpful in maintaining the Sadrist movement and their governmental apparatus.

To conclude, although the Sadrist movement before and after 2003 share the same name, it became clear that the post-2003 movement can be differentiated from the pre-2003 movement. Under the leadership of Muqtada al-Sadr, the movement established a shadow government which included service provision, coercion through violence, and propagated an ideology that resonated with civilians. Although this was short-lived, due to the establishment of the Mahdi Army which became al-Sadr's military wing, it can be argued that the Sadrist movement can be framed as rebel governance in Iraq between 2003 and 2004.[103]

## II.III Framing the Mahdi Army

In the relevant literature concerning the Sadrist movement and the Mahdi Army, there is an ongoing debate on how the Mahdi Army should be analysed in relation to the Sadrist movement. While most scholars concentrate on the Sadrist movement instead of the Mahdi Army and often approach these two as the same entity, some scholars argue that the Mahdi Army should be addressed independently from the Sadrist movement. By doing so, they argue, the differences between the Sadrist movement and the Mahdi Army become clear, which in turn, benefits the overarching analysis of the movement of Muqtada al-Sadr. But how should the Mahdi Army be framed in the light of the Sadrist movement, rebel governance and ideology?

As mentioned before, the establishment of the Mahdi Army did not occur suddenly. Muqtada al-Sadr was excluded from the Iraqi Governing Council and his Sadrist movement lost momentum. To maintain relevance in the political arena of Iraq, al-Sadr launched the formation of a shadow government and a military wing, called the Mahdi Army, in the second

[102] Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12," 13. & Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr*, 168.
[103] Rebel governance as defined by: Keister and Slantchev, *Statebreakers to Statemakers.*

half of 2003. The goal of the Mahdi Army was to provide security and control over predominantly Sadrist areas whilst simultaneously providing public services such as charity, infrastructural regulation and the establishment of religious institutions. Moreover, the militia was brought to life to establish al-Sadr's shadow government and fight the US-Led occupiers.[104] In other words, the Mahdi Army became the central organisation within the movement lead by Muqtada al-Sadr. The militia took over nearly all the activities of the Sadrist movement which, when looking back, initiated a clear distinction between the two movements. It was the Mahdi Army that used violence to gain authority within the political landscape, contrary to the Sadrist movement. But how do we conceptualize the emergence of the Mahdi Army?

Political opportunity structure (POS) is widely used in academic literature to explain the emergence of movements within an authoritarian state. The model suggests, as explained by Marc Edelman, that movements or organisations should be examined through the context of balance between opportunities and threats. A complementary approach involves the study within a certain time and space, this can be within a given region or nation.[105] When applying this model to the case of the Mahdi Army it becomes evident which opportunities and threats initiated its emergence. The US-led coalition forces removed Ba'ath rule in Iraq but were unable to install a legitimate new government. When they eventually initiated the establishment of the Iraqi Governing Council, Muqtada and his Sadrist movement were excluded. This development threatened not only the authority of al-Sadr in Iraq but also his authority and popularity in areas in which his movement held control. With the establishment of the Mahdi Army, al-Sadr was able to counter these threats and maintain his popularity and dominance in these areas. Mostly because the Iraqi Governing Council was unable to achieve military authority within these areas. Furthermore, because the US-led coalition forces were unable to install a legitimate government in the months after the invasion, al-Sadr was able to take matters into his own hands arouse. Through the use of violence by his militia, al-Sadr gained control over Shia communities and countered the presence of coalition forces and other opponents.

Within the field of social movements, there is another widely used model that could explain the emergence of the Mahdi Army vis-à-vis the political developments in Iraq. The political process model constructed by Doug McAdam underlines the notion that social

[104] Taha, "Turning ex-combatants into Sadrist," 357.
[105] Marc Edelman, "Social Movements: Changing Paradigms and Forms of Politics," *Annual review of anthropology* 30, no. 1, (October 2002): 290.

movements should be seen as rational attempts of excluded groups to participate in a political system.[106] Hereby the emphasis lies on the political opportunity of the movement. In this context political opportunity refers to "any event or broad social process that serves to undermine the calculations and assumptions on which the political establishment is structured".[107] When applying this model to the establishment of the Mahdi Army, it could argued that al-Sadr made the rational decision to construct his militia as the opportunity arose to undermine the legitimacy of the political establishment, in this case, the formation of the Iraqi Governing Council. Additionally, based on this theory, al-Sadr chose to obtain the objectives of the Sadrist movement through the use of violence by the Mahdi Army as explained above.

But what are the characteristics of the militia and how do these characteristics relate to the ideology within the concept of rebel governance? Firstly, the limited number of available sources on the structure and organisation of the militia limits the analysis of the Mahdi Army. Therefore the analysis on the characteristics of the militia is based around secondary source material.

In the beginning stages of its development, different scholars describe the Mahdi Army as being weak and immature.[108] Soldiers did not receive military training and there were no separate units, therefore Patrick Cockburn describes the militia as "just a group of armed men.[109] The image of the militia was being reinforced by the defeat in the battle of Najaf in 2004. Militia members tried to hold their positions in the area around Najaf but, were quickly defeated by the Coalition Forces. There were no signs of coordination or strategy to counter the Coalition Forces, which resulted in the acceptance of a stalemate by al-Sadr to prevent greater losses.[110] Additionally, after the defeat in Najaf, al-Haeri distanced himself from the Mahdi Army and Sadrist movement and issued a *fatwa* which declared that Shi'ites should not pay *khums* to the movements of al-Sadr.[111] Financially, this affected the militia significantly as providing weapons, training, and loans became more problematic and enhanced the weak and immature image of the militia.[112] This development, in combination with factors that are mentioned below, caused the militiamen to start looting and plundering to

[106] Micheal Armato, and Neal Caren, "Mobilizing the Single-Case Study: Doug McAdam's Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930–1970," *Qualitative Sociology* 25, no. 1, (Spring 2002): 95.
[107] As quoted from McAdams in Armato andCaren, "Mobilizing the Single-Case Study," 95.
[108] Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?,", Taha, "Turning ex-combatants into Sadrist," & Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr*.
[109] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr*, 169.
[110] Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 146,147.
[111] *Khums* are religious obligations towards religious causes.
[112] Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 147 & Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12," 15.

provide a source of funding to the Mahdi Army.[113]

But who are these militia members? Amir Taha researched the composition of the Mahdi Army and concluded that the soldiers of the militia are predominantly ex-combatants. Ex-combatants are neither a part of the workforce nor the business class and therefore particularly vulnerable to mobilisation strategies of the Mahdi Army and Muqtada al-Sadr.[114] Apart from ex-combatants, the militants were students, criminals, or disadvantaged youngsters. What these men had in common was that they were somehow marginalized by the Ba'ath regime or Coalition Forces and they were willing to participate in armed battles to combat repetition or enhance their livelihood.[115] Hereby the aspect of ideology plays an important role. From the beginning, al-Sadr was able to attract men who were willing to join the Mahdi Army by resonating with their beliefs and needs. This process, also called the framing process, underlines how a specific audience perceives a certain message.[116] In his speeches, al-Sadr repeatedly touched on the subject of fear regarding the marginalisation of Shi'ites by the Coalition Forces and Sunni affiliated parties, and that this fear should be eliminated through the use of violence.[117] As argued by Patrick Cockburn, the ideological aspect played the most important role in attracting and maintaining Mahdi Army members. Although the militants were undersupplied, suffered great losses, and inferior to the military power of the Coalition Forces, they kept fighting in the name of the Shia movement of al-Sadr.[118] The strength of al-Sadr was that he could mobilise the Shia masses, predominantly the angry and poor men who were underrepresented in Iraq.[119] Despite the lack of training facilities and weaponry, some militants even sold everything they owned to buy weapons so they could join the Mahdi Army.[120]

But what were the ideological aspects which appealed to the men who joined the Mahdi Army? Firstly, al-Sadr debated that the traditional Shia establishment was unable to deal with the problems of the Shi'ites in Iraq. To overcome these problems an activist approach was needed, in this case through the use of violence by the Mahdi Army. Secondly, by propagating Iraqi nationalism and Shia radicalism, al-Sadr motivated men and women who

---

[113] The problem of funding is discussed in: Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 147 and throughout: Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr.*
[114] Taha, "Turning ex-combatants into Sadrist," 359.
[115] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sad*r, 196.
[116]Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual review of sociology* 26, no.1, (2000).
[117] Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 146.
[118] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 185.
[119] Ibid, 184.
[120] Ibid, 183.

were concerned with the religious aspect of the movement.[121] However, it becomes clear that the foremost motivation to join the Mahdi Army was based on personal gains. By looting and plundering government offices, banks and civilian houses, the militants tried to gain material goods. This did not only spread fear and anger among civilians towards the militants, but it also undermined the authority of al-Sadr over his Mahdi Army. As looting and plundering increased, it became more obvious that Muqtada had little control over his Mahdi Army.[122] Moreover, the image of the Mahdi Army changed drastically in the year after its establishment. In the beginning, the militia was seen as a military movement that could liberate Iraq from invaders and counter Sunni dominance, but as the looting and plundering continued, civilians started to realize that the militia was uncontrollable and its members primarily after material gain. [123] As Marisa Cochrane states:

'The rapid growth in the movement from 2004 to 2006 and the subsequent emergence of a mafia-like system undermined Muqtada al-Sadr's control over his commanders. As local commanders grew more powerful and financially independent, they became less likely to follow orders from Muqtada al-Sadr and the clerical leadership in Najaf'.[124]

Although al-Sadr tried to regain control over his Mahdi Army by disposing of disloyal commanders, he was unable to do so. As sectarian violence increased in Iraq in 2005 and 2006, death squads of the Mahdi Army terrorized and killed innocent civilians and tried to gain control over larger parts of Bagdad, Najaf, and Basra.[125] In the light of these events, the power ideology trade-off from Keister and Slantchev comes into play. In this model, there is a trade-off between the ideology of rebels versus civilian compliance. If the ideology of the rebels becomes too extreme or does not resonate with civilians, civilians will be less likely to cooperate with rebels in place. Therefore, rebels should adjust their ideological agenda to maintain or maximise civilian compliance. In other words: "Rebels face a delicate balancing act between satisfying their own ideological goals and supplying policies that do not engender too much resistance".[126] As the looting, plundering and sectarian cleansing continued, the power ideology trade-off became out of balance, which caused a decline in support for the militia. Moreover, due to the use of excessive violence against civilians by the militia, there

[121] Taha, "Turning ex-combatants into Sadrist," 369.
[122] International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Civil War," 16. & Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr," 147.
[123] These statements or statements with the same meaning can be find in: Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr*, 185, Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 148, International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Civil War," 17 & Taha, "Turning ex-combatants into Sadrist," 368.
[124] Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12," 21.
[125] Ibid, 25.
[126] Keister and Slantchev, *Statebreakers to Statemakers*, 15.

was also the threat of total political isolation by the Coalition Forces and Iraqi Governing Council. Al-Sadr needed to act and commanded the militia to stand down from fighting. However, the militia continued their operations, mainly battling the Coalition Forces and using excessive sectarian violence.[127] Al-Sadr was left with no choice but to disband the Mahdi Army and temporarily flee to Iran. By doing so, he tried to maintain his role in the political arena of Iraq.[128]

In conclusion, the Mahdi Army can be framed within the concept of rebel governance. As the military wing of the Sadrist movement, the militia took over their activities. This included service provision, coercion through the use of violence, and propagating ideology. Although the militia quickly gained control over several areas, their popularity declined. Excessive use of violence, plundering, looting, and its uncontrollable nature not only caused a break between al-Sadr and the militia but also an ideological break between the rebels and their followers. Thus, it was the ideological aspect of Muqtada al-Sadr and the Mahdi Army which provided an increase in members and followers, while, paradoxically, ideology was the foremost factor that caused the decline of support and eventually dismantling of the militia.

Through the use of the mentioned theories and concepts, the Sadrist movement and the Mahdi Army are analysed and contextualised. This benefits the analysis of the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr in the upcoming two chapters.

[127] Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12," 23.
[128] International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Civil War," 16 & Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 149.

# Chapter III: Shia Politics in Iraq until 2003

The rise of Muqtada al-Sadr in Iraq after the US-led occupation did not occur suddenly. Deep-rooted sentiments such as anger, betrayal and marginalisation among the Iraqi Shia, provided al-Sadr with almost unlimited reasons and sources to elaborate upon to enhance support and followers. Moreover, by analysing events and developments of the Iraqi Shia before 2003, factors that can answer the question of why Muqtada al-Sadr seized power in Iraq can partly be identified. Therefore, this chapter analyses Shia politics, fragmentation, marginalisation, and resistance to identify which aspects have contributed to the rise of al-Sadr in Iraq.

## III.I Shi'ites Fragmented and Frustrated

As mentioned in chapter I, after the coup d'état of 1958 by General Abd al-Karim Qasim, a new phase in the history of Iraq began. Modernisation and secularisation were the two main pillars that would enhance the economy and population of Iraq.[129] This development posed an immediate threat to Shi'ism in Iraq. Because the traditional Shi'ite establishment remained silent, Baqir al-Sadr established the Da'wa party to actively fight the regime. Although support for the Da'wa party grew in the years after its establishment, no noteworthy changes could be made to prevent the economical and religious marginalisation of the Shia population.[130] The process of marginalising the Shia population was intensified when the Sunni Ba'ath party took power in 1968.

Under the leadership of Saddam Hussein, the strength of the state grew. Through the nationalisation of Iraq's oil industry, the Ba'ath regime was able to invest in large industrial and infrastructural projects, which lead to the growth of the economy. Furthermore, the regime invested in goods that could drastically improve the lives of Iraq's inhabitants. Schools, universities and hospitals were built and expanded.[131] Alongside investments in the public and economic sectors, the regime constructed a security apparatus that would maintain Ba'ath dominance in Iraq. By heavily monitoring rivals or disloyal figures by this apparatus,

[129] Aziz, "The Role," 208.
[130] Alaaldin, "The Islamic Da'wa Party," 64.
[131] Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 64.

the regime was able to quickly counter political threats.[132] As it became evident after the establishment of Ba'ath rule, it was predominantly the Shi'ites in general and the Da'wa party in particular, that posed the biggest threat to the hegemony of the Ba'ath in Iraq. But why were the Shi'ites dissatisfied and thus a threat to the Ba'ath regime?

The foremost factor which could explain dissatisfaction from the Shia population is arguably the rule of a Sunni party in Iraq. Since the establishment of the Republic of Iraq, the division among sectarian lines has increased dramatically. As Khalil Osman argues, the enhancing sectarian division had negative consequences for the cohesion of Iraqi inhabitants. Different communities started to feel deeply alienated from each other, which in turn, obstructed the forming of Iraqi national identity.[133] When the Ba'athist came to power, two main strategies were deployed in an attempt to construct feelings of national identity. The first strategy was to construct national identity through the integration of different communities in their successful development programs. The second strategy was to de-emphasize sectarian identity in governmental rhetoric and policy.[134] While the second strategy was utilized, Lisa Blaydless concluded that Shi'ites and Kurds never held noteworthy ranks in Hussein's government. Political appointments were based on loyalty and trust rather than cultural or religious backgrounds. As it turned out, the people who held the closest ties with Hussein were integrated into the government and were dominantly Sunni.[135] So, even though the Ba'ath regime tried to incorporate different cultural and religious communities in their state- and nation-building, it became evident that important (political) positions were only available for persons who had a strong affinity with the Ba'ath regime. In other words, the Shi'ites were excluded from participating in Hussein's government due to a lack of affinity and loyalty for the regime. Not only the growing secular nature of the regime caused discontentment among the Shia community, but the security apparatus of the Ba'athist also played an important role in the enhancement of anger towards the regime among Shi'ites.

Although large parts of the population benefited economically from the regime's investments in the early 1970s, political opposition existed and was occasionally highly vocal.[136] Because Hussein feared the loss of his support base and popularity due to political opposition within and outside his Ba'ath party, he constructed a strong security apparatus that

---

[132] Lisa Blaydes, *State of Repression: Iraq under Saddam Hussein*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 70.
[133] Khalil Osman, *Sectarianism in Iraq: The Making of State and Nation Since 1920*, (London: Routledge, 2014), 5.
[134] Blaydes, *State of Repression*, 69.
[135] Ibid, 70.
[136] Ibid, 73.

was able to monitor large quantities of people to counter political threats.[137] During Ba'ath rule, political threats to overthrow or compromise the regime came from different directions. Kurds, Iranians, and ex-Ba'ath party members posed a threat to the regime but, as argued by different scholars, it was mainly political activists within the Shia community which Hussein feared the most.[138] The growing popularity of the Da'wa party in the beginning years of Ba'ath rule and their participation in political activism in combination with the large population of Shi'ites in Iraq provided Hussein with enough reasons to marginalize the Shia threat.[139] Through the use of its expanding security apparatus, the regime was able to monitor its enemies and act quickly.[140] People who acted suspiciously while being monitored would immediately be arrested and questioned, mostly through the use of torture.[141] In other words, through the use of monitoring and force, Hussein was able to eliminate or marginalize political enemies and threats. Furthermore, other measures were taken to marginalize the political active Shia. Shia newspapers and different educational religious institutions were closed, while Da'wa members were arrested and imprisoned. These actions further triggered discontent among large parts of the Shia population towards the Ba'ath regime.[142]

Although political opposition existed in the 1970s, it should be mentioned that political opposition and discontent towards the Ba'ath regime was limited. As pointed out by Lisa Blaydes, due to economic and social goods investments by the Ba'ath regime, the vast majority of Iraq's population benefited economically, especially the Shia middle class.[143] However, from 1979 onwards, internal and external developments caused a tremendous increase of discontent among Shi'ites which in turn, enhanced their political activism in the upcoming decades.

The 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran was an ideological and political threat to the Sunni ruling regime in Iraq. The Iraqi regime feared that the revolution would spread among Iraqi Shi'ites and that this could eventually cause a revolution in Iraq. To counter this threat, the regime intensified the repression and persecution of Shi'ites, mainly Shi'ites who had ties

---

[137] Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 223.
[138] As argued in: Shanahan, "Shia," 945, Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's,* 194., Osman, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, 274 & Blaydes, *State of Repression,* 243.
[139] Shanahan, "Shia," 945
[140] Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's*, 95.
[141] Ibid, 196.
[142] Shanahan, "Shia," 945.
[143] Blaydes, *State of Repression,* 78.

with the Da'wa party.[144] Thousands of Shi'ites were deported and as mentioned in chapter I, the ideological leader of the Da'wa party, Muhammed Baqir al-Sadr was executed in 1980.[145] This, in combination with the Iran-Iraq war that started in September 1980, caused dissatisfaction among the Shia population to reach its peak. The eight-year war with Iran had an immediate impact on the economy of Iraq. Iran started to attack economic targets (oil-plants) and within a week after the start of the war, Iraq was forced to suspend all exports.[146] Not only the 'economic free-fall' of Iraq during the war caused discontent among the Shi'ites and Iraqi inhabitants in general, but the high numbers of casualties in the Iraqi Army caused a rapid decline of morale among its Army and population. As estimated by different scholars, nearly 80 percent of the Iraqi soldiers were Shia. Therefore, the Shia community experienced higher war deaths during the eight-year war.[147] Furthermore, Iraqi Army, which was predominantly Shia, fought their religious counterparts which further reduced their morale.[148]

Although the regime tried to boost the morale and nationalistic sentiments of the Shia through financial compensation to families of war casualties and the embracing of Shia religious symbols and uses.[149] The war burden which particularly impacted the Shia population seemed irreversible. Resistance from the Shia against the regime during the war years intensified and became more visible but exploded after the first gulf war in 1990. Because Shia resistance and political opposition rapidly increased during the Iran-Iraq war, the regime intensified the marginalisation of politically active Shi'ites.[150] Even more, Shi'ites were imprisoned, tortured and deported.[151] The forms of resistance and marginalisation of the political activist Shi'ites are further analysed in the next section 'Shia resistance under Saddam Hussein'.

Within the analysis of Shia politics in Iraq, it is important to note that Shia political activism can best be described as being highly fragmented. Rivalries among different Shia movements and parties were the norm rather than the exception.

During the Iran-Iraq war, Shia political activism came not only from the Da'wa party.

---

[144] In: Blaydes, *State of Repression,* 82, Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's*, 124 & M.S. "Introduction," in *The Iran-Iraq war : historical, economic, and political analysis*, ed. M.S. El Hazhary, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 2.
[145] Blaydes, *State of Repression,* 83.
[146] G. H. Jansen, "The Attitudes of The Arab Governments towards the Gulf War," in *The Iran-Iraq war : historical, economic, and political analysis*, ed. M.S. El Hazhary, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 83.
[147] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 57 & Blaydes, *State of Repression*, 94.
[148] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 57.
[149] Families received for example: a car, thousands of Dinars, a plot of land or interest-free loans. Also, the regime payed respect to Shia symbols and uses by donating tot the religious establishment and respecting Shia holidays. In: Blaydes, *State of Repression,* 85, 101 & Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 61.
[150] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 65.
[151] Mentioned in: Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 59, Blaydes, *State of Repression,* 107 & Shanahan, "Shia," 946.

With the establishment of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) in 1982, Shia political activism became highly fragmented and caused a discourse within the Shia religious establishment. Established by former Da'wa member Muhammed Baqir al-Hakimi, the SCIRI aimed to bring together different Shia movements and parties to offer more resistance against the regime of Hussein.[152] Because the SCIRI became an umbrella organisation of Shia political activism in Iraq, its influence among the Shia community grew rapidly.[153] Initially, the Da'wa party became a part of the SCIRI but later separated in 1984 due to conflicts regarding political and religious leadership. Al-Hakimi advocated the vision of Iranian Grand Ayatollah Khomeini and challenged the political guidance of the Shia in Iraq. Al-Hakimi argued that the *wilayat al-faqih* should be in the hands of Ayatollah Khomeini instead of the Martyr Baqir al-Sadr.[154] The lion's share of Da'wa members still followed the ideology of Baqir al-Sadr which caused conflict within the Shia camp from 1982 onwards.[155]

Moreover, several scholars pointed out that the Iraqi Shi'ites were and are not a politically heterogeneous group. Although the Shia make up the largest community in Iraq, they are diffused over the entire political spectrum.[156] As scholar al-Khafaji writes:

'From individuals occupying leading posts in the Ba'athist governing machinery, to liberals, monarchists and communists. Those Shia who maintained a religious posture, or opposed the regime because of its anti-Shia stance, also showed a wide array of loyalties'.[157]

To summarize, the marginalisation of Shi'ites by the Sunni Ba'ath regime caused feelings of discontent and anger. This development caused the enhancement of political activism and resistance. Besides, Shia political activism became fragmented with the establishment of the SCIRI. Before, Shia resistance and activism were mainly carried out by Da'wa party members. Discourse about which leader and ideology should be followed initiated a conflict between the different Shia activist parties, mainly Da'wa and the SCIRI, in

---

[152] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr*, 64 & Juan R. I. Cole, "The Ayatollahs and Democracy in Iraq," *ISIM review*, (Spring 2006): 34-35.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Shanahan, "Shia," 947. *Wilayat al-faqih* can best be described as religious and political guidance from a Shi'ite leader, in this case Grand Ayatollah Khomeini. In: Hamid Mavani, "Khomeini's Concept of Governance of the Jurisconsult ( Wilayat al-Faqih ) Revisited: The Aftermath of Iran's 2009 Presidential Election," *The Middle East journal* 67, no. 2, (April 2013): 207-228.
[155] Al-Sadr's ideology is mentioned in Chapter I.
[156] Blaydes, *State of Repression*, 88 & Isam al-Khafaji, "A Few Days After: State and Society in a Post-Saddam Iraq." In *Iraq at the Crossroads: State and Society in the Shadow of Regime Change*, ed, Toby Dodge and Steven Simon (Florence: Routledge, 2003), 82.
[157] al-Khafaji, "A Few Days After," 82.

the years after 1982. Moreover, the diffuse political composition of the Shia community did not imply that all people with the Shia identity participated in rebel activities against the regime, nor did all Shia consider themselves to be against the Ba'ath regime.[158]

## III.II Shia Resistance under Saddam Hussein

In this section, two of the most noteworthy and widespread events of resistance by the Shia are being analysed to determine why the Shia in these cases have risen up against the regime of Saddam Hussein. First, the factors which caused the uprising of 1991 are being analysed. Second, the factors which caused the widespread rebellion of 1999 are being identified. These analyses of Shia resistance before 2003 benefits the analysis of the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr because it illustrates which factors could eventually lead to widespread Shia rebellion. Although there are numerous cases of Shia resistance from the 1970s to 2003, these events remain relatively marginal compared to the large scale events of 1991 and 1999. Moreover, the selection of these two events is based on available literature and sources. The rise ups of 1991 and 1999 are described more extensively compared to other incidents of Shia resistance.

In March 1991, after the Gulf War ceasefire, the protest which was later titled the Shia uprising of 1991 or *Sha'aban Intifada*, spread across Iraq. The uprising began in the southern Shia parts of Iraq where demoralized soldiers crossed the border to Iraq after the defeat in Kuwait and started to revolt near the city of Basra.[159] Civil unrest quickly spread to the northern regions of Iraq, which is predominately Kurdish. In the northern and southern regions, soldiers, civilians, and anti-government forces took the streets and started to remove portraits of Hussein and scanting anti-regime slogans. Moreover, armed forces captured the holy city of Najaf and other predominantly Shia settlements from governmental forces. Regime officials were being tortured, killed, or lynched. Although the uprisings quickly spread in Iraq, it was unsuccessful in large parts of Bagdad and other central and predominantly Sunni cities.[160] As Patrick Cockburn argues, the unsuccessful spread of the uprisings in Sunni dominated areas prevented the overthrow of Hussein. The excessive use of violence by the protesters strengthened support for Hussein within the upper ranks of the

[158] Blaydes, *State of Repression*, 89.
[159] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 68.
[160] Blaydes, *State of Repression*, 88.

regime.[161] At the end of March, Hussein restored his authority throughout Iraq through the use of his army and Guardian corps. The armed forces of the protesters were no match to the military power of the regime. The regime executed and tortured thousands of people who participated in the uprising, after which the gap between the Sunni and the Shia of Iraq seemed unbridgeable.[162] But why did the Shia uprising started in 1991, and which factors caused mainly the Shia population of Iraq to revolt?

As mentioned by several scholars, the foremost cause of the uprisings was the defeat of the Iraqi army in Kuwait. After the Iran- Iraq war, the morale of Iraqi soldiers was low and experienced a further setback after the quick defeat in Kuwait.[163] After Hussein ordered a withdrawal from Kuwait after ground and air offences by the US-led Coalition forces, the Iraqi Army simply broke up. Thousands of soldiers were left unprotected and walked hundreds of miles to the Iraqi border. After they arrived in cities around Basra in Southern Iraq, the angery and disillusioned soldiers started protesting against the regime of Hussein, they shot at posters of Hussein and attacked government institutions. The uprising quickly spread among civilians in the southern cities of Iraq.[164]

When analysing why not only Iraqi soldiers but also civilians participated in the uprising of 1991, it becomes clear that four other factors caused discontent and anger among the population, predominantly among Shi'ites.

Firstly, the eight years of war with Iran caused an economic downfall which affected the Iraqi population in general but to a greater extent the Shia population.[165] This becomes evident when the economic decline is compared to the different regions in Iraq during and after the Iran- Iraq war. Shia regions in Southern Iraq experienced a greater economic decline compared to the more central and Sunni dominated areas.[166] This economic conditions partly explain why Shi'ites in the south of Iraq were angry and displeased with Ba'ath policy.

Secondly, most aerial attacks carried out by the US-led Coalition Forces during the Gulf War targeted infrastructure and power plants in the south of Iraq. Moreover, land troops invaded parts of Southern Iraq during the war.[167] Therefore, the casualties and loss of infrastructure were most apparent in Shia areas, enhancing the anger and discontent among

---

[161] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 70.
[162] As argued in: Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 71 & Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 138.
[163] Blaydes, *State of Repression,* 106.
[164] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 73 & Blaydes, *State of Repression,* 87.
[165] Blaydes, *State of Repression,* 86.
[166] Abbas Alnasrawi, "Iraq: Economic Sanctions and Consequences, 1990-2000," *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 2 , (April 2001): 206.
[167] Blaydes, *State of Repression,* 87.

inhabitants of these areas.[168]

Thirdly, it can be argued that the increasing marginalisation of political opposition from 1980 onwards also contributed to the outbreak of the uprising. Not only intensified the persecution of political activists, but the regime also started to punish entire families of people who participated in political opposition.[169] As mentioned before, repression from the state targeted mainly politically active Shia because they posed the biggest threat to the authority of the regime.[170] Therefore it can be argued that the intensification of repression and marginalization during the 1980s caused disloyalty and anger towards the Iraqi regime by the Shia.

Lastly, the defeat of Iraq in the Gulf War highlighted that the authority of Hussein and his instruments of repression had weakened. The resources and men which were used to conduct repression were now used to deal with the burden of war elsewhere.[171] Moreover, it can be argued that the defeat of Iraq and the Iran-Iraq ceasefire meant that the success and thus authority of Hussein was declining. Pathing the way to participate in mass protests. To conclude, a mix of factors that caused anger and discontent among the population in Iraq, especially the Shia, was boiling underneath the surface. Therefore, when angry soldiers started to protest in the streets of Shia areas in Iraq, they were able to initiate mass protests throughout the country.

In February 1999, a second spontaneous and unorganised mass protest broke out after the execution of Sadiq al-Sadr and his two sons. In the predominantly Shia neighbourhoods of Bagdad and cities such as Karbala, Najaf, and Basra, confrontations between Iraqi security forces of the regime and protesters erupted. The protest was violently repressed by security forces of the regime. Dozens of casualties and hundreds of arrests were reported, although the exact numbers remain unclear.[172] Despite the violent crackdown, several activities of protest continued in the following months.[173]

The foremost factor which explains the outbreak out of protests throughout predominantly Shia areas in Iraq, was the execution of the ‘supreme leader of the Shia in Iraq’

---

[168] Achim Rohde, *State-society relations in Ba'thist Iraq facing dictatorship,* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 49.
[169] Patrick Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr and the Fall of Iraq* (London 2008), 65.
[170] Mentioned at page 38.
[171] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr*, 72.
[172] Exact numbers remain unclear due to incomplete government reports about the protests: Unknown, “Ali Hassan al-Majid and the Basra Massacre of 1999,” *Human Rights Watch* 17, no. 2, (February 2005): 11-12.
[173] Blaydes, *State of Repression*, 260.

and the leader of the Sadrist movement, Muhammed Sadiq al-Sadr.[174] After the *Sha'aban Intifada* in 1991, marginalisation and repression by the Iraqi regime continued and further polarised Iraqi society. To tackle this problem and control the Shia community, Hussein integrated Sadiq al-Sadr into his governmental apparatus. As mentioned in chapter I, al-Sadr used resources provided by the regime to gain control over Shia courts, schools, and institutions, while secretly establishing an underground Shia movement. As a result, al-Sadr became popular and influential within the Shia community.[175] Simultaneously, al-Sadr became more active in opposing Ba'ath policy. Because of his actions, Hussein feared that al-Sadr could become the effective voice of the Shia majority. Despite warnings from Hussein at the address of al-Sadr, al-Sadr continued to undermine the authority of the regime in his Friday sermons.[176] Eventually, Hussein lost patience and allegedly ordered the assassination of Sadiq al-Sadr. Al-Sadr and two of his sons were shot dead in a car when they left one of the Friday sermons in February 1999. As news of his assassination spread, violent protests erupted throughout Shia strongholds.[177] But why did the assassination of al-Sadr cause mass protests throughout Iraq?

Firstly, after the uprising of 1991, the policy of Shia repression and marginalisation continued. Suspects of Shia political activism were heavily monitored and more than a hundred Shia clergy were arrested.[178] Besides causing fear among Shi'ites throughout the 1990s, this also produced emotions of anger and discontent. Simultaneously, the popular and influential Sadiq al-Sadr addressed and magnified the feelings of the Shia in his sermons and *fatwas*. For example, he propagated political activism as the gateway to liberation and the restoration of traditional Shia customs. By doing this, as argued by Patrick Cockburn, al-Sadr developed a social revolutionary element in not only his Sadrist movement but also the ordinary Shia.[179]

Secondly, the economic sanction imposed by the United Nations after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait heavily impacted the population of Iraq. Unemployment rose to around 40 percent and high inflation caused savings and salaries to evaporate. The sanctions were felt most by the lower classes as they could not purchase basic needs. Although the regime implemented a successful food rationing system in the beginning years of the sanctions, it

[174] Sadiq al-Sadr declared himself as the supreme leader of the Iraqi Shia: Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 141.
[175] Mentioned at page 11.
[176] Examples of his activist behaviour are mentioned at page 11.
[177] Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 141.
[178] Unknown, "Ali Hassan," 11.
[179] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 114.

could not provide everyone with basis goods in the years that followed.[180] As the regime failed to care for its population, al-Sadr focused on the poor and needy to enhance his support base. He touched upon the subjects of poverty, services, and other economic-related problems. By doing this, he opposed Ba'ath policy and spread anger and discontent within the Shia community towards the regime.[181]

When analysing why the assassination of al-Sadr caused mass protests throughout Iraq, it becomes clear that the activities of al-Sadr produced emotions of anger and discontent among the Shia towards the Iraqi regime. Moreover, al-Sadr propagated political activism to counter Ba'ath authority. The combination of anger by the Shia and the assassination of Sadiq al-Sadr caused mass protests throughout Iraq.

To conclude, the two events of Shia resistance in 1991 and 1999 were both initiated by external factors, namely the assassination of Sadiq al-Sadr and the rioting of withdrawn soldiers. In both cases, it becomes evident that many Shi'ites became increasingly discontent about their position within Iraqi society. Marginalisation by the regime and economic hardship are two important factors that caused Shia resistance under Saddam Hussein.

## III.III The US-led invasion in Iraq

On 20 March 2003, the invasion of Iraq began. Through a campaign of bombing, the US-led Coalition Forces quickly defeated the Iraqi Army and occupied the country. The Ba'ath regime and Saddam Hussein were removed from power, which marked the beginning of a new era in Iraqi politics. In this section, the failure of the political transition process after 2003 is briefly discussed to identify the political landscape of Iraq in which Muqtada al-Sadr was able to quickly gain political power.

After the invasion, it became clear that the Coalition forces had no sufficient plan to implement a new Iraqi government. The United States set up an occupation structure to immediately declare sovereignty in Iraq. Under the leadership of General Garner, US government personnel administered the Iraqi ministries and thus temporarily held political power. After this plan was deployed in April 2003, Garner started to establish a

[180] Blaydes, *State of Repression,* 116.
[181] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 114-115.

representative, new Iraqi government. Several meetings with different political Iraqi parties were held but the consolidation of an entirely new government proved to be time-consuming.[182] The Bush administration wanted to shift gears and appointed ambassador Paul Bremer to implement the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) in July 2003. Although the 25 members of the council had different religious backgrounds, they could not count on support from the Iraqi people.[183]

The implementation of the IGC brought tensions among the different factions in Iraq.[184] Because the IGC was constructed without the support of the Iraqi people, it became evident that the implemented government was unsuccessful in establishing a new and sustainable government. As it turned out, the unsuccessful implementation of the IGC caused a power vacuum in Iraq which initiated conflict between different political factions who wanted to seize power.

For the Shia, different movements and parties tried to step into the power gap. The Da'wa Party under the leadership of Ibrahim al-Jafari and the SCIRI of Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim both tried to gain power within the Iraqi political arena, but it was Muqtada al-Sadr and his Sadrist movement who captured the spotlight and fought for Shia political dominance in Iraq.

[182] Katzman, *Iraq: Post-Saddam*, 9.
[183] Ali Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 167.
[184] Tensions between different Shia, Sunni and Kurdish parties and movements.

# Chapter IV: The Rise of Muqtada al-Sadr

Through the use of underground networks, the political power vacuum, the Mahdi Army, and his ability to address the Shia, the almost unknown Muqtada al-Sadr rose to power in Iraq after the US-led invasion of 2003. In this chapter, the different aspects which contributed to the rise of the young Shia leader are being analysed to answer the research question: What explains the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr after the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq? This chapter will also present the conclusion of this research.

## IV.I Muqtada al-Sadr's underground network and Sadrist movement

After the assassination of his father, Muqtada was placed under house arrest. Every step he made was monitored, which heavily limited his freedom of movement. Although the regime of Hussein stated that this was done to protect Muqtada from the people who assassinated his father, it is widely accepted that this was done to prevent Muqtada from participating in the uprisings of 1999 and becoming a threat to the regime.[185] Parallel to the house arrest of Muqtada, the Sadrist movement was forced to hide and remain silent. With the assassination of Sadiq al-Sadr, the Sadrist movement had lost its leader and spiritual guide. Moreover, the assassination proved that the Iraqi regime was willing to use extreme measures to eliminate opposition, forcing the Sadrists into hiding.[186] Four years later, the regime of Hussein was removed, creating a window of opportunity for Muqtada al-Sadr and the Sadrist movement to gain power. But how was the young and unknown al-Sadr able to quickly capture the spotlight and become the new leader of the Sadrist movement?

Immediately after the fall of the Ba'ath regime on 9 April 2003, Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Kazem al-Haeri, who fled and stayed in Iran after the Iranian revolution of 1979 and was appointed the new Sadrist leader after the assassination of Sadiq al-Sadr, issued several *fatwa's* concerning the invasion of Iraq. In the first and most noteworthy *fatwa*, al-Haeri stated that the Iraqi Shia should ignore the presence of the Coalition Forces and take matters into their own hands by fighting against cultural corruption and liberate Iraq. He also appointed Muqtada al-Sadr as his surrogate in Iraq, giving him the authority to lead the

[185] This is stated in: Nimrod Raphaeli, "Understanding Muqtada al-Sadr," *Middle East Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 33-42, Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 138 & Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 141.
[186] Timothy Haugh, "The Sadr II Movement: An Organizational Fight for Legitimacy within the Iraqi Shi'a Community," *Strategic Insights* IV, no. 5 (May 2005): 2.

Shia.[187] Although different sources suggest that al-Sadr already began to revitalize the Sadrist networks of his father months before the overthrow of Ba'ath rule, it was the endorsement of al-Haeri in combination with the fall of the Iraqi regime which allowed al-Sadr to resurrect Shia mosques and public institutions.[188]

Due to the abolishment of Friday sermons by the Ba'ath regime in the 1990s, Shia mosques and public institutions were closed. Under the leadership of Baqir al-Sadr, these mosques and institutions became places where Shia political activists, mainly the Sadrists, met and exchanged thoughts. This, in turn, created a Sadrist network throughout Iraq.[189] When the regime fell, Muqtada quickly re-opened mosques and public institutions and took control over universities, hospitals, and welfare centres to set up forms of local governance.[190] Al-Sadr's movement was particularly successful in predominantly Shia areas in Southern Iraq and Saddam City. Saddam City, the large, Shia and poor neighbourhood of Bagdad was quickly renamed Sadr City and became a power base for al-Sadr in the upcoming years.[191]

When analysing the re-opening of Shia power bases by Muqtada al-Sadr, remarkably, other Shia leaders did not intervene in the re-establishment of the Sadrists networks. The quietist Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Da'wa leader Ibrahim al-Jafari, and SCIRI leader Abd-al-Aziz al-Hakim all remained on the side-line, providing al-Sadr with the opportunity to fully control the Shia mosques and institutions.[192]

Although al-Sadr was young, almost unknown, and did not hold a special religious rank, it is remarkable that he quickly became the new leader of the Sadrist movement and utilized their networks. When looking back at the first months after the invasion, the appointment of al-Sadr as the Sadrist leader was made possible by two developments. First, as already mentioned, Grand Ayatollah and Sadrist leader al-Haeri appointed al-Sadr as the deputy Sadrist leader in Iraq. This was crucial in the enhancement of authority by al-Sadr because he was still a low ranked cleric. With his low religious status, he could not issue religious rules and obtain authority over Sadrists.[193] Because of his status, al-Sadr needed the approval of a senior and high cleric to lead the Sadrist movement. Al Haeri gave his authority

---

[187] Juan Cole, "The United States and Shi'ite religious factions in post-Ba'thist Iraq," *Middle East Journal* 57, no. 4 (Autumn 2003): 554.
[188] The suggestion is made in: Haugh, "The Sadr II Movement," 3, Cole, 'The United States," 554 & Al Kubaisi, "The Double Game,".
[189] Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 139 & Berman, *Economics of Terrorism,* 56.
[190] International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Muqtada al-Sadr: Spoiler or Stabiliser?," *Crisis Group Middle East Report* 55, (July 2006): 7. https://www.crisisgroup.org/iraq-s-muqtada-al-sadr-spoiler-or-stabiliser.
[191] Ibidem & Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 160.
[192] Cole, 'The United States," 554.
[193] Muqtada al-Sadr held the title of *Hojjet al-Islam,* a low clerical rank. Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12," 11.

in Iraq to al-Sadr which gave him the authority to rule over the resurrected Sadrist movement

Secondly, the fact that Muqtada al-Sadr stayed in Iraq during the years of repression and marginalisation under Hussein in combination with his family history, gave him status among Sadrists. In contrast with leaders of other Shia political movements such as the Da'wa party and the SCIRI, who fled Iraq during the years of repression and marginalisation, Muqtada al-Sadr stayed in Iraq. As argued by different scholars, this gave al-Sadr a certain form of status when he emerged as the new Sadrist leader. He did not abandon the Shia who were also affected by repressive measures of the Ba'ath regime.[194] Additionally, the al-Sadr family history provided Muqtada with status among the Shia. As mentioned before, Baqir al-Sadr and Sadiq al-Sadr were highly politically active and both became martyrs after they were executed. This did not only give them status among the Shia, but it also meant that their legacy and ideology should be continued by the next generations.[195] When Muqtada emerged, this immediately gave him authority and status among the Shia, in particular among the Sadrists.

To resurrect the Sadrists networks and keep hospitals, universities, and welfare centres under his control, al-Sadr needed financial resources and people to rely on. Because al-Haeri appointed al-Sadr as his representative in Iraq, he was able to collect religious taxes on behalf of al-Haeri. These *Khoms* provided the Sadrist movement with a vast income which was efficiently distributed throughout Iraq. As stated by a spokesman of al-Sadr, the movement collected around 65000 USD a month from these donations, which was spent to support the poor, religious students, and Sadrists offices in Najaf, Karbala, and Bagdad.[196] Furthermore, al-Sadr was in touch with around 15 high clergies throughout Iraq. These clergies acted as representatives of al-Sadr and not only collected religious taxes on behalf of al-Sadr, they were also in charge of reviving the Sadrist movement and controlling their institutions.[197]

---

[194] This suggestion is made in: Haugh, "The Sadr II Movement," 1, Amatzia Baram, "The Iraqi Shi'i Community: Between Sistani, Muqtada, the IGC, and the CPA," Congressional Testimony, *United States Institute of Peace* (April 21, 2004). https://www.usip.org/publications/2004/04/iraqi-shii-community-between-sistani-muqtada-igc-and-cpa & Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 160

[195] As mentioned at page 9. Shi'ite martyrs are referred to as figures of which their heritage should be continued: Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*.

[196] Anthony Shadid, "A Struggle for Iraqi Clergy's Soul," *The Washington Post*, June 30, 2003. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2003/06/30/a-struggle-for-iraqi-clergys-soul/38617bbe-23bf-4bc9-b690-bb9abaa3650b/.

[197] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 159.

## IV.II Political Power Vacuum

In the analysis of the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr, the aspect of the power vacuum comes forward. The political environment after the 2003 invasion allowed al-Sadr to resurrect the Sadrist movement and compete in the battle for power. But how did the power vacuum contribute to the rise of al-Sadr in Iraq?

After the Bush administration declared victory of the Coalition Forces in Iraq on the first of May 2003, it quickly became apparent that nobody held real and sovereign political power in Iraq. Although the Coalition Forces controlled the Iraqi governmental apparatus, the political transition to a representative government proved to be difficult.[198] As a result of the overthrow of the Ba'ath regime, al-Sadr came out of isolation and immediately started to resurrect the Sadrist movement and networks. The political power vacuum granted al-Sadr with the opportunity to start giving sermons and speeches as no sovereign power prevented this. As early as 11 April 2003, al-Sadr gave his first Friday sermon in Kufa, asking the Shia to undertake a pilgrimage to Karbala to express their discontent about the political environment, mainly the US occupation and leading ayatollahs.[199] Thousands of Shia walked towards Karbala, celebrating their religion despite the marginalisation and persecution under Hussein.[200] Noteworthy within this context is the amount of Iraqi media coverage al-Sadr and his actions received.[201] Arguably, this further enhanced the range and impact of his sermons throughout Iraq.

When the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) was established in July 2003, it became obvious that the US was unsuccessful in implementing a representative Iraqi government. Despite the variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds in the 25 member council, they were not chosen by the Iraqi population. As the council was not a representative government, the population and Iraqi political movements started to doubt the authority and political power of the IGC. Directly after the establishment of the IGC, al-Sadr started to criticise its foundation and power. In a sermon delivered on 18 July 2003, al-Sadr portrayed the governing council as illegitimate and 'puppets' of the US-led Coalition Forces, undermining their authority in

[198] As discussed at page 45.
[199] International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Muqtada al-Sadr," 9.
[200] Ewan MacAskill, "Shia Muslims free to mark martyrdom after 30 years," *The Guardian*, April 23, 2003. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/apr/23/iraq.ewenmacaskill.
[201] International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Muqtada al-Sadr," 9.

Iraq.[202] Moreover, al-Sadr told his followers that he was constructing a shadow government: 'I will seek, and so will you, to bring together some parties to write a constitution, establish a governing council, and declare the establishment of an Islamic state that seeks to apply the rule of religion.'[203] Al-Sadr also stated that he was establishing an army to drive the Coalition forces out of Iraq.[204]

In the analysis of the power vacuum in Iraq it becomes clear that within the Shia community, there was also a lack of authority and power after the invasion of 2003. High ranked traditional Shia clerics such as Ayatollah Abdul Aziz al-Hakim and Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani remained quiet and stayed in Iran after the invasion. Al-Sadr attacked their silence by accusing them of cooperating with the Coalition Forces.[205] Moreover, the Da'wa party and the SCIRI were part of the IGC, making them unreliable in the eyes of most Shia.[206]

In conclusion, both the power vacuum in Iraqi politics and within the Shia community provided Muqtada al-Sadr with the opportunity to fill the vacuum and resurrect the Sadrist movement. Al-Sadr used the vacuum to his advantage by criticising the Coalition Forces and his political opponents. This, in turn, further enhanced the popularity and influence of al-Sadr in Iraq.[207]

## IV.III Support & Mobilisation

The rise of Muqtada al-Sadr on the political scene could not be successful without the large-scale support of Shi'ites. Inseparable, through the enhancement of support, al-Sadr was able to consolidate his leadership and mobilise the masses. But how was al-Sadr able to gain support and mobilise his followers?

One of the factors which caused the almost immediate popularity of Muqtada al-Sadr among a Shia fraction was the legacy of his father and father-in-law. Baqir al-Sadr established the Da'wa party and became the "most dangerous opponent" of Saddam Hussein.[208] Arguably,

---

[202] Unknown, "Muqtada al-Sadr," *globalsecurity.org*, accessed November 17, 2020. https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/al-sadr.htm, Unknown, "Inside Iraq," *Iraq Report, Radio Liberty* 6, no. 32 (July 24, 2003). https://www.rferl.org/a/1343132.html.
[203] Unknown, "Inside Iraq,".
[204] Patrick Jackson, "Who are Iraq's Mehdi Army?," *BBC News*, May 30, 2007. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3604393.stm.
[205] Haugh, "The Sadr II Movement," 4.
[206] Cole, "The United States," 556.
[207] Haugh, "The Sadr II Movement," 6, Cole, "The United States," 555 & International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Muqtada al-Sadr," 7.
[208] Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 140.

when looking back in time, Baqir al-Sadr was the first person who established a relatively successful movement of Shia political activism. He issued several *fatwas* wherein he opposed the Ba'ath regime and initiated several Shia uprisings throughout Iraq.[209] After the execution of Baqir al-Sadr in 1980, Sadiq al-Sadr continued the political activist path of his cousin and established the Sadrist movement.

As mentioned earlier, Sadiq al-Sadr and the Sadrist movement set up a network of mosques, schools, and social centres to support the marginalised Shia, in particular, the Shia poor. This did not only give him status as protector of the Shia, but it also provided him with the tools to spread his ideology.[210] The most important feature of his ideology that created a mass following was the belief that the Shia needed to act to revive Shi'ism in Iraq. This, in turn, could counter the marginalisation and suppression of the Ba'ath regime. Sadiq al-Sadr opposed the traditional Shia establishment that followed the principle of *taqiyya* (dissimulation and concealment) when dealing with political affairs. Al-Sadr believed and propagated an approach of political activism to revive Shi'ism and overcome the marginalisation of the Shia by the regime of Hussein.[211] By spreading his message and meeting the needs of the Shia communities through his networks of mosques, schools, and social institutions, Sadiq al-Sadr gained mass appeal among the Shia throughout Iraq, but particularly in the poor Shia neighbourhoods of Bagdad and Basra.[212]

When Muqtada al-Sadr captured the spotlights for the Shia in 2003, it was the legacy of Baqir al-Sadr and Sadiq al-Sadr which provided him with the fundament of support on which he could build. Muqtada elaborated on his family legacy in three ways.

Firstly, Sadiq and Baqir al-Sadr became martyrs after their executions. The al-Sadr family name thus held two holy titles of the martyr. As the ideology behind martyrdom describes, the actions and ideology of the martyrs should not be forgotten, but instead, be continued by the next generation.[213] When the unknown Muqtada al-Sadr took the stage, it was the title of his predecessors that provided him with the immediate recognition and following by the Shia which before supported his father-in-law and father.[214]

Secondly, Sadiq al-Sadr had established a successful network of institutions through which he and the Sadrist movement could help the Shia. Muqtada al-Sadr quickly resurrected

---

[209] Ibid.
[210] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 113.
[211] Ibid, 102, 116.
[212] Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12," 9.
[213] As explained at page 9.
[214] Patrick Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr, the Shia Revival, and the Struggle for Iraq*, (New York: Scribner, 2008), 27.

these networks. This proved that al-Sadr continued the work of his father in the eyes of the Shia. Moreover, it provided al-Sadr with a firm base through which he could enhance his support and popularity.

Thirdly, Muqtada al-Sadr continued the main ideology of his father. Similar to Sadiq, Muqtada believed that political activism of the Shia masses was the key solution for the revival of the Shia. Through this activism, they build a movement that could successfully oppose the oppressor. Where before it was the Ba'ath regime of Hussein that oppressed the Shia, Muqtada al-Sadr now blamed the US-led Coalition Forces and their associated Iraqi allies. Moreover, Muqtada continued to strive for the fulfilment of the material needs of the Shia.[215] Interestingly, Muqtada mimics his father's behaviour when he speeches. He copies the linguistic habits of Sadiq and talks in the same local dialect.[216]

Although Muqtada al-Sadr elaborated on the legacy of his predecessors to gain support and mobilize the masses, it becomes clear that he applied a mix of other tactics and ideologies to enhance the weight of the Sadrist movement in Iraq.

Immediately after a power vacuum emerged in Iraq, al-Sadr claimed legitimacy of his Sadrist movement by challenging the traditional Shia clergy and *Hawza*.[217] Because the Shia community is highly hierarchal and al-Sadr did not finish his religious studies, his legitimacy within the Shia community could threaten his rise to power. He could not issue *fatwas* and legal rulings. To overcome this limitation, the Sadrist movement and al-Sadr challenged the complete traditional Shia establishment in the "competition for resources and symbolic leadership".[218] Instead of challenging the scholarly legitimacy of the traditional clerics, the al-Sadr movement focused on four different sub-frames (Anti-coalition, foreign influence, moral courage and exclusivity of faith) to challenge and weaken their Shia opponents and simultaneously enhance their own popularity.[219] This was done by following the ideology of political activism.

The al-Sadr movement challenged the traditional clergy for not having objected to the rule of the US-led Coalition forces. The Shia establishment remained quiet on this issue while al-Sadr repeatedly advocated the withdrawal of foreign troops.[220] Also, in his speeches, al-Sadr attacked Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani and Ayatollah al-Hakim for leaving Iraq during

[215] International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Muqtada al-Sadr," 17.
[216] Ibid..
[217] *Hawza* is a religius seminar of high ranked Shi'ite clerics.
[218] Haugh, "The Sadr II Movement," 4.
[219] As argued by: Haugh, "The Sadr II Movement," 4.
[220] Baram, "The Iraqi Shi'i,".

difficult times. He accused them of being foreigners which had close and suspicious ties with the Iranian establishment. Furthermore, as argued by al-Sadr, the clergy showed no moral courage to protect the Shia. They remained quiet and did not resist the occupation forces which posed a threat to the Shia community.[221] Additionally, the Sadrists set up courts and ministries in Sadrist dominated areas. Through these institutions, they realised their own interpretation of Islamic law. As an example: alcohol was banned, video shops were closed and women were insisted to wear a veil.[222] By establishing a shadow 'Shia' government, al-Sadr and the Sadrists undermined the authority of the traditional apolitical Shia establishment.[223]

But why did these nationalist, populist and anti-clerical sentiments of al-Sadr result in widespread Shia support throughout Iraq? The foremost explanation of the rise in popularity of al-Sadr is that his beliefs and actions resonated with the feelings and views of the Shia, in particular, the poor urbanised Shia. The Ba'ath regime under the leadership of Hussein had marginalised and suppressed the Shi'ites. This was particularly visible in the poor Shia neighbourhoods. Here, the people needed food, jobs and other goods but were left unheard and unassisted during the reign of Hussein. After the invasion, there was also no strong functioning government that supported and assisted the Shia. In other words, the Shia were again left hopeless. In contrast with other Shia leaders, al-Sadr exactly knew what the Shia needed and undertook action to enhance their hope.

On the practical level, al-Sadr used the networks of mosques, schools, and social institutions to provide meals, education, and healthcare to the Shia who needed it the most.[224] This was most visible in Sadr City, a poor neighbourhood at the outskirts of Bagdad with around 2 million inhabitants. This neighbourhood became the power base of the al-Sadr movement. Within a couple of months, the Sadrists controlled 90 percent of the formal institutions such as mosques, schools and hospitals. Furthermore, several Sadrists offices were opened.[225] Besides restoring basic needs services to the Shia in Sadr City, the Sadrist movement provided security to its inhabitants. Traffic was being regulated and the streets were policed.[226] The movement was also visible in large parts of Southern Iraq and cities such

[221] Haugh, "The Sadr II Movement," 4.
[222] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,*164 & Raphaeli, "Understanding Muqtada al-Sadr," 38.
[223] Haugh, "The Sadr II Movement," 4.
[224] Raphaeli, "Understanding Muqtada al-Sadr," 36.
[225] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 146, 160.
[226] Iranian Labour News Agency - ILNA (Tehran), July 21, 2003, quoted in Mahan Abedin, "Dossier: The Sadrist Movement," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* 5, no. 7. (July 2003)

as Kufa and Najaf.[227] By establishing this apparatus to meet the needs of the Shia, al-Sadr restored hope and enhanced his popularity among the Shia. In addition, it also becomes evident that his popularity created mobilisation. While the Sadrist movement re-opened mosques and resurrected the old networks of institutions, it were the inhabitants themselves who made the apparatus a success. They undertook action to increase their livelihoods by restoring the electricity network and distributing food and other necessities.[228]

On the ideological level, al-Sadr appealed to the Shia because he resonated with their beliefs and position in Iraqi society. Al-Sadr and his predecessors represented the average Iraqi Shia because they did not leave Iraq during difficult times, just as most Shi'ites.[229] Arguably, this created a connection between Muqtada and the Shia as they both had to endure the repressive measures of the Ba'ath regime. Additionally, al-Sadr was the only Shia leading figure who propagated a revival of the Shia in Iraq. He re-opened mosques to restore Friday sermons. In his speeches and sermons, al-Sadr showed that collective action could indeed, restore their faith. The most noteworthy event which illustrated that the faith of the Shia could be revived was the pilgrimage to Karbala which was attended by thousands of believers.[230]

The position of al-Sadr towards the US-led Coalition Forces further enhanced his popularity. As already mentioned, the aspirations and actions of al-Sadr were channelled towards the withdrawal of the Coalition Forces. The Coalition Forces, in the eyes of al-Sadr, prevented Iraq from becoming a free Islamic state in which the Shia could flourish.[231] This belief resonated with the marginalised Shia and in particular with the young and poor Shia men. These young men were mostly uneducated which meant that they could not climb the social and economic ladder. Moreover, the political situation in Iraq left them hopeless, with no prospect of upward social mobility.[232] As it turned out, the characteristics of the al-Sadr movement appealed to these men because it provided them with the opportunity to take matters into their own hands. Through collective political activism, they were able to enhance their social position.

To conclude, al-Sadr was able to enhance his support and popularity by resonating with the Shia on a practical and ideological level. He propagated beliefs and aspirations which

[227] International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Muqtada al-Sadr," 7.
[228] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 146 & Raphaeli, "Understanding Muqtada al-Sadr," 36.
[229] Bayless, "Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?," 145 & International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Muqtada al-Sadr," 8.
[230] As mentioned at page 49.
[231] Haugh, "The Sadr II Movement," 6.
[232] Baram, "The Iraqi Shi'i,".

were in line with the needs of the Shia, while no other leading Shia figure reached out to help the Shia community.

## IV.IV The Mahdi Army

Complementary to the factors of underground networks, the power vacuum, support and mobilisation, the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr in Iraq was successful due to the operations and actions of the Mahdi Army. But how did the establishment of the Mahdi Army contribute to the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr in Iraq? Because the Mahdi Army is already framed and analysed in chapter two, this section will analyse the Mahdi Army in relation to the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr.

In one of his speeches in June 2003, al-Sadr launched the formation of a shadow government and a military wing, namely the Mahdi Army. In the analyses on why al-Sadr established this military wing, two factors can be identified.

Firstly, the Mahdi Army was established to secure the al-Sadr movement and provide security in Shia dominated areas. Although the Sadrist movement had established a successful apparatus of shadow governance in the areas where they were active, a division that could protect and support the movement was missing. By using the Mahdi Army, the Sadrist movement of al-Sadr was able to secure the movement and maintain relevance in the areas which they controlled.[233] In the months after its establishment, the Mahdi Army can therefore be characterised as a component of the Sadrist movement. In contrast to what could be expected from a military wing, the primary goal of the army was to support the Sadrist movement without using violence. The army took over the tasks of providing public services, infrastructural regulation and financial distribution.[234] However, the militia shifted gears from 2004 onwards and started to challenge their enemies by using violence.

Secondly, the Mahdi Army was brought to life as a result of the exclusion of al-Sadr from the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and later the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC). Although the movement of al-Sadr had gained momentum after the invasion and became increasingly dominant in several areas throughout Iraq, he was politically ignored by predominantly the Coalition Forces. This triggered a new approach of al-Sadr to maintain

[233] Micheal Howard, "Mahdi army commanders withdraw to Iran to lie low during security crackdown, " *The Guardian*, February 15, 2007. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/feb/15/iraq.iran & International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Muqtada al-Sadr," 10.
[234] Taha, "Turning ex-combatants into Sadrist," 357.

political relevance. By establishing a military wing, the Sadrist movement could eventually not be ignored in the construction of a new government. This, in combination with the demand for the immediate withdrawal of the US-led Coalition Forces from Iraq by al-Sadr, and the notion that they were not planning to leave in the near future, also initiated the formation of the Mahdi Army.[235] By shifting from indirect confrontation to direct confrontation through the use of the militia, al-Sadr showed that he was prepared to take far-reaching action, namely military confrontation to reach his goals.

Besides the main motivations to establish the Mahdi Army, it can also be argued that these two factors further enhanced the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr in Iraq. By supporting the Sadrist movement in Shia dominated areas, the al-Sadr movement gained in effectiveness and importance. Furthermore, by openly challenging the Shia opponents and the Coalition Forces with the establishment of the Mahdi Army, al-Sadr enhanced his magnitude in the political arena of Iraq. This, in turn, generated more support and followers.

Additionally, two main confrontations between the Mahdi Army and the Coalition Forces showed that Al-Sadr was a rising force that could not be ignored.

In the months after its establishment, the Mahdi Army remained low and focussed on non-violent actions such as supporting the Sadrist movement in distributing goods and providing security. However, in early April 2004, the Mahdi Army clashed with the Coalition Forces in Bagdad, Kufa, Najaf and Karbala.[236] The reason for the military confrontation was the closure of the Sadrist newspaper *Al-Hawza* by the coalition forces and the arrest of prominent Sadrist Mustafa al-Yacoubi.[237] Uprisings began and the Mahdi Army started to mobilize and take tactical positions between the shrines in Kufa, Najaf and Karbala. By doing so, the Coalition Forces could not use artillery against the militiamen because the risk of damaging the holy shrines, which could initiate a further conflict, was too high. Although the militia was inferior to the military supremacy of the Coalition Forces, the battles lasted almost two months. [238] During the confrontations, the CPA demanded the arrest of al-Sadr and the dismantling of his Mahdi Army. When fighting continued and it became obvious that the militia was on the back foot, al-Sadr agreed to withdraw his men. In turn, the CPA no longer demanded the dismantling of the militia and arrest of al-Sadr.[239] Although the all-out

[235] Babak Rahimi, "The Return of Moqtada al-Sadr and the Revival of the Mahdi Army," *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 6, (June 2010): 8-10.
[236] Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12," 14.
[237] Ibid & Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 184.
[238] Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12," 14.
[239] Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr,* 186.

confrontation with the Coalition Forces ended in a stalemate, it can be argued that the Mahdi Army and al-Sadr were the moral winners. The Mahdi Army has shown that they could withstand the assault of the superior Coalition Forces for almost two months. Moreover, while the Coalition Forces aimed at a quick defeat of al-Sadr and his militia, they accomplished the exact opposite. Muqtada al-Sadr and his movement were a force that no longer could be ignored, both militarily and politically.[240]

While several minor clashes between the Mahdi Army and Coalition Forces erupted throughout the summer of 2004, a second full-out confrontation between the two started in August 2004. Militiamen attacked a US-marine convoy because they thought they were coming to arrest al-Sadr. The Coalition forces immediately responded and started an assault on the Mahdi Army in the city of Najaf.[241] Again the Mahdi Army militiamen took tactical position around the holy cemetery of Najaf and the Imam Ali shrine. This time Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani, the moral leader of the traditional Shia clergy, negotiated between al-Sadr and the Coalition Forces. The result was a ceasefire. Al-Sadr was forced to withdraw his militia from Najaf while in turn, arrest warrants against high Sadrists and al-Sadr were dropped.[242]

After the second ceasefire, the Mahdi Army fell apart. Al-Sadr seemed to have lost control over his militiamen as they started to loot and plunder with the use of excessive violence. Moreover, al-Haeri declared that al-Sadr was no longer his representative in Iraq. This not only caused a problem regarding the collection of *Khoms*, the primary source of money, but it was also a blow to the authority of al-Sadr.[243] Because al-Sadr needed to change tactics to regain his authority over his militia and the Shia community, he turned to politics. After months of silence in the aftermath of the Najaf confrontation, al-Sadr reappeared to almost completely focus on enhancing political influence in Iraq. However, the reappearance of al-Sadr into Iraqi politics is beyond the scope of this research.

In the analyses of the two main confrontations between the Mahdi Army and the Coalition Forces, it becomes clear that the Mahdi Army contributed to the rise of al-Sadr in Iraq. It demonstrated the capacity of al-Sadr to mobilise his followers for armed conflict. In addition, while being untrained and unstructured, the militia was capable to stand up against the military superior Coalition Forces. As a consequence, al Sadr and his movement could no

[240] Ibid, 190.
[241] Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12," 14.
[242] Jeffrey Bartholet, "Moqtada al-Sadr and U.S.'s Fate in Iraq, " *Newsweek*, March 12, 2006. https://www.newsweek.com/moqtada-al-sadr-and-uss-fate-iraq-105197.
[243] Cochrane, "Iraq Report 12," 15.

longer military and politically be ignored, giving rise to al-Sadr as the leader of the Shia. Furthermore, the two confrontations showed that the militiamen were highly loyal towards al-Sadr. While being unpaid, mostly untrained and suffering heavy losses during the confrontations, they continued to fight and remain loyal to al-Sadr.

## Conclusion

This research questioned the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr after the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. Building on the theory of rebel governance and guided by the explaining-outcome process-tracing method and critical content analyses, the different factors that contributed to the rise of power by al-Sadr after 2003 are identified. First and foremost, it becomes evident that the Shia community before 2003 was heavily marginalised and repressed by the Ba'ath regime of Hussein. This not only caused feelings of discontent and anger by the Shia but, it also gave rise to political activism. Through the use of political activism, Baqir al-Sadr tried to enhance the position of the Shia community in Iraq. However, it was under the leadership of Sadiq al-Sadr when the Sadrist movement gained momentum and started to successfully challenge the authority of the Ba'ath regime. When repressive measures increased and Sadiq al-Sadr was assassinated, the movement was forced into hiding.

When the Ba'ath regime was removed from office during the US-led invasion of 2003, the unknown, young and inexperienced Muqtada al-Sadr captured the spotlights as the new political activist leader of the Shia. Once again, the movement of an al-Sadr tried to enhance the position of the Shia community in Iraq. This research concludes that Muqtada al-Sadr's rise to power was enabled by the factors: power vacuum, underground networks, mobilisation and the Mahdi Army.

Firstly, the power vacuum which emerged after the US-led invasion provided al-Sadr with a window of opportunity. The Coalition Forces successfully removed the regime of Hussein but were unable to implement a representative government. Moreover, the traditional Shia establishment remained quiet which also paved the way for al-Sadr to step into the vacuum, achieve his goals, and resurrect the Sadrist movement.

Secondly, al-Sadr resurrected the underground networks and Sadrist movement which were established by his father. By resurrecting the Sadrist movement and Sadrists networks of mosques, schools, and other social institutions, al-Sadr was able to construct a shadow

government which provided the Shia with material and social needs. This, in turn, enhanced the popularity of al-Sadr within the Shia community. As pointed out, the main explanation of why the inexperienced and relatively unknown Muqtada al-Sadr was able to lead the resurrected Sadrist movement was his family legacy. The al-Sadr family name not only provided Muqtada with status among his followers, but al-Sadr also utilized the main aspect of his predecessors, namely the enhancement of the Shia community through the use of political activism.

Thirdly, al-Sadr was able to enhance his popularity within the Shia community and mobilise his supporters by resonating with the Shia on a practical and ideological level. On the practical level, the Sadrist movement provided meals, security, and healthcare to the Shia who needed it the most, such as in Sadr City. In line with the main aspect of rebel governance, namely ideology, al-Sadr propagated beliefs and aspirations which corresponded with the needs and beliefs of the Shia. As the theory of rebel governance suggests, ideology influences the relationship between non-state actors and civilians. When the ideology of the non-state actor is in harmony with that of the civilians, support and mobilisation of civilians will increase. The findings in this research suggest that there are two main ideologies advocated by al-Sadr which were in line with the ideology of the Shia. Al-Sadr propagated the revival of Shi'ism in Iraq by re-opening mosques to restore Friday sermons and advocated that the revival of the Shia could be made possible by collective action. This, in turn, further enhanced support for the movements of al-Sadr. Moreover, al-Sadr resonated with the beliefs of the Shia by demanding an immediate withdrawal of the Coalition Forces to implement an Iraqi Islamic state. As argued by al-Sadr, it was the US-led coalition which prevented the social, political and economic revival of the Shia.

Lastly, through the use of the Mahdi Army, al-Sadr demonstrated his rise as the leader of the Shia. The militia was capable to stand up against the Coalition Forces, which propelled al-Sadr into the Iraqi political arena. No longer could al-Sadr be politically ignored by his opponents. Additionally, the battles fought by the Mahdi Army demonstrated the capacity of al-Sadr to mobilise his followers for armed conflict.

These combined factors enabled the quick rise of Muqtada al-Sadr after the US-led invasion of 2003. Through his actions, al-Sadr cemented his leadership over the Shia and spectacularly reshaped the political landscape of Iraq.

# Bibliography

Abood, Aqeel, “The Sadrist movement: Success in Mobilizing People in Iraq,” *Kufa Review* 2, no. 2. (2013): 77-13, 2013. https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2013/03/201331384858751104.html

Alaaldin, Ranj,” The Islamic Da‘wa Party and the Mobilization of Iraq’s Shi‘i Community, 1958–1965, “ *The Middle East Journal* 71, no. 1 (Winter 2017): 45-65.

al-Bayati, Hamid, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: An Insider's Account of the Iraqi Opposition to Saddam,* Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2014.

Allawi, Ali A, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace,* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

Allawi, Ali, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace,* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

Alnasrawi, Abbas, “Iraq: Economic Sanctions and Consequences, 1990-2000,” *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 2 , (April 2001): 205-218.

Arjona, Ana, Nelson Kasfir, and Zachariah Mampilly, *Rebel Governance in Civil War,* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Armato, Micheal and Neal Caren, “Mobilizing the Single-Case Study: Doug McAdam’s Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930–1970,” *Qualitative Sociology* 25, no. 1, (Spring 2002): 93-102.

Aziz, Talib. M, “The Role of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr in Shi’i Political Activism in Iraq from 1958 to 1980,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 2 (May 1993): 207-222.

Baram, Amatzia, “The Iraqi Shi'i Community: Between Sistani, Muqtada, the IGC, and the CPA,” Congressional Testimony, *United States Institute of Peace* (April 21, 2004). https://www.usip.org/publications/2004/04/iraqi-shii-community-between-sistani-muqtada-igc-and-cpa.

Bartholet, Jeffrey, “Moqtada al-Sadr and U.S.'s Fate in Iraq, ” *Newsweek*, March 12, 2006. https://www.newsweek.com/moqtada-al-sadr-and-uss-fate-iraq-105197.

Bayless, Leslie, “Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35, no. 2 (February 2012): 135-155.

Beach, Derek, and Rasmus Brun Pedersen, *Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013.

Benford, Robert D. and David A. Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” *Annual review of sociology* 26, no.1, (2000): 611-639.

Bennet, Alexander, and George Andrew, *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005.

Bennett, Andrew & Jeffrey T. Checkel, "Process tracing From philosophical roots to best practices," in *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*. edited by Andrew Bennett & Jeffrey T. Checkel, 3-37. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Berman, Eli, *Radical, Religious, and Violent: The New Economics of Terrorism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Blaydes, Lisa, *State of Repression: Iraq under Saddam Hussein*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.

Cochrane, Marissa, "Iraq Report 12: The Fragmentation of the Sadrist movement," *Institute for the Study of War* (2009): 1-50.

Cockburn, Patrick, *Muqtada al-Sadr and the Fall of Iraq*, London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2008.

Cockburn, Patrick, *Muqtada al-Sadr, the Shia Revival, and the Struggle for Iraq*, New York: Scribner, 2008.

Cole, Juan R. I., "The Ayatollahs and Democracy in Iraq," *ISIM review*, (Spring 2006): 34-35.

Cole, Juan, "The United States and Shi'ite religious factions in post-Ba'thist Iraq," *Middle East Journal* 57, no. 4 (Autumn 2003): 543-566.

Cook, David, *Martyrdom in Islam*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007

Dodge, Toby and Steven Simon, ed. *Iraq at the Crossroads: State and Society in the Shadow of Regime Change*. Florence: Routledge, 2003.

Edelman, Marc, "Social Movements: Changing Paradigms and Forms of Politics," *Annual review of anthropology* 30, no. 1, (October 2002): 285-317.

El Hazhary, M.S., ed. *The Iran-Iraq war : historical, economic, and political analysis*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2012.

Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Militia," Accessed October 10, 2020. https://www.britannica.com/topic/militia.

Haugh, Timothy, "The Sadr II Movement: An Organizational Fight for Legitimacy within the Iraqi Shi'a Community," *Strategic Insights* IV, no. 5 (May 2005): 1-10.

Howard, Micheal "Mahdi army commanders withdraw to Iran to lie low during security crackdown, " *The Guardian*, February 15, 2007. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/feb/15/iraq.iran.

International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Civil War, The Sadrist and the Surge," *ICG Middle East report* 72 (February 2008): 1-22.

International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Muqtada al-Sadr: Spoiler or Stabiliser?," *Crisis Group Middle East Report* 55, (July 2006): 1-25. https://www.crisisgroup.org/iraq-s-muqtada-al-sadr-spoiler-or-stabiliser.

International Crisis Group. “Iraq’s Civil War, the Sadrists, and the Surge,” Middle East Report No. 72. Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2008. https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/iraq-s-civil-war-sadrists-and-surge.

Iranian Labour News Agency - ILNA (Tehran), July 21, 2003, quoted in Mahan Abedin, “Dossier: The Sadrist Movement,” *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* 5, no. 7. (July 2003)

Jackson, Patrick, ”Who are Iraq's Mehdi Army?,“ *BBC News*, May 30, 2007. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3604393.stm.

John Esposito, *Mujtahid*, The Oxford Dictionary of Islam, September 1, 2004

Johnson, David E., M. Wade Markel, and Brian Shannon, *The 2008 Battle of Sadr City: Reimagining Urban Combat*, Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2013.

Katzman, Kenneth, *Iraq: Post-Saddam Governance and Security*, New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2009.

Keister, Jennifer and Branislav L. Slantchev, “Statebreakers to Statemakers: Strategies of Rebel Governance,” unknown, 2014.

Khoury, Dina Rizk, *Iraq in Wartime: Soldiering, Martyrdom, and Remembrance,* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

MacAskill, Ewan, “Shia Muslims free to mark martyrdom after 30 years,” *The Guardian*, April 23, 2003. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/apr/23/iraq.ewenmacaskill.

Mavani, Hamid, “Khomeini's Concept of Governance of the Jurisconsult (Wilayat al-Faqih) Revisited: The Aftermath of Iran's 2009 Presidential Election,” *The Middle East journal* 67, no. 2, (April 2013): 207-228.

Murray, Williamson, *The Iran-Iraq War: A Military and Strategic History,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Neuendorf, Kimberley A, *The Content Analysis Guidebook*, Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2017.

Opp, Karl-Dieter, *Theories of political protest and social movements: A multidisciplinary introduction, critique, and synthesis,* London: Routledge, 2009.

Osman, Khalil, *Sectarianism in Iraq: The Making of State and Nation Since 1920*, London: Routledge, 2014.

Rahimi, Babak. “The Return of Moqtada al-Sadr and the Revival of the Mahdi Army,” *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 6, (June 2010): 8-10.

Raphaeli, Nimrod, “Understanding Muqtada al-Sadr,” *Middle East Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 33-42.

Robin-D'Cruz, Benedict and Renad Mansour, "Making sense of the Sadrists: Fragmentation and Unstable Politics," *The Foreign Policy Research Institute* (March 2020). https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/iraq-chapter-1.pdf.

Rohde, Achim, *State-society relations in Ba'thist Iraq facing dictatorship,* New York: Routledge, 2010.

Sassoon, Joseph, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Serena, Chad C, *A Revolution in Military Adaptation: The US Army in the Iraq War,* Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2011.

Shadid, Anthony, "A Struggle for Iraqi Clergy's Soul," *The Washington Post*, June 30, 2003. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2003/06/30/a-struggle-for-iraqi-clergys-soul/38617bbe-23bf-4bc9-b690-bb9abaa3650b/.

Shanahan, Rodger, "Shia political development in Iraq: the case of the Islamic Dawa Party," *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 5 (July 2004): 943-954.

Sindawi, Khalid, "Ḥawza Instruction and its Role in Shaping Modern Shī'ite Identity: The Ḥawzas of al-Najaf and Qumm as a Case Study," *Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 6 (November 2007): 831-856.

Taha, Amir, "Turning ex-combatants into Sadrist: explaining the emergence of the Mahdi Army," *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 3 (May 2019): 357-373.

The Iraq Study Group, "The Iraq Study Group Report," *United States Institute for Peace* (2008). https://www.usip.org/publications/2006/12/iraq-study-group-report.

The Oxford Dictionary, “organization,” Accessed October 15, 2020. https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/organization.

Unknown, “Ali Hassan al-Majid and the Basra Massacre of 1999,” *Human Rights Watch* 17, no. 2, (February 2005): 1-36.

Unknown, “Inside Iraq,” *Iraq Report, Radio Liberty* 6, no. 32 (July 24, 2003). https://www.rferl.org/a/1343132.html.

Unknown, “Iraq protests end in 20 deaths,” *BBC News,* April 4, 2004. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3597887.stm

Unknown, “Muqtada al-Sadr,” *globalsecurity.org*, accessed November 17, 2020. https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/al-sadr.htm.

Wehrey, Frederic M, *The Iraq Effect: The Middle East After the Iraq War,* Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2010.