DISCOURSE AND EMOTION IN SUSTAINING VIOLENT SOCIAL MOVEMENTS DURING MILITARY OCCUPATIONS: IRAQ, NORTHERN IRELAND, AND THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

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By

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ABSTRACT

Why do violent social movements rise or fail during military occupations? How are some leaders able to overcome the problem of collective action and sustain violent campaigns that require voluntary, risky actions, but others are not? Why are only some leaders effective in achieving political objectives through sustained collective violence? In Iraq (2003–11), how was Muqtada al-Sadr, leader of the Sadrist Trend, able to muster a violent militia and vast popular support and thereby become a potent political player? Why did the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq fail to maintain its influence, and why did Al Qaeda in Iraq gain and then lose the ability to mobilize violence in the same period? Similarly puzzling variations in the outcomes of violent collective action have been observed elsewhere. In Northern Ireland (1969–98), how did the Provisional Irish Republican Army outstrip the Official Irish Republican Army in sustaining collective violence? In the Palestinian territories (1987–2015), how did Hamas defeat its established rival Fatah and transform itself into a highly organized political and social movement with a capacity for lethal terrorism?
I argue that favorable microstructural conditions and emotional appeals from credible leaders with legitimacy among domestic audiences are necessary and jointly sufficient to sustain violent collective action. It is the interaction of discursive psychological variables and microstructural conditions through emotional mechanisms that enables only some leaders to sustain what I term violent social movements, or VSMs. I develop a middle-range theory of VSMs, using the methods of case- and mechanism-oriented comparisons, within-case process-tracing, discourse analysis, and archival research, while also drawing on my fieldwork in Iraq, Israel, Northern Ireland, and the Palestinian territories.
To my son, Levon,

and my parents, Zhanna and Levon,

with infinite love and gratitude.

—Irena
# Table of Contents

Chapter 1: A Theory of Violent Social Movements...
- The Puzzle, Its Theoretical Significance, and Its Policy Implications.................................1
- The Argument and the Hypotheses.........................................................................................12
- A Review of the Literature and Alternative Explanations.......................................................16
- The Research Design...........................................................................................................43

Chapter 2: Sustaining Violent Social Movements in Iraq, 2003–11.................................71
- The Microstructural Conditions and Violent Collective Action in Iraq, 2003–11.........................73
- A Shared Discursive Opportunity: The US-Led Occupation and Collective Emotions................89
- Contending Violent Social Movements in Iraq and the Role of External Assistance in Sustaining the Sadrist Trend, the ISCI, and AQI-ISI.................................................................101
- Sustaining Violent Collective Action: The Interaction of Microstructural Conditions and Discursive Psychological Variables..................................................................................143

Chapter 3: Sustaining Violent Social Movements in Northern Ireland, 1969–98..............190
- The Microstructural Conditions and Violent Collective Action in Northern Ireland, 1969–98 ........192
- A Shared Discursive Opportunity: The British Occupation and Collective Emotions................222
- Contending Violent Social Movements in Northern Ireland and the Role of External Assistance in Sustaining the OIRA and the PIRA.................................................................244
- Sustaining Violent Collective Action: The Interaction of Microstructural Conditions and Discursive Psychological Variables..................................................................................271

Chapter 4: Sustaining Violent Social Movements in the Palestinian Territories, 1987–2015.....321
- A Shared Discursive Opportunity: The Israeli Occupation and Collective Emotions..................346
- Contending Violent Social Movements in Gaza and the West Bank and the Role of External Assistance in Sustaining Fatah-PLO and Hamas...............................................................366
- Sustaining Violent Collective Action: The Interaction of Microstructural Conditions and Discursive Psychological Variables..................................................................................395

Chapter 5: Conclusion...........................................................................................................452

Bibliography: Selected Books and Articles.............................................................................466
CHAPTER 1

A THEORY OF VIOLENT SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The Puzzle, Its Theoretical Significance, and Its Policy Implications

Why do violent social movements (VSMs) rise or fail during military occupations? How can some leaders overcome the problem of collective action, or the “rebels dilemma,” and thus both mobilize and sustain violent campaigns that require voluntary, risky actions, while others cannot do so? Specifically, how did the Sadrist Trend succeed in sustaining violent collective action (VCA) to achieve its political objectives and propel its leader, Muqtada al-Sadr, into the ranks of potent political actors in post-Saddam Iraq during the period 2003–11? How was al-Sadr able to lead the movement through a successful transition from military to political resistance after his Jaysh al-Mahdi Army (JAM) was beaten by the Coalition forces in 2004 and by the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in 2008? In contrast, why did the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) receive only modest support from Shias, despite being led by the powerful al-Hakim clerical dynasty? And why did Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) first gain and then lose an ability to sustain violent campaigns?

Similarly puzzling variations in the outcomes of VCA have been observed in other places. In Northern Ireland during the years 1969–98, for nearly three decades, the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) outstripped the Official Irish Republican Army (OIRA) and sustained

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collective violence. In the Palestinian territories during the years 1987–2015, Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya (known as Hamas) defeated an established rival, Harakat al-Tahrir al-Watani al-Filastini (known by the acronym Fatah), and evolved into an organized political and social movement with an effective military infrastructure and a capacity for lethal terrorism. How have Hamas’s leaders maintained its relevance, popular base, and ability to incite violence—even in the presence of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF)?

It is exceedingly difficult for a VSM to sustain VCA—especially when it is opposing a powerful occupying force—because this action tends to provoke repression, mass incarcerations, and other forms of retaliation by indigenous governments or foreign authorities. If “rationality requires inaction,” what solidifies and sustains violent civilian mobilization? How do episodes of contention evolve into sustained VCA by civilians? What strategies do leaders of VSMs employ? Why are some leaders effective in mobilizing—and sustaining—violent resistance, while others are not? Which mechanisms catalyze VCA? And which local actors should the United States and its allies support to foster stability in transitional, failing, or postconflict fragile states? The rise of a VSM during a military occupation may not be counterintuitive. For example, a military occupation can subjugate the local population, delegitimize the indigenous government, and spur a nationalist backlash—all of which, in turn, can trigger resistance. But it is truly puzzling how VSM leaders manage to sustain VCA in the presence of formidable foreign armies that operate with legal immunity in occupied territories.

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2 The core of the Irish Republican Army was the Irish Volunteers (Oglaigh na hEireann), a group that originated in Dublin in November 1913. In 1919, the Volunteers (and a few affiliated groups, including the Fenians and the Irish Republican Brotherhood) began calling themselves the Irish Republican Army (IRA)—the name which they officially adopted in 1922. The term IRA is used in this study to denote the movement before it split in 1969 into the Official IRA (OIRA) and the Provisional IRA (PIRA).

Despite this puzzle’s theoretical significance and its policy implications, political scientists lack theories of how VSMs manage to sustain themselves once they have emerged and spread. In explaining the causes of collective violence, scholars of civil conflict have primarily focused on preexisting grievances, structural and rational choice mechanisms, top-down elite manipulation of identities by national leaders, and bottom-up selective violence by local ethnic entrepreneurs who make instrumental use of ethnosectarian themes. The recent literature on mobilization has emphasized selective incentives and transaction costs. These different mechanisms help explain the eruption of collective violence but overlook the conditions that sustain civilians’ voluntary participation in it. For example, one trait “that served and still serves Hamas well is the reputation

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of its leaders and activists among the Palestinians for ascetism, altruism, dedication, and honesty.

. . . No one joins Hamas to make money or has become rich by virtue of their position within it.”

Moreover, even scholars who have studied ethnosectarian entrepreneurs have given little attention to “negative cases”—that is, cases of leaders who have attempted but failed to sustain VCA. Political scientists have largely neglected how the personal backgrounds and characteristics of leaders can influence their ability to sustain collective violence. In his memoir of the Sandinista Revolution (1979–90), Nicaragua’s former vice president, Sergio Ramirez, recollected: “Not only was the Cuban Revolution the model, but Fidel was the model figure. For some, copying his gestures in his speeches, his tone of voice, his way of speaking, his reflexive silences holding his hand in the air near his chin, and even his way of leaning on the podium, became a mimetic habit that bordered on caricature, considering the serious differences in physical appearance between him and those who imitated him.”

In another example, Cathal Goulding, the OIRA’s former chief of staff, was depicted this way: “The first thing that struck anybody about Goulding was not his politics but his physical attractiveness. He was small, but strong and stocky, and nobody ever noticed his height because he had the head of a Greek god: curly hair, laser-blue eyes set in lizard-lazy lids that would suddenly blaze out at you, backed by a boyish grin that broke women’s hearts and made men want to follow wherever he led.”

Finally, political scientists have refrained from integrating discursive variables and emotional mechanisms from other fields of scholarship into theories that seek to explain or predict VCA. Specifically, the role of emotions such as anger, humiliation, and fear in sustaining VCA

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remains unexplored. “I’m angry! I’m angry at this filthy life!” a resident of the Iraqi city of Falluja voiced his wrath at the US-led occupation. Many in the city shared his sentiment: “We’re becoming like the Palestinians.” “We don’t accept humiliation and we don’t accept colonialism.”13 Within a year after the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, Falluja became the epicenter of Sunni Arab resistance, and Iraq was convulsed by violence. Some historians have stressed that “humiliation as grievance is one of the great engines of rebellion,”14 but political scientists have yet to test how leaders rhetorically arouse collective emotions and strategically align their messages with popular grievances in order to sustain VCA.15

In this dissertation, I build on the existing literature and examine how the interaction of microstructural conditions with discursive psychological variables through emotional mechanisms sustains VCA. I make theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions to extant scholarship on low-intensity conflict, collective action, and military intervention by formulating a middle-range theory of VSMs that can meaningfully inform policy. Theoretically, the dissertation makes three significant contributions. First, it focuses on the less-developed sustaining mechanisms—as opposed to the well-developed triggering mechanisms—of collective violence. Second, it introduces a novel concept—a VSM—distinct both from a terrorist group and from a

nonviolent social movement. And third, it delineates the scope conditions by identifying the variables that are necessary and jointly sufficient to sustain a VSM.

Methodologically, the dissertation employs case- and mechanism-oriented comparisons, within-case process-tracing, discourse and content analyses, archival research, fieldwork, and interviews, thus substantiating the utility of microfoundational qualitative analysis in the accumulation of knowledge. I make two specific methodological contributions. First, I use an interdisciplinary approach that synthesizes microstructural conditions from the fields of civil conflict and social movement with discursive psychological variables and emotional mechanisms from scholarship on persuasive communication and social psychology in order to predict a VSM’s rise or demise. And second, I examine “negative cases” of leaders who have tried but failed to sustain VCA.

Empirically, the dissertation conducts full case studies of seven VSMs in Iraq, Northern Ireland, and the Palestinian territories. Given that it is a relatively recent conflict, the Iraq War has not been examined in depth in works of political science. In contrast, the Anglo-Irish and the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts are among the most widely explored cases of intrastate collective violence. But although these conflicts have been researched extensively, there is a conspicuous lack of mechanism-based, microcomparative analyses of VSMs in Northern Ireland and the Palestinian territories.

The phenomenon that I investigate—a VSM—has been a recurrent challenge for US national security and international peace. Since the end of the Cold War, low-intensity, intrastate conflicts sustained by VSMs have called attention to how seemingly isolated local struggles can evolve into international crises with far-reaching strategic ramifications. Events in Afghanistan, Chechnya, the Congo, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Rwanda, Somalia, Syria, and the states of the former
Yugoslavia have demonstrated the corrosive spillover effects of ostensibly limited wars. These conflicts have destabilized entire regions, radicalized populations in surrounding countries, led to genocidal violence, generated mass dislocation and humanitarian crises, invited foreign military interventions, and bred terrorism. For example, Lebanese Hizballah committed and sponsored acts of terrorism against Western targets; deployed terrorism in countries as remote as Argentina; inflicted substantial losses on the region’s most powerful military force during the 2006 Israel-Hizballah War; and caused the collapse of Lebanon’s unity government in 2011. VSMs are likely to continue to foment conflicts that transcend local and regional boundaries, thus endangering international security and placing even greater demands on the resources of the international community and the US military.

In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States and subsequent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, US intelligence and military organizations have worked to become more effective in conducting counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations against transnational terrorist groups and indigenous insurgencies. Critical to this effort has been the attempt to better understand the factors that trigger collective violence and to develop military strategies to prevent such violence from erupting. But scant effort has been devoted to the equally important challenge of identifying the mechanisms that sustain violent movements once they have emerged. Similarly, little attention has been given to politically agile and media-savvy leaders who use discourse as a mobilization tool or a battlefield weapon. Western governments invariably classify such leaders as terrorists, thus failing to capture crucial distinctions among different types of violent actors and to understand the characteristics that make them legitimate in the eyes of local populations.

As a result of these omissions, the international community’s response has been either massive military intervention or inaction. Conflict resolution through robust diplomatic and
economic operations—to mitigate civil wars and failed states that enable the rise of violent substate actors—has been overlooked. Understanding the mechanisms that sustain collective violence is crucial for devising balanced counterinsurgency and counterterrorism strategies; containing the spread of political violence; and preventing fragile states from morphing into failed states. Recognizing which factors lend legitimacy and credibility to resistance leaders and resonance to their messages among domestic audiences—all of which are required in sustaining VCA—will enhance both scholars’ and policymakers’ ability to formulate nonmilitary conflict-resolution approaches to counter violent movements that imperil regional security and international peace.

The cases of Afghanistan and Iraq have demonstrated that along with effectuating positive changes, military intervention can set off internal conflicts, exacerbate ethnic or sectarian animosities, and leave behind fragile states with fractured societies. In light of such potential unintended consequences, traditional military approaches need to be amended. Durable peace requires an amalgam of strategies: compelling counternarratives to delegitimize VSMs, conflict resolution to reshape the conditions that sustain them, and calibrated military measures to defeat them.

The need to explore the psychological motivators of collective violence is therefore urgent. The US military and policymakers have recently acknowledged this as they have sought to defeat actors such as the Islamic State (IS) by trying to understand the “psychological, emotional and cultural power” such groups use in “drawing people to them in droves.” To assist nations undergoing transition or conflict, the United States and its allies must develop a nuanced understanding of the endogenous political, socioeconomic, and cultural factors that enable the rise of violent movements and leaders. It is equally important for the United States to recognize which

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local actors have the prowess and popular support to orchestrate violent resistance against an incumbent government or foreign forces and to divert these individuals’ capabilities into the work of stabilizing and democratizing their homelands.

During the war in Vietnam, the revolutions in Latin America, and the Arab Spring in the Middle East, the United States frequently erred by promoting exiles who seemed appealing because of their espousal of Western values, English language skills, and media savvy. But the same attributes that appeal to Americans—coupled with a lack of recent experience living in their homelands—sever former exiles from local populations and their grievances. In contrast to individuals who choose a comfortable exile, homegrown leaders may be unknown in the West, but they stay in their native countries and personally experience repression or civil war. Hence, they develop a keener knowledge of domestic grievances, greater local legitimacy, deeper ties to indigenous social networks, and sharper instincts about local politics. When they are ignored by intervening great powers, however, these actors often resort to violence. In Iraq, for instance, Muqtada al-Sadr initially called for a peaceful protest against the Coalition forces. But after the Coalition authorities treated him with contempt—by dismissing al-Sadr and his militia as “nothing more than a nuisance”; by suspending his weekly publication, Al-Hawzah Al-Nāṭiqahin, in March 2004; and by seeking to arrest him in connection with the murder of his political rival, Abdul Majid al-Khoei—al-Sadr announced that “peaceful protests had become useless and urged his followers to ‘terrorize’ their enemy.” Ahmed Chalabi, an exile and a former US ally, was repudiated by the Iraqis, but Muqtada al-Sadr became one of the country’s most potent politicians.

The repeated failure of the United States to foresee the ascendance of militant leaders has proven costly. In post-Saddam Iraq, it resulted in a protracted insurgency that escalated into a brutal intercommunal war (2006–7). In Egypt, American policymakers underestimated the potential of Mohamed Morsi, a senior member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood who gained street credibility due to his opposition to Hosni Mubarak and became Egypt’s president in June 2012. Since the outbreak of the conflict in Syria in March 2011, the United States has struggled to determine which local leaders to support politically and militarily to end the civil war that has spawned terrorism, engendered a refugee crisis, provoked the persecution of religious and ethnic minorities, led to the use of chemical weapons, disrupted regional trade, and destabilized US allies in the region such as Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon—gradually transforming Syria into a theater of proxy confrontations between the Arab states and Iran, Russia and the West, and Sunnis and Shias.21 In the wake of the 2011 allied intervention in Libya, the United States neglected to integrate into the political process the unruly militias, focusing instead on formerly exiled professors Mahmoud Jibril and Abdurrahim el-Keib, neither of whom lasted even a year as leaders of the opposition and then the government. On 11 September 2012, the militiamen executed a vicious attack on the US diplomatic mission in Benghazi. Similar situations have occurred throughout history, including in Cuba in the 1950s, El Salvador in the 1980s, and Nicaragua in the 1930s.

As a great power, the United States will continue to engage in overseas operations against violent substate actors such as VSMs. Even if the United States resists entanglements in long-term occupations in the future, as it did after the Vietnam War (1954–75) and during the relative US retrenchment under presidents Ford and Carter, international and regional developments can still

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force US diplomatic or military interventions. To achieve international and national security objectives effectively—and to reduce the dependence on purely military solutions—US policymakers and military strategists must continue to augment their understanding of different violent substate actors. My dissertation contributes to this effort by examining the mechanisms that lend legitimacy and credibility to local leaders and enable them to sustain VSMs.
The Argument and the Hypotheses

This dissertation identifies the conditions that sustain the VSMs that participate in insurgencies, carry out terrorist attacks, and cause the spread of deadly conflict. The theoretical goal is twofold: first, to develop a middle-range theory of VSMs, which I do by identifying new variables and mechanisms that sustain VCA and by focusing on the characteristics of leaders and their use of discourse to arouse collective emotions; and second, to apply in new ways and configurations some of the variables from extant scholarship on civil conflict, social movement, persuasive communication, and psychology, which I do by organizing them into a coherent theory that can guide an empirical inquiry and inform policy. More precisely, I investigate how microstructural conditions and discursive psychological variables interact through emotional mechanisms to sustain VCA.

I argue that favorable microstructural conditions are necessary to trigger VCA but are not sufficient to sustain it. Sustaining VCA requires leaders who have legitimacy and credibility among the audiences they seek to mobilize; connections to local social or religious networks; and a perceptive understanding of potential supporters’ discursive and emotive symbols, collective memory, and interpretations of history. The leader’s message must meet exacting criteria to recruit supporters. It is the interaction of the messenger, message, and microstructural conditions through emotional mechanisms that allows only some leaders to sustain VCA.

The first part of the VSM theory addresses the required microstructural conditions: the provision of local security and socioeconomic services, the presence of a military occupation, and

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the particular movement type. Favorable microstructural conditions—inadequate security and a weak economy—make it easier for VSM leaders to generate messages justifying violent action. I examine an additional microstructural condition—external assistance—and argue that such assistance is a contributing cause of, rather than a necessary condition for, sustaining VCA. The second part of the VSM theory focuses on why some leaders and not others are able to sustain VCA. I argue that effective leaders must possess particular characteristics and generate messages that resonate with potential supporters by meeting specific criteria. I test five hypotheses, as follow.

Hypothesis 1: Inadequate Microstructural Conditions and Violent Collective Action. (a) Deteriorating security and socioeconomic conditions facilitate leaders’ mobilization of civilians for VCA and undermine civilians’ support for the incumbent government and foreign counterinsurgency forces. (b) The presence of occupying forces supplies would-be resistance leaders with a discursive opportunity to sustain VCA.

Hypothesis 2: External Assistance as a Contributing Microstructural Condition. (a) External assistance for a VSM from a state or transnational movement—in the form of matériel, training, intelligence, logistics, financing, sanctuary, or ideology—can contribute to sustaining VCA. (b) Conversely, external assistance can alienate certain domestic constituencies, if they perceive the assistance as a sign of foreign influence that delegitimizes a VSM and its leader. (c) When various VSMs in the same country consistently receive external assistance, it becomes difficult for one VSM or leader to establish hegemony over the others. Instead, an occasionally violent competition for legitimacy, resources, and recruits arises among different VSMs and their leaders.
Hypothesis 3: Movement Type. (a) Homegrown movements that have remained in the homeland during times of hardship are more effective in both attracting and sustaining popular support due to the legitimacy they have accumulated over the years, the support of local social networks, and the knowledge of the indigenous habitat and grievances—all of which they use to appeal to local sensibilities and symbols. (b) Repatriated movements that have spent extended time in exile to escape war or persecution cannot maintain strong political and cultural connections with the local populace, and they lose touch with the grievances of those who have stayed in the homeland and suffered during periods of repression or civil conflict. As a result, they experience difficulty establishing or regaining legitimacy and credibility among former compatriots. (c) Local populations perceive foreign movements as lacking the cultural awareness, ideological ties, and altruistic motives required for sustaining civilian support; therefore, local alliances with foreign movements are transient.

Hypothesis 4: Emotive and Evocative Frames in Sustaining Violent Collective Action. To sustain VCA, leaders must have the rhetorical prowess to generate effective messages that (a) resonate with potential supporters’ perceptions of recent or historical grievances and collective anger; (b) capitalize on the messenger’s credibility, legitimacy, and reputation for competence; (c) evoke strong emotional images and metaphors framed in terms of injustice and potential losses if nothing is done, often stressing the threat of impending violence by the out-group against the in-group; (d) invoke shared sacred texts endorsing violence, self-defense, and meta-morality as legitimate in the circumstances; (e) make a rational claim that collective violence against the out-group can successfully forestall impending aggression; (f) are continuously updated to maintain relevance; and (g) are not effectively rebutted by credible counterframes from the opponents. (h) If its leader
succeeds in monopolizing the discourse of resistance against a foreign occupation, a VSM is more likely to sustain VCA.

**Hypothesis 5: Leader Characteristics and the Relation of Message to Messenger.** (a) The involvement of leaders whom local people perceive as legitimate, competent, and altruistic sustains VCA. (b) The leaders must be credible in the context of the specific messages or frames that they promote, and inconsistencies between their frames and their own actions will reduce their ability to mobilize supporters. (c) If the messenger loses his or her legitimacy, credibility, or reputation for competence, then the mobilization for VCA will fail, or new leaders will come forward within the movement. (d) VSM leaders emulate the successful tactics of their competitors.
A Review of the Literature and Alternative Explanations

Structural and Rational Choice Explanations of Violent Mobilization

Scholars have identified an array of structural and rational choice mechanisms to explain collective violence.\textsuperscript{23} I explore each in turn.

\textit{Grievance, Greed, and Macrostructural Mechanisms.} One of the earliest attempts to explain the eruption of civil conflict was Gurr’s research on relative deprivation and grievance-induced political violence.\textsuperscript{24} In line with Gurr’s reasoning, Geertz, Horowitz, and Shils argue that long-standing ethnic or religious grievances between hostile groups can trigger violent conflicts.\textsuperscript{25} However, many societies with such grievances have existed for long periods without engaging in VCA. For example, Shia Arabs constitute almost 60 percent of Iraq’s population, and for decades they were subjected to discrimination by the ruling Sunni Arab minority, which made up roughly 15–20 percent of the population. But Iraqi Shias only sporadically revolted against the regime, in 1991 and 1999, and they failed to sustain VCA to achieve political objectives until the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq.

This suggests that additional mechanisms are necessary to turn what are often called ancient hatreds into active conflicts. In the words of William Cardinal Conway, in Northern Ireland


the conflict “comes not from hatred but from fear.”

Fundamentally, long-standing grievances cannot in themselves explain why violence is sustained. Protracted violence tends to erode the contending groups’ zeal over time, as basic needs and fears come to dominate the lives of ordinary civilians, although a small number of hard-core rebels may persist. At this juncture, civilians mobilize around the actor or group that can protect and provide. For example, the Algerians, in exchange for order, succumbed to the brutal authoritarianism of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), which rose to power in 1962, while the war-weary Afghans saw the Taliban as a stabilizing force and enabled the group to seize Kabul in 1996. These anomalies cast doubt on the validity of the ancient hatreds argument. More pointedly, grievance and hatred hypotheses overlook both the role of leaders and their use of emotional appeals and rhetorical strategies to establish connections between old animosities and recent events.

The limits of the relative deprivation and ancient hatreds hypotheses led civil conflict scholars to investigate whether structural conditions or material and organizational resources might better explain the origins and longevity of civil conflicts. Skocpol, for example, has developed a structural model of social revolutions using state breakdown and political crisis as key enabling variables. Fearon and Laitin have found that structural factors—weak state capacity, political instability, poverty, rough terrain, and large rural populations—increase the risk of civil war and insurgency. Cederman, Wimmer, and Min contend that ethnic exclusion from state power can lead to the outbreak of civil war. Scholars like Berdal and Malone, Collier and Hoeffler, Felbab-

27 Theda Skocpol, States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
Brown, and Ross posit that in fragile states, the availability of extractable or lootable natural resources (such as diamonds, mineral deposits, timber, and, to some degree, oil) or of illicit markets offering “rents” and higher rates of return than legal economic activity provide would-be rebels with both a motive (greed, as opposed to grievance) and the means (money and arms) to initiate and continue violence.\textsuperscript{30} Keen argues that the intersection of greed and grievance makes civil strife more likely in fragile states.\textsuperscript{31} In a related line of argument, Weinstein posits that environments abundant in natural resources encourage rebel groups to perpetrate high levels of indiscriminate violence, whereas resource-scarce environments pressure rebels to use violence selectively.\textsuperscript{32} The theory of resource mobilization, originally developed by the social movement theorists McCarthy and Zald, also deemphasizes grievance-induced social mobilization. Instead, it stresses the essential components of mobilization processes, such as the aggregation of resources (money and labor), the development of institutions necessary for this aggregation, the recruitment of external supporters, and costs-and-rewards systems.\textsuperscript{33}

Arguments based on these macrostructural factors are congruent with the fact that the removal of Saddam Hussein’s regime in 2003 and the ensuing state and social breakdown opened the space for violent contestation for political power and economic resources among and within various factions. The demobilization of the Iraqi army, coupled with the disenfranchisement of


thousands of Baath Party members, created an opportunity for native Shia and Sunni factions to initiate violence to redress their long-standing (Shia) or recent (Sunni) grievances. Iraq’s rent-generating oil and natural gas deposits introduced another dimension into the conflict. These resources are typically considered less lootable than precious metals and gems because they require the capacity for extraction and transportation, but both Sunni and Shia militias tapped into pipelines, hijacked tanker trucks, and smuggled petroleum products abroad to finance their operations. Additionally, the porous Syria-Iraq border facilitated illicit trading of livestock, pharmaceuticals, cigarettes, and weapons that benefited the Sunni rebels, while the Shia militants smuggled similar goods across the Iran-Iraq frontier.

Attendant bargaining indivisibilities further exacerbated the conflict.34 After the fall of Saddam Hussein, a number of Shia leaders (including some from the ISCI) advocated the formation of an autonomous Shia region in oil-rich southeastern Iraq, similar to the Kurdish region in the country’s north. Such territorial demarcation would have deprived Sunni Arabs concentrated in the relatively oil-scarce provinces around Baghdad of lucrative oil revenues. Nor could Iraq’s contending communities trust one another to be honest in accounting for those revenues. Amid rapidly escalating sectarian tensions, the possession of “goods” (such as the control of neighborhoods, the provision of essential socioeconomic services, and protection) became a zero-sum contest.

Territorial indivisibility was a central contention in Ireland. The Anglo-Irish Treaty marked the end of the Irish War of Independence (1919–21) and sealed the partition of Ireland by granting

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legislative independence to the Irish Free State, which became the Republic of Ireland in 1948, and by creating Northern Ireland, which was autonomous from the Free State but under Great Britain’s jurisdiction. Because the agreement included partition, it was unacceptable to the Irish republicans and nationalists, who believed that Northern Ireland constituted an integral part of historic Ireland: “Providence has fashioned this land [Ireland] to be one and indivisible.”

The perceived indivisibility of Ireland exacerbated the outbreaks of fighting between the unionists, who viewed Northern Ireland as a legitimate part of the United Kingdom, and the nationalists.

In a similar manner, the Israelis’ and Palestinians’ irreconcilable claims to Jerusalem sparked violent conflicts between the two communities over the right to control the Holy City. Ahmad Shukairy, former chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), underscored Palestine’s indivisibility in a speech delivered to the United Nations General Assembly in November 1963: “But scattered as we may be, we come to you in one delegation, representing one people for one Palestine, free and undivided, independent and unpartitioned; and herein lies the solution of the Palestine refugee problem, a solution based on the unity of the Holy Land—and I emphasize the unity of the Holy Land because it cannot be a Holy Land if it is partitioned; holiness is indivisible.”

Before the formation of the State of Israel in 1948, many Jewish leaders vowed to “never consent to the partition of Palestine because every particle of earth of this land, promised to us by the Torah and the Prophets, is holy to us.”

Macrostructural factors such as government collapse or weak state capacity, resource endowments, and long-standing disputes over indivisible issues help explain the outbreak of

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violent conflicts in Iraq, Northern Ireland, and the Palestinian territories. In the case of Iraq, macrostructural conditions explicate both the anti-US insurgency and the subsequent sectarian war that occurred from the 2003 US-led invasion until the beginning of the surge in February 2007 officially known as Operation Enforcing the Law or the Baghdad Security Plan. They also partly account for the reduction in violence after the surge, when the US and Iraqi forces together continued to make tangible improvements in public security.\(^{38}\) Similarly, macrostructural factors—in particular, state-supported socioeconomic discrimination against the Catholic community under Stormont (Parliament of Northern Ireland)—precipitated the outbreak of the Troubles in Northern Ireland in 1969, while the reforms introduced in the 1970s under Great Britain’s direct rule—coupled with the British military’s shift to a population-centric counterinsurgency—led to the decline in violence across Northern Ireland after 1982.

As seen in these examples, macrostructural factors can contribute to the onset of collective violence, but they do not explain why some leaders and not others are able to sustain violent mobilization. Compared with other leaders in the same period, Muqtada al-Sadr did not possess superior material resources. More generally, under Saddam Hussein, the Shias had fewer military and financial means that they could mobilize rapidly than did the Sunni Arabs, who had traditionally dominated the regime, held leadership positions in the Iraqi army and security services, and stockpiled weapons in anticipation of the US invasion. Likewise, the leaders of the neophyte PIRA had less manpower and material assets compared with their counterparts in the OIRA at the start of the Troubles. The key mobilizable resource that gave the advantage to the

Sadrist Trend in 2003 and to the PIRA in 1969 was young men willing to fight. Therefore, motivational messages, rather than resource endowments, require a closer examination.

Microstructural Conditions. In contrast to the macrostructural factors, recent civil conflict scholarship emphasizes the impact of microlevel variables and endogenous mechanisms on the process and outcome of a conflict. The microstructural conditions central to the conflicts in Iraq, Northern Ireland, and the Palestinian territories concerned local security, the provision of essential socioeconomic services, the presence of occupying forces in particular localities, and the VSM type. I discuss the VSM type in the empirical chapters, rather than in the literature review, because this is a condition I uncovered in the context of Iraq, and there has not been much written about how a movement type—which I categorize as homegrown, expatriate, repatriated, or foreign—can affect local mobilization for VCA.

With respect to the contributing microstructural condition, external assistance, outside actors helped fuel sectarian conflict in Iraq by providing matériel and logistical support to the combatants. Iran supplied Shia militias (such as Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq, the Badr Corps, Kata’ib Hizballah, and the JAM and the affiliated Promised Day Brigade) with money, arms, training, and

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sanctuaries,41 while the Gulf states and Syria financed Sunni rebel groups (including AQI) and facilitated the infiltration of foreign fighters into Iraq.42 Still, Iran’s43 and Syria’s44 curtailment of support between 2008 and 2011 did not undermine the rebels’ ability to mobilize collective violence. Daily acts of violence in Iraq became less common in the years 2008–11; however, they persisted, and many militias retained the capacity to perpetrate violence on a large scale.45 In a similar vein, external actors exacerbated the violent conflicts in Northern Ireland and the Palestinian territories. But the sponsors’ withdrawal of assistance to the PIRA and Hamas might have affected the frequency and effectiveness of the military operations conducted by these VSMs, not their ability to sustain VCA.

Other endemic microstructural factors—such as pervasive patrimonialism, tribalism, and clanism or the presence of local havens conducive to recruitment (for example, community-based organizations and places of worship)—fed synergistically into the provision of street-level security


that played a critical role in people’s decisions about whether to support the insurgents or the counterinsurgents. “We don’t care whether the government is Shiite, Sunni, American or Iranian. All we want is security and safety,” one Iraqi citizen said. “But no one in the government represents that now.”46

Like macrostructural factors, microstructural conditions explain the initial mobilization, but not its sustainment. In Iraq, concurrently with strengthening the Iraqi government and army, the 2007 surge strategy executed a population-centric counterinsurgency and forged a working alliance between the US forces and the Sunni Arab tribal movement known as the Sunni Awakening (al-Ṣāḥwah). But when, as a result of these activities, microstructural conditions became less favorable to the mobilization of collective violence, the Sadrist Trend did not lose its ability to sustain VCA. The surge strategy helps explain AQI’s sudden decline, but not al-Sadr’s continued ability to mobilize armed supporters. The evidence from Northern Ireland corroborates that microstructural conditions are necessary but not sufficient for sustaining VCA. In the 1970s, the British authorities introduced a number of political and social reforms in Northern Ireland. Simultaneously, the British military made crucial changes to its counterinsurgency strategy, shifting from coercive to hearts-and-minds methods. Still, the PIRA’s agility—manifested in its adept exploitation (in action as well as rhetoric) of the socioeconomic discrimination and violence directed against the Catholic minority; its willingness to turn to politics when the microstructural conditions had become less conducive to continuing a violent struggle; and its leaders’ strategic framing of political objectives to align with popular grievances—enabled the VSM to sustain violent resistance through the late 1990s.

These examples demonstrate that when local violence threatens civilians’ lives and livelihoods, they mobilize around the leader or group that can defend them, often switching allegiance to former adversaries. The rise of the JAM illustrates this. To attract sympathizers, the JAM provided protection, arbitrated neighborhood disputes, restored electricity and water supplies, and offered other essential services to the Shia community. As a result, the JAM’s membership increased exponentially, reaching an estimated 60,000 people by 2006. The PIRA employed similar tactics. By defending the Catholic community against both the loyalist militias and British forces, it grew rapidly within a year of its formation: “By the time of the Easter 1970 riots the Provisional IRA in the city [Belfast] had grown so quickly that it was obliged to reorganize.” A relatively new entrant into the market of violent movements, Hamas demonstrated its resolve to protect the Palestinians and its capacity to provide basic socioeconomic services to the poor by fighting the Israeli occupation and operating a charitable, logistical, and financial support network known as the da’wah. Founded in 1987, Hamas won a decisive victory in the Palestinian parliamentary elections of 25 January 2006.

The discussed evidence raises the question of why the JAM, the PIRA, and Hamas, rather than any other Shia, Catholic, and Sunni movement, were able to reach such a critical mass in the first place that they were able to provide security and services in the neighborhoods of Iraq, Northern Ireland, and Gaza and the West Bank. The civil conflict literature offers useful insights into rebel governance, but it does not address this question.

Rational Choice Mechanisms. Rational choice hypotheses of collective violence underscore the importance of information asymmetries and credible commitments. One way in which these mechanisms triggered collective violence in Iraq and Northern Ireland was through the “ethnic security dilemma,” the logic of which also applies in instances of sectarian polarization. Posen argues that the absence of an effective central government compels various ethnic, religious, and cultural groups to provide for their own security by competing for power. However, one group’s mobilization and accumulation of power renders every other group vulnerable, thereby setting in motion an escalation spiral that can lead to preemptive violence. Even factions that do not intend to take advantage of other groups after gaining power find it difficult to convince their opponents of that fact.

In Iraq, the Coalition forces’ inability to immediately fill the power and security vacuums that ensued from the collapse of Saddam Hussein’s regime revived fears and historic animosities between the country’s two main sectarian communities—the Shia and the Sunni Arabs—and among various ethnic groups, especially the Arabs and the Kurds. Large-scale violence erupted when the bombing of the Shia Askariya Shrine (or the Golden Mosque) in Samarra in February 2006 propelled Iraqis to polarize along sectarian lines and turn to local militias for protection. Disenfranchised Sunnis feared retaliation from the Shias, whom they had systematically oppressed; while the Shias, who gained political influence as a consequence of the US-led intervention, feared the Sunnis’ return to power and therefore were unwilling to make credible

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commitments to protect the rights of the Sunni Arab minority or share political power with them. These uncertainties—exacerbated by private information about each community’s resolve or capabilities and by incentives to misrepresent that information—sparked intercommunal violence. Predictably, the sectarian fights were most violent in neighborhoods where the Shias and the Sunnis lived in proximity, because it was in these mixed areas where the competing groups’ security was most at risk.\textsuperscript{55}

A similar escalation spiral occurred in Northern Ireland, where the government’s inability to restore and maintain public security contributed to the eruption of sectarian violence in the late 1960s. One of the consequences of Ireland’s partition in 1921 was the growing sectarian polarization and the ensuing discrimination against Northern Catholics. But although the discrimination was at times a mutual affair—by most accounts, Protestants were discriminated against in the areas dominated by Catholics—the discrimination against the Catholic population in electoral politics, housing, education, and employment was profoundly more significant.\textsuperscript{56} According to some scholars, “Northern Ireland was created and defined so as to guarantee a perpetual Protestant and unionist majority. As the new state became established, so Protestant power became entrenched within all the major institutions.”\textsuperscript{57} The state’s discriminatory policies prompted the formation of a civil rights movement in the North in the late 1960s, which sought equal, just treatment for the Irish Catholics. Stormont regularly met the demands of the Catholic population with force, as did a group of Protestant loyalists in a defining incident on 4 January 1969 when they brutally attacked civil rights marchers at Burntollet Bridge, near Derry. The


assault reinforced the Catholics’ perceptions that the authorities were unwilling to protect them, while the IRA was no longer capable of defending them: “‘IRA—I Ran Away,’ yelled bitter wall daubs in Belfast’s Ardoyne district, after a whole street had been burned by Protestant mobs.”

Of perhaps central importance, the escalation of intercommunal violence, frequent pogroms against the Catholic community, and the government’s inability to maintain public order convinced many supporters of peaceful protest that reform in Northern Ireland was not feasible. In view of this, “the need for Catholic ghetto defenders now seemed unchallengeable.”

The partition of Palestine into an Arab state and a Jewish one in 1947 has caused recurrent ethnosectarian fights between the Palestinians and the Jews in the Holy Land. Each side has sought reassurance that the other will not destroy it. But the Israelis’ military occupation of the Gaza Strip from 1967 to 2005, their continued presence and construction of settlements in the West Bank, and the Palestinians’ use of terrorism in Israel convinced each opponent of just the opposite. The cyclical outbreaks of violence culminated in the Palestinian intifadas in 1987 and 2000.

Even though local ethnosectarian security dilemmas partly account for the eruption of violence in Iraq in 2006, in Northern Ireland in 1969, and in the Palestinian territories in 1987 and 2000, they do not answer my central question: Why were only some leaders able to sustain VCA around contentious issues? Other rational choice explanations—in particular, coercion and selective incentives—provide some insight into the question of sustaining violence. McCormick and Giordano argue that emerging insurgencies resolve the mobilization dilemma by using symbolic violence to draw followers into their ranks. The use of such violence serves two

purposes. First, it provokes excessive or indiscriminate retaliation from the government and thus motivates moderates to join in collective violence; second, it signals the rebels’ strength and ability to win and thus encourages undecided civilians to participate in armed struggle. Kalyvas and Kocher suggest that because nonparticipation in collective violence can be costly, the collective action problem can be neutralized; for example, civilians subjected to state-sponsored coercion might turn to the rebels for protection, as might civilians seeking to avoid rebel sanctions for nonparticipation.61 The authors acknowledge, however, that there is scarce evidence to conclude that participation in rebellion is less risky than nonparticipation. Eck argues that the effectiveness of coercion depends on the exigencies of a conflict and organizational needs.62 Indeed, many insurgent leaders use coercive techniques like in-group policing to punish potential defectors and collaborators. But coercion, whether rebel-induced or state-sponsored, can backfire if it is pursued too aggressively or for too long. Although the historical record on the effectiveness of coercion is mixed, the Chechen wars (1994–96 and 1999–2009), the Hukbalahap rebellion in the Philippines (1948–53), the Palestinian intifadas (1987 and 2000), and the case of AQI show that coercive methods used against civilians are counterproductive. People may initially yield to force but will seek protection from factions with similar identities and interests.

The selective incentive hypothesis postulates that side payments to individuals can help overcome the problem of free riding and defection.63 Similarly, instrumental explanations of collective action within the psychological paradigm emphasize individuals’ assessments of costs

and benefits. Still, in their formative periods VSMs often lack funds to provide salaries or services. In Iraq, although some individuals might have hoped to receive protection, status, and material gains (such as loot or economic aid) by joining the JAM, the short-term costs of mobilization included violent engagements with rival militias and US troops that almost decimated the militia in 2004. Clearly, material incentives were not a major mobilizing factor. In the words of one militiaman, “some people were selling what they owned in order to buy weapons so they could fight with the Mehdi army [JAM].” Similarly, “AQI members were not adequately compensated for the additional risk they took on.” In Northern Ireland, PIRA leaders and full-time members received the equivalent of £5 per week. But as one former PIRA volunteer noted, “five pounds wouldn’t buy you even cigarettes for a week.” As discussed, the Palestinians respect Hamas for its ascetic, noncorrupt leadership. When Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the spiritual leader and founder of Hamas, was offered a monthly stipend of $1,000, “he refused to take more than the equivalent of $600 because he believed he did not need more to live comfortably. Sheikh Yassin’s example was followed throughout the ranks of the movement.” More generally, financial incentives can undermine group loyalty by enticing individuals whose allegiance can be traded.

To sum up, microstructural conditions—inadequate provision of local security and essential socioeconomic services, the presence of occupying forces, and the VSM type—facilitate leaders’ mobilization of civilians for VCA. But although permissive microstructural conditions are necessary to trigger VCA, they are not sufficient to sustain it. Similarly, many of the alternative  

65 Quoted in Patrick Cockburn, Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Fall of Iraq (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 2008), p. 183.
67 Irena L. Sagsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer, Newry, Northern Ireland, 16 December 2014.
mechanisms reviewed above—grievance, greed, ulterior motives, coercion, side payments, and external assistance—are apposite to the conflicts in Iraq, Northern Ireland, and the Palestinian territories. Yet they only partly explain why some leaders become powerful and capable of sustaining VCA. To address this question, I examine discursive arousal of emotions and review the relevant literature on identity, emotions, legitimacy, military occupation, frame alignment, and constructivism.

**Discursive and Emotional Explanations of Violent Mobilization**

*Identity*. Studies of identity explore not only obvious clashes over religious,\(^{69}\) national,\(^{70}\) and ethnic\(^{71}\) differences but also identity-based bidding for in-group status and power.\(^{72}\) From the essentialist standpoint, ethnosectarian entrepreneurs manipulate intercommunity antagonisms to gain status and power within their own communities by adopting hard-line stances and using provocation or violence. Former Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic’s use of ethnonationalist

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themes to rise to power in the 1990s epitomizes this process. In multiethnic or multisectarian societies, bidding for power can occur in electoral politics and also within and among rival rebel groups. As Petersen observes, some communities “produce status rewards that help to drive the original actions of resistance. In societies with existing antipathy against an occupier, performing a small act of resistance can enhance one’s esteem in the eyes of fellow community members.”

The literature on ethnosectarian entrepreneurs explicates the motives and means of many would-be resistance leaders. But theorists in this field ignore the tripartite relationship between the mobilization message, the agent who delivers it, and the strategic context, thus missing important ideographic mechanisms—such as the symbolism of martyrdom, societal rewards for heroic sacrifice, allocation of honor, and social acceptance or ostracism—all of which, in certain cultures, can act as powerful incentives for perpetuating violence, as demonstrated by the Iraqi Sadrist Trend, Palestinian Hamas, Lebanese Hizballah, and Provisional Irish Republican Army.

**Emotions.** What scholarship on identity within the realms of civil conflict and mobilization overlooks is the focus of the theorists who seek to explain collective action through psychological mechanisms. The works by emotion theorists on the role of anger in triggering collective action

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are particularly relevant. Mackie and coauthors find that anger can lead to aggressive behavior against the out-group by the in-group, if its members’ expectations of collective support and level of group identification are high.  

Distinguishing between emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping, van Zomeren and coauthors argue that group-based anger (deriving from appraisals of unfairness) and group efficacy (deriving from appraisals of instrumental social support) are two distinct pathways to collective action. Collective action tendencies, in turn, are stronger when emotion-focused coping is supplemented by problem-focused coping. In a subsequent study, these authors contend that stronger group identification facilitates collective action tendencies through group-based anger, whereas weaker group identification moderates collective action tendencies through group-efficacy beliefs. In a third article, van Zomeren and Spears argue that individuals who minimally identify with a social group behave like “intuitive economists,” engaging in collective action only when the personal benefits outweigh the costs. In contrast, those who identify highly with a social group perform as “politicians,” maintaining their ties to social groups to whom they are accountable, or as “theologians,” striving to defend social norms they hold sacred. Rydell and coauthors find that individual and intergroup anger—“anger aroused by a threat or insult to the in-group but not to the self as a unique individual”—have a similar impact on arousal, information processing, and the judgment of risk. Significantly,

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intergroup anger increases risk taking and thus the likelihood of aggression against the out-group.\textsuperscript{80} Moreover, although fear of reprisals can inhibit participation in collective action, observational and experimental evidence suggests that when individuals identify with a political faction they perceive to be threatened, they often respond to collective action dilemmas with angry and enthusiastic contributions.\textsuperscript{81}

Using experimental and statistical methods, these works offer valuable insights into the role of emotions in motivating collective action. Yet purely psychological explanations of collective action have a number of limitations. First, emotion theories are based on experiments in laboratory settings and do not process trace specific kinds of action seen in the social world. These theories predict “collective action tendencies,” “behavioral intentions,” and a “desire to take action” that may or may not result in a particular behavior. Second, theories of emotion fall short of specifying the mechanisms that transform the feeling of anger into violent action. Why and how does anger trigger violent behavior in some cases but not in others?\textsuperscript{82} Third, studies of emotion disregard the microstructural conditions that can amplify or diminish the relevance of emotions and group identification.

This dissertation contributes to the understanding of the role of emotion in mobilizing collective action in two specific ways. First, I argue that the emotions of anger, humiliation, and fear can trigger a specific behavior—VCA—when microstructural conditions are permissive and when VSM leaders perceived as legitimate strategically frame messages to activate collective


\textsuperscript{82} Some laboratory and field studies demonstrate that the emotion of anger does not necessarily result in aggressive behavior. On the contrary, anger generates a variety of impulses and behaviors, including positive responses such as a desire to reconcile with the instigator or engage in calming activities. See James R. Averill, “Studies on Anger and Aggression: Implications for Theories of Emotion,” \textit{American Psychologist}, vol. 38, no. 11 (November 1983), pp. 1145–60; Richard M. Perloff, \textit{The Dynamics of Persuasion} (Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum, 1993).
emotions and channel them into sustained violence. Second, I identify specific microstructural conditions—ineffective local security and socioeconomic services and the presence of a military occupation—that facilitate emotion-based mobilization.

Legitimacy and Military Occupation. I discuss the legitimacy and military occupation hypotheses in tandem because the two are connected in the context of collective violence. Occupying forces can trigger VCA not only because the local population perceives the occupation as illegitimate but also because foreign occupation delegitimizes the indigenous government. In light of this, many theorists and practitioners of counterinsurgency identify legitimacy (or its deficit) as a variable that contributes to the eruption of collective violence. For example, the military expert Martin van Creveld observes that “a community which cannot safeguard the lives of its members . . . is unlikely either to command their loyalty or to survive for very long.” And the counterinsurgency expert Robert Thompson notes that “winning the population can tritely be summed up as good government in all its aspects.” It is, then, hardly surprising that some of the most resilient VSMs in history—the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale, Iraqi Sadrist Trend, Lebanese Hizballah, Palestinian Hamas, Provisional Irish Republican Army, and Viet Nam Cong San (Vietcong)—arose in opposition to a military occupation, established strong political and military infrastructures, and provided services and protection in order to outgovern and outlegitimize the incumbents.

Edelstein argues that the main mechanisms leading to a successful occupation are the occupied population’s recognition of the need for occupation; the perception by both the occupier and the occupied that each is endangered by a threat to the occupied territory; and a credible guarantee that the occupying power will eventually withdraw and return control to an indigenous government. In this view, the United States faced violent resistance in Iraq between 2003 and 2007 because none of the specified conditions were met. But as the 2008 Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the governments of Iraq and the United States (which required all US forces to leave Iraq by December 2011) was nearing its end, a number of Iraqi leaders voiced concern that the country’s armed forces were not ready to defend Iraq against external “foreign aggression.” Similarly, many ordinary Shias and Sunnis expressed doubts about the ISF’s capability to provide internal security in the absence of US troops and, therefore, supported continued US engagement, especially in training the ISF, economic programs, and security operations against AQI. Regardless, many resistance leaders, including most notably Muqtada al-Sadr, threatened to reactivate their militias and resume armed resistance if the US forces had not completely withdrawn by December 2011. The fact that the Iraqi public was divided over the issue of the US military presence demonstrates that some Iraqis considered the government legitimate, while others thought the resistance was.

Hence, what is missing in legitimacy and military occupation scholarship, and what my argument adds, are hypotheses on what legitimizes certain opposition leaders and a focus on local, context-specific, and perception-based legitimacy that is different from the Weberian and other normative conceptions. My field research and interviews have revealed that due to their social structure, culture, or historical circumstances, some societies accept as legitimate the use of violence by subnational actors—in contrast to other societies, in which only a state or regime exercises a monopoly on force in the territory. To be clear, most ordinary civilians prefer a functioning government that can defend them and provide services for them. But when the government (or occupation forces) fail to protect and provide, over time people tend to grow receptive of alternative, often illicit, methods of protection and provision. A case in point is Iraq. The country has experienced three wars over the past three decades: the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88), the Gulf War (1990–91), and the Iraq War (2003–11). As a result of these events and historical tribal rivalries, Iraqis have developed a high tolerance for violence. Indeed, many of them view the possession of weapons and affiliation with irregular militias as symbols of prestige and legitimate power. As one Iraqi summed up the situation, “we are a nation of pistols. Our leaders have traditionally presented pistols to their subjects as a reward. . . . Even today the most popular children’s toy is a gun. We aren’t afraid of guns. We celebrate weddings and winning football matches with guns.”

Similar proclivities can be observed in Palestinian society. A Palestinian woman in Ramallah explained: “When choosing a boyfriend, even a teenage girl pays attention if a guy has fought against the Israeli occupation. You see, she might ask him directly if he spent time in an Israeli jail. Such experience builds up a man’s status and reputation in our society. A man who hasn’t fought the Israelis or spent time in an Israeli prison is not masculine enough, is

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90 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with an Iraqi employee of the National Democratic Institute (interviewee 2), Erbil, Iraq, 30 June 2012.
not Palestinian enough. Palestinian women view unfavorably men who lack these experiences.”

In Ireland, too, “violence is a tradition,” and “a citizen without arms is like a priest without religion, like a woman without chastity, like a man without manhood.” Therefore, “so honorable is it in Republican circles to have served time in prison for political crimes.”

I posit that leaders must first establish their own local legitimacy before they can mobilize first movers and push other potential leaders aside. The centrality of leaders’ legitimacy is not a novel insight; constructivists have emphasized the importance of legitimacy for becoming successful norms entrepreneurs and achieving a cascade effect. I contribute to the extant literature, however, by identifying three emotional mechanisms that shed light on how VSM leaders acquire local legitimacy and secure a critical mass of supporters. The first mechanism is the collective emotions of anger, humiliation, and fear. Leaders who remain in the homeland develop a deeper understanding—compared with their exiled or foreign counterparts—of how to invoke the shared symbols and experiences of fellow citizens in order to arouse collective emotions. The second mechanism is shared suffering. Leaders who stay in the country during difficult times accrue legitimacy among the vast majority of citizens who also stay in the homeland and suffer—unlike the leaders who flee into comfortable exile. Leaders who are expelled from the home country but continue to make sacrifices for their people from abroad (for example, by promoting the national cause or raising funds for resistance while themselves being targeted by authorities) typically maintain their legitimacy. The third mechanism is cultural tolerance of

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91 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a Palestinian woman (interviewee 24), Ramallah, West Bank, 21 December 2013.
92 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a British Protestant (interviewee 46), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 23 November 2014.
violence. Societies that have experienced protracted armed struggle develop tolerance for violence and enable the rise of leaders willing to muster VCA to defend their communities and achieve political objectives. Through these three emotional mechanisms, leaders who stay in the homeland acquire the requisite legitimacy, credibility, and rhetorical resources to incite collective emotions—and hence the ability to sustain VCA—that foreign leaders or leaders returning from exile lack.

*Frame Alignment*. The frame alignment hypothesis from the social movement literature is especially relevant to the VSM theory. Snow and coauthors define frame alignment “as a conceptual bridge linking social psychological and resource mobilization views on movement participation.” But the core argument of the VSM theory differs from traditional frame alignment models of social mobilization in two important respects. First, social movement theorists focus primarily on nonviolent protests, rather than violent movements in the context of civil war, ethnosectarian violence, or military occupation. Indeed, in social movement theories—such as in those on resource mobilization, political process, collective behavior, new social movements, and informal networks—“incidents of collective violence are in actuality only by-products of normal processes of group competition over power and conflicting goals.”

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movement scholars treat violent struggle “either as the unproblematic extension of ordinary social movement processes, or conversely, as a pathological effect of competition or decline within social movements.” Thus, in social movement theories violence may or may not be part of collective action. In contrast, I focus on why ordinary civilians engage in sustained VCA.

Second, in their discussions of structural criteria, social movement scholars have typically emphasized political opportunity structures—a rather generic, all-encompassing concept. Gamson and Meyer note that “the concept of political opportunity structure is in trouble, in danger of becoming a sponge that soaks up virtually every aspect of the social movement environment—political institutions and culture, crises of various sorts, political alliances, and policy shifts. . . . Used to explain so much, it may ultimately explain nothing at all.” The authors emphasize that “political opportunity structure is too broad to be useful by itself in helping us to understand what conditions or circumstances produce more or less space for movement action. Any explanatory power comes from the specific variables that are part of it.” I identify concrete microstructural variables that facilitate continuation of VCA, demonstrating the importance to sustained mobilization of security conditions, provision of essential socioeconomic services, the presence of occupying forces, and the movement type.

Constructivism. A final strand of the literature apposite to the VSM theory comes from the constructivist school of international relations. The recent wave of constructivist-oriented works

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is informative because it assigns causal weight to political discourse;\textsuperscript{108} ethical beliefs;\textsuperscript{109} norm entrepreneurs, transnational advocacy networks, and epistemic communities;\textsuperscript{110} rhetorical coercion;\textsuperscript{111} an agent-centered constructivist interpretation of events;\textsuperscript{112} social learning;\textsuperscript{113} domestic-level variables;\textsuperscript{114} and even emotion.\textsuperscript{115} Drawing on the tradition of the political theorist Jürgen Habermas, some scholars have combined works on argument and persuasion with constructivist and rationalist explanations to demonstrate the effects of what they call persuasive communication, communicative action, and rhetorical action on world politics.\textsuperscript{116} Other

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Constructivist arguments about the role of discourse in international politics are promising, but they focus on global issues such as the delegitimization of colonialism, international institutions and norms, humanitarian intervention, transnational advocacy networks, and the use of weapons of mass destruction. Constructivist research has not addressed the question of how leaders’ rhetorical arousal of emotions sustains local mobilization for VCA.

Drawing on the reviewed literature, I identify in table 1 the explanatory microstructural and discursive psychological variables central to the VSM theory and the emotional mechanisms through which these variables interact to sustain VCA.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|l|l|}
\hline
\textbf{Independent Variables} & \textbf{Emotional Mechanisms} & \textbf{Dependent Variable} \\
\hline
Security conditions & Collective anger, humiliation, fear & VCA \\
Socioeconomic conditions & Shared suffering & \\
Military occupation and counterinsurgency & Cultural tolerance of violence & \\
VSM type & & \\
Leader’s background & & \\
Messenger’s legitimacy & & \\
Effective messages and frames & & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Variables and Mechanisms}
\end{table}
The Concepts

The unit of analysis in this study is a *violent social movement*, or a VSM. I specify a novel theoretical concept to capture a distinct empirical phenomenon that is often mischaracterized as a terrorist group. I define a VSM as *sustained violent collective action by individuals who share an ethnic or religious identity, a grievance or an ideology; use violence to achieve political objectives; and strive to maintain a popular base by engaging in activities such as provision of socioeconomic services, religious activism, and propaganda*. The concept of the VSM is illustrated in figure 1.

**Figure 1. The Concept of the VSM**

![Diagram showing the relationship between Violence, Collective Action, and Politics and/or Governance in the context of VSM]

*Source: Author's illustration*
Terrorism experts study political violence by focusing on a small core group of terrorists and by analytically dissociating militants from the broader population. Even counterinsurgency practitioners who have developed the hearts-and-minds theories emphasizing the significance of the populace typically do not consider ordinary civilians as an active part of the process that sustains collective violence and instead treat them as a separate, homogenous monolith whose support must be gained in order to defeat the insurgents. In contrast, the concept of the VSM underscores civilians’ instrumental role in enabling and sustaining VCA through seemingly discrete military, political, social, economic, religious, and cultural activities.

A VSM differs from both a terrorist group and a social movement. A terrorist group encapsulates a few operatives largely decoupled from the broader civilian population they claim to serve. A social movement encompasses many kinds of peaceful and contentious politics. A subset of a social movement, a VSM fosters symbiotic relationships with civilians and seeks to engage ordinary citizens in politically motivated violence. VSMs gain a popular base, recruits, and funds through social networking, religious activism, propaganda, charity, and communal service. The Afghan Taliban, Algerian Front de Libération Nationale, Iraqi Sadrist Trend, Lebanese Hizballah, Palestinian Hamas, and Provisional Irish Republican Army are prime examples: they began as small militant groups or nonviolent social movements and transformed into VSMs engaged in political, military, and social welfare activities.

A terrorist group can evolve into a VSM by providing social services, forming a political wing, or allying with an existing political party. Conversely, a VSM can devolve into a terrorist

group if it loses its popular base; or it can convert into a nonviolent movement or a political party if it lays down its arms in exchange for political concessions. A nonviolent social movement, in turn, can adopt violent tactics and become a VSM. Some VSMs control territory, create institutions emulating national ones, and aim to outgovern the incumbents in providing protection and services.

I have not selected as case studies units that in the period under examination operated strictly as terrorist groups or criminal gangs or that became political parties or nonviolent social movements. Groups excluded on this basis are the following: in Iraq, Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), predominantly Kurdish Ansar al-Islam (AAI) and its Arab counterpart, Ansar al-Sunna Army (AAS), the Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI), Jaysh al-Mujahideen (JM), Kata’ib Hizballah (KH), Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al-Naqshabandi (JRTN), and the 1920s Revolution Brigades; in Northern Ireland, the Continuity IRA (CIRA), Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), and Ulster Defence Association (UDA); and in the Palestinian territories, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Black September Organization (BSO), Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine–General Command (PFLP-GC), Palestine Liberation Front (PLF), and Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP).

Substantively, I am interested in three aspects of substate political violence: civilians’ voluntary participation in VCA; indigenous social and cultural catalysts that facilitate the use of violence; and leaders’ propensity to use violence to achieve political goals. Although civilians who join armed movements use violence strategically—for example, to influence the behavior of an adversary and to change the political, economic, or social status quo—the three aspects delineated above distinguish this use of calculated communal violence from another type of strategic violence, which is usually referred to in the civil war literature as “coercive violence.”¹¹⁹ Coercive

violence is typically perpetrated unilaterally by either a government (to subdue or exterminate an opposition group) or by rebels (to gain tacit or active civilian support). The primary goal of coercive violence is to achieve civilian compliance through compellence. Though instances of coercion unavoidably occur during civil conflicts, I am interested in the mechanisms that motivate civilians to participate in collective violence on a voluntary basis. This example from Iraq is revelatory: “I left my wife who has just given birth to our daughter,” a follower of al-Sadr said, “so I could come here and fight for Muqtada.”

In addition, I examine collective civilian participation in protracted violent conflicts, rather than individuals’ involvement in isolated acts of terrorism or criminal activity. Even though violence perpetrated by individuals is common during mass insurgencies—for example, when people take advantage of chaos and lawlessness to engage in revenge or to make pecuniary gains—individual motives are typically not sufficient to sustain VCA in the long run. I investigate active civilian support for collective violence, manifested in acts such as citizens’ participation in armed struggle; provision to rebels of intelligence that is both credible and actionable; violent protests against political processes; the use of informal mobilization channels; and attacks on government

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120 My research indicates that the capacity to carry out coercive violence can work as a counteracting mechanism: in a conflict environment, civilians perceive militias possessing coercive capacity as capable of providing protection, but in a postconflict environment, people typically view substate armed actors as spoilers of peace. On counteracting mechanisms, see Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), pp. 145–46.


or foreign counterinsurgency forces. Observable behavior is the clearest indicator of active support, but civilians’ attitudes (which are mostly useful for gauging passive support) can become relevant if they are translated into a particular action, such as voting.

In the social science literature, civilian support is normally depicted as a dichotomous variable—it either exists or it does not. In reality, however, civilian support has gradations and elasticity. Both attributes are relevant to the question of sustaining VCA. For instance, what motivates individuals to switch positions along the spectrum presented in figure 2—that is, either by moving sequentially from neutrality to passive support to active participation, or by making a dramatic switch from neutrality to active resistance? The following examples from Ireland corroborate the proposition that civilian support is protean. “In consequence of the events that occurred in the decisive week of the Easter Rising of 1916, and more particularly of the events that followed it, thousands of young men all over Ireland, indeed thousands of men of all ages in the country, turned irrevocably against the English Government and became uncompromisingly dedicated to the cause of obliterating the last vestiges of British rule in Ireland. I was one of them. My comrades of the West Cork Brigade were others.”

Another IRA man recalled: “The papers

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123 Improvised explosive device (IED) and suicide attacks in Iraq were difficult to carry out without civilian consent or involvement. The execution of IED attacks required two kinds of support: active civilian support to transport, plant, and detonate bombs; and passive civilian support to allow insurgents to escape, blending back into the population after an attack. Sunni tribes facilitated IED attacks against counterinsurgency forces by providing the insurgents with money, manpower, intelligence, and sanctuaries. Four elements have made the use of IEDs in Iraq possible: “knowledge, organization, material, and the surrounding population.” See Montgomery McFate, “Iraq: The Social Context of IEDs,” Military Review (May–June 2005), p. 37.

124 Identifying precise indicators for passive support is problematic. First, in some cases it is difficult to distinguish passive support from neutrality: are fence-sitters passive supporters, or are they neutral? Second, it is hard to differentiate passive support for insurgents from passive support for counterinsurgents: if a civilian is aware of insurgent activity yet fails to inform counterinsurgents, does s/he sympathize with insurgents, or does s/he not help the counterinsurgents to avoid reprisals? Finally, it is difficult to collect meaningful data on passive civilian support because the forms of such support are obscure.


carried the news, and you could see the change of heart in the people. Each day, the British shot
two or three, dragging it out over a few weeks. When they shot McDermott [Mac Diarmada], who
was basically a cripple, and then put James Connolly into a chair to shoot him because his leg was
gangrenous and he couldn’t stand, well that was it for me. I was utterly appalled and just had to do
something.”

Figure 2. The Spectrum of Civilian Support

Opponents:
Counterinsurgents

Insurgents

Civilians:
Active
Passive
Neutral
Passive
Active

The Coding of VSMs and Leaders

I have developed a coding system to classify the VSMs and leaders examined in this study. If a
VSM and a leader originate in the home country, both the VSM and the leader are coded as
homegrown. If the leader of a homegrown VSM is expelled or flees into temporary exile (because
of threats to his or her life, arrest warrants, or other risks to the survival of the leader and/or the
VSM)—but maintains control over the VSM through local counterparts and activities, such as

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advocacy and fund-raising for the homegrown VSM—the leader is coded as a leader-in-exile, while the VSM is coded as homegrown.

If a VSM’s leader emigrates from the home country voluntarily for an extended period, the leader is coded as expatriate. If an expatriate leader exports the homegrown VSM to a host country, the exported VSM is coded as expatriate if it remains in the host country or repatriated if it returns to the home country. If an expatriate leader returns to the home country, the leader is coded as repatriated.

A leader who originated abroad is coded as foreign. If the leader imports a VSM from abroad to a new host country, the VSM is coded as foreign. If a foreign leader assumes leadership of a homegrown VSM, the leader is coded as foreign, while the VSM is coded as homegrown. If a foreign or local leader succeeds in indigenizing an imported VSM (to counterbalance the adverse effects of foreign identity on recruitment, perceptions, and access to local resources), and if, over time, the VSM adapts, recruits locally, and assimilates into the host culture, becoming an entrenched part of society, the VSM is coded as homegrown.

The Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this study is violent collective action, VCA. The outcomes of interest are sustained VCA that leads to political gains or failed VCA that results in political losses. Experts frequently use “failure” and its diametrical opposite, “success,” to characterize an insurgent or terrorist group’s effectiveness, defining success in terms of the group’s ability to achieve its declared political objectives. But the notions of success and failure involve ambiguity and a degree of subjectivity, depending on who gauges the outcome—insurgents, counterinsurgents, or the
population. For example, has Hamas been a successful VSM? On a tactical level, Hamas was highly effective in its use of violence to undermine the “land-for-peace” deal and, more generally, to derail the Israeli-Palestinian peace process from 1993 to 2001. But from a strategic point of view, although Hamas has achieved substantial gains since its formation in 1987—most notably, in 2006 this VSM won a significant majority in the Palestinian parliament by defeating Fatah and in 2007 it formed a government in the Gaza Strip—it has thus far failed to fulfill its stated core objectives: the establishment of an Islamic state in historic Palestine and the destruction of Israel. The PIRA furnishes another example. Although its political wing, Sinn Fein, has become a powerful player in domestic politics, the PIRA has failed to realize its ultimate objective: achieving a united 32-county Ireland by abolishing the partitioned 6-county and 26-county states.

Instead of the reductive success/failure dichotomy, I use more nuanced criteria in assessing effectiveness, taking the complexity of VSMs into account. In concrete terms, I evaluate a movement by its ability to sustain costly VCA long enough to evolve into a potent actor in a national or regional political ecosystem. This means that a VSM is effective if it has evolved from a nonactor into an actor capable of influencing the domestic political status quo, even if it has been unable to achieve all of its declared political objectives. Furthermore, a VSM is effective if it builds and maintains a large reservoir of supporters and retains the capacity to generate violence on a large enough scale to affect the internal balance of power or electoral competition (with the exception of instances in which a VSM decides to demilitarize after achieving the desired political status or acceptable concessions). Thus, I seek to identify the mechanisms that sustain VCA, transform it into a VSM entrenched in a society, and catapult the VSM’s leader to the forefront of

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national politics. A case in point is the Sadrist Trend and Muqtada al-Sadr, whose “meteoric ascent” has baffled Iraqis and Americans alike.\textsuperscript{130} Analogously, in the run-up to the January 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, “no one—including Hamas—anticipated it would emerge as the dominant political party and form a ruling cabinet.”\textsuperscript{131}

The Independent Variables

The independent variables in this study fall in two categories: microstructural and discursive psychological. I delineate four microstructural variables central to the VSM theory: security conditions and socioeconomic conditions—measured as either adequate or inadequate, depending on whether or not the incumbent government or the occupying forces consistently protect the local populace, in the case of security conditions, and provide essential social and economic services, in the case of socioeconomic conditions; military occupation—gauged by the presence of foreign troops in particular localities; and the movement type—categorized as homegrown, expatriate, repatriated, or foreign.\textsuperscript{132}

There are three particularly important discursive psychological causal variables. The first is a leader’s background, categorized as homegrown, expatriate, repatriated, foreign, or leader-in-exile. The second is the messenger’s legitimacy—measured as strong (if a leader is perceived as legitimate and credible by the local populace and is capable of using persuasion or, if necessary,
limited or indirect intimidation to mobilize civilians for VCA) and weak or declining (if a leader lacks or loses the described qualities and capabilities). The third is whether a message is effective (that is, its communication frames strategically align with popular grievances, shape or reinforce attitudes, and influence behaviors) or ineffective (it fails to resonate with target audiences, shape or reinforce attitudes, and influence behaviors).

A few clarifications about the specified discursive psychological variables are necessary. Although the background and legitimacy of leaders are correlated in some cases, they are not coterminous. In spite of extended exile, leaders like Yasir Arafat of Fatah and the PLO and Khaled Meshal of Hamas maintained legitimacy among their followers because they worked incessantly for the cause of Palestinian statehood and risked assassination by Israel’s security and intelligence services. The elevated status of the Palestinian leaders-in-exile juxtaposes the standing of Iraq’s repatriated leaders among the people. In most Iraqis’ perceptions, leaders like the al-Hakims and Ahmed Chalabi lived comfortably in the Gulf states or Western capitals, oblivious to the grievances and suffering of their compatriots in the homeland. Though these leaders launched foundations or businesses abroad, those initiatives were predominantly symbolic or self-serving, requiring little if any personal sacrifice on behalf of the Iraqi nation.

If foreign or repatriated leaders import a VSM from abroad to a host country and succeed in indigenizing the imported VSM, over time its foreign origins become less relevant to local followers. This nuance is significant on two accounts. First, it reinforces my argument that the leader’s background and the messenger’s legitimacy are two distinct and necessary conditions; and second, it eliminates the possibility of one variable overshadowing the other. A case in point is the Taliban movement, which developed in the refugee camps in Pakistan in the 1980s before
taking power in Afghanistan in 1996. The precautions taken by the Taliban leaders not to appear as “stooges of outside powers” allowed this predominantly Pashtun VSM to spread and become an organic part of multiethnic Afghan society. Lebanon’s Shia Islamist movement Hizballah, molded and financed by Iran and Syria, is another example. Unlike the ISCI, which was also formed with the help of Iran, Hizballah and its leaders remained in Lebanon during the civil war (1975–90) and fought Israel’s occupation (1982–2000), earning local legitimacy as defenders of the battered Shia community.

The discussed combinations of the leader’s background and the messenger’s legitimacy and the ensuing variation in the outcome of VCA demonstrate the autonomous causal effects of the two variables. Just as the leader’s background does not automatically translate into the messenger’s legitimacy (or lack thereof), maintaining the messenger’s legitimacy requires both taking action and producing effective messages and frames. Some leaders uphold strong legitimacy and a revered status in exile by fostering bonds and effective communication with the audience in the homeland. Thus, from exile in France, Iran’s former supreme leader, Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, “sent his oratory . . . to millions of his compatriots at home on cassettes,” galvanized the masses, and spearheaded a revolution in Iran; then he won a landslide victory in the national referendum, transformed Iran into an Islamic republic in 1979, and became its preeminent political and religious leader until his death in 1989. But some leaders wasted an inherited legacy. One example is Mahmoud Abbas, who assumed the leadership of Fatah, the PLO, and the Palestinian

Authority (PA) after Arafat’s death in 2004 but steadily lost his legitimacy among the Palestinians, who increasingly supported the more radical Hamas.  

Cognizant of the fact that legitimacy is not a static characteristic, al-Sadr exerts a deliberate effort to uphold his family’s legacy. On 15 February 2014, two months before Iraq’s parliamentary elections, al-Sadr unexpectedly announced his decision to dissolve the al-Ahrar Bloc, the political party affiliated with the Sadrist Trend. He excoriated the Iraqi government for its dysfunctions, along with some al-Ahrar Bloc members for their alleged involvement in corruption, in a speech expounding his decision—a decision that was necessary “to maintain the legacy of the Sadr family.” The party regrouped, after the resignation of several al-Ahrar Bloc members following al-Sadr’s announcement, and successfully participated in elections on 30 April 2014. Al-Sadr’s maneuver to distance himself from Iraq’s tumultuous politics demonstrated his resolve to fortify the al-Sadr family’s legitimacy and religious authority by ensuring that his and his associates’ actions conform to the principles espoused by his father and uncle. (Al-Sadr rarely makes an appearance in public without the portraits of the two martyrs accompanying him.)

In sum, the three discursive psychological variables—the leader’s background, the messenger’s legitimacy, and effective messages and frames—are discrete conditions required for sustaining VCA.

137 Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, “Given the Outcome of the Israeli Operation in Gaza and the UN Recognition of a Palestinian State, Palestinians Move towards Hamas’ over Abbas’s Way, Whereas Israelis Stand Steadfast in Their Evaluations and Preferences” (Ramallah, West Bank: Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 26 December 2012).

The Case Selection

I have selected VSMs from the universe of post–World War II internal conflicts. To qualify for the surveyed subset of conflicts, an internal struggle had to include four features: a VSM, sectarian violence within local communities, a military occupation by an established democratic regional or world power, and counterinsurgency.139

Violent Social Movement. As defined above, a VSM is sustained violent collective action by individuals who share an ethnic or religious identity, a grievance or an ideology; use violence to achieve political objectives; and strive to maintain a popular base by engaging in activities such as provision of socioeconomic services, religious activism, and propaganda.

Sectarian Intercommunal Violence. I include a sectarian dimension as a scope condition because VSMs (unlike, for example, terrorist groups) are nested in civilian populations that support them. Most often, an ethnic or religious community serves as a base that enables a VSM. And because ethnic and religious groups tend to be geographically concentrated, their identity differences quickly become politicized during a conflict, thus facilitating mobilization. Obviously, class cleavages can also spark an insurgency, as in the cases of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) and the Sendero Luminoso (SL) in Peru, even though class struggles have declined since the end of the Cold War. But rarely does a class-based insurgency have the cohesion and geographic concentration necessary to evolve into a VSM. Indeed, the opposite trend has been observed since the 1990s. Class-based insurgencies devolved into terrorist groups or criminal gangs. As one Colombian official observed, “while they may hide behind a Marxist ideology, Colombia’s leftist guerrillas have ceased to be a political insurgency. They have

139 I do not include counterterrorism as a separate scope condition, because counterinsurgency, as a rule, involves counterterrorism operations; but not every counterterrorism operation expands into counterinsurgency.
traded their ideals for drug profits.”

The OIRA’s failure to mobilize a class-based national liberation front and its subsequent fragmentation is another example.

Some academics and policymakers use the terms “ethnic” and “sectarian” interchangeably. This causes conceptual confusion and entails policy consequences; for example, conflating or inaccurately describing two distinct phenomena can misguide the process of conflict management. Though some conflicts involve both ethnic and sectarian dimensions (for example, the Anglo-Irish and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts), not every sectarian conflict is necessarily ethnic; nor does every ethnic conflict have a sectarian aspect. This study focuses on intercommunal violence that is clearly or predominantly sectarian.

The occurrence of sectarian intercommunal violence in this study is not measured against the commonly used numerical metrics of civil war, such as 1,000 battle deaths annually, at least 25 battle fatalities in a single year, or an average of 100 deaths per year. Instead, I examine the historical background of each case individually to determine if the substate political violence involved a religious dimension, in addition to recurring casualties as a result of fights between sectarian communities; and if, in the aggregate, the intercommunal violence was sustained and reciprocated for at least two years.

Military Occupation. Not all violent groups emerge as a result of a military occupation; consider anarchists, traditionalists, reformists, and separatists. This dissertation, however, focuses on VSMs that arose in opposition to or were active during military occupations. The concept of

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military occupation lacks a clear-cut definition. This is evident from the fact that some experts view the conflict in Northern Ireland as an internal struggle, while others see it as a military occupation. International conventions provide a few guidelines for identifying an occupation, but these guidelines are ambiguous and can be interpreted in diverse ways. For instance, Article I of the 1977 Geneva Protocol I seeks “to establish that certain armed conflicts, which might be viewed by some as essentially internal in character, are really international, and hence fully subject to the better developed legal regime governing international armed conflicts.” Such ambiguity surrounded the British military presence in Northern Ireland in the aftermath of the Irish War of Independence, which resulted in the partition of Ireland, the withdrawal of the British troops from the Free State, and their continued presence in the North: “The United Kingdom’s role in Northern Ireland is called an occupation by some of its adversaries, but this is not the view taken of it by the British or Irish Governments, or by other States. However, even in this case the relevance of some standards derived from the laws of war as well as other international legal norms came to be accepted.”

Legal ambiguities notwithstanding, a central question in this study is whether the indigenous population perceives the control of its territory by foreign authorities or armed forces as an occupation. A related issue is how effectively resistance leaders frame this control as an occupation. I determine these attitudes by conducting historical analyses and interviews and using opinion polls. In the case of Ireland, the empirical evidence shows that many people in both parts of the country, the North and the South, perceived the British presence as a military occupation. Consequently, in a survey conducted in 1990, 56 percent of Northern Catholics supported “a

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complete withdrawal of British troops” from the province, although, as the analysis in chapter 3 below demonstrates, Irish Catholics expressed nuanced and contradictory opinions on this issue over the course of the Troubles. In contrast, the leaders of the PIRA unequivocally asserted that “we have had a military occupation here [in Northern Ireland].” Because legal definitions of a military occupation overlook the issues of its legitimacy and popular perceptions of it—both of which are important considerations in this study—I draw on a few existing definitions and define military occupation as the control of the territory by a ruling authority and its armed forces against the volition of the sovereign of that territory or its population, in the absence of popular acceptance of the ruling authority’s legitimacy.

Two important observations emerged from the interviews I conducted in Iraq, Northern Ireland, and the Palestinian territories. Most Iraqis and Palestinians spoke of “occupation” (iḥtilāl) and its effects in historical, cultural, and personal terms—not from a legal perspective. A related point is that most Iraqis and Palestinians eschewed being associated with “violent” action but took pride in being members or supporters of “resistance” (muqāwamah), even if the resistance involved acts of terrorism and other types of political violence. Resistance, in their view, is legitimate. Resisting an occupying force is a duty. And the fact that many Irish leaders persuasively framed the presence of the British forces in Northern Ireland as a military occupation—foreign, at that—reveals the significance of the occupied people’s perceptions that, along with actual ethnic or sectarian differences, shape the occupier’s foreignness. Hence, the attitudes of local populations justify integrating legitimacy and popular perceptions into the definition of occupation.

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146 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 1990 (http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/); accessed 10 August 2015.
I am interested in cases involving a long-term occupation (lasting at least five years) by a regional or world power that is an established democracy and conducts counterinsurgency operations against VSMs in the occupied territories. Both an occupation’s duration and whether the occupying power is a democracy have implications for counterinsurgency operations: comprehensive counterinsurgency campaigns usually span a period of several years, whereas the military culture of democracies is believed to influence the methods and execution of counterinsurgency operations.149

Counterinsurgency. I define counterinsurgency as military, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions carried out by an indigenous government or foreign forces to defeat a VSM.150

I have compiled a dataset of post–World War II internal conflicts that involve a VSM, intercommunal violence, a military occupation, and counterinsurgency. A few additional comments about the process of case selection are in order. First, I have included cases in which the military occupation (or colonization) started before World War II, but in which VCA did not erupt before the war and continued after it. Second, I have excluded cases in which a great or regional power intervened in an internal conflict by assuming an advisory role only, providing economic and security assistance to the local government to fight the resistance, or sending a limited number of military advisers to train the indigenous military. Examples of cases excluded on this basis are the Colombian Civil War (1964–present), the insurgency in Dhofar (1969–76), the Angolan Civil War (1975–2002), and the Salvadoran Civil War (1979–91). I have also

150 This definition draws on the definition of counterinsurgency in the United States Army and Marine Corps, Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3–24 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), glossary, p. 4.
excluded peacekeeping interventions that did not evolve into long-term occupations. For example, in 1987 the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) intervened in the Sri Lankan Civil War (1983–2009), which was sustained by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), but the IPKF withdrew all its troops by March 1990. Likewise, in 1992 the United States and United Nations intervened in the Somali Civil War (1991–present), but in March 1994 and March 1995, respectively, US troops and UN peacekeeping forces left Somalia. Finally, NATO-led military interventions and peacekeeping operations in the former Yugoslavia between 1992 and 2004 did not develop into occupations.

Third, I have excluded VSMs that fought occupation forces but did not simultaneously engage in protracted intercommunal conflict. For example, Egypt remained under British occupation until 1954, but the Muslim Brotherhood has not been involved in sustained intercommunal violence since the end of World War II. During the Malayan Emergency (1948–60), the Chinese-dominated Malayan Communist Party and its military arm, the Malayan National Liberation Army, fought the colonial government, not other ethnic or sectarian communities. Throughout the Jewish insurgency in Palestine (1945–48), groups that resisted the British occupation—such as Haganah, Irgun Zevai Leumi, and Lohamei Herut Israel—were hostile rivals that nonetheless eschewed internecine violence. Similarly, between 1994 and 2009, the Chechen rebel forces fought the Russian army and carried out terrorist attacks against the civilian population—while Russian artillery and air offensives caused thousands of civilian fatalities—but there was no intense intercommunal violence in Chechnya during that period.

Using the same principle, I have excluded VSMs that participated in long-term intercommunal conflict or struggle against the government, when there was no military occupation. For example, the Cultural Revolution in China (1966–76) resulted in violent factional
struggles, but it was not caused by a foreign occupation; nor did it lead to one. Similarly, none of
the struggles between the following VSMs and their governments involved military occupation:
the Tupamaros in Uruguay (1963–72); the Basque Euskadi Ta Askatasuna in Spain (1968–2011);
the Sendero Luminoso (1980–95) and the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (1996–97), both
in Peru; the Naxalites in India (1967–present); the New People’s Army, the Moro National
Liberation Front, and the latter’s splinter group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (1970–present),
all in the Philippines; the Maoists in Nepal (1996–2006); the Anya-Nya (1955–72) and the Sudan
People’s Liberation Movement (1983–2005), both in Sudan; and the Frente Sandinista de

Finally, I have excluded the secessionist conflicts in which the territory of a separatist entity
is disputed by two sovereign states. A case in point is the insurgency in the Indian state of Jammu
and Kashmir (1988–present), which is essentially a by-product of a territorial dispute between
India and Pakistan over the Kashmir region. Conversely, I have included cases of post–World War
II secessionist conflicts and partitions in which a territory either lost its autonomy or was forcibly
detached from one state by another, which then annexed the territory or enabled its de facto
independence. For example, in 1968 the Republic of Indonesia revoked Aceh’s status as an
autonomous special region, which had been part of the agreement whereby the Dutch government
 transferred its authority over the region to the Indonesian government in 1949. The revocation of
Aceh’s autonomy—coupled with the region’s precolonial history as an independent sultanate—
precipitated violent resistance\textsuperscript{151} against the perceived “neo-colonial Indonesian government.”\textsuperscript{152}

Similarly, Turkey’s occupation and partition of Cyprus led to intercommunal violence from 1974 to 1983. The conflicts I have selected as potential case studies are listed in table 2.

Table 2. Potential Case Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict and Dates</th>
<th>Occupying Power (Occupied Territory) and Dates</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yugoslav National Liberation War, 1941–45</td>
<td>Nazi Germany (Yugoslavia), 1941–45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Civil War, 1943–49</td>
<td>Nazi Germany (Greece), 1941–45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indonesian War of Independence, 1945–49</td>
<td>Netherlands (East Indies), 1800–1949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French-Indochina War, 1945–54</td>
<td>France (Indochina), 1862–1956</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anglo-Irish Conflict, 1948–98</td>
<td>Great Britain (Ireland), 1800–1921; (Northern Ireland), 1800–2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1948–present</td>
<td>Israel (Gaza Strip), 1967–2005; (West Bank), 1967–present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenyan Emergency, 1952–56</td>
<td>Great Britain (Kenya), 1887–1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurgency in Cyprus, 1954–59</td>
<td>Great Britain (Cyprus), 1879–1959</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vietnam War, 1954–75</td>
<td>United States (South Vietnam), 1965–75</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Yemen War, 1955–69</td>
<td>Great Britain (South Arabia), 1839–1967</td>
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<tr>
<td>Angolan-Portuguese War, 1961–74</td>
<td>Portugal (Angola), 1951–61</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guinea-Bissau War of Independence, 1963–74</td>
<td>Portugal (Guinea-Bissau), 1630–1975</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mozambique-Portuguese War, 1964–75</td>
<td>Portugal (Mozambique), 1895–1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodian Civil War, 1970–97</td>
<td>Vietnam (Cambodia), 1975–89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turco-Cypriot War, 1974–83</td>
<td>Turkey (Northern Cyprus), 1974–83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanese Civil War, 1975–90</td>
<td>Israel (Lebanon), 1982–2000; Syria (Lebanon), 1976–2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soviet-Afghan War, 1979–89</td>
<td>Soviet Union (Afghanistan), 1979–89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taliban Insurgency, 2001–present</td>
<td>United States, Great Britain, and NATO (Afghanistan), 2001–14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq War, 2003–11</td>
<td>United States (Iraq), 2003–11; Great Britain (Iraq), 2003–9</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{151} On the surface, the secessionist conflict in Aceh resembles the secessionist struggles in Sri Lanka (1972–2009) and Sudan (1956–2001). However, unlike Aceh, postcolonial Sri Lanka and Sudan were not transferred by the colonial powers to other sovereign states. Instead, these territories gained independence from Great Britain (1972), in the case of Sri Lanka, and from Egypt and Great Britain (1956), in the case of Sudan. Sri Lankan and Sudanese societies—both divided along political, religious, class, and caste lines—fought ethnic and interreligious wars as a result of the postcolonial domestic developments. Similarly, many of the fifteen republics of the former Soviet Union experienced political upheavals after becoming independent in the early 1990s. The secessionist conflict in Senegal’s Casamance region, conversely, bears a similarity to the conflict in Aceh: France’s handover of the Casamance territory to the state of Senegal in 1960 and the latter’s refusal to grant the territory independence triggered violent struggle by the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance against the government of Senegal. But in contrast to the Acehnese conflict, the struggle in Casamance lacked strong sectarian undercurrents.

The Case Studies

As a test of the hypotheses, I examine three VSMs in Iraq (2003–11), two in Northern Ireland (1969–98), and two in the Palestinian territories (1987–2005). In Iraq, I study the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr and his Sadrist Trend to determine how he was able to sustain VCA even after the microstructural conditions had become less permissive. I contrast this outcome with two negative cases of VSMs and leaders who, by conventional measures, initially appeared more likely than al-Sadr to galvanize followers but ultimately failed to sustain large-scale popular support. First, I compare the Sadrist Trend to the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, a powerful Islamist movement that failed to gain significant legitimacy and credibility among ordinary Shias in the period under examination. Second, I compare al-Sadr’s steady rise with the rise and fall of Al Qaeda in Iraq. In Northern Ireland, I examine two VSMs: the Official Irish Republican Army and a splinter organization, the Provisional Irish Republican Army, to establish why the latter was more effective than the former in both mobilizing and sustaining VCA. In the Palestinian territories, I contrast Hamas’s rise as an Islamist resistance movement with Fatah’s decline as a national liberation movement. Table 3 summarizes the salient causal variables relevant to the VSM theory and the variations in outcomes among empirically observed combinations.
Table 3. Cases and Typological Space

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VSMs</th>
<th>Microstructural Variables</th>
<th>Discursive Psychological Variables</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Security Conditions</td>
<td>Socioeconomic Conditions</td>
<td>Military Occupation, Counterinsurgency</td>
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<tr>
<td>AQI-ISI</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
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<td>ISCI</td>
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<td>Sadrist Trend OIRA</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
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<td>PIRA</td>
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<td>Fatah-PLO</td>
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<td>Hamas</td>
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I have selected seven VSMs from two different geographic regions, Europe and the Middle East. Although the microstructural conditions in which the selected VSMs evolved have similarities (for example, sectarian polarization, inadequate public security, economic deterioration, military occupation, and counterinsurgency), there are distinctions that merit notice. Most markedly, unlike post-Saddam Iraq, Northern Ireland maintained substantial state capacity throughout the conflict, and it had not experienced the sort of authoritarian rule that was dominant in Iraq before the US-led intervention. Unlike both Iraq and Northern Ireland, the Palestinian territories—Gaza and the West Bank—are enmeshed with the territory of the occupying power. The presence of similar background conditions across Iraq, Northern Ireland, and the Palestinian territories—and, more important, within each geographic unit—allows me to control for many structural variables and, by isolating the effects of the causal variables of interest and their interactions, to determine if differences in VSM characteristics, leaders, and messages explain the variation in sustaining VCA. The focus on three discrete polities offers two additional opportunities: to examine whether the functional aspects of VCA (for example, sectarian...
polarization and the presence of a military occupation) play out similarly in distinct geographic regions and to observe how contextual idiosyncrasies influence VSMs’ evolution and resilience.

The conflicts listed in table 2 that I have not selected as case studies all have confounding characteristics that interfere with local mobilization dynamics. For instance, the Lebanese Civil War (1975–90) led to several concurrent occupations, including by Israel, Syria, and the US Multinational Force (USMNF). As a result, the civil war provoked proxy wars (for example, between Israel and Syria through Lebanese militias allied with those countries), which distorted mobilization for VCA in significant ways. Because they also involved proxy wars, I have not selected VSMs that engaged in struggles between communists and anticommunists during the Cold War, such as the Vietcong in Vietnam (1955–75), the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia (1967–91), and the mujahideen in Afghanistan (1979–89). In Greece and Yugoslavia, the resistance movements operated in the complex political-military environment of World War II: engaged in fratricidal warfare, some VSMs received support from the Allied armies, while others collaborated with the Axis powers.

The wars in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique were all part of the larger Portuguese Colonial War (1961–75) in Africa that triggered not only proxy wars but also direct confrontations among several states. The North Yemen War occurred in the context of the British occupation of South Arabia, involving Egypt directly and the Soviet Union indirectly. Although the Indonesian War of Independence was directed against the Netherlands, the United Kingdom occupied parts of Indonesia until 1946, and, by most accounts, Japan’s occupation of other parts of Indonesia (1942–45) influenced the course of events leading to the revolution. In Afghanistan, the war against the Taliban was led by the United States, but NATO was another major participant, and the continued cross-border cooperation between the Afghan Taliban and the Pakistani Taliban,
or Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, added a transnational dimension to the Taliban movement. In the same way, the war between Indonesia and East Timor led to interventions by multiple actors, such as the International Force East Timor, the UN Transitional Authority in East Timor, and the Australian-led International Stabilization Force.

**Potentially Anomalous Cases**

Leaders and groups that did not rhetorically arouse collective emotions or that lacked widespread civilian support but sustained violence and became significant domestic actors would constitute anomalous cases for the VSM theory. One example is Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) in Iraq, a Shia terrorist group that has been nurtured by Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps–Qods Force (IRGC-QF). AAH originated between 2006 and 2008, after several of Muqtada al-Sadr’s lieutenants split from the JAM to form a separate organization. Without relying on civilian support, the group was effective in conducting high-profile assassinations and spectacular attacks, especially at a time when al-Sadr was urging his followers to lay down arms and turn to political resistance.\(^{153}\) AAH was able to maintain violent activities without substantial civilian support, but seen in context, it is hardly an anomaly. It received extensive and continuous financial, logistical, and training support from the IRGC-QF, and therefore its survival and operational effectiveness did not depend on the local populace.

Nonetheless, by 2010 AAH had departed from its modus operandi as a secretive terrorist organization and sought both to participate in politics and to increase its influence among Shias. In a variety of ways, the group began to emulate the Sadrist Trend. For example, AAH opened

religious schools to expand its pool of recruits and asserted that it targeted only foreign enemies and deemed “the blood of Iraqi citizens and military personnel a red line.” By engaging in social service activities and opening channels of communication with the broader population, the leaders of AAH hoped to boost their legitimacy, rebutting al-Sadr’s denunciations of the group as “criminals and murderers” for attacking Iraqi civilians. In January 2012, the leaders of AAH announced their decision “to join the political process.” This transition was driven by at least two factors. First, as Iraq became more stable in the years 2008–11 and the war-weary population grew less tolerant of sectarian violence, AAH was forced to modify its tactics. Second, after the last US troops left Iraq in December 2011 and thus effectively undermined the group’s raison d’être for continuing its violent campaign, AAH recalibrated its objectives and discourse in order to maintain its relevance. Together, these circumstances help explain what appears to be a potentially deviant case.

The Methodology

Against the backdrop of the tradition of quantitative studies of political violence, this study uses qualitative methodologies to identify idiographic causal mechanisms that sustain VCA. I employ an interdisciplinary approach that has rarely been utilized to explain VCA during a military occupation.

VCA involves complex causation, “a situation in which an outcome may follow from several different combinations of causal conditions.”\textsuperscript{157} Hence, case- and mechanism-oriented comparisons and typological theorizing, rather than correlation- and variable-oriented econometric analysis, are especially apposite methods for this study. In particular, these methods enable researchers to identify various configurations and interactions of causally relevant conditions and to determine both which causal conditions are necessary and which combinations of conditions are sufficient for the empirical outcome of interest. Furthermore, typological theorizing facilitates cross-case comparisons; an analytical dissection of correlations; and an iterative, back-and-forth analysis between the cases and the theory to refine the causal model—all techniques that are critical for unraveling multiple or conjunctional causation. Because my theory includes both agency and structures, typological theorizing is especially useful because it allows me to integrate within a single theoretical framework variables and mechanisms that link agency and structures.\textsuperscript{158} I supplement the cross-case comparisons of cases with the methods of within-case process-tracing, discourse and content analyses, archival research, fieldwork, and interviews.

Process-tracing generates additional methodological advantages; therefore, I use it to verify the validity of causal inferences, detect potentially omitted variables or equifinality (that is, alternative causal paths leading to the same outcome\textsuperscript{159}), and account for complex causal processes in both cross-case comparisons and comparisons within the cases over time.

In testing the hypotheses involving discursive psychological variables, I carry out discourse and content analyses of published material, including the following items: newspaper and

magazine articles; transcripts of interviews and television programs; Friday sermons; statements by VSM leaders and members; and posts on websites. The primary sources for the texts and translations are archives and databases, including the Access World News of the News Bank, BBC Monitoring, International Newsstand, Declassified Documents Reference System, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, and World News Connection, as well as the Conflict Records Research Center of the National Defense University, the Harmony Program of the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, the Library of Congress, the National Security Archive of George Washington University, and the Northern Ireland Political Collection Archives of the Linen Hall Library in Belfast. I also use secondary sources, such as published and unpublished memoirs; oral histories; anthropological studies; reports from American and international think tanks and nongovernmental organizations; and public opinion polls. I have used graphs to present the results of the content analysis of the Iraqi VSMs, but it was not possible to make similar graphical presentations of the content analyses of the VSMs in Northern Ireland and the Palestinian territories, because most published material from the 1950s through the late 1980s has not been digitized. I used microfilm to analyze the texts that were not available electronically.

Because discourse and content analyses have limitations—given that only published information is available for examination, and the information comes from certain actors and media outlets on the subjects that these actors and outlets choose to publicize—I supplemented them with fieldwork and interviews to triangulate, check facts, and fill possible information gaps. I completed field research and semistructured interviews for this project in Iraq, Israel, Northern Ireland, and the Palestinian territories. I interviewed former and active VSM leaders and members, as well as adherents of militant groups not included in this study; ordinary citizens; internally displaced persons; political and military officials; members of security forces; and local journalists and
analysts. In keeping with ethical standards and the Institutional Review Board requirements, the names and identities of the interviewees have been kept confidential.

In combination, cross-case and within-case microcomparative methods facilitate typological theorizing, which has the advantage of generating not only theoretical explanations and contingent generalizations but also policy recommendations. Unlike statistical analysis, which focuses only on broad symmetric correlations (such as the presence or absence of causal conditions), the methods selected for this study permit me to test specific mechanisms and examine symmetric as well as asymmetric relationships not captured by or conflated in correlation-oriented analyses.

In chapter 1, I have outlined a middle-range theory that explains and predicts the rise and demise of VSMs during military occupations; specified its main argument and hypotheses; identified the microstructural and discursive psychological variables as well as the distinct emotional mechanisms through which these variables interact to sustain VCA; reviewed the extant alternative explanations for violent mobilization; and discussed the methodologies employed to test the VSM theory. In chapters 2, 3, and 4, I test the theory and its hypotheses in seven empirical cases of VSMs in Iraq, Northern Ireland, and the Palestinian territories, respectively.
CHAPTER 2

SUSTAINING VIOLENT SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN IRAQ, 2003–11

As a test of the VSM theory, I examine three movements in Iraq that varied greatly in their ability to sustain VCA to achieve political objectives. I focus on the period of the military occupation led by the United States, from the March 2003 invasion of Iraq to the December 2011 withdrawal of all Coalition troops from the country. Concentrating on this period allows me to observe which VSMs were able to sustain VCA, outlast the 2006–7 sectarian carnage and the 2007–8 US surge, and emerge as important political contestants in Iraq’s 2010 parliamentary elections or gain political concessions without participating in elections.

First, I evaluate the security and socioeconomic conditions during the US-led military occupation of Iraq (2003–11) and the role of external assistance to the VSMs. I posit that the inadequate microstructural conditions in Iraq in 2003–7 facilitated the VSMs’ mobilization for VCA and that the inflow of external aid contributed to the continuation of armed struggle. Next, I investigate the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr and his homegrown movement, the Sadrist Trend, by process-tracing how he was able to sustain VCA even after the microstructural conditions had improved. I argue that al-Sadr became more influential than most Western or Iraqi observers had anticipated because his personal background and his family’s decision to remain in Iraq during Saddam Hussein’s rule gave him legitimacy and credibility among disaffected Shias and because he was able to frame messages emphasizing his personal history and family legacy, discredit his competitors, exploit the precarious security and socioeconomic conditions, and target a concrete enemy. His rhetoric resonated strongly with ordinary Iraqis because he deftly aroused their shared
emotions of anger, humiliation, and fear, using them to mobilize the masses for VCA. And when his military strategy encountered setbacks in 2004 and 2008, al-Sadr demonstrated strategic and tactical agility by turning to political resistance and burnishing his religious credentials. As a result, he became a powerful political leader capable of influencing national elections, organizing mass rallies, and fomenting violence in post-Saddam Iraq.

I briefly contrast this outcome with two negative cases of VSMs whose leaders initially appeared more likely than al-Sadr to galvanize followers, but who ultimately failed to sustain large-scale popular support for violent resistance. I show why the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), a repatriated Shia Islamist VSM, failed to gain significant credibility and influence among ordinary Shias. I argue that despite the ISCI’s positional advantages, this VSM’s leaders, who had lived in exile for decades, lacked a mobilization message compelling enough to engender and sustain a vast base of supporters. I also contend that although Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) generated powerful messages that initially resonated with Iraq’s Sunni Arab population, its lack of local social networks and connections to the indigenous tribes, use of excessive violence against Shia and Sunni civilians, perpetration of culturally offensive acts, and implementation of harsh versions of Islamic law, *Sharī‘ah*, eventually undercut this VSM’s message and ability to sustain VCA. I find support for the VSM theory through both cross-case comparisons and comparisons within the cases over time.
An Overview of Iraq’s Economic and Security Conditions

The modern state of Iraq emerged in the 1920s. It was carved out of three provinces of the Ottoman Empire—Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul—which were initially controlled by the Mamluk pashas (1831–1914) and, after their reign ended, by the British mandatory authorities (1914–20). From 1921 until the 2003 US-led invasion, the country was ruled by Iraqi monarchs (1932–58), nationalists and communists (1958–68), and Baathists (1968–2003). The US-led Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and, then, an interim government administered Iraq from 2003 until the parliamentary elections of January 2005.

By the end of the 20th century, Iraq had evolved into a complex polity that wrestled with clashing ethnic and sectarian identities, tribal and clan politics, competing urban and rural interests, secular and religious rivalries, and intracommunal and intercommunal struggles—all kept in check by authoritarian cliques of rulers. These fault lines in Iraqi society spawned tensions that frequently flared into revolts and coups d’état—until Saddam Hussein took the reins of power in 1979. Hussein kept Iraq’s restive populace under control by exterminating or coopting his political rivals; using terror and chemical weapons; exploiting ethnic, sectarian, and tribal cleavages; and maintaining intricate surveillance, intelligence, and security networks. In addition, the economic prosperity triggered by the rise in oil prices in the 1970s allowed Hussein to use lucrative incentives to nurture a patronage system, which he ran with the help of members of his Tikriti tribe to ensure the regime’s survival. The Iran-Iraq War (1980–88) reinforced the dictator’s personal power, as

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Iraqis, driven by patriotism, rallied behind the government. On the flip side, however, the war precipitated the country’s economic meltdown, which was exacerbated by Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the Gulf War (1990–91), and economic sanctions imposed on Iraq by the United Nations.

In the late 1970s, international organizations such as the World Bank ranked Iraq among the most developed upper-middle-income states in the Middle East, on the basis of quality-of-life indicators such as wage levels, employment rates, literacy and school enrollment rates, health and infant mortality rates, and family food consumption. But a combination of domestic and external factors—including political repression, costly militarization, the government’s control of oil revenues and investment opportunities, capital stock degradation, inefficient state-owned enterprises, wasteful subsidies, savage wars, and decade-long sanctions—stifled the growth of Iraq’s oil-dependent economy. Even though Hussein’s regime manipulated and concealed economic data, a few available indicators portray a declining Iraqi economy in the 1990s. For instance, Iraq’s oil production, which increased from 1.5 million barrels per day (bpd) in 1970 to 3.5 million bpd in 1979, dropped to 500,000 bpd in the years 1991–96. The country’s per capita gross domestic product (GDP) declined from more than $2,500 in 1979–80 to below $500 in 1991–96 (in 2002 US dollars). Per capita export earnings decreased by more than 86 percent, from $4,100 in 1979–80 to $544 in 2002 (in 2002 US dollars). The unemployment rate in Iraq (excluding the three Kurdish provinces of Dohuk, Erbil, and Suleimaniya) surged above 18 percent of the labor force in 1997. And inflation, measured by the consumer price index (CPI), reached 387 percent

in 1995. Because of these mounting economic pressures, in January 1996 Iraq’s government accepted the terms of United Nations Security Council Resolution 986, which instituted the Oil for Food Program (OFFP) to alleviate the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi civilians by lifting the oil embargo. The program produced mixed results, and Iraq’s economy remained depressed. Iraq’s economic decline in the period of the wars and sanctions was not evenly distributed across the country. The regions where the political elite and government employees were clustered (for example, the provinces of Anbar and Baghdad) benefited from the regime’s largesse.

The US-led occupation of Iraq had equivocal effects on the country’s security and economy, both of which deteriorated precipitously in the initial years of the occupation (2003–7) before they began to improve (2008–11). The removal of Hussein’s regime created security and political vacuums that produced a failing state and gave rise to various Shia and Sunni rebel groups. Violence escalated measurably during the 2006–7 sectarian war. The monthly civilian death toll from violence reached 3,297 in July 2006 and remained high until the end of 2007. In Baghdad alone, more than 1,700 people were killed every month from November 2006 through January 2007. “We are walking with our coffins in our hands,” one Iraqi said, reflecting on the security situation. “Nothing in Iraq is guaranteed anymore.” A young woman from Baghdad recollected: “We lived through very bad situations in 2005 and 2006. At that time, it was natural to see dead people in the streets and no one would even bury or cover them for fear of being associated with them and meeting the same fate. I still remember walking to school one day and seeing a dead guy sprawled on the sidewalk. I made it a habit to never again look at dead bodies directly, so that I

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wouldn’t remember their faces.”

Tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians perished at the height of the intercommunal fight: 29,380 in 2006 and 25,921 in 2007. The deteriorating security also uprooted scores of Iraqis: in 2005, 262,299 people became refugees and 1.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). By 2008, an estimated 2 million people had fled Iraq, and another 2.7 million had become IDPs.

The economy collapsed in tandem with security, reinforcing Iraq’s downward spiral. The immediate impact of the US-led invasion on Iraq’s economy was a sharp drop in the generation of electricity and the halting of oil production in April and May 2003. Before the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq’s electricity generating capacity was 9,295 megawatts (MW), and 87 percent of the population regularly received electricity. In the war’s immediate aftermath, the country’s generating capacity dropped to 2,325 MW and had reached only 3,300 MW by 2003. Although the supply of electricity improved after 2003, it chronically fell short of demand. Similarly, when oil production resumed in late 2003, it was at the level of 1.3 million bpd and remained under 2.5 million bpd through 2010—below the average rate expected of a country endowed with one of the world’s largest oil reserves. Consistent with the overall lethargic performance of its economy, Iraq’s per capita GDP remained low. Although it grew modestly after the OFFP took effect in 1996, it stagnated below $2,000 until 2006, constituting a decline of almost a third vis-à-vis its highest

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167 Irena L. Sargsyan, email correspondence with a resident of Baghdad (interviewee 11), 19 February 2013.

Opinion polls of Iraqis reflected these realities, albeit with an expected time lag. In 2006, 53 percent of surveyed Iraqis rated their economic situation as “poor,” and 76 percent replied that security was “poor.”\footnote{International Republican Institute, “Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion, March 23–31, 2006” (Washington, DC: International Republican Institute, 27 April 2006).} In 2007, 78 percent of those polled responded that the overall situation in Iraq was “quite bad” or “very bad.”\footnote{August 2007 poll by ABC News / BBC News / NHK (New York, NY: ABC News Polling Unit, September 2007), Polling the Nations database; accessed 5 August 2014.} Pessimism about the government’s performance grew concomitantly. In July 2005, 12 percent of the surveyed residents believed that public corruption in Iraq had become “worse” or “much worse.” Less than a year later, in March 2006, 68 percent of Iraqis agreed that corruption had grown “worse” or “much worse.”\footnote{International Republican Institute, “Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion, March 23–31, 2006” (Washington, DC: International Republican Institute, 27 April 2006).} “We need a Mahatma Gandhi,” one Iraqi said—“one who can see the suffering of his people and decides to end it peacefully.”\footnote{Quoted in Ulrike Putz, “Life in Baghdad’s Slums: Fighting to Survive in Sadr City,” \textit{Spiegel}, 1 September 2010.}

Iraq’s security and economy showed signs of improvement between 2008 and 2011, in large part due to the shift in the US military strategy from hard counterinsurgency that emphasized the use of force to soft counterinsurgency that prioritized the local population’s security and socioeconomic welfare. A few key indicators are illustrative of the incremental progress that took place between 2008 and 2011. The rampant violence that followed the 2003 US-led invasion subsided. Civilian deaths declined by more than a half, from the estimated total of 10,203 in 2008 to 4,153 in 2011.\footnote{Iraq Body Count database (https://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/); accessed 4 August 2014.} As Iraq’s economy began to recover, per capita GDP increased from $1,941
in 2007 to $2,323 in 2011 (in constant 2005 US dollars).\textsuperscript{181} By 2011, Iraq had achieved a degree of macroeconomic stability, as shown in positive, albeit fluctuating, economic growth and single-digit inflation, measured by the CPI.\textsuperscript{182} Iraq’s oil production rose to 2.7 million bpd in 2011, and its oil exports were estimated at 2.1 million bpd. The availability of electricity in some regions increased from two to eight hours daily, but its chronic shortage continued to exact a high cost on Iraq’s economy and population.\textsuperscript{183} Overall, the country’s economy, dependent on its hydrocarbon sector and sorely lacking in diversification, remained susceptible to the volatility of international oil prices and domestic political unrest. In addition, Iraq’s dilapidated infrastructure and frequent acts of sabotage continued to impose constraints on oil production and electricity generation.

The modest advances in Iraq’s security and economy were echoed in public opinion polls, after a predictable lag. In early 2008, 62 percent of polled Iraqis regarded the security in their neighborhood as “very good” or “quite good,” and 57 percent evaluated their families’ economic situation as “very good” or “quite good” (with 31 percent noticing improvement in the preceding six months).\textsuperscript{184} Although the quantitative metrics corroborate an amelioration of security as a result of the US surge, it is noteworthy that many Iraqis felt more secure because sectarian and ethnic cleansing had forced them to flee to safer areas. Hence, though the majority of Iraqis concurred that security had improved, 60 percent rated their freedom to live without persecution in a desired location as “quite bad” or “very bad.”\textsuperscript{185} According to the same poll, the majority of respondents

rated as “quite bad” or “very bad” specific socioeconomic conditions: the availability of jobs (70 percent), electricity (88 percent), clean water (68 percent), and medical care (62 percent).\textsuperscript{186}

In a 2009 survey, the number of Iraqis who felt that security in the country had improved grew to 81 percent, but the proportion of people who believed that the overall economy was “not good/poor” also grew, reaching 57 percent.\textsuperscript{187} Of particular importance, and in line with the trend in the 2008 poll, 35 percent of respondents indicated that their personal economic situation had “gotten better.”\textsuperscript{188} Similarly, in comparing the specific socioeconomic conditions in 2009 with those of the previous year, respondents indicated that the following services had become “better”: electricity (49 percent), water and sewage (39 percent), and wages and salaries (48 percent).\textsuperscript{189} Thus, although nationwide dissatisfaction persisted in particular areas—for instance, the perceptions that government corruption and unemployment had grown “worse” were widespread in 2009 (58 percent and 54 percent, respectively)\textsuperscript{190} and 2010 (62 percent and 63 percent, respectively)\textsuperscript{191}—a relative improvement was tangible on a personal level. The number of Iraqis who evaluated their socioeconomic conditions poorly enough to be regarded as “suffering” fell from 30 percent in 2008 to 14 percent in 2010,\textsuperscript{192} and 55 percent reported in 2010 that the financial situation of their household had become “much better” or “somewhat better” compared with the

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previous year.\textsuperscript{193} When asked to compare the conditions in Iraq in 2011 with those before the surge of US troops, 34 percent of respondents confirmed that the country was “better off” after the surge, while 16 percent replied that it was “worse off” and 43 percent felt it was the “same.”\textsuperscript{194}

The opinion polls of Iraqis cited above were conducted by different organizations, and their use of distinct methodologies and samples accounts for some variation in Iraqis’ attitudes about the security and socioeconomic conditions in the same or contiguous periods of time. In addition, several major events that occurred between 2008 and 2011—such as the eight-month-long political stalemate that followed Iraq’s 2010 parliamentary elections and the announcement of the deadline for the withdrawal of the US troops from Iraq—could have caused the fluctuation in people’s assessments of security and socioeconomic well-being. Still, these different polls converge in confirming the general trends prevalent in Iraq in the years 2003–11. Between 2003 and 2007, Iraq’s population experienced a deterioration in security and socioeconomic conditions; but from 2008 to 2011, Iraqis reported improvement in both security and the economy. The period following the end of the US-led occupation of Iraq is beyond the scope of this study, but it is noteworthy that the progress achieved between 2008 and 2011 proved fragile or reversible in some areas.

\textbf{Social Ramifications of the Deteriorating Economy and Security}

The nationwide statistics discussed above conspicuously fail to capture the impact of the worsening security and economic conditions on the average Iraqi. Even though human suffering rarely transpires through the miasma of war, analyzing the tangible changes that occurred on

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\textsuperscript{193} International Republican Institute, “Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion, June–July 2010” (Washington, DC: International Republican Institute, 2010). \\
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personal and social levels is essential to understanding why many ordinary Iraqis joined or supported the VSMs during the US-led military occupation.

The precipitous decline in Iraq’s security and economy severely affected individuals and households. By conservative estimates, Iraq’s unemployment rate soared to 28 percent of the labor force in 2003. The unemployment rate among people aged 15–24 years was at least 33 percent in 2004. The CPA’s decision to disband the Iraqi Army and implement de-Baathification deprived tens of thousands of Iraqis of salaries, contributing to the swelling unemployment that made many ordinary people susceptible to recruitment by the VSMs. “I haven’t been working at all for the last two weeks,” a young Iraqi man from Sadr City said. “If I stay like this for another week my family will starve, and if someone comes with $50 and asks me to toss a grenade at the Americans, I’ll do it with pleasure.”

In the years of the US-led occupation, poverty became ubiquitous in Iraq. Most striking, the majority of poor Iraqis were just below the Iraqi poverty line of 76,896 Iraqi dinars (roughly $66) per person per month, and the majority of nonpoor Iraqis were just above this line. This meant that a moderate shock at the personal level (for example, a temporary loss of employment or unexpected medical expenses) or the macroeconomic level (for example, a decline in security or a rise in food prices) exposed the vast majority of Iraqis to poverty. “We can’t live without the

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rations,” said a father of two who had lost his job. “I have no money left. Life has become very difficult. The Iraqi people are hungry.”\footnote{Quoted in Sharon Behn, “Violence Forces Iraqis to Give Up Meat,” \textit{Washington Times}, 31 May 2007.} Adding to this problem, the insurgents routinely targeted bakeries. Bread (both flat bread, \textit{khubz}, and diamond-shaped bread, \textit{ṣamūn}) is the dominant staple of Iraqis’ diet, so by intentionally attacking bakeries, the insurgents sought to disrupt daily life. “To shut down a well-known bakery in a neighborhood, that means you paralyze life there,” one Iraqi man explained.\footnote{Quoted in Sabrina Tavernise, “Sects’ Strife Takes a Toll on Baghdad’s Daily Bread,” \textit{New York Times}, 21 July 2006.} “I don’t know which bakery I should go to, because I don’t know which one of them might be targeted. You can see how bad things are,” another person complained.\footnote{Quoted in Jamie Tarabay, “Bakeries Get Caught in Iraq’s Sectarian Crossfire,” NPR, 4 April 2006.} Many Iraqis managed to avoid absolute poverty only due to the Public Distribution System, which provided food rations but could not prevent the deterioration of people’s living conditions.\footnote{World Bank, “Country Partnership Strategy for the Republic of Iraq for the Period FY13–FY16” (Washington, DC: World Bank, 13 November 2012), p. 2.}

The proportion of urban residents living in slum conditions tripled, from 17 percent in 2000 to 53 percent (or 10.7 million people) in 2010.\footnote{United Nations Human Settlements Program, \textit{State of the World’s Cities 2010/2011: Bridging the Urban Divide} (London, UK: Earthscan, 2010), p. 33.} In many locations across the country (including in the prewar upscale districts of Baghdad), residents received a maximum of two hours of electricity per day.\footnote{Ryan C. Crocker, “Report to US House of Representatives on the Situation in Iraq,” joint hearing of the US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Armed Services, Washington, DC, 10 September 2007.} A manager at an Iraqi power plant noted: “My wife all the time says to me, ‘You work all day at a power plant, but you can’t get electricity to your own house?’ Generation is too low for demand.”\footnote{Quoted in James Janega, “After 4 Years, Electricity Still Luxury,” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, 25 June 2007. A popular Iraqi joke at the time was: “Mother, mother! Daddy was electrocuted!” The mother reacts: “We have power?” See Jay Price and Jenan Hussein, “When Lights Go On, Baghdad Scrambles,” \textit{Philadelphia Inquirer}, 14 October 2007.} The impact of deteriorating socioeconomic conditions on households was also reflected in a survey of Iraqi women conducted in 2004: 95 percent replied that their
families did not receive enough electricity; 64 percent said that they lacked access to water; 87 percent complained about the lack of work opportunities for family members; 57 percent and 51 percent, respectively, did not receive access to adequate medical care and education; and fewer than 6 percent believed that “the government has done something to make their lives better over the past year.”

Although precarious security and the ailing economy compelled many Iraqis to emigrate, others left the country because of the grim career prospects there—even for citizens with professional and entrepreneurial skills. And because well-educated and highly skilled individuals made up a large proportion of emigrants, Iraq fell behind other low- and middle-income countries in the region with respect to the availability of good-quality health care and education. The life expectancy of Iraqis declined by 3 years in less than three decades (from 1980 to 2006), whereas in neighboring countries it climbed by almost 15 years in the same period. Numerous civilians died because simple medical procedures were incompetently performed or were unavailable as a result of the shortage of specialists. Education also suffered. In the 1980s, Iraq was the leading country in the MENA region in primary school enrollment; in 2006, only Oman lagged behind Iraq in this category. The dearth of experts in petrochemistry, engineering, and physics posed challenges for Iraq’s pivotal oil and gas industry. Although the government began to invest in the construction of hospitals and schools after 2004, buildings alone could not make up for the loss of human productivity and expertise.

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The ranks of Iraqi professionals were further attenuated by targeted assassinations. More than 2,200 doctors and nurses were killed between 2003 and 2008, and more than 470 Iraqi academics were murdered between 2003 and 2006. Thousands more fled due to death threats and retaliatory acts of revenge that were often carried out because of the emigrants’ actual or alleged ties to the former Baath regime. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, 20,000 of the 34,000 doctors registered in Iraq in 1990 had left the country by 2008. Because of the rise in assassinations of Iraqi journalists, the country’s rank in the World Press Freedom Index slid from 125th in 2003 to 158th in 2008.

Iraq’s humanitarian crisis had far-reaching ramifications. The flight of educated people, energetic youth, and members of minority groups during the past few decades had eroded the country’s social fabric, its multicultural heritage, and the foundation of what could have become a vibrant civil society. A shopkeeper from Baghdad’s famed bookselling quarter, Mutanabi Street, lamented: “I wish you could see how it used to be on Fridays. You could not even walk. The whole street was filled with books and people. Mutanabi Street is a part of how great Baghdad is.” Citing an Arab proverb—“Cairo writes. Beirut publishes. And Baghdad reads.”—he said that poor security “means the death of education, the death of the history of the street, the death of the culture of Baghdad.”

Many members of the country’s religious and ethnic minorities were particularly desperate to leave Iraq. Christians were among the most vulnerable—they were persecuted by extremists for

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their religion, were not protected by the government, and lacked a militia to defend their communities. So more than half of Iraq’s approximately 1 million Christians left the country between 2003 and 2011. In Ankawa, a Christian suburb on Erbil’s outskirts, an Assyrian Christian shared his experiences one suffocating July evening, with remnants of a sandstorm lingering in the air. He had been kidnapped by Shia militiamen in Baghdad during the sectarian war that broke out in 2006. Shortly after he was freed, he had to leave school when sectarian and ethnic cleansing forced his family out of Baghdad. Invoking the ordeal of the persecution he had experienced firsthand, he told me: “I can never return to Baghdad. The Shia militias have wiped out entire Christian neighborhoods like Ghadir and Dora. Nowadays, it’s dangerous for a Christian to be anywhere in Iraq. Sunni and Shia extremists continue targeting us. Nor are we welcome in Kurdistan. I try not to leave Ankawa. It’s not safe out there.”

Another Christian intoned that she felt she could never be safe in Iraq. A statuesque, soft-mannered Armenian, she had fled Baghdad with her parents and found temporary sanctuary in Erbil. “I will be leaving for Jordan soon,” she told me in the lobby of a hotel where she worked as an administrator. “The war has changed our lives irreversibly. Baghdad will never be the same.” She reminisced nostalgically: “On weekends, my relatives and friends from Basra and Mosul used to visit my family. We would cook dinner together, sing, and dance until late at night. Those carefree days are gone. The Islamists have taken over Baghdad. And they have no tolerance for other cultures and traditions.”

Perhaps the most damaging aspect of Iraq’s security, economic, and humanitarian crises was that many Iraqis had become demoralized, unable to envision an Iraq that would restore the

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lives they once led. People’s desperation was palpable, especially among the hundreds of thousands who had been uprooted and ostracized. “I love my country, but it doesn’t have a future,” a Sunni IDP from Baghdad told me in Erbil. “I want my children to have a future, receive a college degree like I did. But they have no future in Iraq.” Suppressing her anger, she continued: “I want my children to obtain a new nationality, any but Iraqi. . . . Many Iraqis wish they could get back the stability that we once enjoyed. We didn’t have mobile phones, but we had education and jobs. Mobile phones and toys like these are not adequate compensation for what we have been suffering since 2003. . . . IDPs are like orphans. Nobody wants to own us, nobody takes care of us. Erbil says we are Baghdad’s problem; Baghdad says we are Erbil’s problem. I want to leave Iraq to regain my dignity.”

The Iraqi government did little to cauterize the hemorrhage of its citizens fleeing violence, repression, and marginalization. The country’s inauspicious security and socioeconomic conditions—coupled with rampant public corruption and abuses of human rights—tarnished the government’s legitimacy. Transparency International’s rating of corruption in 180 nations ranked Iraq 113th in 2003 and 178th, the worst, in 2008. In both 2005 and 2008, the Fund for Peace classified Iraq as among the five most fragile states in the world. And Human Rights Watch regularly revealed violations of civil liberties perpetrated by the government, including torture of detainees, oppression of women, and executions.

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Iraqis’ perceptions of their nation’s poor security and socioeconomic conditions were critical in leading many people who felt hopeless and powerless to turn to the VSMs for protection and sustenance: “everybody wanted armed men they could trust at the end of their street.”222 As security and socioeconomic conditions worsened, people began to equate inaction with weakness. “If a government is too scared to pick up a body, is it a government?” complained one Iraqi, referring to the government’s refusal to collect the remains of an acquaintance of his from a Sunni neighborhood because it was too dangerous.223 In early 2004, 42 percent of Iraqis believed that “giving more authority to independent neighborhood militias” would be “very effective” or “somewhat effective” in increasing security.224 A young Shia employee at the Ministry of Defense expressed his support for the militias protecting Sadr City: “I know they are killing Sunnis now—none of us likes this. But it keeps balance in our sensitive areas. We need that.”225

Qasem Daoud, a former national security adviser, explained the Shias’ haste to form militias: “The support of the militias within the Shiite community comes from the failure of the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Defense, and the coalition forces to provide security. The creation of these militias comes as a reaction.”226 And this same rationale—coupled with Sunni Arabs’ mistrust of the Shia-dominated security forces—motivated the formation of Sunni armed groups. Infiltration by Shia militias of the national institutions responsible for protecting citizens led many Sunnis to view the security forces and police as “Shia death-squads in uniform”227 and their actions as “state terrorism by the Ministry of Interior.”228 Iraqi Sunnis blamed police

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commando units, such as the Wolf Brigade and the Volcano Brigade affiliated with the Badr Corps, for indiscriminately detaining and murdering them and carrying out sectarian cleansing. Leading Sunni religious figures like Harith al-Dari, secretary general of the Association of Muslim Scholars, threatened to withdraw from the political process to “defend ourselves [Iraq’s Sunni Arabs],” and his followers vowed to “take revenge on the Brigade of shame [the Wolf Brigade].”

The *London Times* reported in 2006: “Tareq al-Hashemi, Iraq’s Sunni vice president, is forming a unit of the National Guard that will act as his personal bodyguard and fend off attacks against Addumiyah, a Sunni district surrounded by overwhelmingly Shia districts. It will be the first official Sunni militia group and a counter to security forces that have been heavily infiltrated by Shia militias.”

A QI leaders exploited the swelling grievances of Iraq’s Sunni Arabs and recruited civilians to participate in violent resistance. Said one Sunni recruit: “We all know the Shia are recruiting in their districts across the city, firstly to kill Sunnis and secondly to divide the country.”

As is evident in the testimonies of Iraqis, the devastating social consequences of the inadequate security and economic conditions predisposed many Iraqis to join the resistance. Equally important, the presence of the Coalition troops drove mobilization in both communities. The Sunnis viewed the Coalition forces as abetting the Shia-dominated government in fighting the Sunni-led resistance. And despite the fact that some Shia factions made common cause with the United States, many others—the Sadrists Trend, in particular—vowed to fight to expel the occupier. Next, I discuss how and why the presence of the occupying forces facilitated the VSM leaders’ mobilization of Iraqi civilians for VCA.

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A Shared Discursive Opportunity: The US-Led Occupation and Collective Emotions

The US-led occupation of Iraq from 2003 to 2011 provided AQI, the ISCI, and the Sadrist Trend with comparable opportunities for sustaining VCA. As one Baghdad native put it, “to us, the [US] occupation means humiliation and insult.” In Iraq’s distinctly patriarchal social system, many perceived the occupation as a personal affront—an act intended to challenge Arab male authority and honor and to undermine men’s vocation as breadwinners and protectors of women, children, and property. In the words of another Iraqi, the US-led occupation was “part of a plan to steal our souls—to castrate us.”Although the vast majority of Iraqis wholeheartedly echoed these sentiments, the United States and its Western allies miscalculated the Iraqi response when on 22 May 2003 UN Security Council Resolution 1483 made the occupation of Iraq official by granting the authority of occupying powers to the United States and the United Kingdom. At the stroke of a pen, the liberation anticipated by some Iraqis turned into the nation’s occupation, awakening Iraqis to the new reality. “The resolution issued by the [UN] Security Council stated clearly that Iraq was an occupied country. It made us realize fully what had befallen us,” the Baghdad native said.

The symbolism of ihtilāl (occupation)—rooted in the depths of Iraq’s history and culture and etched in the collective psyche of Arabs in the Middle East—escaped the occupying Western powers. But the journalist Anthony Shadid grasped the significance of imposing an occupation on Iraqi society:

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232 Irena L. Sargsyan, email correspondence with a resident of Baghdad (interviewee 10), 22 February 2013.
234 Irena L. Sargsyan, email correspondence with a resident of Baghdad (interviewee 10), 22 February 2013.
For many Americans, even Europeans, the term “occupation” probably evokes the aftermath of World War II and an American-led vision of cooperation with like-minded peoples forging a common destiny. But for Iraqis, and for most Arabs, the term . . . brings to mind Israel’s record in the Middle East . . . [and] the region’s most incendiary issue: Palestine. . . . [I]htilal suggests years of Palestinian resistance to the Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. The images are persistent: hulking Caterpillar bulldozers demolishing homes of stone and concrete in the squalor of Gaza; American-built Apache helicopters hovering over West Bank villages along rocky, terraced Palestinian hills; imposing Merkava tanks crashing across refugee camps as haunted faces in black-checked kaffiyehs watch them pass. This has become the Arab notion of occupation; those images define *ihtilal*.\(^{235}\)

The declaration of Iraq’s occupation inadvertently validated the calls for jihad issued by both the extremists and influential Muslim thinkers. Defensive jihad is a fundamental concept in the Quran that legitimizes holy war against non-Muslim forces that usurp a Muslim land, while offensive jihad sanctions unprovoked attacks against *kāfir* (unbelievers).\(^{236}\) Capitalizing on these concepts (often selectively, and out of context), Osama bin Laden addressed the Iraqi people in February 2003, warning them of “the Crusaders’ preparation for war to occupy one of Islam’s former capitals, loot Muslim riches, and install a stooge government to follow its masters in Washington and Tel Aviv, like the other treacherous puppet Arab governments, to pave the way for the establishment of Greater Israel.” He excoriated “this corrupt, unjust war that the infidels of America are waging with their agents and allies.”\(^{237}\)

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Jerusalem and Palestine, condemned the attacks by the Coalition forces against Iraq as “illegitimate.” According to him, “the US and Britain want to occupy Iraq to put their hands on the Iraqi oil fields, which represent the largest oil reserves in the world.” Clerics from Cairo’s Al Azhar university, a renowned center of Muslim thought, declared that “George Bush is destroying our values, our principles, and our freedom. He uses his power without reason.” The rhetoric of the American officials did little to counter these claims or assuage the Iraqis’ growing suspicions. In fact, Iraqi religious figures and resistance leaders used American statements such as “this crusade, this war on terrorism” to justify armed struggle. One Iraqi noted that when President [George W.] Bush used the word crusade, he confirmed what the Islamists had been preaching all along. I attended many Friday sermons at the time. The message of the mullahs was this: “We and our faith are under attack. We must defend ourselves. The defense of faith justifies any means. Collect money, buy weapons, and kill Americans.” And here is the problem, as I see it. Those who are not sufficiently educated easily follow the call of a mullah. Those with secular degrees—they often have to go to the mosque for public opinion reasons—also listen to the mullah. And because they don’t have a religious education or don’t know much about religion, they think that the mullah is intelligent and wise. Hence, the mullah is an authority even for secular individuals. But who is a mullah? In Iraq, it is typically a former low-scoring, poorly performing student.

Fatwas sanctioning jihad and martyrdom operations inspired thousands of religiously motivated foreign fighters to infiltrate Iraq in anticipation of the US-led invasion, so they could fight the “Anglo-American crusaders.”\(^\text{242}\) But after the US-led invasion, the calls for violent resistance also began to resonate with local Iraqis, including mostly secular Sunni Arabs and Baathists. These native people had become enflamed by the country’s security and economic collapse, which worsened exponentially with time; the counterinsurgency campaign, which prioritized military operations and force protection; and the Coalition forces’ insensitivity to local traditions, values, and norms. Iraq’s martial culture served as a conduit for funneling people’s frustration and anger into VCA against the Coalition authorities.

To begin with, the disbanding of the Iraqi Army had stung the nation’s pride. The military had historically been the most powerful and prestigious institution in Iraq. And because of its elevated status, the Iraqis saw in the demobilization of the army “intentional contempt directed toward Iraq as a nation and as a people.”\(^\text{243}\) The more entropic the country became, the more suspicious of the Americans’ motives the Iraqis grew—even those who had initially been supportive of the US mission. “Their [US forces’] main task, their whole reason for being here, is to prevent exactly this [bloodbath], but they do nothing,” said an Iraqi mother who had once welcomed the US troops. “They just let it go, my God, so easily.”\(^\text{244}\) Another Iraqi woman echoed her frustration: “My friends and I greeted the Americans with cheers. But America failed us, it disappointed us. America killed all our hopes.”\(^\text{245}\) The Americans’ visits to the neighborhood “are


\(^{245}\) Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with an internally displaced Sunni from Baghdad (interviewee 3), Erbil, Iraq, 28 June 2012.
like show business,” an Iraqi man complained. “When they come, they try to protect themselves, not us.”

“All bad things that are happening in Iraq are just because of the Americans,” a former professional soccer player said. “When should they leave? As soon as possible. Every Iraqi will tell you this.”

“It was better under Saddam,” another man observed. “On Fridays, even when we had electricity problems, they didn’t switch the electricity off. There was a system and order.” He blamed the Americans for the reigning lawlessness and violence: “The Americans are the reasons for it. This is the truth. You must hear it. Sectarian strife is like a fire. When the fire starts, it eats everything.”

The Coalition forces’ routine procedures often failed to take into account local traditions, moral values, and codes of honor. Arbitrary detentions; arrests of men in front of their mothers, wives, and daughters; and house searches with women inside were perceived by the Iraqi people as assaults on their honor (‘ird, sharaf) and dignity (karāmah), and also on Islam. A minister in the Kurdish Regional Government emphasized that “Americans did not understand the Iraqi culture. The soldiers searched houses aggressively. They searched women in the same way they searched men. They scoured bedrooms and tossed around people’s underwear. They violated societal norms. Such behavior gave rise to rumors like the one that Americans have binoculars through which they can see women naked. These rumors spread like fire in our communities.”

The most common missteps by the Coalition forces that Iraqis cite as manifestations of insolence include intrusions into a family’s home without an invitation during the raids (the family

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249 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a minister in the Kurdish Regional Government (interviewee 6), Erbil, Iraq, 26 June 2012.
and protecting its honor are paramount to Arabs); house searches with dogs (considered unclean animals by Arab Muslims); body searches in front of other people at congested checkpoints; speaking to women during the raids (engaging a woman in conversation or maintaining eye contact with her is rude); interrogating men about their families (unacceptable in Iraqi culture); forcing suspects resisting detention to lie on the ground and then stomping on them with boots (showing the sole of a shoe is an insult in Arab culture, and wearing shoes in mosques is proscribed); and transgressing sacred space or blocking access to historical sites.

These and similar actions by the Coalition forces infuriated the Iraqis, motivating many of them to take up arms to avenge the real or perceived wrongdoings. In some instances, the tribal code of honor demanded revenge killing (tha’r) to preserve one’s reputation and manhood. “The searches made the people boil,” an Iraqi man said, seething with rage himself.250 “The United States through its actions made people hate the Americans much more than before,” said a Sunni Arab whom the Coalition forces had detained without a charge for more than two years.251 “We will defend our houses, our land, our city,” vowed an Iraqi businessman. “We are Muslims, and we will defend Islam. The first thing we will do is defend our houses.”252

Criminal incidents, such as the massacres of Iraqi civilians by US forces in Haditha in 2005 and Mahmudiya in 2006—following the widely publicized abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib in 2004—only deepened Iraqis’ anger about the US-led occupation. “I am not surprised by what happened in Haditha because Americans are terrorists and killers. And this is the way of life now,” a young Iraqi man said.253 The conduct of the Coalition forces also ignited xenophobic prejudices

in Iraqi society. “To have Negroes occupying us is a particular humiliation,” explained a Sunni rebel. “Sometimes we aborted a mission because there were no Negroes.” He added: “I know the soldiers have no choice about coming here and all have a family and friends,” but “we are under occupation. They bomb the mosques, they kill a huge number of people. There is no greater shame than to see your country being occupied.”

“We are a Muslim country,” an elderly man complained. “We don’t want anyone to rule us who’s not from our country. They [the Americans] said they came to liberate us. Liberate us from what? They came and said they would free us. Free us from what? We have traditions, morals, and customs. We are Arabs. We’re different from the West. If we’re to be freed from the regime, we’re the ones responsible for freeing ourselves.”

Iraq’s conservative norms demanded that Iraqis take action against the indignities of the US-led occupation, and the country’s martial culture dictated the method: armed resistance. People from various communities in Iraq spoke to me about the propensity to use arms in their culture. “We are not a progressive society. We are tribal people. You see me wearing this expensive suit and these chic glasses, and you see this mobile phone,” an Iraqi man said, pointing to his garments and then to the accessories that he had put on the table between us. “But on the inside, I am the same peasant that I was several years ago. And like me, others—including those in the government—haven’t matured yet. We all are peasants. And we act on our instincts when we get angry, and we use guns to settle our differences.”

For many Iraqis, armed struggle is the only method they know for resisting a military occupation or solving internal political and sectarian problems. Another Iraqi man said: “Using power, force, violence is normal in our society. We are

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256 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with an Iraqi employee of the National Democratic Institute (interviewee 2), Erbil, Iraq, 30 June 2012.
not ashamed to fire guns. We can always find ways to justify violence. Politics justifies [the use of] violence. Change in Iraq has always occurred through violence, because there are few other available avenues.\textsuperscript{257} A mother of two teenagers expressed a similar view: “All this young generation knows is war. Our kids play with AK-47s. Our culture is militaristic, and it has always been that way. Whoever owns guns has power and prestige in our society. Therefore, it is easy for militias to recruit our unemployed youth. We are used to violence. And we are used to achieving things through violence. Our nation needs a psychiatric rehabilitation.”\textsuperscript{258}

As a result, calls to arms—such as “we want manhood and heroism”; “it is legitimate to fight the Americans”; “pour on it [the United States] your anger and change its strength to weakness, its wealth to poverty, its unity into disunity”—inspired resistance among the Iraqis fulminating against the US-led occupation.\textsuperscript{259} A Sunni Arab father who originally supported the US-led invasion of Iraq told the Observer why he decided to join the resistance: “When I heard that the Americans were coming to liberate Iraq, I was very happy. I felt that I would be able to live well, travel and have freedom. I wanted to do more sport, get new appliances and a new car and develop my life. I thought the US would come here and our lives would be changed through 180 degrees.”\textsuperscript{260} But his faith in liberation faded away after seeing the “barbaric, savage” images of civilian fatalities and the looting of Baghdad that occurred in the immediate aftermath of the invasion. “When I saw the American soldiers watching and doing nothing as people took everything, I began to suspect the US was not here to help us but to destroy us.”

\textsuperscript{257} Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with an Iraqi employee of the National Democratic Institute (interviewee 1), Erbil, Iraq, 27 June 2012.
\textsuperscript{258} Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with an internally displaced Sunni from Baghdad (interviewee 3), Erbil, Iraq, 28 June 2012.
rebel was not alone in experiencing profound disappointment when “the chaos of war . . . got worse, not better.” His friends and neighbors shared his anger. “We realised. We had to act.”

Another Iraqi from a privileged Sunni family who was awaiting assignment to a suicide bombing mission pointed out that seeing US troops fire on protesters at a school prompted him to join the jihad against the Americans, who, he felt, had overstayed their welcome: “We expected them [the US forces] to bring Saddam down and then leave. But they stayed and stayed.”

In 2004, the confrontation between the Iraqis and the Coalition forces spiraled into violent fights in the country’s Sunni-dominated regions. The battles of Falluja in April and November 2004 marked the beginning of the persistent, brutal Sunni insurgency. In the spring of the same year, another front opened in the Shia-dominated areas of Iraq. The closure of al-Sadr’s newspaper, arrests of senior JAM lieutenants by the CPA, and the incursions of US forces into Sadr City sparked revolts in Baghdad, which spread to the south and culminated in the Battle of Najaf in August 2004. The Coalition forces prevailed in Falluja and Najaf, but the myths of martyrdom and valorous resistance against the occupier took on a life of their own. The myths, nurtured by the VSM leaders, endured even after the Coalition had shifted to a new counterinsurgency strategy designed to restore public security, provide socioeconomic services to the local population, and foster communication and forge partnerships with local tribes.

The relative stability established across Iraq as a result of the US-led surge did not allay Iraqis’ anger at the Coalition forces. By the time the surge had concluded, the vast majority of Iraqis attributed the improvement in security to the Iraqi government, army, and police (and, to a lesser extent, to the Sunni Awakening and Shia militias). Only 4 percent of Iraqis surveyed in a


poll acknowledged the role of the Coalition forces in restoring security across the country.\textsuperscript{263} Iraqis’ views of the Coalition forces were negative, both before and after the surge. In 2004, 71 percent of polled Iraqis regarded the US forces as occupiers, compared with the 43 percent who thought so at the time of the invasion.\textsuperscript{264} In 2005, more than 78 percent of those polled expressed “not much confidence” or “no confidence” toward “US and UK occupation forces.”\textsuperscript{265} (This number remained almost unchanged, at 79 percent, in 2008.) In 2006, 61 percent of Iraqis approved of attacks on the Coalition forces.\textsuperscript{266} (Support for such attacks among the Sunnis was even higher, at 92 percent.)\textsuperscript{267} In 2007, 81 percent of those polled responded that they “very often” or “quite often” took measures to stay away from the Coalition forces “to avoid trouble”\textsuperscript{268} (this was close to the 86 percent who did the same thing in 2005).\textsuperscript{269} And in 2008, 72 percent of the Iraqis opposed the presence of the Coalition troops in their country.\textsuperscript{270}

In reality, however, the Iraqi people’s attitudes toward the Coalition forces were more complex than they appeared. Consistent with the data across the various polls discussed in this study, Iraqis’ views of the US-led occupation had remained invariably negative both before and after the surge. Yet a noticeable shift in public attitudes could be detected, depending on how questions were framed. Specifically, although the majority of Iraqis consistently viewed the

\textsuperscript{264} March–April 2004 poll by CNN / USA Today / Gallup Poll (Storrs, CT: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, April 2004), Polling the Nations database; accessed 2 August 2014.
\textsuperscript{269} October–November 2005 poll by ABC News (New York, NY: ABC News Polling Unit, December 2005); accessed 5 August 2014.
“occupation” of their country negatively, as discussed above, many began to support US “security operations” against AQI after the surge—despite the fact that these operations essentially required the presence of the Coalition forces in the country. For instance, in early 2008, 80 percent of Iraqis supported US security operations in Iraq against foreign jihadists.\(^{271}\)

This dichotomy in Iraqis’ attitudes is reflected in people’s expressed opinions. According to most accounts, the vicious Sunni-Shia sectarian war made Iraqis feel less strongly that the US forces should withdraw immediately. Clearly, however, this change was not because people had begun to favor the presence of the foreign army, but because many felt that the US troops were the only buffer preventing the two communities from slaughtering each other. “There will be lakes of blood,” one Iraqi said. “Of course we want the Americans to leave, but if they do, it will be a great disaster for us.” Others insisted that the Americans should rectify their misdeeds before extricating themselves from Iraq. “Don’t let them go before they have corrected what they have done,” said a Sunni Arab politician who believed that “the US occupation is the work of butchers.” Another Iraqi wavered: “I really don’t know what I want. If the Americans leave right now, there is going to be a massacre in Iraq. But if they don’t leave, there will be more problems. From my point of view, though, it would be better for them to go out today than tomorrow. We just want to go back and live like we did before.”\(^{272}\) Still others decided to tolerate cooperation with the Coalition forces to thwart what they perceived as a bigger threat: Iran. One supporter of the Sunni resistance said: “We decided we’d better counter Iran’s plans for Iraq. But our cooperation with the US is only

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temporary and cannot be called collaboration. We remain opposed to the occupation; we don’t forget the ultimate objective, which is to chase out the occupying forces.”

This seeming disjuncture in Iraqis’ attitudes and opinions attests to the significant role that the rhetorical framing of the struggle and discursive arousal of emotions played in mobilizing civilians for VCA. The reality that the majority of Iraqis viewed the Coalition forces as occupiers and harbored negative emotions about the US-led occupation did not in and of itself create a consensus for violent resistance. Rather, as the following case studies of AQI, the ISCI, and the Sadr Trend demonstrate, only those VSM leaders who established strong legitimacy and adroitly exploited the US-led occupation as a rhetorical target were able to turn the shared discursive opportunity into sustained VCA.

In this section, I have examined the security and socioeconomic conditions in Iraq during the US-led occupation, establishing the inadequacy of these conditions in 2003–7 and tracking their relative improvement in 2008–11. I have also analyzed the effects of the country’s declining security and failing economy on ordinary civilians. The evidence corroborates that the deteriorating security and socioeconomic conditions undermined the Iraqis’ support for the incumbent government and foreign counterinsurgency forces, thereby facilitating VSM leaders’ mobilization of civilians for VCA. And the presence of military occupation—coupled with actual or perceived misconduct by the occupying forces—enflamed collective anger and supplied would-be resistance leaders with a discursive target to sustain violence.

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Contending Violent Social Movements in Iraq and the Role of External Assistance in Sustaining the Sadrist Trend, the ISCI, and AQI-ISI

The three VSMs selected here as case studies in Iraq arose to resist the incumbent government and/or occupation forces, and all three had existed inside or outside Iraq before the fall of the Baath regime. Although these VSMs adopted divergent modi operandi, they strove to achieve similar goals: political power and religious influence. Formed to resist the Baath regime, the ISCI (originally the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, or SCIRI) supported the US-led invasion of Iraq, and its leaders joined the US-appointed Interim Governing Council in July 2003, while retaining the Badr Corps militia that engaged in struggles for power and sectarian strife. Although some hard-liners in the Badr Corps objected to the ISCI’s cooperation with the Coalition forces,274 because it required disarmament, the ISCI nominally “turned the Badr Corps into the Badr ‘organisation,’” suggesting—although not carrying out—a metamorphosis from military to civilian activity for this militia.”275 Unlike the ISCI, the Sadrist Trend assumed a steadfast anti-occupation stance and, although this VSM entered politics in December 2005, its JAM militia continued to attack the Coalition forces and rival sectarian militias.

As Shia Islamist movements, the Sadrist Trend and the ISCI sought to appeal to Iraq’s Shia community. In contrast, AQI attracted the support of Iraq’s Sunni Arab population, establishing strongholds in the predominantly Sunni provinces of Anbar and Ninewa and waging anti-American as well as anti-Shia campaigns. While both the ISCI and the Sadrist Trend have pursued

domestic political agendas, AQI has sought to topple Iraq’s Shia-dominated government, establish a fundamentalist Sunni emirate in its place, and expand it into a caliphate, a transnational Islamic state.\footnote{Although AQI rejected Iraq’s political process, some groups linked to this organization did participate in the 2009 elections.}

The VSMs varied not only in leaders’ readiness to engage in political and electoral processes but also in their tactics. The Badr Corps and the JAM carried out political assassinations, extrajudicial executions, extortion, and kidnapping but eschewed suicide attacks on civilians akin to those perpetrated by AQI militants. The use of extreme tactics, such as suicide bombing, would appear endogenous to my argument had Iraqis considered them inherently immoral. Most, however, deemed suicide bombings unacceptable if they inflicted casualties on the local population. As one Sunni cleric said in addressing AQI, “why are you driving the troubles into our town? If you want jihad, the U.S. military is there.”\footnote{Quoted in Sabrina Tavernise and Dexter Filkins, “Local Insurgents Tell of Clashes with Al Qaeda’s Forces in Iraq,” \textit{New York Times}, 12 January 2006.} A 2006 poll confirms that the majority of Iraqis supported “attacks on US-led forces” (61 percent, including 92 percent of Sunnis), disapproved of attacks on Iraq’s “government security forces” (96 percent) and “civilians” (100 percent), and also expressed “an unfavorable view of al Qaeda” (94 percent, including 77 percent of Sunnis).\footnote{Program on International Policy Attitudes, “The Iraqi Public on the US Presence and the Future of Iraq” (Washington, DC: Program on International Policy Attitudes, 27 September 2006).} Overviews of the three VSMs follow.

\textbf{The Sadrist Trend}

The Sadrist Trend is a homegrown Islamist movement led by Muqtada al-Sadr. It has several branches, including the military wing, the JAM\footnote{In 2014, Muqtada al-Sadr renamed the JAM, calling it Saraya al-Salaam, or the Peace Brigades.} (and its affiliate, the Promised Day Brigade, or
PDB); the political party, the al-Ahrar Bloc, and the Munasirun organization, which provides community services and religious education. Muqtada al-Sadr was born into a prominent Shia clerical family: “There is a group of these worthies in Kadhain, the holy city, 8 miles from Baghdad. . . . Chief among them are a family called Sadr, possibly more distinguished for religious learning than any other family in the whole Shi'ah world.” His father’s cousin, Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (also known as the First Martyr), was a preeminent intellectual and a fierce opponent of the Baath Party. He became a leading figure among the Shia scholars and religious authorities (‘ulamā’) after the monarchy’s overthrow in 1958. His writings—including *Falsafatuna* (Our Philosophy, 1959); *Iqtisaduna* (Our Economy, 1960–61); and *Al-Bank Al-Laribawi Fi Al-Islam* (The Nonusurious Bank in Islam, 1973)—became influential in the Shia world. His appeal to Shias to return to Islam through social revolution had a universal, rather than class-based, overtone.

Through the establishment of Dawa, a Shia Islamist party, Baqir al-Sadr sought to counter the influence of secular organizations like the Baath and Communist Parties, and he straddled the gap between Iraq’s clerical and political institutions. But in so doing, he posed challenges to the ḥawzah’s religious leadership (*marji‘a*), and later to the ruling Baath Party. His prolific scholarship and political activism gained him not only tens of thousands of followers but also a number of opponents. On 8 April 1980, members of Saddam Hussein’s government executed Baqir

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280 The Office of Martyr al-Sadr (named after Muqtada al-Sadr’s father) also focuses on political activities of the Sadrist Trend.
284 In Iraq, a ḥawzah is a seminary of traditional Shia Islamic studies led by several senior clerics, or grand ayatollahs. More generally, ḥawzah refers to Iraq’s Shia religious elite.
al-Sadr and his sister, Amina al-Sadr (known by her sobriquet Bint al-Huda), who was a respected educator and activist.\textsuperscript{285}

Baqir al-Sadr is revered by Iraq’s Shias as an illustrious representative of their intellectual clerisy, but his cousin and Muqtada’s father, Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr (also known as the Second Martyr), gained widespread popularity among ordinary Iraqis for his nationalistic outlook and fervent advocacy for poor and disenfranchised Shias. From the outset, “his mixture of Islamic revivalism, nationalism and populism had a deep appeal to angry, alienated but terrorized young Shia men.”\textsuperscript{286} Sadiq al-Sadr’s nationalistic zeal manifested itself in his rhetoric and actions. In stark contrast to traditional Shia prayers, his Friday sermons (\textit{khutbah}), which he reinstated in the late 1990s, began with chants: “Yes, yes to Islam; yes, yes to the faith; no, no to injustice; no, no to Israel; no, no to America; no, no to the devil.”\textsuperscript{287}

Sadiq al-Sadr regularly addressed people’s economic problems in his sermons and helped provide social services to Shia communities when the Iraqi population was suffering from the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq by the United Nations Security Council in the 1990s. Many Iraqis have attested to his active involvement in the daily life of destitute Shias. One of his followers recalled: “In selecting a \textit{marja’}, I choose the one who knows my suffering, who is close to the poor and the disinherited.”\textsuperscript{288} Sadiq al-Sadr’s dedication to the poor and his determination to improve their economic and social status in Iraqi society set him apart from the conservative \textit{marji’a} and its prominent representatives, like Grand Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei and Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who “dwelt in aristocratic isolation from the world of their followers.”\textsuperscript{289}

\textsuperscript{286} Patrick Cockburn, \textit{Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Fall of Iraq} (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 2008), p. 98.
\textsuperscript{287} Quoted in Patrick Cockburn, \textit{Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Fall of Iraq} (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 2008), p. 99.
\textsuperscript{289} Patrick Cockburn, \textit{Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Fall of Iraq} (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 2008), p. 113.
Sadiq al-Sadr also promoted national unity and sought to bridge historical Sunni-Shia cleavages: “There is no Sunna and no Shia. Yes to Islamic unity!” His political activism contrasted with the tradition of the silent ḥawzah (or al-ḥawzah al-ṣāmitah). In Iraq, clerics representing the vocal ḥawzah (or al-ḥawzah al-nātiqah) are politically active, whereas those belonging to the silent ḥawzah reject the involvement of religious figures in the state’s political affairs. But it was Sadiq al-Sadr’s active involvement in politics that generated a vast number of loyal followers, including many young Iraqis who would become Muqtada al-Sadr’s reservoir of support in post-Saddam Iraq. In the end, Sadiq al-Sadr attained his principal objective. He solidified a large popular base (qa’idah sha’abīyah) for the marji’a, and he revived Iraqi Shias’ identity, faith, and assertiveness. But he paid a high price. On 18 February 1999, Sadiq al-Sadr was assassinated with his two eldest sons, Mustafa and Muammal. Unlike the executions of other religious leaders by the Baath regime, Sadiq al-Sadr’s murder provoked a crisis. Ali Allawi, the first civilian minister of defense in post-Saddam Iraq, recalled: “His [Sadiq al-Sadr’s] followers exploded in a paroxysm of rage. In the Thawra stronghold of east Baghdad, thousands took to the streets, congregating around the al-Muhsin Mosque, and calling for the regime’s overthrow. The regime’s tanks and heavily armed security forces met them. Casualties were in the hundreds. Throughout southern Iraq, city after city was roiled with demonstrations and acts of resistance against the regime. . . . The regime’s ruthlessness and accomplished security apparatus was able to re-establish control.” After the assassinations, government authorities closed Sadiq al-Sadr’s office in Najaf, and his movement effectively went underground.

Muqtada al-Sadr’s family background gave him both discursive resources and “a legitimacy whose magnitude the United States never fully appreciated.” In Iraq’s patrimonial society, family legacy is an enduring and powerful force. An Iraqi man explained: “Among our people, family name is an engine that can drive a movement. . . . The al-Sadr family has strong religious authority and genuine Iraqi roots.” The assassination of his father and brothers opened an opportunity for Muqtada to become a key contender to revive and lead his father’s movement. And when Ayatollah Kazim al-Hairi, whom Sadiq al-Sadr had nominated as his successor, decided to remain in Iran and designated Muqtada al-Sadr as his representative in Iraq, he unwittingly facilitated the rebel leader’s rise.

The fact that Muqtada al-Sadr remained in Iraq during the worst of Saddam Hussein’s repression against the Shias gave him a key advantage over other aspirants to power—including al-Sadr’s most formidable rivals, the prominent al-Hakim clerical family—who returned to Iraq from exile only after the US-led forces deposed Saddam Hussein and the Baath Party in 2003. “The people who deserve to rule are the ones who stayed here,” al-Sadr told Shadid. He quoted what his father said in refusing to leave Iraq to save his life: “I should stay here and suffer with the people. If I go abroad, I will pave the way for others to go abroad like me.”

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294 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with an Iraqi employee of the National Democratic Institute (interviewee 1), Erbil, Iraq, 27 June 2012. The interviewee provided additional examples to reinforce his point and compared the two powerful clans that have dominated Kurdish politics: the Barzanis, who lead the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), and the Talabans, who lead the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The interviewee said: “The KDP benefits from the powerful legacy of Mustafa Barzani. Being the son of Mustafa gave Masoud Barzani a great advantage over Jalal Talabani. In Iraq, a family’s good name can overshadow its members’ bad political decisions, because people remain loyal to the legacy. Those who don’t inherit a strong legacy have to compete very hard with the name and legacy of their rivals. The Talabans, for example, have always had to compete with the ‘soul’ of Mustafa, rather than the person of Masoud. That being said, if a leader is really good, he will eventually overcome the legacy disadvantage, even if he has to compete against a ‘mountain’ like the Barzanis.
After Saddam’s fall, the political environment is changing, and increasingly there are opportunities to compete.”
Muqtada al-Sadr adroitly used his family’s sacrifice and resonant legacy to craft messages with powerful symbolic appeal to those who shared the experience of remaining in Iraq and surviving Saddam Hussein’s brutal rule. Notably, he consolidated his power not only by exploiting emerging opportunities but also by shaping them. In April 2003, for example, he was allegedly involved in the murder of Abdul Majid al-Khoei—another key rival just returned from exile in London and the charismatic son of Ayatollah al-Khoei, the predecessor of Iraq’s leading cleric at the time of the US-led occupation, Ayatollah al-Sistani. As a result, after the fall of Baghdad in 2003, al-Sadr emerged as the leader of the Sadrist movement. His “meteoric ascent” defied the expectations of Iraqis and Americans alike. In July 2006, the International Crisis Group reported:

The most puzzling aspect of Muqtada’s ascent is that he possesses none of the more obvious criteria of political success and little that can account for the existence and resilience of his social base. Although coming from a prominent family, he is neither particularly charismatic nor a particularly adept speaker. He does not enjoy the backing of a party apparatus. He has few religious credentials. By most accounts, even his material assets are scanty: by and large, he is excluded from the financial networks controlled by the Shiite clerical class and is not truly aligned with any foreign sponsor, receiving at best limited material support from Iran.

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Indeed, young Muqtada, who had been “thrust into the limelight solely on the strength of his father’s legacy,” lacked the religious credibility, maturity, and reputation of Sadiq al-Sadr.\(^{300}\) He had failed to complete his seminary education; and because he spent time playing video games when he was expected to be studying Islamic law and theology, his classmates nicknamed him “Mulla Atari”\(^{301}\) (after the maker of Atari video games), while many others “denigrated him as a *zatut* (an ignorant child).”\(^{302}\) Muqtada was “a low-ranking cleric, at best *hujjat al-islam*, a junior grade well below ayatollah,” and because of his youth, “the more established ayatollahs, for whom maturity is a requisite, would never treat him as an equal.” Due to Muqtada’s inexperience in politics, many of his father’s senior followers broke away from him: “The more established in cities like Baghdad and Basra quickly dismissed him as an upstart, as did some of the more prestigious Shiite families,” while “the clerical families in Najaf and Karbala—many of Iranian descent, many affluent by virtue of their ties to the lucrative commerce associated with pilgrimage to the sacred cities—deemed him a rabble-rouser at best, a threat to their order at worst.”\(^{303}\) To draw a contrast between Muqtada and his father, many called his followers Muqtadaists (*al-Muqtadiyīn*) rather than Sadrists. Likewise, “the exile opposition considered the Sadrists a spent force and trivialized their political significance inside Iraq.”\(^{304}\)


By most accounts, the Coalition authorities dismissed Muqtada al-Sadr and his militia as “nothing more than a nuisance.” However, *Time* reported in May 2004 that “US commanders insist al-Sadr is a small-time threat whose appeal is limited to a ragtag bunch of angry young men. But judging by the number and intensity of worshippers thronging the mosque in Kufa last Friday, the US may be underestimating the rebel leader. In fact, the more the US aims its guns at al-Sadr, the more popular he seems to become. According to a recent poll, he is now second in popularity to the Grand Ayatullah Ali Husaini Sistani, the Shi’ites’ spiritual leader.”

Figure 3 charts Western miscalculations about the leaders likely to become influential in post-Saddam Iraq. Ahmed Chalabi, one of the most vociferous proponents of the US intervention in Iraq, received broad media coverage in the United States between 2002 and 2004. Repudiated by the Iraqis, Chalabi failed even to win a seat in the first parliamentary elections in 2005. His party, the Iraqi National Congress, received only 30,000 out of 12 million votes. “This Chalabi doesn’t represent anyone,” said one Shia cleric. “He is just a corrupt businessman.” According to a 2004 poll, when asked “which national leader in Iraq, if any, do you not trust at all?” more than 10 percent of the respondents named Chalabi, compared with the 3 percent who expressed distrust of Saddam Hussein.

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307 In the citation analyses, I used the LexisNexis database, US Newspapers and Wires, and the search options “power search” with “duplicate options off.” The analyses tally the number of articles for each month in which the name of the particular individual appeared. The most salient time period is between 2002 (when the United States began planning the invasion of Iraq) and 2006 (when a four-year government was formed in Baghdad).
The al-Hakim family, also supporters of the American invasion of Iraq, gained widespread attention in Washington in the early years of the US-led occupation, but many Iraqis brushed them aside because of their close ties to Iran and the United States. Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani, a central spiritual authority revered by the Shias in Iraq and around the world, eschewed involvement in politics and rejected US appeals to exert his influence at moments of crisis. It is noteworthy that in the early years of the occupation, American political and military leaders underestimated Ayatollah al-Sistani’s influence and legitimacy among Iraq’s Shias; subsequently, they overestimated the reclusive cleric’s willingness to enter the political arena and sought his mediation when ethnic and sectarian violence engulfed Iraq in 2006–7. As a representative of the silent ḥawzah, al-Sistani was deeply committed to noninterference in politics, and his reluctance to engage in political affairs allowed Muqtada to be flexible in his actions.

In contrast to the leaders whom Washington expected to become influential, Muqtada al-Sadr was barely mentioned in the US media until 2004, when he mobilized resistance against the Coalition forces in Najaf. Through his fierce opposition to the US-led occupation, al-Sadr came into the spotlight and became a formidable political force to be reckoned with in post-Saddam Iraq.
The Sadrist movement rapidly transformed itself into a full-fledged movement and permeated the areas of the country where the government and the Coalition forces failed to provide protection and essential services. Between 2005 and 2006, the JAM’s growth in influence and size (to an estimated strength of 60,000 by 2006) “astonished even those observers who correctly predicted the rise of the Sadrist as a major military force in the post-Ba’athist era.”

Public opinion polls of Iraqis confirm these facts. A May 2004 US survey shows an 81 percent increase in popular support for the Sadrist movement.

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al-Sadr, compared with three months earlier: 40 percent and 41 percent of those polled said they had a “much better” and a “better” opinion, respectively, of al-Sadr; and only 14 percent and 5 percent felt “somewhat worse” and “much worse,” respectively, about the Shia leader.\(^{313}\) With its growing number of supporters, the JAM became a more lethal force. A US government report stated in November 2006: “The group that is currently having the greatest negative affect [sic] on the security situation in Iraq is Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM), which has replaced al-Qaeda in Iraq as the most dangerous accelerant of potentially self-sustaining sectarian violence in Iraq.”\(^{314}\)

**The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq**

The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq emerged as another powerful Shia Islamist movement in post-Saddam Iraq. Established as an Iranian proxy militia during the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88), the ISCI evolved into a VSM with a well-organized political party and an effective military wing, the Badr Corps. A repatriated VSM, the ISCI is led by members of the prominent al-Hakim dynasty, who have historically jousted with the al-Sadrs for religious and political influence. (Although the al-Hakim family also carries the surname al-Tabatabaei, which denotes descendants of the Prophet in Iran, its members stress their Arab origins.\(^{315}\))

Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, the son of the renowned marja’ Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim, fled Iraq for Iran in 1980 to escape persecution by the Baath regime. With the help of the Iranian government, in November 1982 he founded the ISCI. In reaction, the Baath authorities

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continued to arrest members of the al-Hakim family in Iraq, executing many of them in 1983.\textsuperscript{316} Although the ISCI persevered, Baqir al-Hakim’s “rise would have been inconceivable without Iranian patronage and pressures on other groups.”\textsuperscript{317} As Iran engaged in conflict with Iraq, Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps–Qods Force (IRGC-QF) created the Badr Brigade (which later expanded into the Badr Corps) to assist Tehran with intelligence collection during the Iran-Iraq War\textsuperscript{318} as well as conduct attacks against the regime of Saddam Hussein and the dissident Iranian group the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK), based in Iraq.\textsuperscript{319} (While the ISCI fought alongside the Iranian forces in the Iran-Iraq War, the MEK fought with the Iraqi forces against Iran.) The IRGC-QF continued to train, deploy, command, and arm the Badr forces after the war.\textsuperscript{320} Initially, the Badr Brigade drew most of its recruits from the ranks of Shia Iraqi prisoners of war captured by Iran. Dubbed \textit{al-tawwābīn} (penitents)—like the warriors who fought against Imam Hussein in 680, but whose remorse later compelled them to change sides—many of these people constituted the core of the Badr Corps.\textsuperscript{321}

When the Gulf War broke out in August 1990, the ISCI saw an opportunity to depose Saddam Hussein’s regime. After the defeated and demoralized Iraqi Army was pushed out of Kuwait by the US-led forces, mutinies erupted in Iraq’s military and rapidly spilled into the country’s south, where they sparked Shia popular uprisings. Taking advantage of these upheavals, Iran deployed between 3,000 and 5,000 Badr fighters into Iraq, where they conducted anti-Saddam

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\item \textsuperscript{316} Ali A. Allawi, \textit{The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace} (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 35.
\item \textsuperscript{317} Faleh A. Jabar, \textit{The Shi’ite Movement in Iraq} (London, UK: Saqi, 2003), p. 238.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
operations by vandalizing the Baath Party’s offices, attacking police stations, and putting up posters of Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah al-Hakim. But the ISCI’s abortive attempt to hijack the Iraqis’ popular uprising to establish a Shia theocracy in Iraq backfired and generated lasting collective resentment: Iraqis “blame SCIRI [ISCI] for having transformed an army-based anti-regime revolt into an Iran-sponsored Shiite rebellion, only to leave the population exposed to brutal reprisals once defeated Badr fighters slipped back into Iran.” The ISCI’s abortive attempt to ignite a revolution in Baghdad left “a legacy of massive popular distrust, and even a sense of betrayal, resulting from its ill-considered attempt to hijack a popular revolt to suit its own narrow objectives.”


**Al Qaeda in Iraq**

The foreign Salafi jihadist movement Al Qaeda in Iraq, or Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, was founded in 2003–4. It encompassed foreign terrorists, members of Ansar al-Islam (Partisans of Islam, a Kurdish Islamist group), and indigenous Sunni Arab rebel groups. The organization was also known by the name Tanzim Qa’idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (Al Qaeda Organization in the Land of the Two Rivers). In the 1990s, its predecessor—a terrorist group led by Abu Musab al-

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Zarqawi, an Arab of Jordanian descent (also known as Muhannad)—was called Jama’at al-Tawhid waal-Jihad (Monotheism and Holy Struggle). In 2006, al-Zarqawi established the Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC), an alliance of Iraqi Sunni insurgent groups dominated by AQI and designed to consolidate the relationship between AQI and nationalist factions, such as the Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI) and the 1920s Revolution Brigades. The MSC failed to serve its purpose, and the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) emerged as the offshoot of AQI after al-Zarqawi’s death.

When he became the emir of AQI, al-Zarqawi pledged his allegiance (bay’ah) to the global Al Qaeda organization in 2004, in a letter that he reportedly wrote to Osama bin Laden. In turn, bin Laden anointed al-Zarqawi “the prince of al Qaeda in Iraq.” This letter, captured by the CPA in Iraq, reveals AQI’s ideology and strategic goals. Put simply, the group adheres to an extreme form of Salafi Islam and demands excommunication (takfīr) of those Muslims who do not practice it. As noted above, AQI’s primary objectives were the establishment of an Islamic state in Iraq and its expansion into a transnational Islamic caliphate.

In the letter, al-Zarqawi also identified AQI’s enemies: Americans, Kurds, and “soldiers, police, and agents.” But he expressed the deepest animosity toward Shias, and a repeated theme in the letter was AQI’s determination to foment a sectarian war in Iraq. This strategy had a dual purpose: first, to garner wide Sunni support; and second, to use this support to expel the Coalition forces from Iraq, overthrow the government, and establish an Islamic state in Iraq. Al-Zarqawi explained the logic: “If we succeed in dragging them [Shias] into the arena of sectarian war, it will

become possible to awaken the inattentive Sunnis as they feel imminent danger and annihilating death at the hands of these Sabeans.” He also said: “Despite their weakness and fragmentation, the Sunnis are the sharpest blades, the most determined, and the most loyal when they meet those Batinis (Shi’a), who are a people of treachery and cowardice.”

To stoke sectarian violence, AQI organized a series of bombings of Shia shrines—in Najaf and Baghdad in March 2004, and in Najaf and Karbala in December 2004—culminating in February 2006 with the attack on Iraq’s most sacred Shia site, the Askariya Shrine. (Radical Sunni clerics in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia who backed AQI also maintained that Shias were “more dangerous than Jews and Christians” and ranked Iran, the “Safawi [a reference to the Shia Persian Empire] enemy that seeks the destruction of Islamic civilisation,” as worse than their perceived archenemies, the United States and Israel.)

But the Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri questioned the wisdom of targeting ordinary Shias in a letter he wrote to al-Zarqawi in July 2005. Al-Zawahiri underscored the centrality of popular support—“the strongest weapon which the mujahedeen enjoy”—to waging jihad. While “any rational person understands with ease that the Shia cooperated with the Americans in the invasion of Afghanistan,” al-Zawahiri wrote, “the majority of Muslims don’t comprehend this,” and hence “many of your [al-Zarqawi’s] Muslim admirers amongst the common folk are wondering about your attacks on the Shia.” He warned: “Among the things which the feelings of the Muslim populace who love and support you will never find palatable—also—are the scenes of slaughtering the hostages. You shouldn’t be deceived by the praise of some of the zealous young men and their description of you as the shaykh of the slaughterers.” In conclusion, al-Zawahiri emphasized: “I say to you: that we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking

328 Quoted in “Shia Power Causing Resentment in Parts of Arab World” (no author), Irish Times, 7 August 2007.
place in the battlefield of the media. And that we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma.”

AQI played an instrumental role in thrusting Iraq into a bloody ethnic and sectarian war. In February 2007, General David Petraeus, then the US Army’s commander of the multinational forces in Iraq, identified AQI as one of the gravest threats to Iraq’s stability: “I think it is probably public enemy number one. It is the enemy whose actions sparked the enormous increase in sectarian violence that did so much damage to Iraq in 2006, the bombing of the Al Askari mosque in Samarra, the gold-domed mosque there, the third-holiest Shi’a shrine. And it is the organization that continues to try to reignite not just sectarian violence but ethnic violence, as well, going after Iraqi Kurds in Nineveh province and Kirkuk and areas such as that, as well.”

This VSM conducted high-profile kidnappings and executions, mounted some of the most lethal suicide bombings in Iraq, and carried out terrorist strikes against both the Iraqi and Coalition forces and Iraqi civilians. But in 2006, AQI reached a turning point. On June 7, a US air strike killed the organization’s leader, al-Zarqawi. Although his death was a blow to the VSM, AQI and its offshoot, the Islamic State of Iraq (hereafter, AQI-ISI), quickly regrouped; announced a new leader, the Egyptian-born Abu Hamza al-Muhajir (believed to be Sheikh Abu Ayyub al-Masri); and switched to an increasingly decentralized but still lethal mode of operation. In the wake of al-Zarqawi’s death, the rifts widened between AQI-ISI and Sunni nationalist rebel groups, on the one hand, and between AQI-ISI and global Al Qaeda, on the other hand. The enmity between AQI-ISI and the Sunnis intensified because of the former’s determination to assert control over Iraq’s

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various Sunni tribes. AQI-ISI attempted to coerce the tribes into subscribing to Salafi jihadist ideology and pledging allegiance to foreign leaders.\textsuperscript{331} “Someone from outside the tribe should not tell us what to do,” said an associate of a Sunni sheikh. “It is unacceptable for us.”\textsuperscript{332} The disagreements between AQI-ISI and global Al Qaeda started with al-Zarqawi’s dismissal of directions from Al Qaeda’s leaders to reduce strikes against Iraqi civilians and Shia cultural and religious sites because those could not be justified as attacks against the “far enemy,” the United States and its allies.\textsuperscript{333}

Al-Muhajir continued directing AQI-ISI’s activities, such as military and intelligence operations, recruitment, and dissemination of Salafi jihadist ideology.\textsuperscript{334} He and his Iraqi counterpart, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi (believed to be Hamid Dawud Mohammad Khalil al-Zawi), led AQI until both were killed in a joint Iraqi–US Special Forces operation near Tikrit on 18 April 2010.\textsuperscript{335} Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini al-Qurashi (also known as Abu Dua) assumed the leadership of AQI-ISI in May 2010. Although some US military commanders believed that by decapitating the organization they had “dealt devastating and perhaps irreversible blows to al-Qaeda in Iraq”—citing a sharp decline in suicide attacks and an inflow of foreign fighters after the leaders’ deaths—many others cautioned that “AQI retains ‘the ability for surprise and for catastrophic attacks.’”\textsuperscript{336} After the last US troops left Iraq in December 2011, AQI’s ability to

\textsuperscript{331} See document NMEC-2007-637854, Harmony Program database, Combating Terrorism Center, US Military Academy, West Point, NY; accessed 8 September 2014.


maneuver and launch attacks markedly increased. The VSM’s strategy of Iraqifying—by simultaneously pursuing several initiatives, such as reducing the number of foreign fighters in its ranks and allowing local Iraqis to join its leadership; capitalizing on Sunnis’ grievances and marginalization; and exploiting Iraq’s chronic political crisis—led to its revival. Though it was a grave threat to Iraq’s stability, AQI-ISI nonetheless devolved from a VSM into a terrorist group with very limited support among Iraqis.

The civil war in Syria and the attendant power vacuum provided the remnants of AQI-ISI with an opportunity to establish a base in that country, recruit foreign fighters, and rebrand themselves as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and later as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). In 2014, ISIS seized Mosul, Iraq’s second-largest city; Qaraqosh, Iraq’s biggest Christian town; Sinjar, the ancestral home of the Yazidis; and other areas, along with strategic installations such as dams and oil refineries. Following ISIS’s capture of territory in Syria and Iraq, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared himself a caliph (“Caliph Ibrahim”), claimed leadership of the global Muslim community, and renamed the organization the Islamic State (IS) to expunge the geographical boundaries implied in its previous names. I have not selected the IS or its forerunners, ISIS and ISIL, as case studies for two main reasons. First, even though the IS evolved from AQI-ISI, it became a different organization that was no longer connected to global Al Qaeda. Ayman al-Zawahiri disowned ISIL in early 2014 and recognized its Syrian-based rival, Jabhat al-

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Nusra, as an Al Qaeda affiliate.\textsuperscript{341} Second, ISIS, ISIL, and IS emerged after the United States ended its military occupation of Iraq.

**External Assistance to the ISCI and the Sadrist Trend**

Like other substate violent political organizations, VSMs receive external assistance—in the form of matériel, training, intelligence, logistics, financing, sanctuary, and ideology—from state sponsors, transnational movements, and individual donors. Although it is a difficult task to precisely identify the sources, scope, and frequency of VSMs’ external assistance (even for the increasingly sophisticated intelligence agencies around the world), the existing evidence shows that substate actors both seek and accept assistance from external sponsors. Indeed, some scholars argue that the most powerful determinant of the outcome in asymmetric warfare is the absence or presence of external assistance for rebels.\textsuperscript{342} I contend that such external assistance contributes to, but is not a necessary condition of, sustaining VCA. Moreover, external assistance can alienate certain domestic constituencies and undercut support for VCA, if supporters perceive the assistance as a sign of foreign influence that delegitimates a VSM and its leaders. When various VSMs in the same country consistently receive external aid, it becomes difficult for one VSM or leader to establish hegemony over the others. This engenders competition—occasionally violent—for legitimacy, resources, and recruits among different VSMs and their leaders.

The three VSMs in Iraq—AQI, the ISCI, and the Sadrist Trend—accepted various types and amounts of external assistance from both state and nonstate sponsors during the US-led


The Shia VSMs, the ISCI, and the Sadrist Trend received assistance primarily from the Iranian government, including the IRGC-QF, and the Lebanese Hizballah. They also financed their activities through the collection of religious taxes and volunteer contributions and through racketeering, kidnapping, and smuggling.

Tehran’s assistance to the VSMs in Iraq stemmed from an amalgam of factors. The shifting balance of power in the Persian Gulf, triggered by the removal of Saddam Hussein’s regime, revived Iran’s quest for regional preeminence. Historical events preceding the US-led occupation—the most important of which was the Iran-Iraq War—had set a pattern for Iran’s interference in Iraq’s affairs through surrogates. The political vacuum that originated after the fall of the Sunni-dominated Baath regime encouraged Tehran to help its allies consolidate the Shia control of the nascent Iraqi government. And the perceived strategic threats that emanated from the 2003 US-led invasion—such as the proximity to Tehran of the US troops deployed in Iraq and the implications of the US military presence for Iran’s confrontation with the West over its developing nuclear program—urged Tehran to take measures to deter US action against Iran.

As an implacable foe of the Baath regime, Tehran expended considerable effort and resources to spread its influence throughout post-Saddam Iraq in order to shape a stable but weak and pliable regime in Baghdad; constrain American power in the Persian Gulf; mire the Coalition forces in attrition warfare against Iraqi rebels; and use Iraq as a potential springboard for projecting its influence abroad. The Iranian government sought to achieve these goals with a combination of political, diplomatic, informational, economic, and military tools. Some of Iran’s programs in the religious and cultural domains played a constructive role in Iraqi society. However, Tehran’s skewed economic policies disadvantaged Iraq, and its supply of arms, including the deadliest of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and explosively formed penetrators (EFPs)—along with its
training of rebels in advanced combat skills, sniper and kidnapping operations, and the production of explosives—fueled violence in the country.

Of particular importance, Iran’s leaders struck alliances with various progovernment and antigovernment VSMs to hedge against the risks in volatile Iraq. Tehran used its long-standing proxies, the ISCI and the Badr Corps (which it had helped to found), to wield political influence in post-Saddam Iraq by continuously funneling financial and military assistance to this VSM and emplacing its cadres within the highest echelons of the Iraqi government and security forces. (IRGC-QF documents obtained by *Time* magazine indicate that in August 2004 alone, Iran paid the salaries of at least 11,740 members of the Badr Corps;\(^{343}\) and intercepted Iraqi intelligence reports attest to Iran’s assistance to this VSM before the 2003 US-led invasion.\(^{344}\)

In contrast, Iran’s relationship with the Sadrist Trend and the JAM proved complicated, not least because of Muqtada al-Sadr’s staunchly nationalist platform, his opposition to federalism (which was preferred by Tehran and its Shia allies in Baghdad), his antiestablishment stance, and his determination to remain free of foreign influences. The Sadrist Trend received limited Iranian aid and maintained its reputation for being independent of Tehran. On numerous occasions, al-Sadr resolutely condemned Iran’s meddling in Iraq’s affairs. For example, during a 2008 interview with Al Jazeera, al-Sadr recalled: “In a meeting I had with Iran’s leader last year, I told Ayatollah Khamene’i to put an end to Iran’s political and military activities in Iraq.”\(^{345}\) Because of his position and rhetoric, Tehran regarded al-Sadr as an unreliable, mercurial partner. But the Iranians could invariably count on the loyalty of the ISCI’s politicians. As one ISCI politician pointed out,

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\(^{343}\) Michael Ware, “Inside Iran’s Secret War for Iraq,” *Time*, 15 August 2005.


\(^{345}\) Quoted in “Iranian Website Condemns Iraq’s al-Sadr over Comment about Supreme Leader,” Tabnak, translated from Persian and distributed by BBC Monitoring, 2 April 2008.
“the Iranians will stay in this place forever till the Judgment Day and the Americans will withdraw.”

The testimonies of both the Sadrists and outside observers confirm the fact that the Sadrist Trend and the JAM received limited external assistance and financed their own activities: “Even Jaysh al-Mahdi, which one is tempted to see as the Sadrist movement’s hard-core, for the most part is self-financed. All members underscore the personal sacrifice they endure on behalf of the cause, for example by purchasing their own weapons.”

“The Mahdi Army is the people,” a tribal elder said. A JAM fighter explained: “Jaysh al-Mahdi members buy their own weapons and drive their own cars. They don’t receive a salary because it is an ideological army [Jaysh ‘aqa’idi] that only works for God.” Another member of the Sadrist Trend concurred: “Muqtada basically does not fund Jaysh al-Mahdi; Jaysh al-Mahdi funds itself. Volunteers use their personal Kalashnikovs and guns.” Invoking the 2004 fighting against the US forces in the city of Najaf, a member of the JAM recalled: “I had to spend 1,000,000 dinars during the Najaf crisis [approximately $700]. A friend had to spend $2,000.” Consistent with the statements of JAM fighters, a spokesman for Martyr al-Sadr’s office said that “the Imam Al-Mahdi Army [JAM] are but a segment of society who leapt to the defence of Holy Al-Najaf and the shrine of Imam Ali, God’s peace be upon him, just as they did when a siege was laid to the home of our leader Al-Sayyid Muqtada Al-Sadr, who represents the Iraqi people’s aspirations. . . . We do not have a

military base or salaries.” Dismissing the possibility of the JAM’s disarming, a member of the Sadrist Trend’s social service committee explained that al-Sadr does not own the arms: “I bought my weapons with my own money.” And a senior official of the Sadrist Trend denied that “Iran is financing the Al-Sadr Movement, saying that the Al-Sadr Movement is self-supporting.” In contrasting the JAM with the Badr Corps, a member of the ISCI confirmed: “Jaysh al-Mahdi is not organised like a proper army. Its members do not receive a salary.” Thus, even if the Sadrist Trend received a modicum of assistance from Iran, “the movement is not for sale. Mr. Sadr gets his strength from the street. And the Arabs of the Iraqi street have no time for Persian bosses.”

To maintain its ability to influence the military balance of power inside Iraq, the IRGC-QF also aided the Special Groups (SGs), such as Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) and Kata’ib Hizballah (KH)—often in partnership with the Lebanese Hizballah, whose Arab-speaking operatives faced fewer obstacles in training the Iraqis than the Farsi-speaking Iranians. According to the Multi-National Force–Iraq (MNF-I), Iran supplied the SGs with funds of between $750,000 and $3 million a month. Iraqi sources suggest that AAH, one of the SGs, received $5 million from Iran monthly. In addition to providing monetary assistance to Shia rebel groups, the IRGC-QF ran intelligence-collecting and smuggling networks inside Iraq; facilitated the infiltration into the

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355 The Special Groups (SGs), also known as Special Group Criminals (SGCs), are terrorist groups trained and supplied by the IRGC-QF and Lebanese Hizballah.
358 Adam Schreck and Qassim Abdul-Zahra, “In Iraq, Militia’s Shift Could Bolster Iran’s Hand,” Associated Press, 6 January 2012.
country of senior operatives of the Lebanese Hizballah (for example, Ali Musa Daqduq, who helped train AAH); and deployed its own experienced agents, who were affiliated with the Badr Corps (for example, the EFP smuggler Abu Mustafa al-Sheiban and the terrorist Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who participated in the bombings of the American and French embassies in Kuwait in 1983 and attempted to assassinate the emir of Kuwait in 1985, before becoming a member of the Iraqi parliament in 2005). General Qassim Suleimani, the commander of QF, reportedly “admitted to having hundreds of agents in Iraq at his disposal.”

Iran’s political and military support of progovernment as well as antigovernment VSMs and SGs appeared to work against its foreign policy goal of bolstering the Shia-dominated government in Baghdad, given that Tehran often had to intervene diplomatically to extinguish the crises caused by rebel groups it had nurtured. Similarly, alleged Iranian assistance during the US-led occupation to some Sunni terrorist groups—such as Ansar al-Islam and the Ansar al-Sunna Army, based in the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq—seemed counterintuitive, considering Iran’s amicable relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)—although Iran could have supported these groups to impel the KRG to restrain the anti-Iranian guerrillas of the Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê (PJAK). From Tehran’s perspective, however, the policy of backing various progovernment and antigovernment actors inside Iraq maximized Iran’s leverage and secured its

national interests. This policy allowed Iran to simultaneously expand its opportunities and reduce potential risks vis-à-vis Iraq. It is also possible that the ostensible inconsistencies in Iran’s policy stemmed from discord among the Islamic Republic’s clerics, politicians, intelligence agencies, and military, each of which prioritized different goals.\(^{365}\)

Even though Tehran had maintained plausible deniability with regard to arming and training Iraqi rebels, ample evidence points to the contrary.\(^{366}\) This evidence comes from sources such as the American and British militaries,\(^{367}\) Iraqi and Western government officials and agencies,\(^{368}\) the media,\(^{369}\) analysts, and unclassified documents. The US military regarded attacks involving EFPs (produced in or after 2003) as undeniable evidence of Iran’s connection with Iraqi militias. The Coalition authorities traced to Iran the sophisticated technology required to manufacture these armor-piercing roadside bombs. In February 2007, the US military announced that EFPs had killed more than 170 and wounded 620 additional Coalition troops since the spring of 2004,\(^{370}\) and it publicly accused “the highest levels of the Iranian leadership of arming Shiite


militants in Iraq.” In April 2008, General Petraeus attested to “the destructive role Iran has played in funding, training, arming, and directing the so-called Special Groups.” In 2010, James Jeffrey, former US ambassador to Iraq, stated that up to a quarter of the American fatalities in Iraq (at the time, more than 4,400) had probably been caused by the Iranian-backed militant groups. Along these lines, Jane’s Intelligence Review reported in October 2011 that “Iranian-backed Shia militants in Iraq are responsible for a disproportionately high number of the US casualties suffered in recent months.” Evidence provided by the Iraqi detainees to the Coalition forces also implicated Iran:

[Detainee] worked in the Mirayd market selling false ID cards. While [Detainee] worked in the Mirayd market, [Detainee] witnessed SG [Special Groups] weapons smugglers and weapons dealers openly bragging to other SG members about receiving shipments of EFPs, RPG-7s, Katyusha rockets, and PKCs from the IRGC-QF. [Detainee] frequently observed RPG-7s, Katyusha rockets, PKCs, and Iranian ammunition for sale in the Mirayd market. . . .

The SG weapons smugglers often spoke of receiving EFP shipments from Iran through Basrah, Amarah, and Diwaniyah. The weapons are being smuggled from Iran into Iraq by trucks hauling sheep, cigarettes, and cement. [Detainee] does not have knowledge of the routes taken by SG weapons smugglers. The weapons smuggled into Iraq through Basrah, Amarah, and Diwaniyah are taken to Sadr City and distributed to SG in outlying provinces from Sadr City.

Another detainee described his training in Iran to the Coalition interrogators:

[Detainee]’s third trip to Iran occurred during Ramadan. When it came time for the celebration of Eid the instructors took the group to the Imam Khomeini shrine. [Detainee] decided not to go because [Detainee] did not want to spend his Eid celebrating at the shrine of the Imam Khomeini. [Detainee] follows Sayid Muqtada al-Sadr because Sayid Muqtada has always helped the poor Shi’a like his father Sayid Muhammad. Sayid Muqtada does not put himself above the poor people and is a very simple man. When the group returned from the Imam Khomeini shrine they were visited by XXXX. XXXX and XXXX asked why everyone did not go to the shrine. [Detainee] told XXXX that [Detainee] alone did not want to go and no one else should be punished for this. XXXX told [Detainee] that He [sic] should attend events with the rest of the class. XXXX and XXXX did not directly state anything about following religious guidance from Iran but [Detainee] got the impression that everyone in Iran was attempting to draw the trainees into following a different leader than Sayid Muqtada al-Sadr.376

Deadly Rivalry. The evidence analyzed above proves that the Shia VSMs and rebel groups received external assistance over the course of the US-led occupation. This assistance prevented the VSMs from establishing hegemony and led to internecine, Shia-against-Shia violence between them and also between the VSMs and various rebel factions. Ferocious fights for power, legitimacy, resources, and recruits erupted between the JAM and the Badr Corps in 2005–7,377 and

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between the JAM and the SGs after these groups’ emergence at various junctures, beginning in 2004.378

While the Badr Corps and the JAM fought each other for power and resources, the SGs waged battles against the JAM to prove to the Shia community who was the legitimate leader of the resistance. For example, AHH and its leader, Qais al-Khazali—a disciple of Sadiq al-Sadr and subsequently Muqtada al-Sadr’s chief spokesman, until he broke away from the Sadrist Trend in 2004—fought the JAM to establish the fact that the members of AAH, rather than those of the Sadrist Trend, were the real Sadrists and thus constituted the authentic resistance (even though AAH subscribed to the ideology of Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini and his successor, Ayatollah Khamenei, often displaying the pictures of these religious leaders during parades and in areas under its control). According to al-Sadr, to present itself as the leader of the opposition to the Coalition forces, “Asaib Ahel al-Haq wants to bring me down in the eyes of my followers in the Iraqi community.”379 To underscore AAH’s disloyalty, al-Sadr’s followers derided al-Khazali’s supporters as “Al-Khawarij [dissidents in early Islam].”380 And to further undermine AAH’s reputation, al-Sadr publicly denigrated its members who spilled innocent Iraqi blood as “criminals and murderers with no ethics or religious sincerity.”381 He decried AAH’s “negotiation with the

379 Quoted in Qassim Abdul-Zahra, “Iraq’s Sadr in War of Words with Splinter Group,” Agence France-Presse, 17 December 2011.
occupation” as illegal when the group made contacts with the Coalition authorities to arrange for the release of al-Khazali, his brother, Laith al-Khazali, and Ali Musa Daqduq—who had been captured by the British forces in Basra in 2007—in exchange for the British civilian contractor, Peter Moore, kidnapped in the same year in Baghdad, along with four security guards from the United Kingdom. The verbal sniping between the JAM and AAH erupted into gun battles in the late 2000s.

Losing the People. The external assistance that the Shia VSMs and rebel groups received from Iran affected Iraqi popular support for these groups. Generally, large segments of Iraq’s Arab population harbor negative attitudes toward their Persian neighbor. These sentiments have been shaped in part by historical events. Ideological and imperial rivalries between the Shia Safavids and Sunni Ottomans, which began with the Ottoman conquest of Iraq in 1514 and continued until 1818, affected the populations in the lands of Mesopotamia that would become the state of Iraq. In 1603, Shah Abbas of the Safavid dynasty recaptured the lost lands of the Persian Empire and conquered new territories, including those of modern Iraq. Shia Islam spread into Iraq when the Safavids adopted Shiism as the state religion in the 16th century. The religious struggles for the leadership of Islam between the Persian and Ottoman leaders resulted in brutal oppression of the Shias in Turkey and the Sunnis in Iran. The Ottoman pashas recovered the territories captured by Shah Abbas, including Baghdad, after his death in 1629. The Shia-Sunni fault lines in modern Iraqi society trace their origin to the period when the Ottoman rulers strengthened their control

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over the conquered population, empowered the Sunnis, and alienated the Shias, thus encouraging the latter to strengthen ties with Iran.

The British occupation of the three Ottoman provinces—Basra (1914), Baghdad (1917), and Mosul (1918)—led to the creation of Iraq under a League of Nations Mandate (1920–32) and an independent monarchy (1932). But the forces that had influenced Iraq in the preceding decades continued to shape its politics in the 20th and 21st centuries. One such force relevant to the subject discussed here is the Arab-Persian rivalry and sectarianism that reached an ignition point when, threatened by Iran’s aspirations to export its Islamic Revolution of 1979, Saddam Hussein preemptively attacked Iran. The exchange of brutalities between the two nations over the course of eight years left a permanent residue in the hearts of those who participated in the war and influenced their kith and kin through oral history and folklore.

Tehran’s emboldened attitude and interference in post-Saddam Iraq further enkindled Iraqis’ nationalism. Public opinion polls conducted between 2003 and 2011 reveal that Iraqis—including large numbers of Shias—held consistently unfavorable views of Iran. In 2004, 60 percent of surveyed Iraqis believed that Iran had a negative influence on Iraqi politics, and only 17 percent felt that it had a positive influence. According to polls conducted in 2007, 67 percent of Iraqis felt that Iran played a negative role in Iraq, and 79 percent (including 62 percent of Shia respondents and 99 percent of Sunni respondents) expressed a belief that Iran actively encouraged sectarian violence in the country. And in 2009, 68 percent of Iraqi respondents agreed that Iran

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played a negative role in Iraq.\textsuperscript{389} Shortly before the United States withdrew all its troops from Iraq, the Iraqi people were asked who had benefited the most from the Iraq War. Fifty-four percent of respondents identified Iran as the primary beneficiary, 48 percent chose the United States, and 40 percent said Iraqi elites. Only 4 percent thought that the Iraqi people had benefited the most. In the same survey, the Iraqis were asked which countries would make a positive or negative contribution to Iraq after the United States’ withdrawal. Among Iraq’s neighbors, Iran received the highest negative ratings: 67 percent of Iraqis (including 51 percent of Shia respondents and 87 percent of Sunni respondents) anticipated a negative contribution from Iran, while only 20 percent felt that Iran would make a positive contribution to Iraq.\textsuperscript{390} In that climate, Iran’s funding, arming, and training of Iraqi militias delegitimized VSM leaders like the al-Hakims in the eyes of the Iraqi people. Many factions that ran in the 2009 elections—being sensitive to the attitudes of their domestic constituencies—used slogans such as “100 percent Iraqi” and “born in Iraq and financed by Iraqis” to distinguish themselves from their Iranian-backed rivals.\textsuperscript{391}

\textbf{External Assistance to AQI-ISI}

AQI-ISI generated funds through both external money flows and internal revenue sources. Publicly available records and AQI-ISI’s internal documents intercepted by the Coalition forces\textsuperscript{392} reveal


\textsuperscript{392} These captured documents provide valuable insights into AQI-ISI’s financial and operational capabilities. A note of caution is in order, however. The captured records constitute a small, nonrandom sample. Hence, in many cases the information they divulge pertains to the finances and operations of AQI-ISI branches in particular provinces and districts of Iraq (or in one of the six subsidiary geographic “sectors” into which the VSM divided Anbar Province), and thus may not reveal the general patterns characteristic of the entire organization.
that the VSM did not have a regular state sponsor. Instead, AQI-ISI received assistance from Sunni donors in the Gulf states—including former members of Iraq’s Baath Party who had fled to Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates—and transnational Islamic charities. Global Al Qaeda, headquartered in Pakistan, invested little in AQI-ISI besides its brand name and reputation. (As a matter of fact, the central organization requested funds from AQI, as evidenced in a 2005 letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi.)

In addition, AQI-ISI generated significant revenue through donations from its foreign fighters and suicide bombers; contributions from AQI leaders; local (often coercive) fund-raising; informal value-transfer systems, known as hawālāt; and criminal activities, such as smuggling, counterfeiting, and kidnapping. Illegal oil sales also served as a major source of profit. In 2007, the US Department of Defense estimated that 70 percent of production from Iraq’s largest oil refinery, located in Baiji, near Mosul, was funneled into the black market—equivalent to $2 billion worth of refined petroleum products. Because the area, dominated by Sunni Arabs, was a hotbed of rebel activity, it was believed that a large portion of the profits went into funding the Sunni resistance, including AQI-ISI. And the fact that AQI-ISI operatives refrained from sabotaging the facility suggests that this VSM depended on cash flows from the refinery. In line with the estimates provided by the US government, the Iraqi officials confirmed that the Sunni resistance generated

half of all illicit profits by smuggling oil. 397 Although earlier assessments made by Iraqi and American officials converged, later analyses based on captured materials concluded that oil smuggling was not necessarily AQI-ISI’s principal source of revenue but just one source, and that the sale of stolen capital goods was similarly profitable. 398

Irrespective of AQI-ISI’s revenue amounts and streams, in 2007 US intelligence agencies established that AQI-ISI’s illicit financial enterprise was so lucrative that it allowed this VSM to transfer funds to global Al Qaeda. “Iraq is a big moneymaker for them [global Al Qaeda],” confirmed a senior counterterrorism official. 399 Snapshots of AQI-ISI’s finances reveal that in Anbar Province, this VSM generated almost $4.5 million (or $373,000 monthly) from June 2005 to May 2006 and $4.3 million (or $860,000 monthly) between June and November 2006. 400 Another indicator that AQI-ISI was financially self-sufficient through 2006 is the number of violent attacks perpetrated by the organization. Even though the cost of devices used in carrying out attacks and suicide missions is cheap, the expenses associated with conducting such operations are significant and include payments to disseminate militant ideology, arrange logistics, train the fighters, forge documents, and film the attacks. Some scholars estimate that conducting an attack cost AQI-ISI more than $2,700. 401 To maintain its intensive terrorism campaign during 2005 and 2006, AQI-ISI had to expend significant financial resources. For example, between June 2006 and

November 2006, in Anbar Province alone, more than 1,000 violent attacks occurred on average every month, most of which were attributed to AQI-ISI.  

Despite its relative financial independence, AQI-ISI did receive significant funds and manpower from foreign fighters. The intercepted records and statements by US officials indicate that the majority of the known AQI-ISI foreign fighters were of Saudi Arabian origin (41–45 percent), followed by Libyans (19 percent; however, Libya contributed more fighters on a per capita basis) and citizens of other countries. Saudi Arabian nationals contributed more funds—both individually and collectively—to AQI-ISI than foreign fighters originating from other countries. In addition to contributing personal funds, foreign fighters likely served as conduits for transferring funds raised by AQI-ISI’s recruiting networks abroad. One analysis suggests that 281 foreign fighters entered Iraq from Syria over a six-month period, between September 2006 and May 2007 (which amounted to roughly 47 fighters in 30 days), and shows that the AQI-ISI trafficking network functioned with a remarkable reliability in the relatively unpredictable environment, delivering fighters and suicide bombers—and with them, funds—every 4.5 days in this period. It is noteworthy that the foreigners were also responsible for the large portion of suicide bombings in Iraq. For example, roughly 75 percent of the 394 suicide bombings between

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August 2006 and August 2007 were conducted by foreign fighters, who had infiltrated Iraq primarily through Syria, assisted by the so-called coordinators in that country who served as intermediaries.\textsuperscript{406} But AQI-ISI’s reliance on foreigners for raising funds and conducting military operations became problematic when the VSM attempted to reinforce its dominance by coercing local Sunni rebel groups and tribes into submission. Those who refused to pledge allegiance to AQI’s Islamic State were accused of apostasy. Using references from the Quran, al-Zarqawi declared \textit{harb al-riddah} (war on apostasy) and denounced the Sunni rebel groups and tribes that did not subscribe to his vision of the Islamic rule, comparing them to the factions that had abandoned the faith after the Prophet Muhammad’s death.\textsuperscript{407}

\textit{Deadly Rivalry}. During 2007, the rivalry between AQI-ISI and Sunni rebel groups—such as the 1920s Revolution Brigades, Ansar al-Sunna Army, IAI, and Jaysh al-Mujahideen (the latter three groups formed the Jihad and Reform Front, or JRF, in 2007 to thwart AQI-ISI’s hegemonic designs)—mutated into violent confrontations. AQI-ISI and the IAI fought each other in the battle of Amiriya in Baghdad in May and June 2007. At about the same time, the 1920s Revolution Brigades clashed with AQI-ISI in the city of Buhriz, in Diyala Province. This violent competition between AQI-ISI and the Sunni rebel groups spilled from the battlefield into the propaganda front. AQI-ISI began to lose its monopoly on communication, as local rebel groups that had operated clandestinely stepped up their rhetoric because AQI-ISI’s brutality threatened their survival and sullied the reputation of the Sunni nationalist resistance.


In a 2007 interview with Al Jazeera, the spokesperson for the nationalist-oriented IAI, Ibrahim al-Shammari, said: “Al-Qaeda’s agenda started to reveal itself clearly in October last year. . . they started to consider themselves as a state and started to target other Iraqi resistance factions, including prominent Sunni personnel in our community, and this affected our relations with them.”\footnote{Quoted in “Iraq Tribal Leader Offers US Talks,” Al Jazeera, 13 September 2007.} In 2007, an IAI communiqué appealed to bin Laden to rein in AQI-ISI: “We call on the leaders of Al-Qaeda, especially Sheikh Osama bin Laden, may God protect him, . . . to assume their responsibilities towards the activities of the Al-Qaeda Organisation in Mesopotamia.”\footnote{Quoted in “Islamic Army Seeks bin Laden Crackdown on Iraq Rival,” Agence France-Presse, 6 April 2007.} To distance themselves from AQI-ISI’s slaughter of Iraqi civilians, some Sunni rebel groups issued statements “vowing to fight the US ‘occupier’ without shedding the blood of ‘innocents.’”\footnote{Steve Negus, “Rifts Suggest Growing Isolation of Radical Groups,” \textit{Financial Times}, 4 May 2007.} Al-Shammari stated on Al Jazeera TV: “The resistance targets all the enemies of the Iraqi people and all those who occupy Iraq. The Iranian occupation and its agents are a target. The US occupation and its agents are legitimate targets.” But he pointed out that “targeting any innocent person in Iraq is absolutely not one of our aims” and that “every Iraqi not involved in any action that serves the occupation is considered an innocent citizen.” Asked about the clashes with AQI-ISI, he replied:

During the first period of Jihad, no two jihadist groups were as close to one another as were the Islamic Army and the Al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad Organization, which later became Al-Qa’idah. . . . However, lately, especially after the death of Abu-Mus’ab al-Al-Zarqawi, may God have mercy upon his soul, this gap has became [\textit{sic}] wider. The atrocities that the brothers in Al-Qa’idah committed against the various jihadist groups, especially the Islamic Army, increased. Some 30 people were killed from the Islamic Army. . . . Moreover, there were transgressions in matters of Islamic shari’ah, the Koran, the Prophet’s tradition, and the tenets followed by the Sunni
community. . . . Assassination of the mujahidin, attempts to force the mujahidin to hand over their weapons or express allegiance to their organization, which they called the state.411

Salafi jihadist groups voiced similar complaints against AQI-ISI. In a 2007 letter, Ansar al-Islam demanded a written explanation from AQI-ISI for having sentenced one of its commanders to death “as an apostate” and killing him. Ansar al-Islam also blamed AQI-ISI’s leadership for “setting up a negative trend which led the Muslim nation which was supportive in the past but turned against us.” Ansar al-Islam wrote:

We are [sic] hereby inform you once more about the developments in Diyala area where the motto of (allegiance and the caliphate) has emerged and fatwas were issued stating that whoever does not give allegiance to the emir of the state is to be killed and that it (pledging allegiance) is an obligation. . . . We understand the justifications by which you want the people to join and pledge allegiance to it, but we do not believe that these actions justify shedding the blood of innocent people, issuing threats, or harming people. . . . To evade confronting the problems, you come up with the solution of joining you under the pretext of unity. . . . We are sincerely advising you not to be responsible for dividing the ranks, fragmenting the mujahidin, dampening the zeal of and isolating the mujahidin from the Muslim masses by these conducts.412

In the same year, Ansar al-Islam’s affiliate, the Ansar al-Sunna Army, inveighed against AQI-ISI and published a letter to its leader, al-Masri:


Individuals from your group have conducted operations of kidnapping, torture, and the killing of people from our group and in a number of regions, with their (full) knowledge that they were from the al-Ansar [al-Sunnah] group. . . . The most recent incident of this nature was when a group from your organization spilled the blood of three of the best cadres of the mujahidin and those who had prior jihad experience in the battlefields who had many witnesses of them in operations in which they inflicted great injury upon the enemy time after time and repeatedly in the city of Mosul.413

Many Sunni rebel groups that had welcomed AQI-ISI, benefited from its vast material and ideological resources, and joined forces with it in an armed struggle against the US-led occupation, later underscored this VSM’s foreign identity as a source of the growing conflict between the local Sunni rebel groups and AQI-ISI. In the words of the IAI’s spokesperson, “Al-Qaeda’s people are ignorant of politics and religion, and this ignorance has direct military implications. If one American sits in the midst of a crowd of Iraqi civilians, al-Qaeda sees it as a legitimate and justified target. These ideas were imported by foreign mujahidin. They are inconsistent with local traditions and culture.”414 A Sunni rebel affiliated with the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades expressed fury at AQI-ISI’s killings of Iraqi civilians: “I wished I had a nuclear bomb to attack them [AQI-ISI]. We told them, ‘You are not Iraqis. Who gave you the power to do this?’”415

413 Quoted in Brian Fishman, “Dysfunction and Decline: Lessons Learned from Inside Al Qa’ida in Iraq” (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, US Military Academy, March 2009), p. 9 (parentheses and brackets in the original).
To deflect this type of criticism, AQI-ISI vilified its former allies, both the nationalist rebel groups and the Salafi jihadists. For example, in a May 2007 letter to Emir Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, an AQI-ISI field commander provided religious justification for killing members of the IAI:

We, in Baghdad, are aware of the true nature of the Islamic Army and its leadership, and how they perform open conspiracies and scandalous ambushes. However, they can only deceive the simple-minded people. . . . Explaining the true nature of the Islamic Army for all the people would have been more difficult had they not committed atrocities for many years and their extreme hatred for the honest and God-believing mujahidin. We, in Baghdad, wish to show the blessed Emirate that we understand the Islamic religious law policy of our state in dealing with the other groups, such as merging, pardoning, and to work auspiciously with them. However, members of the Islamic Army in al-‘Amiriyyah, under the leadership of someone known as Sa’d ‘Uraybi, have even departed from religious restrictions. . . . We have fought them legitimately, without mystery or secrecy. We consider them (tyrants) and we applied the Prophet’s tradition of fighting the tyrants, such as: not to kill their wounded, not to follow their escapees, and only fight those who carry weapons [against us].416

Nevertheless, as the microstructural conditions continued to shift between 2006 and 2008, AQI-ISI’s rhetoric gradually lost its popular appeal, and this VSM’s leaders found it difficult to counter the messages emanating from influential Sunnis weighing in on the war of words between AQI-ISI and rival Sunni rebel groups. Harith al-Dari of the Association of Muslim Scholars, a leading Sunni cleric with strong anti-American views, rejected AQI-ISI’s project of an Islamic

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state, declaring that the organization had “gone too far” and that “Ayman al-Zawahiri doesn’t represent Iraqis.”

_Losing the People._ AQI-ISI’s hard-line stance and armed confrontations with nationalist rebels also alienated the local Sunni tribes, many of which had initially fought alongside the VSM against the US-led occupation. The animus between AQI-ISI and the Sunni Arab population deepened after the VSM had abandoned its relatively conciliatory attitude toward the local population, triggering a social upheaval and propelling the tribes to collaborate with the US forces to oust the AQI-ISI from its enclaves in Iraq’s northwestern provinces. Because tribes and their constituent clans have traditionally acted as autonomous centers of political and economic power in Iraq, their growing hostility toward AQI-ISI posed grave dangers to the VSM. AQI-ISI countered the tribes’ opposition with violence, conducting assassinations and suicide operations against potentates and members of the tribes, but failed to regain popular support. In a 2008 poll, 80 percent of Iraqis—including 66 percent of Sunnis, 83 percent of Shias, and 98 percent of Kurds—supported US security operations in Iraq against AQI-ISI and foreign jihadists.

In this section, I have reviewed three rival VSMs in Iraq and examined the effects of external assistance on sustaining collective violence. The existing evidence proves that external assistance played only a secondary role in sustaining VCA. The influx of arms, manpower, and finances from state sponsors and private donors discouraged the VSMs from making compromises; precluded any one of them from establishing hegemony over the others; and contributed to violent fights among the rivals over legitimacy, resources, and recruits. Armed battles bled into the arena of verbal combat. Other factors besides external assistance—such as funds generated domestically,

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exploitation of the local populace and resources, and ideological differences—exacerbated the violent struggles among various militant groups in Iraq. The capacity of AQI-ISI, the ISCI, and the Sadrist Trend to perpetuate violence and preclude one another from totally dominating the Iraqi theater was manifested most conspicuously during the sectarian civil war. But while external assistance contributed to the continuation of violence, the cases of AQI-ISI and the ISCI demonstrate that it was not enough to maintain popular mobilization and support in the long run. Significantly, foreign assistance delegitimized the ISCI and AQI-ISI in the eyes of Iraqis. In the following section, I discuss the conditions that were necessary and jointly sufficient to sustain VCA in Iraq.
Sustaining Violent Collective Action: The Interaction of Microstructural Conditions and Discursive Psychological Variables

In a letter captured by the US forces, bin Laden wrote to Mullah Muhammad Omar, the spiritual leader of the Taliban movement in Afghanistan: “It is obvious that the media war in this century is one of the strongest methods; in fact, its ratio may reach 90% of the total preparation for the battles.”\textsuperscript{420} Despite the significance that VSM leaders assign to effective communication, realists and strict behavioralists dispute the causal influence of ideational, discursive, and psychological variables on preferences, behavior, and policy outcomes. In contrast, I argue that a message or a frame can exert a causal effect on sustaining VCA—under two conditions. First, the microstructural conditions in which the discourse is delivered, interpreted, and received must be favorable—that is, security and essential socioeconomic services must be inadequate, as they were in Iraq in the years 2003–7. Second, the messenger and the message must both meet the criteria delineated in hypotheses 4 and 5, which were presented in chapter 1. Here I test hypotheses 3, 4, and 5 in the case of the Sadrist Trend, briefly contrasting it with the ISCI and AQI-ISI.

Emotive and Evocative Frames in Sustaining Violent Collective Action

Iraqi Shias are very religious, and for many of them, Islam is more than a belief system. For example, the Quran prescribes patterns of behavior and provides instructions for routine activities that observant Muslims should perform.\textsuperscript{421} Moreover, unlike the Sunnis, the Shias are loyal to a

\textsuperscript{420} Document AFGP-2002-600321, Harmony Program database, Combating Terrorism Center, US Military Academy, West Point, NY; accessed 2 May 2011.

spiritual leader, *marja’*—a potential source of solidarity for political opposition—whose pronouncements have the force of law for devout followers. Although this religious idiosyncrasy can facilitate mobilization for VCA, the doctrine of *taqīyah* (precautionary dissimulation)—which is prevalent in Iraq’s culture, especially among the Shias—makes it difficult to sustain popular mobilization. The doctrine allows a Muslim individual to renounce his or her faith in the face of life-threatening religious persecution, but Iraqis often evoke *taqīyah* to justify changing one’s position for political expediency. Alluding to this doctrine, one Iraqi told me: “Shias are like a river; Sunnis are like a lake.”

In view of these opposing dynamics, Muqtada al-Sadr’s appeal to local sensibilities and symbols to sustain VCA in the long run is telling. As one Iraqi cautioned, “Do not underestimate the significance of symbols. Symbols are what led volunteers to join *Jaysh al-Mahdi*, because its soldiers will form the nucleus upon which Imam al-Mahdi will rely when he reappears. In their discourse and speeches, Sadrists in general and Muqtada in particular often cite this image. Most Shiite scholars invoke Imam Husayn—but Muqtada appeals to the Hidden Imam to electrify the masses.”

A senior official of the Sadrist Trend made a similar statement:

> Al-Imam al-Mahdi [JAM] is an ideological army that believes in change and in reform, and we have been forced to carry up arms to defend ourselves. . . . According to the Shi’i creed, we believe that at the end of time an Imam will appear. . . . Therefore, the Al-Mahdi Army was established to prepare believer youths and create an enlightened and cultured ideological base. We did not believe in carrying up arms but we had to carry up arms to defend ourselves against the occupiers, the

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422 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with an official in the Kurdish Regional Government (interviewee 7), Erbil, Iraq, 27 June 2012.

enemies of Islam, and the enemies of Iraq. There is no definitive proof that there is another resistance. Whatever is happening in Iraq is only terrorism. We want a resistance with a genuine leadership. The Al-Sadr Movement has a genuine leadership.\footnote{Quoted in “Al-Sadr Official Denies Al-Mahdi Army Role in Iraq’s Sectarian Killings,” Al Arabiya, translated from Arabic and distributed by BBC Monitoring, 13 December 2006.}

The removal of Saddam Hussein’s secular regime revived the Islamic ethos and brought Islam back into Iraqi politics.\footnote{In the 1990s, Saddam Hussein added a religious dimension to politics to rehabilitate the regime’s legitimacy in the wake of the brutal suppression of the Shia uprisings that took place in 1991 and 1999. He launched the “Faith” campaign by adding quotes from the Quran to his public speeches, constructing lavish mosques, banning the consumption of alcohol, and ordering the inclusion of religious symbols in the mass media. See Irena L. Sargsyan, “Should Islamists Have a Role in the Arab Spring?” \textit{USA Today}, 20 June 2011.}

Taking advantage of this unprecedented opportunity for relatively free expression and association, many rival opposition groups engaged in religious outbidding.\footnote{On religious outbidding, see Monica Duffy Toft, “Getting Religion? The Puzzling Case of Islam and Civil War,” \textit{International Security}, vol. 31, no. 4 (Spring 2007), pp. 97–131.}

They used religious themes and symbols to vilify their competitors, impugn the reputations of rival leaders, delegitimize the new Iraqi government, demonize the Coalition forces, and boost their own credibility and legitimacy. The journalists David Baran and Mathieu Guidère observed this in 2005:

\begin{quote}
The insurgents have undeniably achieved a degree of sophistication in their discourse, in many ways because of their skillful manipulation of the wealth of resources in Islamic and Arab culture. Leaning heavily on just a few verses from the Koran, they invoke a succession of episodes from religious and Arab nationalist history, with a venerable tradition of poetry and tribal folklore. The war is likened to the Battle of Badr, where Muhammad and his followers were victorious despite being overwhelmingly outnumbered. The “collaborators” are dubbed “children of Ibn al-Alqami,” which is a reference to the 13th-century vizier who handed over Baghdad to the Mongol invaders. Resistance heroes such as Hamza Ibn ’Abd al-Muttalib and Omar al-Mukhtar are invoked. New
\end{quote}
patriotic songs are composed. These references are then translated into direct acerbic, language that contrasts well with the highfalutin US talk of “liberty” and “progress,” and firmly roots the current campaign in a long history of struggle and sacrifice.427

The Sadrists in particular stressed religious zeal: “Muqtada and his followers are intensely religious and see themselves as following in the tradition of martyrdom in opposition to tyranny established when Hussein and Abbas were killed by the Umayyads on the plains of Kerbala 1,400 years ago. Little about the Sadrists or modern Iraq will be explicable without an understanding of the Shia faith.”428 By emphasizing the revered status of martyrs in Shia culture, Muqtada al-Sadr reinforced his own legitimacy as the scion of a family of martyrs.

Al-Sadr has adeptly used religious themes to mobilize supporters against the Iraqi government and the Coalition forces. A case in point is the uprising in Kufa in April 2004. During the siege of Najaf, he made a strategic move by going on a religious retreat in the mosque in Kufa, which has a deep symbolic meaning for religious Shias (and which also served as a sanctuary that the Coalition forces would be reluctant to attack). To sustain the popular resistance in Najaf, Karbala, and Kufa while he was on retreat, al-Sadr repeatedly issued statements comparing President George W. Bush to the Shias’ historical archenemy, the Umayyad caliph Yazid I.429 Before the US occupation of Iraq, Shias called Saddam Hussein “the Yazid.”430 (Yazid was the nemesis of the Shia martyr Imam Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. Imam Hussein

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428 Patrick Cockburn, Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Fall of Iraq (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 2008), p. 16.
was martyred in the Battle of Karbala in 680, while his father, Ali ibn Abi Talib, was murdered in
the great mosque of Kufa in 661.)

Notably, the Battle of Karbala occupies a central place in Shiism; it epitomizes the Shias’
historical suffering at the hands of powerful enemies and symbolizes the struggle of the righteous
against evil. To reinforce the parallel between the US-led occupation and this historic event, al-
Sadr declared: “The US-led forces have the money, weapons and huge numbers, but these things
are not going to weaken our will because God is with us.” There is evidence that the religious
themes with which he infused his statements resonated strongly with Shias and inspired armed
resistance. In the words of a young militiaman, “we didn’t fight because of the closure of the
[Sadrist] newspaper or the arrest of al-Yaqubi, but because we thought our religion was in
danger.” Western journalists on the ground discerned the Sadrist’s élan: “When Mr. Sadr fights,
he fights. His followers may continue to participate in a few freelance kidnappings and homemade
bomb attacks, but a true Sadrist uprising is more like an earthquake.”

Initially, al-Sadr called for a peaceful protest against the Coalition forces. But after
several incidents—including the suspension by the CPA authorities in March 2004 of his weekly
publication, Al-Hawzah Al-Naṭiqahin—and given his growing suspicion that Iraqi and US officials
were planning to arrest him in relation to the murder of Abdul Majid al-Khoei, al-Sadr announced

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431 In the Shia tradition, what scholars call the Karbala paradigm offers a model for taking action against injustice,
occupation, and oppression. See Michael Fischer, Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution (Cambridge, MA:
433 Quoted in Patrick Cockburn, Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Fall of Iraq (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 2008), p.
184.
that “peaceful protests had become useless and urged his followers to ‘terrorize’ their enemy.”

To mobilize supporters for an armed struggle, he invoked the 1920s revolution against the British occupation of Iraq and the 1991 Intifāḍat Shaʿbān against the regime of Saddam Hussein. In attempts to further unify the Shiias, he consistently issued statements urging his followers to fight “before the great flood comes and before the army of Satan readies itself to eliminate you one after another.” But he also reminded them that the Americans would retreat once they face the “test called the Shiites.”

Resonating with the Iraqis’ resilient nationalism, which had survived even the recent sectarian carnage, al-Sadr’s messages accentuated the country’s unity. “Our objective in Iraq is to remove the US occupation and not to fight one another,” he said. “I consider any attack on any Iraqi as an attack on me.” Al-Sadr would later forge alliances with Sunni factions: “The main reason we allied with the Sunnis in Diyala was to send a message to the country’s Sunnis, assuring them that we stand against sectarianism,” a Sadrist member of Iraq’s Council of Representatives (COR) said. In contrast, by opposing an amendment to the de-Baathification law, leaders of the ISCI demonstrated intransigence toward reintegrating the Sunni Arabs into Iraq’s new political system. “Are the Nazis in Germany allowed now to get sensitive jobs?” demanded Ammar al-Hakim, son of the late ISCI leader Abdul Aziz al-Hakim.

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441 Quoted in a special correspondent, “Iraq’s Cold War,” *Niqash*, 26 September 2013.
ISCI, the Iraqi government, and US officials publicly accused al-Sadr and the JAM of inciting violence, he promptly countered those allegations. For example, during a press conference in May 2005, al-Sadr declared: “Any action targeting unarmed civilians is forbidden under any circumstances. . . . We reject these terror operations, whether they are carried out by the occupiers or others. . . . The occupiers are trying to sow division among the Iraqi people, but there are no Sunnis and Shiites. Iraqis are one.”\(^{443}\) In another statement directed at splinter Sadrist groups such as the SGs, he stressed: “I disown anyone who would harm the Iraqi security forces as long as they keep their distance from the occupation forces and seek maintenance of Iraq’s dignity.”\(^{444}\) Al-Sadr rhetorically transcended the JAM’s engagement in sectarian strife, while his spokesmen conveniently blamed rogue militiamen for the reprisals against the Sunnis.

To bolster his nationalist credentials, al-Sadr supported Iraq’s political and territorial integrity and vehemently rejected federalism. For example, in August 2005, Al Arabiya Television reported: “The Martyr Al-Sadr Office in Baghdad has announced Al-Sadr trend’s rejection of the establishment of a federal state—as proposed yesterday by Abd-al-Aziz al-Hakim, head of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) [ISCI]—in the presence of the occupation. . . . However, if the occupation leaves, then the brothers can resolve this matter through round-table discussions, and there can be dialogue within the entire Iraqi people, who will either welcome the federal system, or reject it.”\(^{445}\) Al-Sadr and the al-Hakims repeatedly clashed over the ISCI’s advocacy of “Shiastan.” “We believe that this step will unite Iraq, not divide it,” Ammar al-Hakim said in defense of the project. “It will put an end to the Iraqi Shiites’ historic feeling of

\(^{443}\) Quoted in “Shiite Firebrand Sadr Urges Restraint over Iraq Communal Tensions,” Agence France-Presse, translated and distributed by Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 16 May 2005.

\(^{444}\) Quoted in “Shi’i Leader Al-Sadr Disowns Anyone Targeting Iraqi Forces,” Aswat Al-Iraq, translated from Arabic and distributed by BBC Monitoring, 3 September 2010.

being marginalized.”

In 2005, the discord over federalism between the two rivals escalated into street fights between the Badr Corps and the JAM. Al-Sadr’s supporters voiced their nationalism during protests they staged: “Demonstrators raised Iraqi flags and Islamic banners and shouted in support of Iraq’s unity, such as ‘No, no to division; yes, yes to unity.’ They also raised banners saying: ‘Iraqis have the right to all Iraq,’ ‘No federalism under occupation,’ and ‘Yes, yes to unity.’”

Al-Sadr’s steadfast nationalism also permeated his tirades against the US forces and the Iraqi government. His nationalist messages, “which contrasted with the attitude of many other Shiite leaders, were in a way a continuation of his father’s policies. As Muqtada saw it, the occupation merely prolonged the oppression that had begun with US-backed sanctions which had disproportionately hurt impoverished Shiites.” In his sermons, al-Sadr lambasted the quietists, whose inaction during Saddam Hussein’s rule he viewed as an “internal exile,” and he gibed at those who cooperated with the Coalition authorities, labeling them “infidels” and “lackeys of the occupation.”

Because al-Sadr portrayed the US-led occupation as an assault not only on Iraq but also on Islam, he implied that his political opponents who collaborated with the Coalition authorities were both unpatriotic and heretical: “Four years have passed since the occupation of our beloved country, the Iraq of Islam, by the great Satan, America, and its followers, who want to erase Islam from the world in order to maintain peace for themselves. . . . I renew my demands for the

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withdrawal of the occupier from our land.”\textsuperscript{450} From the onset of the US-led occupation, al-Sadr denounced the institutions that the Coalition authorities helped set up. In 2003, the Office of Martyr al-Sadr stated: “Mr. Muqtada al-Sadr believes that the Governing Council is not a legitimate government and does not represent all the Iraqis. Most of the members of this council did not experience the suffering of the Iraqi people since they left Iraq at the worst times and abandoned the Iraqi people. He said that the Governing Council has formed a gap between it and society.”\textsuperscript{451} Al-Sadr attacked the character of interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi and the legitimacy of his government by criticizing Allawi’s acquiescence to US raids on the city of Falluja in 2004: “You proved to the whole world that you are a continuation of the occupier.”\textsuperscript{452} In the same spirit, al-Sadr declared: “I condemn and denounce the Iraqi Government’s recent decision to legalize the occupation. Giving legitimacy to the occupation is rejected from all aspects.”\textsuperscript{453} He called the US-appointed Iraqi Governing Council an “agent for Americans” and a “Zionist” organization.\textsuperscript{454}

As the United States was preparing for a withdrawal—under the terms of the 2008 Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that called for US combat forces to pull out of most Iraqi cities by the summer of 2009 and that also established December 2011 as the date by which the last US troops must leave Iraq—al-Sadr exploited the opportunity to reinforce the narrative that his

\textsuperscript{452} Quoted in “Al-Sadr Delivers Friday Sermon, Criticizes Iraqi Premier,” Al Arabiya, translated from Arabic and distributed by World News Connection, 23 July 2004.
\textsuperscript{453} Quoted in “Iraq: Muqtada Al-Sadr Condemns Government Decision to ‘Legalize Occupation,’” Al Arabiya, translated from Arabic and distributed by World News Connection, 6 June 2005.
resistance was driving out the occupiers. Toward that end, the Promised Day Brigade reportedly conducted attacks on Americans in Sadr City as the US troops were leaving Iraq.\(^{455}\)

**The Relation of Message to Messenger**

Muqtada claimed the religious and political heritage of the al-Sadr family when he emerged as the leader of the Sadrist movement after the fall of Baghdad in 2003. He undoubtedly benefited from the lasting legacy and virtuous reputation of his relatives, which were so powerful and fresh in the memories of the Sadrist followers that many of them were not concerned about his age or lack of religious training—although senior conservative clerics in Najaf, the Iraqi government, and Coalition officials did criticize him on those scores. A follower of al-Sadr emphasized: “We don’t care about his age. It’s not a matter of age. Age is not a condition. Sayyid Muqtada is completing his father’s divine march.”\(^{456}\) “It’s true, by definition the marja is more erudite,” explained a Sadrist imam, “but what we need is someone who can lead us on the ground [qa’id maydani], and Muqtada proved himself in that way, through both his words and deeds. Marja’iya is one thing; leadership is another.”\(^{457}\)

Indeed, Muqtada al-Sadr deliberately stressed the continuity between his message and that of his father. His repertoire included the same anaphoric chants and leitmotif that Sadiq al-Sadr used during his sermons: “No, no, America! No, no, imperialism! No, no, O occupier! No, no, O terrorism! Yes, yes, O Iraq! Yes, yes, independence! Yes, yes, to peace! Yes, yes, to the religious

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In keeping with his father’s legacy, Muqtada vowed “to defend the oppressed and the weak and to help the poor,” when he resurfaced after the US-led invasion of Iraq. He organized the “Day of Anger” protests, uniting a chorus of rage at local and national governments, and he initiated the annual “Day of the Oppressed” march, mobilizing tens of thousands of Iraqis each year. Al-Sadr’s embrace of the downtrodden contrasted with the ISCI’s elitist demeanor. *Newsweek* magazine reported in 2007 that “in Iraq, Amar Hakim has a darker reputation. When he ran his family’s multimillion-dollar foundation, he had a habit of rolling through Baghdad in a convoy of flashy SUVs, surrounded by a scrum of bodyguards and hangers-on. . . . Critics, many of them Sunni, have nicknamed him ‘Uday Hakim,’ after Saddam’s corrupt and sociopathic son.” Several Iraqis interviewed for this study also compared the younger al-Hakim with Saddam Hussein’s sons, who were known for their ruthlessness and wild behavior. “Today’s militia leaders are the new Udays and Qusays,” complained an internally displaced woman from Baghdad whose father had been murdered at a fake checkpoint. “Because Ammar al-Hakim is connected to some big oil companies, he is seen by many as the new Uday,” said another Iraqi. Although the analogy is hyperbolic, it captures local people’s sentiments toward the al-Hakims at the time.

In contrast, al-Sadr’s advocacy for the poor remained remarkably consistent. Even in late 2010, after he had reached a limited reconciliation with the Iraqi government that he had fiercely

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462 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with an internally displaced Shia from Baghdad (interviewee 11), Erbil, Iraq, 28 June 2012.
463 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with an Iraqi employee of the National Democratic Institute (interviewee 2), Erbil, Iraq, 30 June 2012.
opposed, al-Sadr continued to criticize its failure to deliver essential services. In a speech in early 2011, al-Sadr reminded the Iraqi officials “that he could withdraw support for Mr. Maliki if the government failed to address the most basic complaints of daily life here [in Iraq], particularly for the disenfranchised he claims to represent—shoddy roads, dirty water, leaking sewage and that persistent motif of post-Saddam Hussein Iraq, electrical blackouts.” In 2012, al-Sadr did withdraw support and joined the opposition against Iraq’s prime minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki. The goal was to seek a parliamentary vote of no confidence to remove the prime minister from office in order to enable reform and obstruct the central government’s consolidation of power and autocratic practices.

The period after December 2011 is beyond the scope of this study, but it is noteworthy that in early 2013, al-Sadr voiced support for the Sunni-led antigovernment protests that erupted in Anbar Province in December 2012 and quickly spread to other predominantly Sunni areas of Iraq. The protesters were demanding better government services, the release of Sunni detainees, and an end to discrimination by the Shia-dominated government. Striving to appear moderate, al-Sadr emphasized that he spoke for all Iraqis. “As long as the demonstrations are peaceful and don’t seek to dismantle Iraq, . . . we are with the protests, and parliament should be with them, not against them,” he stated. “The demands of demonstrators are legitimate and popular, so they should be met.” When Iraq experienced a renewed wave of sectarian violence in 2013, al-Sadr issued “a final warning to the government to assume its duty of protecting the people.” In protesting the dysfunction of the Iraqi government, al-Sadr announced his decision to resign from politics in

2014 and devote himself to serving the Iraqis beyond his traditional constituency: “I will remain for all—not for the Sadrists only, for I dedicated myself to Iraq and to Islam.”

Al-Sadr’s messages resonated strongly with Iraq’s Shias because he contextualized his frames effectively. He invariably blamed the United States and the Iraqi government for failing to provide security and services to the Iraqi people—even pointing out that Saddam Hussein’s government had done a better job than its successors in providing electricity and other essential services. In an interview with Al Jazeera, al-Sadr said: “What is worse is that US influence on Iraqis is more negative than the influence of the former Ba’ath Party. The Iraqi people’s sufferings continue as they were under Saddam Hussein. There are no services and there is a lack of security. All the things that we suffered from then still exist. So it is not liberation, but occupation. I call it occupation. I used to say in the past that the smaller Satan left and the arch Satan came.”

By implication, when the powerful United States, which could swiftly topple Saddam Hussein, failed to deliver electricity and water to Iraqis, the Iraqi people assumed that the United States was punishing them, not that it was unable to help them. “Do you really think it’s possible that America—the greatest country in the world—cannot manage a small country like this?” asked an unemployed construction worker. “No! They have not made any mistakes. They brought people here to destroy Iraq, not to build Iraq. They could fix everything in one hour if they wanted!” An Iraqi mother felt the same way: “It would take the Americans five minutes to provide gas, to provide electricity, to provide security.”

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earth, can’t bring order to a small spot on the map? We cannot believe it,” another Iraqi intoned his frustration. In this context, al-Sadr’s defense of the poor and his trenchant invective against the Iraqi government, the United States, and rival movements bolstered his legitimacy among the Shia underclass. In the words of one Iraqi man, “the Sadrist are stronger and braver and also larger in number. Most of the young people are with the Sadrist; they tend to be poor and unemployed, and they find Muqtada’s character more appealing than Abd-al-Aziz al-Hakim’s. They despise Hakim for his role in Iran and his dealings with our POWs [prisoners of war], with many stories circulating of his role in torturing them.”

Unlike al-Sadr, the al-Hakims refrained from condemning the occupation of the homeland and the hardships it had entailed for ordinary Iraqis; instead, they chose to collaborate with the US authorities. Al-Sadr repeatedly chastised them (even in the periods when “the two friends and enemies” formed expedient political alliances) for “not recognizing the resistance” because the ISCI “wants occupation forces to stay in Iraq.” After the United States had withdrawn its forces from Iraq and al-Sadr redirected his jeremiads against the Iraqi government, the ISCI remained circumspect about reproaching the al-Maliki regime: “Unlike Muqtada al-Sadr and his supporters—who clearly oppose, and openly and harshly criticize, Maliki—the ISCI has adopted a calmer tone and avoids personal attacks, most likely because it believes that maintaining good relations with Maliki’s coalition will give it a better chance to maneuver while not antagonizing the prime minister.” In effect, both the substance of al-Sadr’s messages and his argot aroused

collective emotions and motivated the masses. As one Iraqi pointed out, “al-Sadr speaks in very simple, accessible language. He often uses slang. And common people like that he speaks the language of the street.”

His vernacular rhetoric eventually “made al-Sadr more popular with his former enemies, Iraq’s Sunni Muslims and the Iraqi Kurdish, who have described his words as brave and non-sectarian.”

Just as important, al-Sadr’s rhetoric gained credibility among Iraq’s Shias because they saw that it was not empty talk; it was backed by actions such as the Sadrist Trend’s charitable activities. During the most difficult years of the Iraq War, the VSM made monthly payments of 50,000–70,000 dinars to the families of imprisoned and martyred Sadrist martyrs, delivered economic assistance to orphans and the injured, helped the widows of martyrs open small businesses or buy cattle so that they could support their families, and provided medical care and food to poor Shia families. The organization’s cultural commission held festivals commemorating martyrs, and its members visited the orphans of slain fighters to check on their condition, ensure that they were receiving an education, and provide moral support. “We are all here under his [Muqtada al-Sadr’s] protection. . . . Everyone else ignored us, including the government and the Americans,” said an Iraqi who had to take care of four children of his murdered male relatives.

In Iraq’s entropic milieu, al-Sadr’s resonant rhetoric, readiness to use violence, and defense of the downtrodden appealed to many who were dismayed by the national leaders’ ineptitude and lack of spine. “Some Shias mocked Ayatollah [Ali] Sistani because he didn’t engage in politics, take sides in the conflict, or stand up his own militia. But they respected Muqtada [al-Sadr] for his

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479 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with an Iraqi employee of the National Democratic Institute (interviewee 1), Erbil, Iraq, 27 June 2012.
resolve and courage,” said a young man. “I support the presence of the Mahdi Army [JAM],” affirmed a senior judge on Iraq’s criminal court. “I know this is unacceptable in law, in politics, in society, but in this unusual time we are living in, this is the reality.” A Shia sheikh rationalized his decision to join the JAM this way: “I was never a member of the Sadr line, but I really respect them because they are decisive. The people . . . feel more and more that patience is the same as cowardice. I never wanted to reach this stage but I cannot tolerate the situation much longer. Why shouldn’t I fight? Let it be civil war.” A follower of al-Sadr taunted: “If we receive an order, we will eat them [the US forces]—eat them with my own teeth.” During Friday sermons, al-Sadr’s supporters commonly broke into chanting: “We sacrifice our souls for Sadr and his son Muqtada. . . . We are the army of Mahdi [JAM] and the followers of Sadr, and whoever touches you, Muqtada, we’ll cut him to pieces.”

To summarize, the Sadrist Trend—which emerged as a ragtag militia to resist the foreign occupation after the fall of Baghdad—rapidly grew into a full-scale VSM with a vast popular base, while many other movements either disappeared shortly after they emerged or shrank, becoming no more than terrorist groups. In 2007, the New York Times depicted al-Sadr as “a charismatic demagogue with an intimidating private army, a potent political party and an impressive capacity for sending his followers into the street.” As the Sadrist Trend’s support base expanded, the movement augmented its military and political wings with social and public affairs offices to address the grievances of the Shia constituency and to advance its own political aims.

Concomitantly, al-Sadr worked to transform the JAM into a political force. Two objectives account for this decision. In the early years of the US-led occupation, the JAM engaged in sectarian violence, kidnappings, and other criminal activities that tarnished the militia’s reputation. Hence, al-Sadr sought to restore the JAM’s standing. To that end, he publicly expelled 40 JAM commanders in late 2006.\(^{489}\) In addition, as the JAM grew in size, al-Sadr temporarily lost control over the force, especially as several units split off from it in response to al-Sadr’s transition to politics and his declaration of an armistice when the government—with the help of the US troops—fought to disarm the JAM in 2008. (For example, Qais al-Khazali formed the splinter AAH under Iran’s sponsorship; Ismail al-Lami—better known by his nom de guerre Abu Deraa, or Father of the Shield, and the epithets Butcher of Baghdad and Shiite Zarqawi—ran a death squad that tortured and killed Sunni Iraqis.\(^{490}\)) Thus, al-Sadr decided to restructure the JAM into a compact, agile, and disciplined force. He retained a small core of loyal fighters, integrated some members of the JAM into the Iraqi police and army, and reorganized the rest into a new association, the Momahidoun, which was devoted to communal, cultural, and religious services. He called on his followers to pursue intellectual, political, and cultural jihad. By maintaining a fighting force, al-Sadr preserved a credible deterrent to guard his political power.

Al-Sadr played a pivotal role in diversifying the VSM and sustaining its relevance and popular appeal. He demonstrated strategic agility as he navigated the Sadrist Trend’s political discourse and exploited structural conditions to amplify the credibility of his message. Most striking, al-Sadr appears to have learned from his and the VSM’s mistakes, as he adeptly recalibrated his tactics. When the al-Maliki government tried to emasculate the JAM during the


Iraqi-led military operations in the southern port city of Basra, Sadr City, and Amara in the spring of 2008, al-Sadr retreated and ostentatiously devoted more time to religious studies in Iran between 2008 and 2011, while he continued to lead his movement. This stratagem was aimed at bolstering his authority and religious credibility so that he could issue fatwas, collect religious taxes (khums), and gain access to the holy city of Najaf—an important religious, political, and financial center controlled by Iraq’s senior Shia clerics. Even though he is not yet an ayatollah, his followers seek his guidance on religious as well as political matters. Due to its leader’s consistent, credible, and resonant message, the Sadrist Trend rapidly transformed itself into a disciplined and mature VSM, and by 2009 al-Sadr had become “the sole national figure” who could “compete with the prominence of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki.”

Comparing the Homegrown Sadrist Trend, the Repatriated ISCI, and Foreign AQI-ISI

In contrast to the Sadrist Trend, the ISCI, had significant political and military advantages at the onset of the US-led occupation. Some analysts affirmed that “SCIRI [ISCI] faced very few obstacles in maintaining its hegemony as the leading militant group among Iraq’s Shiis after 2003.” Still, the VSM’s scant legitimacy in the eyes of most Iraqis and lack of credibility on a number of critical issues neutralized its positional advantages. The ISCI’s religious legitimacy had been overshadowed by its adherence to the ideology of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Iran’s former spiritual leader. More fundamentally, the ISCI’s close association with both Iran and the United States generated adverse reactions among Iraq’s Shia electorate. While in exile, the ISCI’s

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leaders sought to mount an Islamic revolution in Iraq following the model of Iran’s Islamic Revolution of 1979, spearheaded by Ayatollah Khomeini. And in 1994, the ISCI vigorously supported the spiritual leader’s successor, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in his unsuccessful attempt to become the preeminent religious authority (marja’ al-taqlīd al-muṭlaq) of all Shias.\textsuperscript{494} Supreme leader of Iran since 1989, Ayatollah Khamenei—unlike his predecessor—has not received support from Shias around the world; instead, his influence is confined to his home country. This prompted the ISCI to seek power from other sources, including the United States. An opportunity to cooperate with the United States came during the Gulf War in 1990, and another arose during the Iraq War in 2003. Although the ISCI attempted to distance itself rhetorically from the United States when Iraq plunged into sectarian war—even if its leaders fell short of denouncing the US-led occupation as acerbically, as did al-Sadr and al-Zarqawi—in reality, the VSM grasped the chance for its members to attain key positions in the new government and institutions that the United States helped shape in post-Saddam Iraq. The ISCI’s duplicity—manifested in its euphemistic rejection of the occupation but active cooperation with the Coalition authorities; and in its ostensible disarmament but continued engagement in sectarian violence—did not escape Iraqis. One Iraqi said that the organization “returned to Iraq with the Americans, even though they do not acknowledge this.”\textsuperscript{495} Another observed that operating under the guise of security forces, “the Badr Corps set up fake checkpoints to kidnap and kill Sunnis. Badr was after all Baathist. Its fighters were assassinating Iraqi pilots, naval captains, and engineers who had served in the military under


Saddam and participated in the war against Iran. Badr killed secretly and in more sophisticated ways than other militias.”

The ISCI’s association with Iran and later the United States “assumed an anti-national character,”497 “caused enormous damage to SCIRI’s [ISCI’s] credibility inside Iraq,”498 and cost it “legitimacy deficit in post-war Iraq.”499 Although initiated by Iraq, the war galvanized Iraqis’ patriotism—especially when the military’s retreat from Iranian territories in 1982 and subsequent Iranian incursions into Iraq put the Iraqi population on the defensive. Iraqis responded to the ISCI’s “loyal, if not servile, commitment to Iran’s war objectives” with aversion. Many of them still think of the Badr Corps as “a fifth column serving the Iranian war effort by conducting espionage in border-area villages.”500 Critically, the Islamic groups that went into exile to escape Saddam Hussein “were severed from their national habitat and locked in a few locations in Iran and Syria, where most Shi’i deportees and militants found temporary lodging. The separation from Iraq was not merely physical but also cultural and political.”501 As a consequence, the ISCI’s political influence—which the VSM owed to its access to the state apparatus and to the traditional status of the al-Hakim family among the elite—failed to translate into wide popular support in post-Saddam Iraq.

While al-Sadr’s discourse struck a pragmatic balance between religiosity and nationalism, the ISCI pursued an explicitly sectarian agenda. An example is the VSM’s endorsement of the

sectarian-based federalism mentioned above. In August 2005, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim proposed the creation of an autonomous Arab Shia region in south-central Iraq, modeled after the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in the north: “It is necessary to establish one province for the central and southern parts of Iraq, given the common denominators between the residents of these areas.”

Various factions and constituencies across the country’s political spectrum railed against Al-Hakim’s statement. In response, al-Hakim denied the project’s sectarian undertones: “I am against these sectarian names. We are only interested in the welfare of Iraq and Iraqis.” At the time, his statement gained little traction because the majority of Iraqis—both Shias and Sunnis—strongly supported Iraq’s territorial integrity and viewed the ISCI as a sectarian party.

As some analysts observed, by “prioritizing religious identity over national allegiance, SAIRI [ISCI] and its allies could not reach out to their co-religionists in Iraq.” This became obvious during the January 2009 provincial elections, in which nationalist-oriented parties, including pro-Sadrist factions, outperformed their religious counterparts, including the ISCI, which “has fallen to a status of a 10% party or less in most places.”

The ISCI lost votes even in Najaf Province, which it had previously dominated, and in Baghdad, where it gained 3 seats on the provincial council, down from the 28 it held before. At the same time, public opinion polls of Iraqis in 2008 showed plummeting support for explicitly sectarian parties.

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Sectarianism was not the only decisive factor in the 2009 elections. Equally salient was the provision of security and essential socioeconomic services. In an analysis of the election results, the International Crisis Group reported that “these elections were notable in that voters punished the ruling parties for their failure at local governance.” Qasem Daoud, a member of the ISCI-led Iraqi National Alliance (INA), confirmed that the “ISCI was punished severely by society.”

A clear contrast emerges between how the populist Sadrist Trend and the elitist ISCI approached the problems of local security and the provision of services:

In many Shiite neighbourhoods, the Sadrists often appear to enjoy the common people’s trust, radiating from local mosques to address pressing concerns, especially security. By contrast, with its elite base in Najaf and Karbala, SCIRI[ISCI]/Badr has staked its ambitions on control over state levers of power, including the security apparatus, an enterprise it has pursued single-mindedly, earning it success far beyond its popular support. Although this has given it deeper coffers to draw from and better sinecures to offer, it has failed to translate its control over local government into material benefits for the population (security, infrastructure, services), and grumbling has become widespread. Moreover, the Sadrists are quick to point scornfully at SCIRI’s Iranian baggage.

The ISCI leadership’s alleged involvement in oil and financial transactions exacerbated Iraqis’ unfavorable attitudes toward the VSM. A member of Iraq’s parliament observed:

Senior members of the Majlis [the ISCI] were involved in business deals, oil smuggling, and transfer of petroleum to Iran. They also received commissions from oil companies. Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim and Abdul Aziz al-Hakim were respected religious figures. Therefore, the Majlis’s connections to business corporations, let alone its involvement in corruption—no matter how small—came as a shock to people. People started talking about them [the al-Hakims]. They saw them as corrupt. Against that backdrop, Muqtada appeared as an honest leader. In 2005 the Sadrists were not in charge of ministries. They were not involved in government corruption. What’s more, the government’s military offensive against the Mahdi army [the JAM] in 2008 cast Muqtada as a “victim” of the regime in the eyes of Iraqis.512

Against the backdrop of Iraqis’ growing resentment at Tehran’s interference in their country’s affairs, the ISCI’s historic ties to Iran further attenuated popular support for the VSM. More generally, Iraqis attributed venal motivations to the repatriated fellow citizens. As one resident of Baghdad put it, “these people’s [exiles’] return to Iraq had nothing to do with patriotic and humanitarian motives, but it had everything to do with gaining power and more power. A proof of that is how bad things are in Iraq right now, after more than a decade since their coming to power and running Iraq. . . . These people returned to their country on American tanks, became rulers, and drove the country to the verge of abyss where it’s hanging now. . . . They stole from the people, ruined and destroyed Iraq.”513

In expressing their disgruntlement with leaders in the post-Saddam era, Iraqis are quick to point out these leaders’ backgrounds, using words like manfī (exile), mughtarib (expatriate), ajnabī (foreigner), manbūdh (untouchable, outcast), ‘amīl (foreign agent), and adāh (tool). This is

512 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a member of Iraq’s Council of Representatives (interviewee 8), Erbil, Iraq, 2 July 2012.
513 Irena L. Sargsyan, email correspondence with a resident of Baghdad (interviewee 10), 21 April 2014.
reflected in the words of the imam of al-Mahdi Mosque in Baghdad: “We do not want an opposition coming from abroad or a proxy American government with Iraqi puppets. . . . The Iraqis who lived and suffered in Iraq have more rights to power than those who came from abroad and do not enjoy any leverage.”\footnote{514} The Baghdad resident quoted above expressed a similar opinion: “Unlike King Faisal I, who in building modern Iraq brought together qualified professionals to manage the country’s security and economic sectors—those people had both experience and moral values—the occupation chose the manbūdhīn, the untouchables, who wandered around Europe in search of economic opportunity, financial gain, and personal comfort. They claim to have been oppressed, but that claim doesn’t apply to most of them.”\footnote{515}

Given its lack of legitimacy and credibility, how did the ISCI manage to secure top positions in the new administration? Several factors came into play in the post-Saddam free-for-all: the ISCI’s collaboration with the United States; its political alliance with the two main Kurdish factions, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK); its electoral coalition with Shia and secular political parties; and its genuflection to Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani—all of which “translated into a position of influence in post-war Iraq, most importantly via a seat on the Interim Governing Council and ministerial positions in the first two post-war cabinets, as well as in the drafting of the interim and permanent constitutions.”\footnote{516} The ISCI “also agreed to participate in local elections or to be assigned seats where the US and its allies established councils without elections.”\footnote{517} Its leaders’ access to financial resources and foreign donors enabled the VSM to develop an effective party structure, maintain a strong militia, and launch an aggressive

\footnotesize{\footnote{515} Irena L. Sargsyan, email correspondence with a resident of Baghdad (interviewee 10), 15 March 2014.}  
media blitz in the run-up to the 2005 elections. Additionally, the ISCI benefited from the boycott of the 2005 elections by Sunni Arabs and the efforts by the Coalition and Iraqi forces to subdue its foremost rival, the Sadrist Trend.

Still, the ISCI’s losses in the 2009 openly contested provincial elections showed that its expedient alliances and narrow elite support were not enough to sustain wide popular support. The most compelling indicator of the centrality of discursive psychological factors in sustaining civilian mobilization is the ISCI leaders’ acknowledgment of the importance of narrative and their subsequent effort to rebrand the movement by imitating the Sadrist Trend. In the aftermath of the ISCI’s electoral meltdown, Ammar al-Hakim, then the ISCI’s deputy chairman and later its leader, stated: “We are making a comprehensive review of this phenomenon and are trying to reconsider our political discourse, platform, and formations.” He also said: “We froze talk about federalism and regions long ago.”

Earlier, when the ISCI began to recognize that its close ties with Iran were alienating potential Shia supporters in Iraq, the VSM dropped the word “revolution” from its original name, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, to signal to the Iraqi people that the ISCI had broken with Tehran’s revolutionary ideology. Though it had previously been beholden to Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, the ISCI announced its intent to seek spiritual guidance from Ayatollah al-Sistani. A senior ISCI member explained: “The change will be more as a step to the Iraqisation of the Islamic parties in Iraq.”

The ISCI announced changes in both “the structure of the group and also in its political language, taking into consideration the political facts on the ground.” Toward these ends, the ISCI’s leaders distanced themselves from the Badr Corps, which had grown into the independent

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Badr Organization. Under the leadership of Ammar al-Hakim, the ISCI “adopted a conciliatory rhetoric that focused on concepts such as dialogue, partnership and openness, while avoiding any stance that would be construed as supporting sectarian exclusionism.”

To present the ISCI as a new unifying force, its leaders formed the Citizens’ Bloc, a coalition made up of diverse Iraqi factions that participated in the 2014 parliamentary elections. Emulating the Sadrist Trend, the ISCI launched projects to engage Iraqi youth in its new grassroots organizations, such as the Knights of Hope, and to provide services in Baghdad’s impoverished districts. Seemingly, the ISCI leaders also adopted al-Sadr’s strategy of learning from past mistakes. “It’s permissible to make mistakes in politics,” Hamid Mala of the ISCI stated in 2013. “The first step towards correcting one’s mistakes is to acknowledge them. And that’s what we have done as a political organization. We will succeed because we are serious about our work.”

Although this study of the VSMs in Iraq focuses on the 2003–11 period, it is worth noting that due to its tenacious efforts to reform itself, the ISCI performed relatively well in both the 2013 provincial and the 2014 parliamentary elections.

At the time when the ISCI saw its political and popular standing decline, the Sadrist Trend experienced a “remarkable return to prominence.” It bears clarifying that in 2008–9, al-Sadr (then in Iran) had not yet fully embraced the political process. Nor had the Sadrist Trend managed to completely restore its reputation, which had been tarnished by the JAM’s involvement in low-level violence in the wake of the civil war and by its armed confrontations with the rival Badr Corps in the years 2005–7. In addition, various splinter groups—like AAH, which claimed to be Sadrist but did not take orders from al-Sadr—continued committing high-profile assassinations.

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and risking spectacular attacks at a time when al-Sadr was urging his followers to lay down arms and turn to political resistance.\(^{524}\) Nonetheless, in the 2009 provincial elections held in 14 of Iraq’s 18 provinces, pro-Sadrist factions came in third, after Prime Minister al-Maliki’s Dawa Party and the ISCI. This outcome warrants further explanation. Although the ISCI had been part of the government since 2003, the Sadrist Trend did not fully participate in the US-sponsored electoral process until 2009. (For instance, most Sadrist factions boycotted the January 2005 elections, but they later recognized that the boycott had empowered rival Shia factions collaborating with the US authorities.) Even so, the Sadrists and pro-Sadr factions gained 41 of 440 provincial council seats, compared with the ISCI’s 53 seats, and performed better in Baghdad than the ISCI did.\(^{525}\) Like most parties, the Sadrists did not gain full control of any provincial council, but they won enough votes to obtain senior positions in several southern provinces. In contrast, the ISCI was “decimated across the country,” having suffered significant losses in predominantly Shia provinces south of Baghdad where it had previously performed well.\(^{526}\) The ISCI’s share of seats declined in Basra from 49 percent in 2005 to 14 percent in 2009; in Najaf, from 46 to 25 percent; and in Karbala, from 31 to 15 percent.\(^{527}\)

The Sadrist Trend’s expanding political power was evident, once again, in the parliamentary elections of March 2010, when its al-Ahrar bloc gained 40 of 325 seats in the parliament—second only to the incumbent prime minister’s bloc among the Shia majority—and


acquired ministerial posts, particularly in service ministries.\textsuperscript{528} The ISCI and the Badr Organization ran separately, but jointly gained fewer than half as many seats as the al-Ahrar bloc won. By learning from previous missteps and using methodical polling and databases containing information on voters, and with a shrewd campaigning strategy that included election rehearsals, the Sadrists attained considerable electoral success. An Iraqi employee of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) offered his observations:

The NDI did not train the Sadrists how to run a political party, participate in the electoral process, manage a political website, and respond to citizens’ concerns. We offered training to other political parties and local candidates on how to mobilize a constituency and compete in elections. But the Sadrists performed more effectively than their rivals did. Although they used a number of pragmatic strategies, Muqtada’s willingness to learn from past mistakes was perhaps the most practical approach. Unlike other political parties that strove to show how perfect they were, the Sadrists rolled up their sleeves and focused on developing a new version of Shia politics—one that was more transparent. Other parties clung to stale, Communist-style secretive politics.\textsuperscript{529}

Muqtada al-Sadr also received publicity for helping (reportedly with guidance from Tehran) to resolve the political impasse that followed the elections and paralyzed the government until October 2010. By striking an accord with the incumbent prime minister’s bloc, al-Sadr tilted the political balance in al-Maliki’s favor (the prime minister’s bloc gained 89 seats), thus eliminating the opportunity for Ayad Allawi’s Sunni-dominated front (which won 91 seats) to

\textsuperscript{528} The Sadrist Trend carefully choreographed its moves to affiliate its politicians with social ministries such as health, transportation, agriculture, and education, in order to get access to and provide the services that most Iraqis prioritized. The Sadrists avoided dealing with the foreign affairs, intelligence, defense, and interior ministries, which required contacts with the United States.

\textsuperscript{529} Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with an Iraqi employee of the National Democratic Institute (interviewee 1), Erbil, Iraq, 27 June 2012.
form a government. Al-Sadr’s breakthrough move ended Iraq’s nearly eight-month political stalemate and concurrently elevated the status of his political party in the second al-Maliki administration. Still populist and anti-American, al-Sadr recast himself as a mature politician capable of resolving political crises and delivering essential socioeconomic services.

But in transitioning from armed resistance to political participation, al-Sadr was careful not to compromise the credentials that had earned him widespread popular acceptance among the Shias. Hence, he prepared his supporters for the possibility of engaging in politics, after his military strategy had resulted in a string of setbacks. In an interview broadcast on Al Arabiya, he explained: “Every time has its requirements. I believe that there is now a cultural and strong political war. The political and cultural war must be confronted by a similar war. The cultural, political, and ideological war must not be confronted with a military war. The military must be used only against what is military while the cultural, ideological, and social war must be confronted with something similar.”

Critically, his message remained consistent even after he had joined the political process. In January 2011, he declared: “We are still resisters, and we are still resisting the occupier militarily and culturally and by all means of resistance. Repeat after me: No, no, to the occupier. Let’s have all the world hear that the Iraqi people reject the occupier... Resistance, yes, resistance, but not everyone will carry weapons. Only those qualified will carry weapons.”

As a result, al-Sadr maintained steady popular support. Public opinion surveys conducted in Iraq in September 2011 showed that he had a higher favorability rating than Ammar al-Hakim among both Iraq’s Shia and the broader population. Nearly 59 percent of the Shia respondents

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viewed al-Sadr favorably, compared with roughly 39 percent who felt that way about al-Hakim. Among all Iraqis, 38 percent expressed favorable opinions of al-Sadr and 26 percent of al-Hakim.\(^{532}\) Another September 2011 survey of the central region tested Iraqis’ support for the political parties. In all five provinces in the region, respondents communicated greater support for the “Sadrist Current / Muqtada Al-Sader” than for the “Iraqi Islamic Supreme Council / Ammar Al-Hakim.” The percentages were 12 percent versus 8 percent in Baghdad; 19 percent versus 15 percent in Wasit; 13 percent versus 9 percent in Babil; 16 percent versus 4 percent in Karbala; and 26 percent versus 12 percent in Najaf.\(^{533}\) Al-Sadr continued to command a strong popular following in Iraq. Shortly before the April 2014 parliamentary elections, an Iraqi analyst reacted to al-Sadr’s decision to dissolve the al-Ahrar Bloc and retire from politics: “Sadr is the only person in Iraq who could destroy al-Maliki because he is the head of the deprived section of society—he is the Robin Hood of Iraq.”\(^{534}\)

The evidence analyzed thus far corroborates that leaders who exploited microstructural conditions and strategically deployed emotive and evocative frames resonating with the public were able to sustain a wide popular base and VCA. In contrast, leaders who failed to discursively arouse collective emotions and to capitalize on microstructural conditions had difficulty maintaining public support. Another observation from Iraq’s 2009 elections confirms that the hypotheses hold true even in cases beyond the scope of the conditions demarcated in this study. Unlike the ISCI and the Sadrist Trend, former Prime Minister al-Maliki did not mobilize a violent militia in his pursuit of political power. Instead, he received the patronage of the US authorities to


\(^{534}\) Quoted in Jane Arraf, “Iraq’s Sadr, Lion of Shiite Poor, Quits Politics?” Christian Science Monitor, 18 February 2014.
make a run for the prime minister post. The following mini case study validates my argument about the interacting effects of microstructural conditions and discursive psychological variables in the context of sustaining popular support for an incumbent. I have not tested the generalizability of this finding in nonviolent contests for political power, but the outcomes distilled from the case study are instructive for scholars who may seek to explore the role of emotional mechanisms in the context of nonviolent politics.

Prime Minister al-Maliki’s Islamic Dawa Party (which since 2005 had achieved only minimal representation in any local government) performed strongly in the 2009 provincial elections. This success merits an explanation because, like the ISCI, Dawa has deep ideological roots. It supported the Iranian Islamic Revolution and maintained a relationship, albeit a contentious one, with Iran’s IRGC-QF when many Dawa members, including al-Maliki, had found sanctuary in Iran after fleeing Saddam Hussein’s repression. Unlike the ISCI, however, Dawa, which was cofounded by Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr in Iraq, was seen by the Iraqis as a homegrown movement, even though some of its leaders later went into exile in Iran and Syria.

Why did similar circumstances hurt popular support for the ISCI and its leaders but increase the popularity of Dawa and al-Maliki? A dramatic change in al-Maliki’s political discourse, coupled with his emphasis on Iraq’s relative security and stability after the US-led surge, contributed to his compelling performance in the 2009 elections: “Maliki, sensing which way the winds were blowing, dropped all references to religion in his campaign, wrapping himself instead in the flag and running as a nationalist defender of Iraq.”

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536 In 1979, al-Maliki fled Iraq and took refuge in Syria. Shortly afterward, he moved to Iran. In the early 1990s, he returned to Damascus and remained there until the 2003 US-led invasion.

and instead raised nationalist slogans, as he recognized these had started to resonate with a public exhausted by two years of sectarian war.” In addition, his campaign recruited individuals (including some Sunnis) known for their integrity, nationalist stance, and good record of public service. An example is Jafar al-Sadr, son of Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr.538

At the same time, al-Maliki exploited several opportunities to reinforce his image as a nationalist. He adopted an overtly nationalistic stance during the 2008 negotiations with the United States about the security agreement; confronted the Kurds over the disputed internal boundaries in the northern provinces of Diyala, Kirkuk, and Ninewa; and launched the Basra offensive (code-named Operation Charge of the Knights) in early 2008, under the pretense of bolstering security—although it was also aimed at weakening the JAM’s grip on Basra Province and, in advance of provincial elections, bolstering Dawa Party’s position in the province, where it had little influence. Of greater significance, al-Maliki capitalized on the recent tangible security gains, including the weakening of AQI-ISI, and on the country’s relative stability, going “to great lengths to portray himself as a law-and-order candidate.”539 Al-Maliki even named his electoral coalition State of Law to emphasize the security gains achieved across Iraq.

In the end, al-Maliki’s nationalist discourse—in conjunction with his strong emphasis on concrete security gains—produced the popular support that helped his party win the 2009 elections. One Iraqi politician commented: “Maliki won because he used nationalist instead of sectarian speech.” An Iraqi parliamentarian expressed a similar opinion: “Maliki won because of his nationalist rhetoric.”540 But the difficulties that he experienced during the 2010 parliamentary

elections reinforce my argument that discourse alone is not sufficient to sustain popular support. Al-Maliki’s government had failed to provide the services that it promised to deliver during the 2009 campaign, and it had repeated many of the mistakes that the Coalition authorities had made before revamping their counterinsurgency strategy—the most consequential of which was the alienation of Iraq’s Sunni Arab community. Simultaneously, low-level violence had erupted again in parts of Iraq. The New York Times reported in September 2010: “Politics in Baghdad have been stymied as insurgents have continued bombings and assassinations and Iraqis have become increasingly disgruntled about the failure of the government to deliver basic services.” Antigovernment protests roiled Iraq between 2011 and 2014, and many Iraqis expressed disenchantment with the national leaders—including al-Maliki, who was forced to resign in 2014. An IDP Sunni from Baghdad explained the situation this way:

We don’t know the backgrounds of the people who rule us today. They come from outside Iraq and decide our own destiny for us. Only real Iraqis who stayed here [in Iraq] and suffered for years—only we know what is best for our country, families, and children. They don’t. . . . [The] United States put expats and illiterates in power. The people who rule us today know nothing about governance and our suffering. Maliki and his government do not understand the Iraqi people. How can they represent me? . . . Since 2003 things have been changing from bad to worse. There was

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suffering under Saddam; there is more suffering under Maliki. There was wāṣṭah [nepotism] under Saddam; there is more of the same under Maliki.544

Two important conclusions flow from this analysis. For opposition movements, favorable microstructural conditions, such as the inadequate provision of local security and essential socioeconomic services—together with emotional appeals and strategic framing of messages—are sufficient to sustain VCA. For incumbents or foreign counterinsurgents, favorable microstructural conditions (in their case, the adequate provision of local security and essential socioeconomic services), reinforced by effective communication, are required to sustain popular support.

Microstructural conditions in Iraq were not as favorable for AQI and its offshoot, the Islamic State of Iraq established in late 2006, as they were for indigenous VSMs. Most important, AQI-ISI lacked cultural, ideological, and historical ties to the Iraqi population. In a society that had traditionally been influenced by ancient tribal customs, kinship, and loyalty, AQI-ISI lacked affiliations with local tribes, sheikhs, and religious networks. Nonetheless, it was initially able to gain the support of significant segments of Iraq’s population, largely due to its aggressive communication campaign, which was directed at aggrieved Sunni Arabs. But as the VSM’s rhetoric grew more radical and its ideology proved to be dogmatic—while its tactics shifted from persuasion to intimidation and to brutality—AQI-ISI lost its appeal and support among Iraqis.

As a VSM that integrated elements of a terrorist organization and those of a social movement, AQI-ISI faced a dilemma. In order not to jeopardize its operational capabilities, it had to maintain a degree of secrecy. But to function effectively in a foreign country, it needed the support of the local population. Al-Zarqawi’s response to this dilemma was to foment sectarian

544 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with an internally displaced Sunni from Baghdad (interviewee 3), Erbil, Iraq, 28 June 2012.
violence: “The solution that we see, and God the Exalted knows better, is for us to drag the Shi’a into the battle because this is the only way to prolong the fighting between us and the infidels.”

To mobilize civilians for violence in the Sunni-dominated province of Anbar (which became AQI-ISI’s base of operations) and the neighboring provinces of Diyala, Salahaddin, and Ninewa, the VSM released anti-occupation and anti-Shia propaganda that resonated strongly with Baathists and other Sunni Arabs who had lost their privileged position in Iraqi society and were “angered by dim prospects and resentful of the occupation.”

AQI-ISI placed a premium on information warfare. In a 2005 essay addressed to the Muslim world, the VSM implored its followers to use the Quran as a blueprint and “a very good example of how to conduct an information battle with the infidels.” AQI-ISI’s leaders instructed that “the aim is not to execute an operation, which is followed by complete silence, but telling the reason why it was executed. . . . It is a must that we give this field [communication] what it deserves. . . . How many battles has this nation lost because of the lack of information?”

Experts who studied insurgent groups in post-Saddam Iraq evaluated AQI-ISI as “the most media-savvy and politically vocal insurgent group,” which also deployed “the most sweeping rhetoric.” In the summer of 2005, for example, AQI-ISI published, on average, nine online statements a day, including 180 messages in the first three weeks of July. The Wall Street Journal reported in 2005: “Mr. Zarqawi has deployed a whole inventory of Internet operations beyond the shock video.

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He immortalizes his suicide bombers online, with video clips of the destruction they wreak and Web biographies that attest to their religious zeal. He taunts the US military with an online news service of his exploits, releasing tactical details of operations multiple times a day. He publishes a monthly Internet magazine, *Thurwat al-Sinam* (literally *The Camel’s Hump*), that offers religious justifications for jihad and military advice on how to conduct it."\(^{550}\)

Keeping abreast of the events on the ground, al-Zarqawi promptly updated his communiqués and refuted statements directed against AQI-ISI by urging his followers “not to believe this false information.”\(^{551}\) Officials and experts acknowledged the role of communication in raising al-Zarqawi’s profile: “Today, he is an international name ‘of enormous symbolic importance,’ as US Army Lt. Gen. David Petraeus recently put it, on a par with Mr. bin Laden largely because of his group’s proficiency at publicizing him on the Internet.” Michael Scheuer, a former official at the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), observed that al-Zarqawi’s communication campaign went “from zero to 60.” He said in 2005: “The difference between Zarqawi’s media performance initially and today is extraordinary.”\(^{552}\) According to the terrorism expert Peter Bergen, “using the Internet, Abu Musab al Zarqawi turned himself from a second-tier commander in Iraq into the most feared leader of the insurgency.”\(^{553}\)

Al Furqan, the media arm of AQI-ISI, regularly published press releases on the VSM’s martyrdom operations, publicizing its attacks against the Coalition forces, the Iraqi government and its security forces, and Shia civilians: “The sons of the Islamic State, in a new, blessed foray


in the heart of injured Baghdad, moved to strike the dens of infidelity . . . of the Safavid [a reference to the Shia Persian Empire] government. . . . As we announce our responsibility for this blessed foray, we want to clarify, as we have said repeatedly, that we target the foundations of this evil state and those who supported it and helped establish it.”

Al Furqan also issued comprehensive messages that analyzed political and social issues germane to Iraqi society as well as responded to AQI-ISI’s rival groups and enemies. Even as the microstructural conditions began to change during the US surge, the VSM maintained an effective stream of communication through social media. In March 2007 alone, AQI-ISI issued approximately 162 statements.

The volume of AQI-ISI’s communication was not the only factor that distinguished this VSM from its rivals in Iraq; the content of its messages was unique as well. Between 2003 and 2007, AQI-ISI “was the only insurgent group to make frequent and consistent references to ‘martyrdom-seeking operations,’ or suicide attacks” in audiovisual material. It methodically produced ingenious montages that accentuated the humiliation inflicted on the Iraqis by the US-led occupation—a theme that struck a powerful chord with the Sunni Arab population.

AQI-ISI’s earlier motivational statements that were intended to recruit Sunni Arabs included frames directed against the US-led occupation, the Iraqi government, and Shias. Later, during the surge, AQI-ISI escalated its extremist rhetoric as it sought to incite sectarian mayhem and to intimidate what it called Shia and Sunni collaborators. To sustain violent mobilization, it used emphatically religious language, including quotations from the Quran, and framed its armed struggle as jihad—every Muslim’s religious duty. The VSM inspired younger Sunnis by invoking

pan-Islamic solidarity and global jihad to liberate oppressed Muslims around the globe, and by glorifying the mujahideen who expelled the Soviet army from Afghanistan during the Soviet-Afghan War (1979–89).

AQI-ISI’s anti-occupation frames portrayed the Coalition forces as cowards and simultaneously demonized them: “Every time the Crusaders are defeated and set back in the battlefield and fight, they increase their cowardly actions against our imprisoned heroes in their prisons and detention centers.”\(^557\) The VSM depicted Sunni Arabs as victims of the “Crusader Army”\(^558\) and the “Zionized American Administration,”\(^559\) while it described Americans as leaders of a “siege (hisar)”\(^560\) of the Sunni Arab homeland (an allusion to the siege of Baghdad by Mongols in 1258). The following AQI-ISI statement is revealing: “The condition of the Sunnis has become the same as the condition of the orphans on the table of wicked people. Therefore, it has become a must for the honorable and free Sunni mujahidin, ulema, and notables to make something for their brothers, sons, and honor in light of this silly drama that is called Al-Maliki’s state, in which it was regrettable that Sunni traitors took part. . . . The assaulting invaders and the rancorous Rawafid [a derogatory reference to Shias] should know that Sunni blood is dear and precious and shall not be wasted.”\(^561\)

This effort to criminalize the Coalition forces reverberated strongly in the Sunni Arab community—especially in the wake of the widely publicized battles of Falluja in April and

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\(^{558}\) “Islamic State of Iraq Denies Capture of Senior Members,” translated from Arabic and distributed by World News Connection, 20 November 2006.


November 2004 (code-named, respectively, Operation Vigilant Resolve and Operation Phantom Fury) and prisoner abuse by Coalition servicemen and servicewomen at Abu Ghraib in 2003–4. Still, the central focus of AQI-ISI’s information offensive was Shias, whom al-Zarqawi described as “the insurmountable obstacle, the lurking snake, the crafty and malicious scorpion, the spying enemy, and the penetrating venom.” In the same letter, he said:

Our combat against the Americans is something easy. The enemy is apparent, his back is exposed, and he does not know the land or the current situation of the mujahidin because his intelligence information is weak. . . . This enemy, made up of the Shi’a filled out with Sunni agents, is the real danger that we face, for it is [made up of] our fellow countrymen, who know us inside and out. They are more cunning than their Crusader masters, and they have begun, as I have said, to try to take control of the security situation in Iraq. . . . As the days pass, their hopes are growing that they will establish a Shi’i state stretching from Iran through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon and ending in the Cardboard Kingdom of the Gulf. 562

Skepticism about the ruling Shia parties ran deep among the Sunnis, and al-Zarqawi deftly tapped into Sunni grievances. As one Sunni sheikh noted, “their loyalty is not to their country. [Abdul Aziz] al-Hakim, in one of his speeches—and he was the head of the governing council—asked Iraq to pay compensation to Iran. At the same time, many of the international countries were writing off Iraqi debts. So his loyalty is not to Iraq. Look at their militias and the killing they’ve been doing.” 563

Because AQI’s anti-Shia obloquy appealed to the Sunni Arabs, who opposed the Shia identity of Iraq’s “Safavid” government and security forces, its leaders’ sleight of rhetoric swiftly translated into action. Al-Zarqawi “said in a tape broadcast on the Internet that his organisation was setting up a special unit, the Omar Brigade, to combat the Shia Badr Brigade. This militia, once based in Iran, has been accused of operating death squads against former Baathists and Sunnis. The al-Qa’ida leader also said that the Iraqi army was just as much an enemy as the Americans. Even as his words were broadcast on television in Baghdad, there was a series of attacks on the police special commandos, a paramilitary unit in which the Badr Brigade is increasingly influential.” From the outset of his violent campaign, al-Zarqawi noted that his messages were succeeding in attracting recruits. He wrote to Osama bin Laden that the Iraqis were “easy prey for cunning information [media] and political enticement whose hiss rings out.” The blunders of the US military campaign made Sunni Arabs especially receptive to AQI-ISI’s calls for a violent struggle. A Sunni sheikh observed that Americans “entered as invaders, for sure, it’s the right of the people to resist invaders.” In contrast, AQI-ISI “entered from the gate of martyrdom. They said: ‘We came to help you fight the invaders who invaded Iraq.’”

In the end, AQI’s discursive prowess and operational capabilities—marshalled to gain Sunni popular support and facilitated by the Coalition forces’ missteps in the earlier years of the occupation—enabled the terrorist group to rapidly transform itself into a VSM, while other Sunni

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rebel groups, including those that had originated from the outlawed Baath Party, either allied themselves with AQI or operated clandestinely to avoid prosecution or attacks from the superior Coalition forces, the Iraqi government, and Shia militias, some of which functioned in conjunction with Iraq’s military and police. By late 2006, however, AQI-ISI’s influence had begun to decline.\(^{568}\) A combination of factors accounts for the VSM’s loss of Sunni support. The launch of the surge,\(^{569}\) and the shift in the sectarian balance of power in favor of the Shías in the wake of Iraq’s civil war, changed the conditions on the ground.\(^{570}\) The tensions between AQI-ISI and many Sunni rebel groups and tribes had progressively escalated before the surge. AQI-ISI’s actions—including its implementation of harsh Islamic practices and culturally offensive acts; assaults against tribal leaders; attacks on religious sites; and intimidation of civilians through brute force, beheadings, and terrorist attacks—alienated the Sunni population. Simultaneously, the convergence of tribal anger and shift in the US strategy created propitious conditions for the US-led military campaign against AQI-ISI. Continuous operations by the US military and the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) removed AQI-ISI from its strongholds and improved local security. This success further affected Sunni attitudes, shifting their support toward the US military and the ISF, as evidenced by the emergence of the Sunni Awakening movement, al-Ṣāḥwah.\(^{571}\) Of particular importance, as the US forces made public security a top priority, they also emphasized


communication and information operations and initiated direct contacts with Sunni tribes, seeking to publicize the security gains and to clarify US objectives for the Iraqis.\textsuperscript{572}

In effect, changes in the microstructural conditions from late 2005 to early 2007—including the national elections in 2005; the sectarian war, during which AQI-ISI fomented anti-Shia violence but failed to protect the Sunni population from Shia retaliation; and the US shift to a counterinsurgency campaign centering on the local population—made AQI-ISI’s rhetoric less relevant and convincing. On a local level, material pressures, such as the rivalry between the Sunni tribes and AQI-ISI over the control of neighborhoods, revenue sources, and smuggling routes—coupled with the disconnect between the ideologically indoctrinated foreign fighters and nationally oriented local rebels—deepened the cleavages in the ephemeral alliances between the Sunnis and AQI-ISI. From a strategic perspective, AQI-ISI’s coercive effort to uproot local political structures in its quest to create an Islamic emirate in Iraq—without seeking the approval of the local tribes—was a blunder that turned AQI-ISI from the perceived protector of Iraq’s Sunni Arab population into its oppressor. As the situation on the ground began to change, the VSM’s rhetoric and actions became more extreme. Crucially, the more radical AQI-ISI’s rhetoric grew and the more its leaders overpromised, the less credible the VSM became in the eyes of Iraqis.

To reverse AQI-ISI’s plummeting civilian support, al-Zarqawi made a risky debut on the Internet in a 30-minute video posted in April 2006, shortly before he was slain. In it, he threatened attacks against the US forces and berated the Iraqi government, which, in his words, “whether made up of the hated Shiites or the secular Zionist Kurds or the collaborators imposed on the Sunnis, will be stooges of the crusaders and will be a poisoned dagger in the heart of the Ummah.” He also addressed Iraq’s Sunnis specifically: “God almighty has chosen you to conduct holy war

in your lands and has opened the doors of paradise to you.” Clearly, however, al-Zarqawi’s extremist rhetoric, Internet-broadcast beheadings, and threats had stopped resonating with Iraqis. A businessman in Baghdad reacted to the video thus: “Zarqawi wants to show his power and frighten people. But in reality, he’s the one who should be afraid. We want him dead.” A policeman in Baghdad said: “This terrorist [al-Zarqawi] is bombing all of the Iraqis. He never discriminates between any people. Christians, Muslims, women, children. . . . If he was a real man, he would fight like a man, show himself, and not use car bombs.” A leading Sunni cleric castigated AQI-ISI, saying that “the authentic resistance considers the blood of Iraqis as sacrosanct. But those who masquerade as resistance and for whom the lives of Iraqis are cheap—this is not resistance against the occupier, this is terror.”

Notably, “al-Qaeda’s violence was principally an effect of shifts in allegiance rather than a cause.” By the end of January 2006, AQI’s violent acts in Anbar Province had increased from 25 to 90 a day. And between October 2006 and June 2007, AQI-ISI carried out at least 15 chlorine-gas attacks intended to intimidate Iraq’s civilian population. The chemical weapons were a powerful symbolic deterrent: they evoked Saddam Hussein’s chemical warfare against the restive Kurdish population during the 1986–89 al-Anfal campaign. Thus, AQI-ISI’s increasingly extremist rhetoric and violent treatment of Sunni Arabs were reactions to its loss of leverage and appeal among the Sunni population. The VSM expected to regain the Sunnis’ support through

force and terror. This sequence is significant because it proves that, absent favorable microstructural conditions, discourse is not sufficient to sustain VCA.

AQI-ISI’s belligerence toward civilians, disrespect for indigenous culture, and ignorance of local politics exposed its irreconcilable differences with Iraqis. At its core, AQI-ISI’s nihilistic ideology was alien to the Iraqis’ syncretic system of beliefs and rituals. Its transnational goals and dystopian vision conflicted with the local rebels’ nationalistic pragmatic objectives. Its leaders’ imposition of the Salafi jihadist version of Islam contradicted the traditional forms of faith prevalent in Iraqi society. Its attempts to marry foreign fighters into prominent clans ignited the ire of tribal elders and provoked revenge obligations and retaliatory cycles of violence. Its assassination of tribal notables and religious dignitaries entailed vendettas. Finally, its encroachment on the tribes’ economic interests perpetuated fights over resources. The deeper the schism between the VSM and the Sunnis, the more the local population attributed the conflict to AQI-ISI’s foreign identity. Even though AQI-ISI’s base, unlike its leaders, consisted primarily of Iraqis, those who joined adopted its leadership’s intransigent version of Islam, defying local tribal sheikhs, social elites, and established customs. These fundamental differences led to popular rejection of AQI-ISI. In 2007, an overwhelming majority of Iraq’s Sunnis (96 percent), Shias (97 percent), and Kurds (99 percent) found unacceptable AQI-ISI’s “recruitment of foreign fighters to come to Iraq.” Similarly, most Sunnis (98 percent), Shias (98 percent), and Kurds (100 percent) rejected AQI-ISI’s “attempts to gain control in local areas.”\(^{579}\)

The Sunni Awakening’s rapid growth reinforced Iraqis’ break with AQI-ISI and realignment with the Coalition forces. In mid-2006, civilian volunteer formations, such as the Desert Protection Force, arose in the AQI-ISI bastion of Anbar Province (AQI claimed the

provincial capital, Ramadi, as the capital of the Islamic State of Iraq). In September 2006, Sunni sheikh Abdul Sattar Bazi’a Fatikhan al-Rishawi (commonly known as Sattar Abu Risha) mobilized his 160,000-strong Albu Risha clan as well as the clans of other sheikhs and established the Anbar Salvation Council, which began to cooperate with the Iraqi government and the Coalition forces. By early 2007, the tribal sheikhs had recruited 4,500 new police officers in Ramadi—although previously the local officials had been able to hire only 300 policemen, despite the government’s authorization to create a force of 3,000. Simultaneously, groups of Concerned Local Citizens (CLCs) continued to grow in strength and increasingly supply the Coalition forces with actionable intelligence on AQI-ISI’s activities. For example, largely due to intelligence provided by civilians, the number of weapons caches detected by the Coalition forces and the ISF increased from under 50 in January 2004 to almost 300 in May 2008. Renamed the Sons of Iraq (SOI), these local defense forces included 103,000 civilian volunteers by mid-2008 and spread throughout Iraq, assisting the Coalition forces and the ISF in conducting counterterrorism operations and in securing vital infrastructure, such as roads, oil pipelines, power stations, and municipal facilities in Iraq’s neighborhoods. In short, the Iraqis to whom AQI-ISI had looked for support had turned into its active opponents.

In a 2008 interview with the Washington Post, Riyadh al-Ogaidi, a senior leader of AQI-ISI, acknowledged that “we made many mistakes over the past year.” In his assessment, these mistakes had led to the decline in the total number of AQI-ISI members from 12,000 in June 2007 to roughly 3,500 in early 2008. He blamed AQI-ISI’s emirs for the loss of popular support, pointing

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582 Jim Michaels, “In Ramadi, the Force Isn’t Huge but the Task Is,” USA Today, 28 August 2006.

out that al-Zarqawi was a ruthless but effective leader: “Everyone would be scared of Zarqawi as a tough leader. Whereas Muhajer has now failed in imposing his personality on the organization. He is mild-mannered and weak.”

Although AQI-ISI quickly replaced its leaders as the Coalition forces removed them in an attempt to decapitate the VSM, those who came after al-Zarqawi lacked his authority, omnipresence in the media, and ability to impose a sense of discipline and cohesion on AQI-ISI.

In this section, I have examined how the interaction of the messenger, message, and microstructural conditions through emotional mechanisms allows some VSMs to sustain VCA. Due to its strong legitimacy, the homegrown Sadrist Trend mustered widespread popular support among Iraq’s Shias that enabled this VSM to sustain VCA. The repatriated ISCI, conversely, failed to appeal to Iraq’s Shia constituency because its close relationship with Iran and the occupying Coalition authorities undermined this VSM’s legitimacy among the local Iraqis. AQI-ISI initially garnered broad support among Iraq’s Sunni Arabs; but as a foreign VSM, it failed to sustain VCA because it lacked the requisite ideological and social ties to the local population, social and religious networks, and cultural sensitivity—all of which are indispensable in sustaining armed resistance.

The leaders’ ability to craft and articulate motivational messages and their choice of frames, values, and symbols played a central role in enabling the VSMs to sustain VCA. Muqtada al-Sadr produced compelling messages that emphasized his family legacy; exploited the inadequate security and socioeconomic conditions, both in discourse and the provision of essential services to ordinary Iraqis; used the US-led military occupation as a rhetorical target; delegitimized his political and military rivals; and capitalized on people’s shared experiences of suffering to

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arouse their emotions of anger, humiliation, and fear. By monopolizing the discourse of resistance—and demonstrating readiness to use violence to achieve political objectives—al-Sadr sustained vast support for VCA against the US-led military occupation of Iraq. In contrast, the al-Hakims’ intensely sectarian discourse—coupled with their reticence to denounce the occupation and perceived interest in power and riches—repulsed the Iraqis. And although al-Zarqawi’s scorching anti-Shia rhetoric, inspired by a foreign ideology and accompanied by brutal behavior, appealed to hard-liners in the short run, it failed to resonate with the masses in the long run. The examined evidence also demonstrates that it is difficult for outsiders who have not sacrificed for the national cause to gain the legitimacy, credibility, and domestic popular support necessary to become effective VSM leaders. Homegrown VSM leaders who establish strong legitimacy and credibility and exploit microstructural conditions to arouse collective emotions do rise—in contrast to repatriated leaders returning from exile and foreigners who lack the social and cultural bonds with the local population to generate the discursive emotional appeals required for sustaining VCA. The facts that the ISCI’s leaders took concrete steps to downplay their long-standing relationship with Iran—ranging from renaming the VSM to changing their political discourse—and that AQI-ISI’s leaders made a strategic decision to Iraqify, by reducing the number of foreign fighters in their ranks and allowing local Iraqis to assume leadership roles in the VSM, further corroborate this argument.
In this chapter, I test the VSM theory in two cases in Northern Ireland: the Official Irish Republican Army (OIRA) and the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA). Focusing on the period of the Irish Troubles and the British intervention, I examine why the leaders of the PIRA were able to sustain VCA between 1969 and 1998, but the leaders of the OIRA were not.

I begin by examining the security and socioeconomic conditions in Northern Ireland and the role of external assistance in sustaining armed struggle. I establish that inadequate microstructural conditions in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1982 and the presence of British troops provided the OIRA and the PIRA with similar discursive opportunities to sustain VCA, and that the influx of external assistance to the VSMs exacerbated both collective violence and internecine fighting. Next, I process-trace how the leaders of the PIRA sustained VCA even after the microstructural conditions had become less conducive to violent mobilization between 1983 and 1998. I argue that Gerry Adams was able to sustain VCA and achieve political gains because his personal background and resistance credentials bolstered his legitimacy and credibility among the Catholic, nationalist population. Equally important, his personal gifts—communication skills, strategic acumen, and tactical astuteness—enabled him to develop a new vision for the republican movement that had fallen into desuetude and to generate resonant messages that aroused collective emotions of anger, humiliation, and fear. Adams survived the minefields of Irish politics by demonstrating strategic patience, exploiting the inadequate security and socioeconomic conditions, discrediting rival leaders, and targeting a concrete enemy. Significantly, he recognized
the limits of the armed struggle and turned to politics when the microstructural conditions became
inauspicious for VCA. As a result, he evolved into a powerful political figure in Irish politics.

I juxtapose this outcome with that for the OIRA. The leaders of the OIRA failed to gain
substantial credibility and influence among Northern Ireland’s Catholics because their initial focus
on politically sterile military force precluded them from stringing together a coherent military
strategy and a viable political goal. Subsequently, the leaders made a volte-face toward
parliamentary politics and adopted a foreign ideology that conflicted with republican and Catholic
values. Most important, however, the leaders failed to effectively communicate their agenda to the
local population and attune the VSM’s political program to popular sentiment.

An Overview of Northern Ireland’s Economic and Security Conditions

The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 6 December 1921 marked the end of the Irish War of Independence (1919–21) and sealed the partition of Ireland by granting legislative independence to the 26-county Irish Free State (which became the Republic of Ireland in 1948) and creating the 6-county Northern Ireland (which became a self-governing province of the United Kingdom with its own parliament and executive).585 The 6 counties—Armagh, Antrim, Derry, Down, Fermanagh, and Tyrone—were selected from the 9-county Province of Ulster in a way that ensured a Protestant and unionist majority in Northern Ireland and, by extension, protection from Catholic, nationalist Ireland.587 (The fear of siege is entrenched in the Protestant psyche: “The Protestant is afraid of what would happen to him if he were in a minority in a united Catholic Ireland.”588) Although the conflict between the Gael and the Planter can be traced to the 1609 Plantation of Ulster—a military conquest that established English rule over most of Ireland (parts of Ireland fell under English control following the 1170 Norman Invasion)—the partition of the Emerald Isle deepened the long-standing resentment toward the English unionists as well as created divisions between the pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty nationalist factions. The departure of the British forces from the Free State—the troops occupying Ireland declined from 57,116 (1,312 per 100,000 people) in 1921 to

585 On 7 January 1922, the Anglo-Irish Treaty was accepted by Dail Eireann (Second Dail), a revolutionary parliament in Dublin.
586 Unionists prefer Londonderry, the name given to the county in 1613.
4,399 (349 per 100,000) in 1923—propelled Ireland into a civil war (1922–23) that ended with the defeat of the anti-Treaty nationalists.\textsuperscript{589}

Equally important, the partition of Ireland introduced a dual-minority problem that rekindled sectarianism, triggered the rise of loyalist and nationalist militias, and led to recurring hostilities between the Catholic and the Protestant communities. In the context of the Anglo-Irish conflict, religious denomination and political allegiance are often conflated; but not all Catholics are republicans (or necessarily support nationalist militias), and not all Protestants are unionists (or necessarily support loyalist militias). And although Catholics generally identify with nationalist political parties while Protestants identify with unionist parties, there are small numbers of Catholic unionists and Protestant nationalists. The intercommunal violence that occurred between July 1920 and July 1922 resulted in 557 fatalities, including 303 Catholics, 172 Protestants, and 82 security force personnel. The Catholic community incurred disproportional losses: it constituted only a quarter of Belfast’s population but suffered 257 of the 416 civilian deaths in the indicated period. The growing polarization between Protestants and Catholics led to greater socioeconomic discrimination against the Catholic community in Northern Ireland. In Belfast alone, between 8,700 and 11,000 Catholics were forced out of their jobs and 23,000 out of their homes, and nearly 500 Catholic business were liquidated.\textsuperscript{590}

Northern Ireland’s security and economy remained precarious in the interwar period, from 1919 to 1939. Nationalist and loyalist militia activity, communal riots, and sectarian strife generated low-level violence that militarized the United Kingdom’s internal security, because


civilian unrest often required the army’s involvement.\textsuperscript{591} The economic depression of the 1930s entailed more severe and lasting effects for Northern Ireland than the United Kingdom’s mainland (that is, England, Scotland, and Wales). With half its labor force unemployed in the early 1930s, the province’s unemployment rate remained high throughout the decade.\textsuperscript{592} In 1939, for example, the unemployment rate in Northern Ireland stood at 20 percent, compared with nearly 8 percent in Great Britain,\textsuperscript{593} and its average per capita income constituted 58 percent of the average across the United Kingdom.\textsuperscript{594}

World War II briefly reversed Northern Ireland’s economic decline by creating high demand for the military supplies manufactured in the province. In contrast to the economy of the Republic of Ireland (or the Southwest), which was primarily agrarian and underdeveloped, Northern Ireland (or the Northeast) was industrialized and relatively developed—its ship, aircraft, and linen industries produced exports for Europe and the United States. But the stimulus of the war economy was short-lived, and Northern Ireland’s traditional industries began to decline in the early 1950s, facing an increasingly vigorous competition from the global market. On balance, more jobs were lost in the 1960s and 1970s in the declining industries (such as shipbuilding and linen making) and agriculture than were created in the emerging enterprises (such as mechanical engineering and synthetic fibers) and services.\textsuperscript{595} The lack of employment opportunities—considering Northern Ireland’s relatively high birthrate (about 22 per 1,000 people between 1951

and 1961)—was offset, to a degree, by the mass emigration from the country (roughly 7 percent of its population left between 1951 and 1961).

Before Dublin launched reforms in the 1960s, Northern Ireland’s economy outpaced the economy of the Republic of Ireland, but historically it had performed more weakly than the economies of Western Europe, including mainland Britain, largely because of the region’s industrial structure, large-scale unemployment, high inflation, and resulting low levels of income. Because Northern Ireland lacked natural resources and proximity to international markets and because its economy was export oriented and, therefore, was vulnerable to external shocks, the province’s dependence on Great Britain—coupled with the shifts in the world economy—amplified its secular economic decline in the two decades following World War II.

To keep Northern Ireland’s economic credentials in perspective, it is imperative to note that, on a macroeconomic level, the structural conditions at the start of the Troubles (1969) are not directly comparable to those at the onset of the conflicts in Iraq (2003) or the Palestinian territories (1987). Most important, unlike Iraq, Northern Ireland experienced neither a demise of its economy and institutions when the Troubles erupted, nor political or security vacuums, when Westminster suspended the local government. And in contrast to Gaza and the West Bank—internationally unrecognized political entities—the issue of statehood revolved around societal divisions within Northern Ireland over its separation from the United Kingdom and reunification with the Republic of Ireland, rather than its recognition as an independent political entity. (According to a 1978 poll, only 3 percent of Catholics and 3 percent of Protestants living in Northern Ireland favored an

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independent state without links to either Great Britain or the Republic of Ireland as a “workable and acceptable” solution to the conflict.\textsuperscript{599} Support for an independent Northern Ireland declined further between 1989 and 1994, amounting to 1 percent in each year.\textsuperscript{600} Moreover, unlike Iraq and the Palestinian territories, Northern Ireland maintained a democratic form of governance throughout the Troubles, even though particular state policies, discussed below, diverged from democratic practices.

On a microeconomic level, however, structural conditions in Northern Ireland did resemble those in developing countries and conflict zones, such as Iraq and the Palestinian territories. Although the living standards for the employed segment of the population improved in the aftermath of World War II (wages rose considerably in the 1950s and 1960s\textsuperscript{601}), the dysfunctions that had deformed Northern Ireland’s socioeconomic physique—economic inequality and social discrimination—persisted until the 1990s, creating vast areas where destitution was the norm. Macroeconomic statistics do not capture the localized poverty, income disparity, and skewed economic development in the province that are discussed in the next section. Instead, they created a simulacrum of an economically developed society in which the Troubles erupted.

There are no systematically collected socioeconomic data on Northern Ireland as a separate province, because the government of Great Britain and institutions like the World Bank and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) compile aggregate statistics for the United Kingdom. However, the extant disaggregated data, which are uneven in availability, depict a relatively healthy economy in Northern Ireland with competitive macroeconomic

indicators at the onset of the conflict. Some of these indicators even improved during the Troubles. For example, the average annual growth of Northern Ireland’s real gross domestic product (GDP) amounted to about 3 percent between 1971 and 1996, whereas per capita it grew from £2,279 in 1960 to £3,375 in 1973 (at 1985 purchasing power parity, or PPP). Additionally, Westminster’s subvention (which provided economic insulation to the province and between 1960 and 1998 averaged 25 percent of Northern Ireland’s GDP) prevented Northern Ireland’s economy from collapsing during the global recession precipitated by the oil shocks of 1973 and 1979. The United Kingdom, however, was unable to sustain consistent levels of subsidies to the region in the 1980s because its own economy declined sharply. The province’s unemployment rate stood at 5 percent in 1973 but had reached 13 percent by 1981. Northern Ireland performed well in terms of quality-of-life indicators such as literacy, school enrollment, health, and infant mortality. In 1970, for example, 74 percent of the male population was enrolled in secondary schools, and throughout the conflict Northern Ireland maintained one of the highest levels of educational attainment in the United Kingdom.

However, the precipitous deterioration of Northern Ireland’s security in the wake of the 1968 civil rights demonstrations, which sought to rectify the disadvantaged position of Northern Catholics, aggravated the innate vulnerabilities of the province’s economy. In August 1969, the

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British government launched Operation Banner, dispatching a few thousand troops from its military bases around the world to the riot-riven streets of Belfast to assist the police in restoring public order. By the end of 1972, more than 22,000 British troops had been deployed to the province, in addition to the 9,000-strong Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) that had replaced the Ulster Special Constabulary (USC, or the B Specials) and operated under the command of the British Army. In March 1972, Great Britain established direct rule over Northern Ireland by suspending the local parliament, Stormont, and dissolving it in July 1973. The deployment of British forces was accompanied by a number of reforms, such as the establishment of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in 1971 (based on legislation drafted by Stormont) to build, manage, and allocate public housing; introduction of the Fair Employment Legislation in 1976 to protect employees against discrimination; and reorganization of the police and security services between 1970 and 1977. Although some of the political and social reforms of the 1970s proved moderately effective in the long run, the reforms in the security sector were counterproductive and led to civil and human rights violations in the short run, such as the Northern Ireland Emergency Provisions Act 1973 and the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1974. Between January and May 1974, direct rule was briefly replaced by a Catholic and Protestant intercommunity power-sharing agreement that involved a devolution of powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly. By organizing the Ulster Workers’ Council Strike, however, the unionists opposed the creation of a consultative cross-border Council of Ireland to comprise, according to the 1974 Sunningdale Agreement, representatives from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The power-sharing arrangement fell apart, and direct rule by the British resumed.

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The armed conflict escalated from 1969 through 1982, claiming 2,417 lives.609 There were more than 43,000 shootings, bombings, and arson cases between 1969 and 1983.610 As a result of the Troubles, nearly 3,500 people were killed between 1969 and 1998.611 Ordinary civilians, people unaffiliated with either the security forces or militias, constituted more than 60 percent of all fatalities—2,262, between 1969 and 1996. Another 25,414 civilians were injured in the same period.612 Compared with other protracted intercommunal conflicts—for example, the Lebanese Civil War, in which 120,000 to 150,000 people were killed between 1975 and 1990—the number of fatalities in Northern Ireland might not appear high. However, considered as a ratio of the total population—1.5 to 1.7 million over the span of the Troubles—the death toll in Northern Ireland was significant.613 The three decades of violence also incurred adverse effects on the physical and emotional well-being of Northern Ireland’s society, with consequences ranging from injuries such as loss of limbs or permanent total disability to psychological problems such as chronic depression or alcohol and drug abuse. As one report specified, “the picture is one of depression, anxiety, ulcers and other stress-related disorders, alleviated by tablets and occasional admission to psychiatric care.”614

Overall, the violent conflict had a dual effect on Northern Ireland’s economy: it stunted tourism and compelled international companies to withdraw businesses and investments from the

609 The calculations were made using the Sutton Index of Deaths (http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/sutton/book/index.html). Also see Malcolm Sutton, Bear in Mind These Dead: Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland, 1969–93 (Belfast, UK: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1994).
611 The calculations were made using the Sutton Index of Deaths (http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/sutton/book/index.html). Also see Malcolm Sutton, Bear in Mind These Dead: Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland, 1969–93 (Belfast, UK: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1994).
province, significantly reducing production and employment in the industrial sector; simultaneously, it created employment opportunities in Northern Ireland’s growing service sector, especially in the police, security, and prison services. Local security forces expanded under the British policy of Ulsterization in the mid-1970s. The Catholics, as a rule, did not join the state’s security apparatus to protest its legitimacy and to avoid reprisal from the nationalist militias. In 1969, less than 11 percent of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) members were Catholic—significantly lower than the 33 percent quota allotted to Catholics to match their proportion in Northern Ireland.615 Although Northern Ireland’s shift from an industrial to service-oriented economy was an evolutionary rather than a conflict-driven process, the armed struggle made the transition costlier. In particular, the violence led to a net loss of 24,000 jobs between 1970 and 1980.616 In 1982 alone, the additional costs of security arising from violence amounted to £250 million (not including the extra expenses associated with mainlining the British Army in the North), while the total economic cost of the conflict in the same year consumed £1,054 million, or 23 percent of the province’s GDP (at factor cost).617 By 1974, the daily average number of inmates had exceeded 2,650, up from 600 in 1968 and 1969.618 In 1983, Northern Ireland’s prison population constituted the highest in Western Europe, at 164 prisoners per 100,000 people.619 In 1985, the province’s unemployment rate rose to 20 percent of its labor force,620 and government

spending was channeled into the public sector and security, at the expense of the provision of social services to the population and investment in productive enterprises.\textsuperscript{621} Annually, the Troubles incurred an estimated £365 per capita (in 1989 prices) in the North, not counting the unrealized potential for economic growth and foreign investment.\textsuperscript{622} By 1990, the conflict had been costing the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom £410 million each year.\textsuperscript{623}

With fits, starts, and reverses, Northern Ireland’s security and economy began to improve in the mid-1980s. Against the backdrop of global economy recovering from the recession, the post-Stormont reforms undertaken by the British government in the preceding decade started to yield effects. A few key indicators corroborate this trend. To begin with, violence decreased in comparison with the 1970s (1972, the bloodiest year of the Troubles, produced 480 fatalities\textsuperscript{624}). Compared with the 1969–82 period, 55 percent fewer people were killed in the 16 years of the conflict that followed—1,072, including nationalist and loyalist militants, security forces, and civilians.\textsuperscript{625} The annual death toll exceeded 100 people only in 1981, 1982, and 1988. Shooting incidents declined from a peak of 10,631 in 1972 to 1,142 in 1981, and to a few hundreds per year since 1982.\textsuperscript{626}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{624} The calculations were made using the Sutton Index of Deaths (http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/sutton/book/index.html). Also see Malcolm Sutton, \textit{Bear in Mind These Dead: Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland, 1969–93} (Belfast, UK: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1994).
\item \textsuperscript{625} The calculations were made using the Sutton Index of Deaths (http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/sutton/book/index.html). Also see Malcolm Sutton, \textit{Bear in Mind These Dead: Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland, 1969–93} (Belfast, UK: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1994).
\end{itemize}
GDP per capita grew to £3,798 in 1985 (at 1985 PPP). Significantly, personal disposable income per capita gradually converged with UK levels, reaching £3,538 in 1985 (or 84 percent of the UK’s £4,211).\textsuperscript{627} In evaluating this upturn, however, it is important to keep in mind that the United Kingdom had the slowest growth record in Europe in the indicated period. Other sources, using 1990 prices, indicate GDP per capita growth from £4,695 (or 79 percent of UK levels) in 1971 to £5,279 (or 80 percent of UK levels) in the 1980s, to £7,415 (or 78 percent of UK levels) in the early 1990s, and a drop to £6,900 (or 81 percent of UK levels) in 1995.\textsuperscript{628} Similarly, between 1996 and 1998 GDP per capita amounted to roughly 80 percent of UK levels.\textsuperscript{629} Although the numbers vary slightly across the sources, they show comparable upward trends. Inflation (measured by the consumer price index, or CPI) in the United Kingdom and its regions decreased from an average of 24 percent in 1975 to just above 4 percent in most years between 1982 and 1991,\textsuperscript{630} and to below 3 percent in every year between 1992 and 1998.\textsuperscript{631}

Unemployment began to decrease in the 1990s relative to the previous decades, but remained high—at 14 percent of the labor force in 1982, 17 percent in 1986, 13 percent in 1990 and 1994,\textsuperscript{632} and 7 percent in 1998.\textsuperscript{633} (These statistics were provided by different organizations—based on census versus sample data—and thus display variation; but they conform in depicting a

\textsuperscript{631} World Bank, World Development Indicators databank (http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators); accessed 10 March 2015.
distinct downward trend in unemployment between 1990 and 1998.\textsuperscript{634} Emigration, too, abated in the 1990s. In the post–World War II period, emigration from Northern Ireland, especially of educated and professional people, reached its highest level in the 1970s and 1980s. An estimated 13,700 people migrated out of the province in the years 1973–74. Between 1971 and 1981, on average, 8,000 citizens, including 2,000 to 3,000 young people, emigrated from Northern Ireland every year.\textsuperscript{635} In the same period, Northern Ireland’s annual population growth decreased by 0.6 percent—from 0.8 percent between 1961 and 1971 to 0.2 percent from 1971 to 1981.\textsuperscript{636} The exodus slowed down in the late 1980s and early 1990s. An estimated 4,800 people migrated out of the province in the period 1989–90. Between 1990 and 2000, the outflow of migrants was counterbalanced by a commensurate inflow; roughly 20,000 moved both in and out of Northern Ireland each year.\textsuperscript{637}

Although the Troubles exacerbated the already-dire housing situation in Northern Ireland (for example, in 1972 alone, “14,000 homes were damaged in 284 bomb explosions”\textsuperscript{638}), the dwelling stock had increased and housing standards had improved by the end of the 1970s. According to the House Condition Surveys, the progress continued during the next three decades.\textsuperscript{639} In the years 1978–79, the province’s public-sector housing expenditures amounted to


\textsuperscript{639} Joe Frey et al., “House Condition Survey 2009” (Belfast, UK: Northern Ireland Housing Executive, May 2011), p. 11. Also see Charles Edward Bainbridge Brett, \textit{Housing a Divided Community} (Dublin, Ireland: Institute of Public Administration with Institute of Irish Studies, Queen’s University of Belfast, 1986).
slightly more than 4 percent of the United Kingdom’s total; in 1987–88, it reached almost 10 percent; and in 1986–87, Northern Ireland’s per capita public expenditures on housing exceeded that of England and Wales by nearly three times.\footnote{Frank Gaffikin and Mike Morrissey, \textit{Northern Ireland: The Thatcher Years} (London, UK: Zed Books, 1990), p. 158.} In the thirty years of its existence, between 1971 and 2001, the Housing Executive “built more than 80,000 new homes, housed more than 500,000 people, improved 350,000 homes in the private sector, and sold over 90,000 homes to sitting tenants.”\footnote{Kim Hewitt, “Bombed: But They Kept a Roof over Ulster,” \textit{Belfast News Letter}, 28 August 2001.}

Public opinion polls gradually reflected the positive changes in the economy and security. Surveys demonstrate a shift in attitudes toward contentious issues such as universal suffrage in local council elections, the allocation of public housing, equal opportunity in the job market, and the perceived partiality of the security forces—all of which were at the center of the Northern Ireland conflict when it broke out in the late 1960s. In 1969, the Caledon squatting incident precipitated a series of protests against the perceived unfair dwelling allotment and thus led to the reform of public housing policy. As a result of the reform, in a survey conducted in 1986, majorities of both Catholics and Protestants (84 and 86 percent, respectively) confirmed that their applications to rent from the Housing Executive were treated “fairly.”\footnote{David J. Smith, \textit{Equality and Inequality in Northern Ireland: Perceptions and Views} (London, UK: Policy Studies Institute, 1987), table 97, n. p.} Another survey shows that life satisfaction levels in Northern Ireland began to increase from the mid-1980s through the mid-1990s.\footnote{Jose Luis Iparraguirre D’Elia, “The Quality of Life in Northern Ireland” (Belfast, UK: Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland, 2005), pp. 13–14.}

The improvement of Catholics’ socioeconomic standing can also be gauged indirectly from the responses of Northern Ireland’s Protestants to survey questions pertaining to equality, rights, and relations with the Catholic community. Many Protestants expressed feelings of
marginalization as a result of the socioeconomic reforms that occurred in the 1980s: “attempts to generate a political culture based on equality and fair treatment have been interpreted by the Protestant community as undermining their interests.”

This is evident in comparing Catholics’ and Protestants’ perceptions of equality and inequality in the labor market. In 1986, only 26 percent of the polled Catholics, versus 68 percent of their Protestant counterparts, believed that Northern Ireland’s Catholics and Protestants had the “same chance” of getting a job. In subsequent surveys, the percentage of Catholics who believed that religious discrimination in employment mitigated increased, while the number of Protestants declined. In 1989, 30 percent of Catholic respondents expressed their belief that “the chances of Protestants and Catholics getting a job” were “the same.” In 1994, this number rose to 42 percent. When asked the same question, 60 percent of Protestant respondents in 1989 expressed their belief that the chances were “the same.” In 1994, the number fell further, to 57 percent.

Perceptions of security also improved. In a survey conducted in 1986, 40 percent of Catholic respondents and 45 percent of Protestants affirmed that the “level of political violence” had “increased” during the past five years. But at the time of the survey, 47 percent of all respondents (49 percent of Catholics and 46 percent of Protestants) stated that they felt “completely safe” walking in their neighborhood “after dark,” in addition to 29 percent (26 percent of Catholics and 31 percent of Protestants) who felt “fairly safe” walking in their neighborhood “after dark.” Only 23 percent of all respondents (24 percent of Catholics and 22 percent of

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Protestants) said that they felt “a bit unsafe” or “very unsafe” walking in their neighborhood “after dark.”

As discussed in chapter 2, perceptions of safety typically lag behind the factual deterioration or improvement in security. For example, the attitudes expressed by Catholics and Protestants in the 1986 poll only roughly correspond to the changes on the ground: deterioration of security conditions between 1969 and 1982, and their steady improvement thereafter. The complexity of protracted conflicts warrants taking into account potential intervening variables that might explain lags in perceptions. For example, although the respondents in the 1986 poll had lived in their neighborhood for at least five years, some might have felt safer because they relocated to a secure area in the 1970s as a result of the republican and loyalist violence that led to the largest single displacement of civilians in Western Europe in peacetime, including that of 60,000 people in Belfast alone. Thus, the presence of security forces or sectarian militias in a particular neighborhood; the periods of military cease-fires, political negotiations, and elections; as well as transformative events such as hunger strikes or curfews might have also influenced people’s perceptions of safety. In the early 1990s, however, public perceptions of security caught up with the reality on the ground. This can be discerned from data on people’s residential preferences. In 1989, 70 percent of all respondents (75 percent of Catholics and 67 percent of Protestants) preferred to live in a “mixed-religion neighborhood”; and in 1996, 82 percent of all respondents (85 percent of Catholics and 80 percent of Protestants) chose the same option. Even though Northern Ireland’s economy and security began to improve in the mid-1980s, it is imperative to

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examine how their deterioration in the preceding years affected ordinary civilians’ perceptions, political preferences, and support for the VSMs.

Social Ramifications of the Deteriorating Economy and Security

The Troubles of the years 1969–98 erupted in a society that had been scarred by deeply rooted patterns of segregation, economic disparity, and social discrimination. Sectarian and ethnic boundaries consolidated in the areas affected by the conflict, as the “peace lines” and barricades emerged in Belfast to separate the Catholic Falls from the Protestant Shankill, and the city began to resemble Berlin during the period of the Wall, 1961–89. Indeed, the ethnosectarian fights of the 1970s and 1980s transformed Belfast into one of the most segregated cities in Europe. By 1991, in 62 of its 117 wards, more than 90 percent of residents belonged to one religious denomination.651 And Belfast was not the only divided city. As a resident of Derry652 observed, “we’ve all been stuck in our ghettos for so long that we don’t quite know what to do without them. When the barriers are up, we all know where we are, and who we are. But when they come down, we’re a bit lost in the new landscape.”653

Traditionally, the Protestant (and predominantly English/British) middle class controlled access to wealth and high-skilled and public-sector jobs in Northern Ireland. Catholic (and predominantly Irish/Gael) workers were relegated to unskilled employment and excluded from positions of influence.654 This was mainly because of the state’s discriminatory policies, but also

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652 Derry, Northern Ireland’s second-largest city after Belfast, is formally named Londonderry, but its Catholic residents prefer Derry.
because Catholics refused to make the pledge of allegiance to the Crown that was required of civil servants. Before universal adult suffrage was introduced in 1969, voting rights in the province were determined by the ownership of property ("no house, no vote"\textsuperscript{655}). This differential both disenfranchised a substantial segment of the Catholic population and encouraged the authorities to gerrymander electoral wards when allocating public housing. Notably, these asymmetric relations can be traced to the conquest of Ireland by William of Orange—a Dutch Protestant king of England, Scotland, and Ireland—whose military victory over the Catholic king James II in the Battle of the Boyne in July 1690 finalized Ireland’s subjugation in the 1691 Treaty of Limerick. The victory secured both the ascendance of the Protestant colony known as the Plantation and the enforcement of the Penal Code designed to restrict Irish Catholics’ political and economic powers (and, to a degree, those of Presbyterians) by denying them land ownership and access to education as well as political, administrative, and judicial offices. Ireland’s reconquest set in motion cycles of political insurrections and agrarian disturbances by peasants and coercive responses by ruling elites (on rare occasions, the government combined forceful and conciliatory tactics in the so-called kicks-and-kindness approach).

Some scholars have argued that Catholic grievances have been overstated.\textsuperscript{656} Others have found that religion, working through the mechanisms of discrimination and unequal opportunity, had caused disparity in unemployment between the Catholic and Protestant communities from 1971 through 1985,\textsuperscript{657} and that inequality is even “embedded in the landscape, place names, public

\textsuperscript{655} Hugo Young, “The ‘Irish Question’ Still Confounds Britain,” \textit{Sun}, 1 December 1968.


buildings and official culture.”

Despite the seeming cacophony of arguments about the phenomenon’s scope and intensity, a resounding chorus of scholars agrees on two accounts. First, discrimination against Northern Ireland’s Catholic community existed until the 1990s; and second, although often reciprocal, discrimination against the Catholic population in electoral politics, housing, education, and employment was both extensive and institutionalized. These conclusions are corroborated by evidence uncovered in fact-finding missions (for example, the Cameron Commission Report) and by socioeconomic data disaggregated by religion.

As discussed above, the unemployment rate in Northern Ireland had historically been high; for example, 20 and 27 percent of the labor force was unemployed in, respectively, the 1920s and 1930s. But unemployment had consistently been greater among Northern Ireland’s Catholics, with considerably higher incidence in the province’s western (Catholic-dominated) parts than on its eastern (Protestant-dominated) coastline. In 1971, the unemployment rate for Catholic men was above 17 percent, versus just under 7 percent for Protestant men, and the trend of substantially higher unemployment among the Catholic male labor force continued between 1971 and 1999; for example, the rate was 30 versus 12 percent in 1981 and 28 versus 13 percent in 1991. The overall rise in unemployment in the mid-1970s did not level out the religious differential. Rampant, long-term unemployment among Catholics persisted, and “could not be accounted for by variations in

education, skill level (as measured by social class), geographical mobility, or general motivation.”

A common complaint among Catholics was expressed by a man from Derry: “I haven’t had an hour’s work out of this place for five years. If there’s any job going, it’ll go to a Protestant.” The Protestants saw the same problem in light of a poverty or welfare trap: “There’s Catholics makin’ so much on the brew they don’t want to work. All they want is to breed their kids and insult the Queen. But they’ll take the Queen’s money for their child allowances, so they will, and that’s God’s truth!”

Contrary to stereotypes—for example, that unemployed people in Northern Ireland, and Catholics in particular, are “scroungers” who prefer receiving welfare benefits to performing low-paying jobs—studies have found that most unemployed people, Catholics and Protestants alike, experience social isolation and anxiety as a result of being unemployed, and they view joblessness as a “stigma” and “failure” that “had reduced them in the eyes of others.”

In the 1950s and 1960s, domestic and foreign investments streamed into the Protestant-dominated areas east of the River Bann and into east Belfast, Northern Ireland’s industrial heartland. (One example of contention was the controversy over the building of Ulster University in Coleraine rather than Derry.) Although it is unclear whether the direction of investment and development was steered by politicians or driven by the market forces, the concentration of funds in particular locales widened economic disparity between the two communities and deepened the perceptions of injustice. For example, by 1971 the male unemployment rate in the predominantly

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Catholic Falls area of Belfast had reached 24 percent, versus 12 percent for the entire city.\textsuperscript{666} Said one Catholic: “You know why they won’t give us development grants. They want to force us to emigrate and get us off the election rolls.”\textsuperscript{667}

The reforms introduced in the 1970s to address discrimination in employment, housing, and electoral system did not immediately reduce inequality and poverty rooted in Northern Ireland. “The social reforms here are paper reforms. People want jobs and houses and peace and quiet. And they are not getting it, and it’s unlikely they ever will,” a Catholic man said in frustration.\textsuperscript{668} In a survey conducted in 1983 and 1984, residents of Derry expressed a similar distrust: 58 percent of unemployed people interviewed in the city’s predominantly Catholic area and 72 percent in its mainly Protestant part blamed “Mrs. Thatcher / government” for joblessness.\textsuperscript{669} Many Catholic families across Northern Ireland faced a second or third generation of male unemployment, but those who were employed often endured discrimination in pay and promotion in the workplace. A study based on 1968 data found that although Catholics and Protestants were not “appreciably different in their educational characteristics,” income and occupational disparities between them were significant: “Expressed in US currency, the average annual income of Protestants is about $573 larger than that of Catholics. Recognizing that the mean income of the Catholic is only $2,249, the Protestant-Catholic income difference represents approximately one-fifth of the Catholic’s annual income. . . . Protestants, for example, achieve a direct return of $254 in annual income for each additional year of schooling, compared to $159 for Catholics. . . . On the average, a 10-point increment in occupational status is worth $155 to Catholics but almost twice that amount

($229) to Protestants.”¹⁶⁷⁰ A 1977–78 survey determined that in Belfast, among Catholic and Protestant boys with similar education attainment, only 37 percent of Catholics had found jobs within eight months of finishing school, whereas 61 percent of Protestants had done so.¹⁶⁷¹

External factors aggravated the socioeconomic disparity prevalent in Northern Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s. By 1975, inflation (measured by the CPI) had soared to 24 percent across the United Kingdom and remained high in all its regions through the early 1980s, contributing to the increasing levels of poverty.¹⁶⁷² In the mid-1980s, two-fifths of households in Northern Ireland lived in poverty due to unemployment and low wages.¹⁶⁷³ In the province, the cost of essential consumer goods, such as food and fuel, surpassed the cost of similar basic necessities across the United Kingdom by £400–£595 a year, thus absorbing a significant proportion of low-income families’ earnings. In 1983, nearly 25 percent of all children in Northern Ireland lived in households that subsisted on supplementary benefits, compared with 13 percent of all children in Great Britain.¹⁶⁷⁴ According to a 1983–84 survey, 16 percent of Catholics but only 6 percent of Protestants had at least one room that was substandard.¹⁶⁷⁵ The high unemployment rate, coupled with the highly concentrated low-paid labor force, accounted for Northern Ireland’s ranking in 1986 as the second-poorest region in the European Economic Community (EEC), after Calabria in Southern Italy.¹⁶⁷⁶

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Although islands of deprivation also existed in the Protestant areas, the poorest Protestant wards typically fared better than the poorest Catholic areas. For example, the 1981 male unemployment rate in one of Belfast’s poorest Protestant districts, Shankill, was 28 percent. Conversely, the rate was 56 percent in Catholic-dominated Whiterock.\textsuperscript{677} The rate was also higher for Catholics in Catholic-dominated wards than for those in mixed wards.\textsuperscript{678} Catholics’ inadequate socioeconomic conditions led to their mass departure from Northern Ireland. Notably, people from the minority Catholic community made up more than 60 percent of emigrants in the 1960s and 1980s.\textsuperscript{679} Even though the grievances of the Catholic and Protestant working classes overlapped—both experienced the “equality of misery”—the two communities, divided by sectarian feuds, failed to unite to redress the socioeconomic inequality that afflicted all the underprivileged in Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{680}

People’s perceptions appear to have aligned with the facts discussed. In a 1967 survey, 74 percent of Catholic respondents considered “discrimination as a fact.” At the same time, however, 75 percent of Protestants did not believe that Catholics were “treated unfairly in Northern Ireland.”\textsuperscript{681} A 1969 poll yielded similar responses: 76 percent of Catholics asserted that discrimination existed, and 77 percent of Protestants denied that it did. Furthermore, whereas 77 percent of Catholics felt that “something can and should be done to change things,” the majority of Protestants believed that conversations about discrimination were “the work of trouble-makers

in the Catholic community.” Economic conditions, along with discrimination, appear to have contributed to the mobilization of the civil rights movement. In a 1986 poll, respondents were given eight options and asked to identify causes that had precipitated the Troubles. Considerable numbers—21 percent of Northern Ireland’s Protestant respondents, and 27 percent of its Catholics—specified “discrimination, rights” as the second main cause after “political, constitutional” issues. (In that survey, a majority did not necessarily exceed 50 percent because responses were distributed across eight issues.) Notably, the Protestant population regarded the rallies against discrimination as a source of the conflict, whereas the Catholics saw the discrimination itself as a cause. Moreover, because some people associated discrimination with the denial of voting rights, they might have felt that the practice ceased after the introduction of the one-person, one-vote policy in 1969. In the same survey, substantial minorities of Protestants (11 percent) and Catholics (15 percent) emphasized the “social, economic” causes of the Troubles, and the majority of the Catholics (31 percent, to 19 percent of Protestants) chose “unemployment” as their “biggest problem” and also identified “equal opportunities for Protestants and Catholics” as the most desired change (33 percent versus 8 percent).

Popular perceptions of relations between Northern Ireland’s Catholics and Protestants coincided with first the upsurge and then the decline in the Troubles’ intensity. In 1968, 65 percent of Catholics and 56 percent of Protestants stated that they believed that intercommunal relations were “better” than “five years ago,” and only 4 percent and 7 percent, respectively, felt that

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relations between the two communities had grown “worse” in the same period. By 1986, negative perceptions had increased considerably; 46 percent of Catholics and 47 percent of Protestants found that relations had deteriorated during the previous five years. The escalation of violence throughout the 1970s, the hunger strikes of the early 1980s, the subsequent rise of Sinn Fein, and the Anglo-Irish agreement of 1985 appear to have exacerbated the drastic deterioration in intercommunal relations. Only in the late 1980s did pessimism begin to decline. In 1989, 31 percent of Catholics and 26 percent of Protestants affirmed that intercommunal relations had grown “worse” since “five years ago.” In the 1990s, the numbers dropped further. In 1991, only 16 percent of Catholics and 15 percent of Protestants believed that relations had deteriorated during the previous five years. In 1996, 10 percent and 11 percent, respectively, thought that relations had grown “worse” since 1991. Consistent with the trend of declining pessimism, in seven biennial surveys conducted from 1989 to 1998, increasing numbers of both Catholics and Protestants believed that relations had become “better” compared to “five years ago.”

The data demonstrate the social impact of the inadequate security and economic conditions on both the population and communal relations between Catholics and Protestants. No definitive evidence, however, corroborates the proposition that in Northern Ireland, unemployed or poor

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people were more prone to participating in or supporting political violence than the employed population or the middle class. Some research, using granular data such as unemployment rates disaggregated by religion, suggests that labor market discrimination contributed to the conflict.\textsuperscript{691} Other studies have found no correlation between unemployment and political violence in the province.\textsuperscript{692} The existing statistics and evidence indicate that unemployment or poverty alone did not cause political violence in Northern Ireland. For example, the majority of offenders (51 percent of Catholics and 60 percent of Protestants) who appeared in the Diplock Courts in 1975 were employed.\textsuperscript{693} One former PIRA member recalled: “I was able to keep my civilian job when I became a part-time [PIRA] volunteer. Many other volunteers had jobs. People were engaged in parallel activities. People were going to school, to work. And nobody noticed how material was being moved from one place to another in support of the IRA campaign. There was logistical effort, deliveries occurred. In the end, a bomb would go off here, and another there. Under the guise of normal daily activities, the IRA campaign was going on.”\textsuperscript{694}

In Northern Ireland, socioeconomic disadvantages encouraged the Catholic minority to mobilize for peaceful demonstrations in 1968, under the auspices of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), founded in 1967, and People’s Democracy (PD), formed in 1968. A Catholic woman explained her decision to join the civil rights movement:

You had a lot of job discrimination and that sort of thing. You know, you had advertisements in the paper that would have stated “Protestants only need apply.” . . . As you got older and started to


\textsuperscript{693}“Who Are the Terrorists?” (no author), \textit{Fortnight}, 7 May 1976.

\textsuperscript{694}Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 61), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 8 December 2014.
work, you found out in most jobs you had all Protestant supervisors. And that they were put there, they were appointed to that job because they were Protestant. Not that they were any better qualified than a Catholic was, or had any more experience at this job or that job, just because of their religion. . . . So it was around . . . ’66, ’67, that my interest was first aroused into discrimination in jobs and housing.  

Contrasting with the republicans’ traditional rallying cry to reestablish a united federal Ireland (to be composed of the original four provinces: Connaught, Leinster, Munster, and Ulster), the demonstrations from 1968 to 1970 in Derry and Belfast centered on social justice, civil liberties, constitutional rights, equal opportunity, and abolition of the 1922 Emergency Powers Act and 1922 Civil Authorities Special Powers Act. Hence, they attracted a diverse group of participants, including some Protestants. Distrust of the judicial system, coupled with “the absence of any formal guarantees in the British and Northern Irish constitution of basic civil rights and the consequent lack of any tradition of civil rights litigation,” drove civil rights leaders to take direct action, modeled after African Americans’ civil rights protests and the Congress movement in India.  

Addressing their followers, these leaders cautioned: “If you think you’re marching for a united Ireland, you must march somewhere else.” The song of the day was not “A Nation Once Again” but “We Shall Overcome,” the anthem of the US civil rights movement. Because the marchers demanded a change in the status quo, and thus cast doubt on the legitimacy of Northern Ireland’s government, they aroused Protestant opposition. These civil rights demonstrations were

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697 Quoted in “N. Irish Plan Campaign of Disobedience” (no author), *Los Angeles Times*, 5 May 1969.
countered by raucous Protestant rallies, many led by the Reverend Ian Paisley, a bombastic Protestant minister described as “the most effective mob orator in Britain” and a “brilliantly evocative demagogue” dedicated to “keeping the pope out of Ulster.” His rhetoric “could sway a mob with a few well-chosen words.”

With the exception of episodic clashes between the protesters and the RUC that occurred in 1968 (worst of all, on 5 October in Derry), the government’s and security forces’ initial reaction was inaction, which prompted many to question the state authorities’ readiness to implement socioeconomic reforms and provide protection. “We don’t trust the local government (run by a Protestant majority), the government in London, or the British troops,” a Catholic man complained. But after the RUC had failed to prevent atrocities committed by the loyalist gunmen—for example, burning Catholic houses on Belfast’s Bombay Street in August 1969 and also attacks against civil rights protesters in Dungannon in August, November, and December 1968; in Armagh in November 1968; and in Derry in January 1969—Catholics interpreted the security forces’ insouciance and inertia as collusion with the loyalist militias. A Catholic man recalled the street fight that broke out in one of Belfast’s neighborhoods: “It was awful. The police just stood there and watched while the Protestants shot at us and went up and down the street smashing windows and calling us Pope-heads. We were defenseless.” The evidence that emerged in later years indeed revealed systemic collusion. For example, some RUC officers and UDR members were part of a loyalist death squad, the Glenanne Gang, which operated in the

703 Formed in 1922, the RUC was replaced by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in 2001.
“murder triangle,” an area straddling Armagh and Tyrone counties, where 120 civilians, mostly politically uninvolved Catholics, were murdered between 1972 and 1977.\textsuperscript{706}

As the demonstrations grew in frequency and intensity, the 8,400-strong Ulster Special Constabulary, also known as the B Specials (auxiliary armed police connected to the Protestant Orange Order) were called out to control the riots. The USC had arisen in reaction to the IRA’s campaign during the War of Independence. In the 1920s, it was made up of about 3,500 class A constables, 16,000 class B constables, and 1,000 class C constables, many of whom had dual membership in the loyalist Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) militia, which in turn mobilized in 1912 to fight against Irish Home Rule.\textsuperscript{707} The categories A and C were disbanded shortly after they had been formed. Catholics viewed the USC as a sectarian force, made up of “trigger-happy B-men,”\textsuperscript{708} resembling “a pack of wolves on the prowl.”\textsuperscript{709} The security forces approached the civil rights agitation as another Irish insurrection stirred by the militant Republicans and responded with overwhelming force, as was evident on 4 January 1969, when the RUC targeted a Belfast-to-Derry civil rights march and allowed loyalist militants to ambush the protesters as they were passing through Burntollet. Many marchers sustained severe injuries. Austin Currie, a nationalist member of the Stormont parliament at the time and an opponent of the IRA, noted that “the Ulster police claim that the demonstrations are all an I.R.A. plot. . . . That’s bloody nonsense—the Irish Republican Army has nothing to do with it. . . . I was obviously influenced by Martin Luther King and also by Gandhi. Of course, we have a minority that favors violence, but they can be


controlled.”\textsuperscript{710} Although the IRA did not start or manipulate these demonstrations, the civil rights project was influenced by the republican intellectuals of the Wolfe Tone Societies.\textsuperscript{711} With regard to the IRA’s involvement, the Cameron Commission determined the following:

We have investigated this matter with particular care in view of the extent to which it is surmised that the IRA had become a prominent or even dominant factor in shaping or directing policy of the Civil Rights Association. There is ample evidence that in most of the larger demonstrations promoted by the Civil Rights Association identified members of the IRA have taken part as marchers or stewards. In point of fact, it has been noticeable that as stewards they were efficient and exercised a high degree of discipline on marchers or demonstrators. There is no evidence—and had there been we have no doubt that the vigilance of the RUC would have observed and prevented it—that such members themselves either incited to riot or took part themselves in acts of violence.\textsuperscript{712}

Comparing police action during riots in Chicago and Belfast, the English parliamentarian Russell Kerr commented on the behavior of the American and British security forces: “They both play in the same league, and it’s not a very nice league.”\textsuperscript{713} Bernadette Devlin, then a 21-year-old civil rights leader and the youngest female member of the UK parliament, condemned the police for using “sheer animal brutality” against the protesters and described the escalating street fighting

\textsuperscript{713} Quoted in “North Ireland Police Charge Crowd of 800, Injure 30” (no author), \textit{Sun}, 7 October 1968.
as “the start of civil war in Northern Ireland.” Commenting on the situation, a former member of the Derry City Council said: “It’s hard to believe, but this is tribal conflict now, and as far as the Catholics are concerned, the police are just part of the other tribe. There’s no credible authority left.”

The reciprocal, escalatory spiral of violence between the mostly Catholic protesters, on the one hand, and the police and loyalist militias, on the other hand—unraveling against the backdrop of the Battle for Saint Matthew’s in June 1970 and the Falls Road curfew superimposed by the British Army in July of the same year—convinced many Catholics that the government was committed to repression rather than reform and created the need for defenders of the Catholic community. The IRA, which had laid down its arms in the wake of the abortive border campaign (1956–62) and only belatedly dispatched units to the North, failed to fill the security vacuum. A Catholic man, whose neighborhood had been raided by the loyalist militias, said this about the IRA: “I wish they had been here. We needed their guns. But they let us down, and I don’t imagine they’ll be any better when the troops leave and the Protestants come back at us like they say they will.” The quicksand of deteriorating security made many “people ‘feel good’ to have an IRA man living in the neighborhood.”

In the next section, I discuss why the British forces, deployed to prevent the escalation of hostilities between the Catholic and the Protestant communities, produced the opposite effect and became a rhetorical target that enabled VSM leaders to mobilize civilians for VCA.

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714 Quoted in “N. Irish Seek British Help” (no author), Chicago Tribune, 21 April 1969.
A Shared Discursive Opportunity: The British Occupation and Collective Emotions

The deployment of British troops in Northern Ireland during the Troubles lacked the legal clarity of being a military occupation, as discussed in chapter 1. Great Britain had continuously maintained military forces in Ireland since England’s conquest of the island in 1691. The British Army withdrew from the Republic of Ireland following the partition but retained troops in the North. In 1969, the 14,500-strong British contingent in Northern Ireland included 3,000 army soldiers, 8,500 B Specials, and 3,000 RUC men.\(^{718}\) By the years 1972–73, the number of the British forces in the province had peaked, at 31,000, of whom 9,000 were UDR men.\(^{719}\) Since 1921, Northern Ireland has been a self-governing, internationally recognized province of the United Kingdom. People with English ancestry and a Protestant background, who have constituted a majority in the Northeast but a minority in the Southwest, have favored a formal union with Great Britain. For many of them, home rule has been equivalent to “Rome rule.”\(^{720}\) (Notably, the Presbyterians of Northern Ireland are not as supportive of loyalty to the Crown as are the Anglican Protestants.) As a result, both the British government and the international community approached the conflict in Northern Ireland as predominantly an internal dispute. Accordingly, when the British Army was deployed to the streets of Northern Ireland in the summer of 1969, its mission was to act as a peacekeeping rather than fighting force. At the time, many Catholics welcomed the British forces “as a liberating army that would protect them against Protestant mobs and bring the Unionist Government to heel.”\(^{721}\) “We have an impartial force now in the area,” said a Catholic


man from Derry as he greeted the British soldiers arriving in Bogside, a peculiar enclave of Derry where the Catholic majority felt encircled by Protestants, while the ruling Protestant elite feared being outnumbered by the Catholics.722

The Catholic population’s amicable attitudes toward the British Army proved ephemeral, and quickly mutated into anger. Several mechanisms—most notably, state repression, the brutality and misconduct of the military and security forces, the partiality of the legal system, and people’s intimate encounter with violence—explain the precipitous deterioration of relations between the British Army and Northern Ireland’s Catholic, nationalist populace. Like most conventionally arrayed militaries, the post–World War II British Army was ill suited to interact with the civilian population and to perform law enforcement tasks such as riot controls or street patrols. Nor was it sensitive to its role and actions in Northern Ireland’s divided society. Despite its vast experience with counterinsurgency warfare and imperial policing—from India (1857–58), Palestine (1945–48), and Malaya (1948–60) to Kenya (1952–56), Cyprus (1954–59), and Aden (1963–67)—the conventional British Army was not trained to pacify a domestic urban insurgency that fed off long-standing ethnoreligious and nationalistic chasms. The military’s counterinsurgency doctrine was designed to combat the enemy in the overseas colonies, not British citizens in a relatively democratic society. A British soldier who fought insurgencies in Aden and Malaya spoke about the complexity of the Northern Ireland campaign: “It’s a hell of a difficult job for the professional soldier. You are among your own people, those of your own color and creed. It poses different problems. You have got to remain totally impartial but out there you knew the form. They were gunning for you and you were gunning for them.”723

Strategically myopic, the British Army rarely institutionalized experiences from its previous low-intensity operations. Few lessons were compiled in military manuals or recorded in the accounts of soldier-intellectuals. Instead, “caught every time by surprise when a revolt did begin, the British continued to be shocked, outraged, indignant,” and they impulsively applied savage measures “that ranged from curfews and cordon and search operations at one end of the scale of violence, through collective fines and large-scale detention without trial, and culminated in forced population resettlement and the creation of free fire zones.” The adaptability of rebels and the idiosyncrasies of the local theater, geography, and demography often made past experiences irrelevant and their replication infeasible. Northern Ireland was hardly an anomaly in this regard. The British Army rediscovered the merits of soft counterinsurgency, minimal force, and political concessions only after its overwhelming force had failed to quell the Troubles.

In 1969, the British Army took over the responsibility for Northern Ireland’s internal security after London had determined that the actions of the RUC and USC were inadequate. Unlike the metropolitan police service (“bobbies” and “peelers”), the RUC—the successor of the Royal Irish Constabulary created in 1786 to protect Great Britain’s colonial order and interests, until it was disbanded in 1922—was a quasi-military force, similar to the Italian Carabinieri, French Gendarmerie, and Dutch Marechausse. The RUC performed the duties of a civil police

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force (protecting citizens, enforcing criminal law, and maintaining public order) as well as a military police force (controlling the population, suppressing political dissent, and conducting counterterrorism). The British Army and local security forces responded to the disturbances in Northern Ireland with military force and punitive administrative measures. The counterproductive effects of both the Blacks’ and Tans’ coercive strategies during the Irish War of Independence and the British forces’ retributive response to the 1916 Easter Rising had receded into history. Thus, in tandem with legal tactics, the British Army and local security forces used extrajudicial measures—which included indiscriminate use of force against civilians; arbitrary mass arrests based on inaccurate intelligence, outdated suspect records, and rumors; and procedures amounting to torture in the detention centers at the Army Barracks at Holywood and the Ballykelly airfield, where the internees who came to be known as the “hooded men” were held.727

In August 1971, the Stormont government facilitated the security forces’ reprisals by reintroducing internment without trial.728 The unionist government in the North (and the Irish government in the South) had exercised this policy against rebels in the past, in the years 1921–22, 1939–45, and 1956–62. In the same month, the British Army launched Operation Demetrius, which led to the initial incarceration of 342 suspected PIRA members in the newly constructed Long Kesh Prison (also known as the Maze, or the H-Blocks, after the shape of the cells’ configuration). Between 1 January and 14 February 1972, an additional 2,078 people were interned


but not immediately charged. Some of these detentions lasted indefinitely; the aim was to taint the internees by arousing the IRA’s suspicion and thus preclude their joining or rejoining the VSM after release. The authorities also used long-term detentions as a political tactic, to appease the unionist politicians and loyalist militants, and as a bargaining chip, to influence the nationalists.

The security forces subjected some detainees to in-depth interrogation to extract confessions, using methods such as the “five techniques” (developed in the British colonies and practiced in Northern Ireland during Operation Calaba), which combined hooding, wall-standing, white noise, sleep deprivation, and a bread-and-water diet. In June 1972, the *New York Times* detailed young Catholic Francis McGuigan’s horrendous experience with the five techniques. These “disorientation” methods were designed to break internees’ wills and to humiliate them.

One former detainees described them as “clearly a way of degrading you.” Another explained it this way: “So there was an element of pain, there was an element of stress, and there was an element of humiliation, where they [RUC detectives] would force you to do the exercises rather than endure the pain. For a man in his twenties, the idea that you would succumb to do press-ups for interrogators because you were scared to endure the pain, that’s not only stressful, it’s a humiliating thing.” Another internee recalled: “They took one young fellow out and shaved every hair on his body, saying that he was ‘lousy.’ This was simply an attempt to humiliate him and show us how powerless we were. . . . You had to raise your hand like a schoolboy if you wanted to go to the toilet.” Female republican prisoners compared strip searches to rape. In their own words, “you felt as if you were nothing, you feel degraded. It’s like a rape of some kind.” The strip

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searches made you feel as if “you are cattle in a market,” they “made you very angry, and very violent too.” The acts of humiliation were often executed publicly when, for example, British soldiers transferring IRA internees in Saracen armored personnel carriers from one facility to another deliberately drove through loyalist areas, shouting “we’ve got an IRA man in here,” to gleeful voyeurs’ satisfaction. In documenting the testimonies of individuals arrested under the 1971 Special Powers Act, Amnesty International affirmed that “all kinds of physical ill treatment . . . are felt by the suspect to be painful, degrading, and humiliating.”

The British Army’s forceful incursions into Catholic strongholds to make arrests swiftly mutated into long-term occupation of the nationalist neighborhoods. Operation Motorman, conducted in July 1972—arguably, the largest British military operation since the Suez Crisis of 1956—was executed to regain the so-called no-go zones in Belfast; Derry’s Bogside, Brandywell, and Creggan estates; and the towns of Armagh, Coalisland, Lurgan, and Newry. The operation was a reprisal for the string of PIRA bombings in Belfast on Bloody Friday, 21 July 1972, which in turn was the PIRA’s retaliation for the massacre of Catholic civilians on Bloody Sunday, 30 January 1972, by the Parachute Regiment of the British Army’s First Battalion. By occupying nationalist areas, the army also aimed to collect military and political intelligence about the local theater and its residents, including minutiae such as the layouts of houses, furniture types, and wallpaper colors.

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In 1974, 12 of the 18 British Army battalions were deployed in the nationalist-populated regions; only 3 or 4 were stationed in Protestant areas and 2 or 3 guarded prisons.\textsuperscript{737} Inevitably, the army occupied some areas that held symbolic value for Catholics, such as the place in Derry where the civil rights movement took off. The presence of the plainclothed and heavily armed British Special Air Service (SAS) in Catholic areas fueled the population’s fears and spawned rumors about the regiment’s role as an “assassination squad.”\textsuperscript{738} The actions of the British Army and local security forces directed at civilians amplified collective angst. Amid the ongoing counterinsurgency and adjunct counterterrorism operations, the Catholic, nationalist population was systematically subjected to intrusive searches, illegal house raids, head counts or local censuses, and stop-and-question operations that, along with road and border closures and inspections at permanent vehicle checkpoints, interrupted daily life to maintain repressive stability. In the Catholic enclaves, the army exercised communal screening: “all young people were regarded as potential terrorists and treated accordingly, while in Protestant areas more emphasis was placed on the investigation of specific incidents.”\textsuperscript{739} House raids became increasingly extensive and frequent. The security forces raided 17,262 houses in 1971, 75,000 (nearly one-fifth of all residencies in Northern Ireland) in 1973,\textsuperscript{740} and 250,000 between 1972 and 1976.\textsuperscript{741} The shoot-to-kill policy allowed the security forces to ambush terrorist suspects and rearrest subjects

who had been released by the court.\textsuperscript{742} Rubber and plastic bullets were often as deadly as metal projectiles.\textsuperscript{743}

Hundreds of Catholic civilians were detained under the 1972 Detention of Terrorists Order. Court procedures were bypassed in favor of special tribunals. Nonjury trials became the norm: the Diplock Courts tried individuals suspected of committing terrorism and other scheduled offenses before a single judge. Following the opening of two special interrogation centers in 1977 (at Castlereagh in Belfast, and at Gough Army Barracks in Armagh), the number of complaints against the security forces rose from 1,366 in 1975 to 2,331 in 1978, and the allegations of “assault during interview” increased from 180 in 1975 to 671 in 1977.\textsuperscript{744} Thousands of people were interrogated under the emergency provisions—2,402 in 1975, 3,576 in 1976, 3,571 in 1977, and 3,056 in 1978. At the same time, the official inquiries into those interrogations revealed that between September 1977 and August 1978, a small percentage of the people interrogated at Castlereagh and Gough were charged—an indication that either many of the detainees were innocent or that interrogation was an ineffective method for extracting confessions.\textsuperscript{745}

The described forms of individual and collective punishment were inflicted primarily on the Catholic, nationalist population. Absent from the suspect records were Protestant convicts: “What they [names] did not include was a single Loyalist. Although the UVF had begun the killing and bombing, this organization was left untouched, as were other violent Loyalist satellite organizations such as Tara, the Shankill Defenders Association and the Ulster Protestant

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Volunteers.\textsuperscript{746} Furthermore, loyalist and republican offenders received differential treatment. Even though loyalist and republican militias both committed acts of comparable gravity—the extreme examples include the Protestant Shankill Butchers’ sadistic method of slicing up Catholic victims with cleavers, and the PIRA’s human bombs—disproportionally more nationalists were detained. For example, the number of loyalist detainees peaked at 70 during the May 1974 Ulster Workers’ Council strike, in contrast to the 640 republicans interned in December 1973 alone.\textsuperscript{747} By most accounts, “Protestant political crime was treated leniently (as ‘Loyalist’ activity) while Catholic militants were ruthlessly pursued.”\textsuperscript{748} Experts attribute this disjuncture to the British authorities’ reluctance to prosecute loyalist militants and their treatment of terrorism as an exclusively republican problem. Practically from the outset,

the British government knew that the UDA [Ulster Defence Association, a loyalist militia founded in 1971 that remained legal until 1992] was involved in murder and the wholesale theft of its weapons, for obvious purposes, yet it was still intent on maintaining ‘good relations’ with at least some of its members. . . . By the end of 1972, loyalists had killed 121 people. . . . They were stealing or otherwise purloining UDR weapons at such a rate that the British Army drew up monthly lists. Yet at the end of the year, at a time when hundreds of IRA suspects were being interned without trial, the British Army’s “Arrest Policy for Protestants” recommended no action at all against the UDA.\textsuperscript{749}

Historically, the republicans directed their guns against the unionist regime and the British military, and the loyalists aimed theirs at the Catholic population. This factor might account for the British Army’s and the RUC’s rhadamantine treatment of Catholics (a security approach) and leniency toward Protestants (a due process approach), but it does not explain why Catholics and Protestants suspected of similar crimes received different rights and sentences in a supposedly democratic polity. For example, a Catholic activist was more likely to be charged with sedition or terrorism, but a Protestant with disorderly conduct. One survey, based on a sample of cases recorded in magistrates’ courts in 1972, shows that only 21 percent (or one in five) Catholics—in contrast to 46 percent of Protestants—accused of similar political crimes were granted a bail. 750 A number of fact-finding commissions—though varying in their conclusions and recommendations—established that ill treatment of detainees and application of interment and other extrajudicial measures were preponderantly implemented against the Catholic population. 751 In consequence, the Catholic population’s confidence in the government collapsed. A Catholic man recalled his frustration:

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Foot patrols, checkpoints, house searches that would often result in property damage all happened in the Catholic areas, but not in [the] Protestant [areas]. We [the Catholics] were constantly surveilled; helicopters regularly flew over our neighborhoods. Whenever the nationalist snipers would attack the symbols of the British rule, a more violent response would follow from the army. The British Army used gunfire indiscriminately. No sensitivity, just brute force, ignorance of local customs, and disdain for local people. For us [the Catholics], the army and police became the “others.” Instead of going to the police, if crime happened or any threat [emerged], we would go to the IRA.⁷⁵²

In a 1974 survey, two-thirds of respondents (95 percent of Catholics and 47 percent of Protestants) opposed internment. Moreover, two out of every three interviewees (93 percent of Catholics and 59 percent of Protestants) affirmed that internment diminished people’s confidence in the state’s court system. Whereas 27 percent of Protestants believed that people did not receive a fair trial in Northern Ireland, an overwhelming 88 percent of Catholics held this view.⁷⁵³ The state’s failure to prosecute known loyalist criminals—exacerbated by the fact that many of them held a joint membership in the state’s security forces—“made the Catholic people realise that the RUC and British Army had no interest in stopping the sectarian assassinations which were serving a useful political purpose.” As one man saw it, “UDR until midnight, turn your coat inside out, UDA after midnight.”⁷⁵⁴ In 1973, the British Army estimated that 5 to 15 percent of its UDR members were also militiamen in the UDA, UVF, or Vanguard Service Corps.⁷⁵⁵

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⁷⁵² Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with an Irish Catholic (interviewee 47), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 25 November 2014.
The state’s and the army’s exercise of coercion failed to subdue the unrest. It did, however, fuel an orgy of sectarian violence. As a former PIRA volunteer put it, “repression by the British in Europe couldn’t have been as strong as [it had been] elsewhere around the world, to crush the protests. Repression, if not successful, can tip the balance to the resistance. And that’s what happened in Northern Ireland.”

A PIRA leader made a similar observation: in the fashion in which it was executed in Northern Ireland, “repression by the state angered the people.” Because the state denied legitimate political channels to the Catholic community to air grievances, the firestorm of Irish fury found expression in ever-more-intense riots met with ever-more-forceful responses from both the state and the army, which validated the republican militants’ calls to rid Ireland of the occupier because the “British soldiers and British administrators have never brought anything but death, suffering, starvation and untold misery to the people in this country. They will never bring anything else until they get out.”

In the eyes of the Catholic, nationalist population, the British Army had been transformed from a peacekeeper into an oppressor. The atrocities committed by servicemen and servicewomen—for example, the massacre of 13 Catholic civilians in Derry on Bloody Sunday, and Operation Demetrius, which left 21 civilians dead and 7,000 people without a roof “as their homes were burned to the ground”—alienated Catholics. The exoneration of the military and security personnel who perpetrated these crimes crystallized nationalist public opinion “that there

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756 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 72), Dublin, Republic of Ireland, 20 December 2014.
757 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former senior PIRA leader (interviewee 54), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 3 December 2014.
was no chance of obtaining justice in any case involving the Army.”761 The declassified documents confirm that the British military fervently guarded its personnel’s immunity to prosecution: “the Army should not be inhibited in its campaign by the threat of Court proceedings and should therefore be suitably indemnified.”762

Paradoxically, in spite of the Catholic, nationalist population’s increasingly negative attitudes toward the British Army, the fear of an all-out sectarian civil war led many to approach the withdrawal of the British forces with pragmatism. Although nationalist leaders criticized the British generals’ “unpopular and arrogant attitude” and “dictation” that, they emphasized, no Irish would accept, they acknowledged that the withdrawal of the British Army would result in “an absolute massacre.”763 Ordinary civilians voiced similar concerns. “It would be a bloody massacre,” said a resident of Bogside, where the first battles of the Troubles erupted. “The B-Specials and the RUC would do their old trick of giving cover to the mob and we’d be wiped out.”764 According to a 1978 poll, 64 percent of Catholics but only 15 percent of Protestants in Northern Ireland agreed that “the British Government should announce its intention to withdraw from Northern Ireland at a fixed date in the future.”765 Simultaneously, most of Northern Ireland’s Catholics (55 percent) and Protestants (85 percent) felt that the British Army’s immediate withdrawal from the North, without achieving a political solution, would lead to a “civil war” or “complete breakdown in law and order.”766 (The Catholic minority’s ambivalent attitudes toward

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762 Quoted in “Secret Government Papers Reveal ‘Motorman’ Plans” (no author), Derry Journal, 19 June 2012.
the British Army’s presence mirror the mixed feelings of the Iraqis about the Coalition forces’ immediate withdrawal, discussed in chapter 2.) Still, the British authorities failed to take advantage of Catholics’ ambivalence and continued to conduct counterproductive operations (some of which adroitly provoked by the PIRA) that “made the Provisionals’ violent strategy seem unavoidable, appealing, and even necessary to many West Belfast Catholics.”\textsuperscript{767} As one former volunteer stressed, “the Provisional IRA was not a response to the British presence; it was a response to the British behavior.”\textsuperscript{768}

The British reprisals turned the emotional tide toward the PIRA. “The interrogation issue was a political setback for the security forces and a propaganda victory for the IRA,” observed one expert.\textsuperscript{769} Another concluded that “far from bleeding support away from militant republicanism, collusion fed the conflict.”\textsuperscript{770} Some British defense authorities pointed out that the internment produced temporary security benefits.\textsuperscript{771} The experts concurred on two points, however. First, “internment succeeded in uniting the IRA’s fiercest enemies inside the Catholic community behind them and lent some credence to their claims to legitimacy.”\textsuperscript{772} At the same time, “the political storm raised by internment resulted in official limitations on interrogation, which gave the IRA a real military prize.”\textsuperscript{773} As a result, in the aftermath of Operation Demetrius, “the Provisional IRA, in particular, enjoyed a flood of new recruits.” Similarly, “Operation Calaba was to have

\textsuperscript{768} Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 72), Dublin, Republic of Ireland, 20 December 2014.
calamitous results. Far from providing the intelligence that would enable the police and the army to dismantle the IRA, the use of torture enraged the Nationalist population and encouraged countless young men and women to take up arms against the British.”774 For small gains, the security forces transformed “a sullen Catholic Community into a downright hostile one.”775 Also, the murders of innocent Catholic civilians played into the hands of the PIRA, which welcomed “angry young Northern Catholics.”776 A journalist who interviewed PIRA cofounder Daithi O Conaill relayed that, in O Conaill’s view, the sectarian assassinations of Catholics were “followed by an upsurge of recruitment to the IRA” and “contributed to the sense of social anarchy that was vital to the IRA campaign.”777

These traumatic events aroused collective emotions. According to the Guardian, “Bloody Sunday was a turning point in the Troubles. It made young men, until then more interested in a weekend drink and the odd fumble with a girl, shocked and ashamed. That gave way to anger, and they signed up in their droves for the IRA. There was even a signing-up ceremony in broad daylight.”778 Thus, “for the first time in the history of the state the extreme republican agenda and the IRA’s violent methods were winning the allegiance of a sizable section of the Catholic community.”779 Most telling are the accounts of Catholic civilians—students, teachers, doctors, engineers, working or middle class, well-educated and upwardly mobile—who halted personal and professional aspirations and made common cause with the PIRA. One Catholic, who would become a senior leader of the PIRA, explained how the transformative events of the years 1969–70 radicalized him:

I come from a family where my grandfather fought alongside the British in World War One and World War Two. My two sisters married British soldiers. When the Troubles began, I was a student. I was a pacifist then. I delivered sandwiches and tea to the British soldiers. . . . What I soon saw on the street changed me. My neighbors were arrested, my friends were tortured. The Irish tricolor wasn’t allowed to fly. [Ian] Paisley threatened to take away the tricolor. Then [there were] attacks on the civil rights march, People’s Democracy. August 1969 was crucial. Houses in my community were wrecked and burned down, people were shot dead, and the [Falls] curfew was imposed. The curfew infuriated the people. But the IRA hadn’t fired a shot.

When the [Provisional] IRA did fire back, the Brits went orgasmic about imprisoning the volunteers. But they imprisoned one person, many more joined the movement. Even those people who disapproved of the armed struggle, were affected. In 1971 the prisoners, and later the hunger strikers, themselves became a huge cause for mobilization. Most prisoners had families, relatives, and friends. By putting one person in jail, the Brits “locked up” 10–12 people.780

Another nationalist, who rose through the ranks to become a member of the PIRA’s Executive, explained how his mistreatment by the police and army only strengthened his resolve to continue violent resistance: “Torture doesn’t work. It might work in the short run: you can be broken and tell a few things that the enemy already knows. But in the long run, torture transforms anger into a deep-rooted hatred. I speak from my own experience.”781 A chaplain at Armagh Gaol witnessed signs of torture on the male prisoners transferred from the Crumlin Road prison to the women’s jail in Armagh in the early 1970s: “I saw marks of atrocious torture. People’s private

780 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former senior PIRA leader (interviewee 54), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 3 December 2014.
781 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former member of the PIRA GHQ (interviewee 69), Monaghan, Republic of Ireland, 15 December 2014.
parts were beaten so badly they couldn’t keep their legs together. Amphetamine drugs were used. Pretentious executions were carried out. Confessions were obtained under duress. . . . There were many innocent victims—victims cultivated by the state. Many of them would later join the IRA. . . . Women got involved too. Somebody’s home was wrecked. Somebody’s brother was shot dead. Somebody’s father was tortured. State oppression touched people personally and intimately.”

A former volunteer, who intended to join the IRA regardless of the circumstances, still noted this:

I come from an aristocratic republican background, so I was going to join the IRA anyway. But many of my buddies who became [PIRA] volunteers were influenced by the events. The response to the civil rights protests, in particular, raised the awareness of how persecuted the nationalist community was. The British acted stupidly in handling the crisis. They intruded into our homes and wrecked our property. They conducted strip searches. It was humiliating to be put up against the wall and have your private parts searched. That kind of repression eliminates the middle ground. It turns citizens into revolutionaries. I was arrested when I was fifteen years old. They [the security forces] indiscriminately lifted every male in the area, around 400 of us—something the Nazis would do in the ghettos. Those actions conditioned us to become extreme. It is hard not to feel anger after all that and not to get involved.

The state’s repression, the security forces’ brutality, the law’s discriminatory application, and personal experiences of violence together emerged as the primary catalysts of collective anger that increased the PIRA’s recruitment. And “the combination of the angry working-class youths

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782 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a Catholic monsignor (interviewee 68), Armagh, Northern Ireland, 15 December 2014.
783 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 55), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 16 December 2014.
and their embittered leaders was to give the Provisional IRA a horrific potential for violence.”

Between June and December 1970, the fledgling resistance group of 100 activists with limited popular support grew into an 800-strong force. By 1971, the PIRA had evolved into a VSM that in Belfast alone commanded more than 1,200 volunteers and large-scale popular support.

A few competing motivational mechanisms merit attention. The family tradition of militant republicanism had historically driven recruitment into the IRA. A former hunger striker and a blanketman, who in the early 1980s participated in the dirty protests in Long Kesh, explained his decision to join the PIRA: “My family has traditional republican roots. My father, an IRA man, was imprisoned. My brothers were interned. The republican ethos, the War of Independence, rebel songs and poetry were all part of my growing-up experience. The IRA was in my DNA, so it was inevitable that I would join the movement.” Others became interested in the PIRA through a “godfather” (that is, existing members looked for and sponsored young people sympathetic to the movement’s cause) or a “club” (young sympathizers interested in joining sought contact with established members).

Youth, romanticism, and rebel chic also appear to have inspired potential recruits. A former PIRA volunteer said: “Actually, the motivation was that I was young. When you are young there is an excitement to it. You are seeing guns, you had only ever seen them on the TV or in the comics.” A female volunteer offered a similar reason for joining the PIRA: “I should be ashamed to admit there was fun in it in those days.”

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787 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 55), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 16 December 2014.
790 Quoted in Patrick Radden Keefe, “Where the Bodies Are Buried,” *New Yorker*, 16 March 2015.
Pursuit of idealism, prestige, and status might have attracted a few young individuals, but monetary incentives appear not to have been a factor. A former PIRA leader explained that “the [Provisional] IRA paid strictly pocket money, and only to full-time volunteers. A full-time volunteer received five [British] pounds per week. Everybody within the movement—from leadership down—was paid the same amount. Money was not an incentive to join the movement. Any working man would earn, at a minimum, 30 pounds a week.” A former volunteer confirmed that “full-time [Provisional] IRA volunteers received a subsidy of five pounds per week. Money was definitely not a motivation. Five pounds wouldn’t buy you even cigarettes for a week.”

Scholarly research corroborates that the PIRA’s “individual ASU [Active Service Unit] members do not live lavish lifestyles” and identifies “a broader theme in Republican terrorism, emphasizing the personal sacrifices of potential and actual PIRA members.” Similarly, British intelligence has established that “most of the IRA men who handled income from whatever source seemed to be meticulous in their accounting. There were also examples of punishment beatings handed to those few who misused IRA funds for their own ends. Those men would not only be beaten but would also earn the scorn and contempt of their IRA mates, friends and often their families.”

On balance, the reviewed competing mechanisms might have encouraged some people to join the PIRA, but they could have hardly produced the shared anger—triggered by the state’s repression, the brutality of the security forces, and people’s intimate encounter with violence—that the PIRA’s leaders nimbly channeled into VCA. The long-standing Irish tradition of rebellion facilitated resistance. A former senior PIRA leader explained:

791 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former member of the PIRA GHQ (interviewee 69), Monaghan, Republic of Ireland, 15 December 2014.
792 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 70), Newry, Northern Ireland, 16 December 2014.
Armed insurrection has been a tradition in our culture. Throughout history the template of resistance in our society had been the IRA. The [Provisional] IRA gave structure and direction to the popular uprising. I didn’t have to consult history books to learn how to resist. I and my fellow volunteers were able to speak with the people who had been involved in the earlier struggles. For us, armed struggle was a very practical matter; it wasn’t a theoretical exercise. Armed struggle was common to most [Irish] people. It occurred in the past as well as in modern times. There has been a historical connection. Armed struggle has had legitimacy in our society. To carry it out, we received practical assistance from the older generations. Insurrection doesn’t come about easily. It requires practical skills such as manufacturing of weapons and survival underground. And we had access to such skills [through] learning from the previous generations of fighters.794

By the mid-1970s, the British authorities had come to realize that the heavy-handed military tactics, without an undergirding coherent strategy and political effort, had failed to degrade the PIRA and pacify the rebellious province. Consequently, the British military made crucial changes by shifting from a coercive counterinsurgency to a population-centric campaign that bolstered the socioeconomic reforms simultaneously undertaken by Westminster. In terms of security, the military established a unified command, prioritized civil-military cooperation and army-police coordination, collected high-caliber intelligence, replaced search-and-destroy missions with clear-and-hold operations, and enforced rules to use minimal force. The military had also acknowledged the effectiveness of the PIRA’s propaganda and engaged in psychological operations (PSYOPS), increased communication with the local populace, and offered media

794 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former member of the PIRA GHQ (interviewee 69), Monaghan, Republic of Ireland, 15 December 2014.
training to its personnel. In 1969, at the recommendation of the Hunt Committee, the B Specials were disbanded; in 1972, based on the Gardiner Report, the British government abandoned the techniques of in-depth interrogation; and in 1975, it phased out internment and detention without trial. To make amends with the local population, in 1975 the British authorities adopted two policies: Ulsterization, to lower the army’s profile by prioritizing law enforcement and surveillance over military security; and the criminalization of the PIRA, to undercut the VSM’s popular support and legitimacy by stripping its volunteers convicted after February 1976 of their special-category political prisoner status.

Ulsterization reversed the proportion of the army troops to security forces. A decline in the number of British troops, from 21,000 in 1973 to 12,000 in 1980, was accompanied by an increase in the number of security forces during the same period, as the combined strength of the UDR, RUC, and RUC Reserve rose to 14,500.\textsuperscript{795} Although Ulsterization proved effective in the long run, criminalizing the PIRA backfired. The PIRA’s demands to recognize its prisoners’ political motivation—fighting against “an occupying foreign power”—and reinstitution of their five rights (“the right to wear their own clothes; the right to refrain from compulsory prison work, using the time for education in vocational, craft, or cultural fields; free association with other political prisoners; one letter, one parcel, one visit per week; and restoration of remission of sentence lost through the protest”)\textsuperscript{796} were repeatedly denied by the British government. This led to the dirty protests by the boys on the blanket and hunger strikes between 1976 and 1981 that gave birth to new republican martyrs.

\textsuperscript{796} Document “Election Manifesto, H-Block / Armagh Prisoner Candidates, National H-Block / Armagh Committee,” June 1981, Hunger Strikes Box no. 5 (H-Block / Hunger Strikes; National Smash H-Block / Armagh Committee; Prisoner’s Statements and Letters), Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland; accessed 29 November 2014.
In this section, I have investigated the security and socioeconomic conditions in Northern Ireland during the Troubles and the British intervention, and how the existing data map a progressive decline between 1969 and 1982 and a relative improvement between 1983 and 1998. During the initial years of the Troubles, the inadequate socioeconomic and security conditions undermined ordinary people’s confidence in the government and security forces, while the conduct of the British Army and its heavy presence in nationalist areas ignited Northern Catholics’ collective anger, feeding the VSM leaders’ narrative of occupation. The question is why the PIRA, rather than its seasoned rival, the OIRA, was able to exploit this discursive opportunity to mobilize and sustain VCA. Although in the 1960s the OIRA was weakened, it had more resources and manpower than the PIRA in 1969–70. The following sections untangle this puzzle.

Contending Violent Social Movements in Northern Ireland and the Role of External Assistance in Sustaining the OIRA and the PIRA

The two VSMs selected as case studies in Northern Ireland are the Irish Republican Army and its splinter, which evolved into an autonomous organization. The former is known as the Official IRA, and the latter as the Provisional IRA, after their formal split in late 1969. Both movements arose to resist the British presence in Ireland and, using similar methods, strove to reunite the partitioned island. The OIRA’s strongholds had traditionally been located across the Republic of Ireland, whereas the PIRA was in Northern Ireland.

The Official IRA

In the modern context, the Irish Republican Army (Oglaigh na hEireann) was formed in 1919, but its roots extend to the various republican organizations—such as the Society of United Irishmen, Fenian Brotherhood, Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood, and the Irish Volunteers—that sprang up after the Wolfe Tone rebellion of 1789. On 21 January 1919, the Irish Volunteers, rebranded the Irish Republican Army, fired the first shots in the War of Independence against the British occupation—a conflict that lasted for nearly two years, ended with the defeat of the IRA, and led to the partition of Ireland. The partition, ratified in the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty, engendered divisions within the ranks of Irish nationalists: namely, between the pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty factions (or the “staters,” under the leadership of Michael Collins; and the “irregulars,” under the leadership of Eamon de Valera) and, more broadly, between constitutional nationalism and constitutional nationalism.

798 Later renamed Irish Republican Brotherhood.
militant republicanism. The ensuing year-long Irish Civil War ended with the capitulation of the anti-Treaty nationalists in 1923. Following the defeat, De Valera turned to parliamentary politics and absorbed most of the IRA units into the newly created Fianna Fail republican party.

The remaining IRA volunteers conducted intermittent acts of violence, and at the onset of World War II declared war against England, which materialized in a string of assassinations and spectacular attacks in Great Britain. In the aftermath of the IRA’s “appallingly ill-conceived” bombing campaign (1939–40), known as the forties campaign, the government of the Republic of Ireland proscribed the movement afresh.799 The IRA had been declared illegal in the past, including in 1922, 1931–32, and 1936. Many of its members were then interned. The threat from Germany’s Third Reich necessitated additional security measures across Europe. A corollary: communication between the IRA units in Dublin and Belfast became increasingly difficult; the leaders recognized the need for an autonomous IRA unit in the North; and the Northern Command emerged in June 1939.800 In the 1940s, the IRA had ostensibly been reconciled with accepting the legitimacy of the southern state and had remained defunct until 1949, when its leaders began to prepare for an offensive against the British in Northern Ireland, using the South as its logistical base. Operation Harvest—popularly known as the border campaign, because it was carried out in the border counties of Armagh, Fermanagh, and Tyrone—was a series of otiose attempts between 1956 and 1962 to drive out “the invader” and to achieve “an independent, united, democratic Irish Republic.”801 The lack of enthusiasm for the IRA’s campaign on the part of Northern Catholics affected this VSM’s operational effectiveness. In January 1962, the IRA leaders thus announced the cessation of the border campaign because of the “attitude of the general public whose minds

have been deliberately distracted from the supreme issue facing the Irish people—the unity and freedom of Ireland.\textsuperscript{802}

The same year, Dubliner Cathal Goulding, who inherited his passion to oust Britain from Ireland from his grandfather, a Fenian revolutionary republican, and his father, a rebel of the 1916 Easter Rising—and who himself had recently been released from a prison where he had spent time during most of the border campaign for conducting a raid on a military base in England in 1953—assumed the leadership of the IRA as its chief of staff.\textsuperscript{803} Under Goulding, the IRA made a dramatic turn to constitutional politics, explicitly embraced Marxism, and recast the republican struggle as a proletarian class conflict. Both domestic and external developments in the 1960s contributed to the shift in the IRA’s strategy: domestically, the lack of popular support for a military campaign in Northern Ireland as Northern “Catholics simply ignored the IRA’s call to arms”; and externally, economic integration in Europe, the spread of the civil rights movement in the United States, and the rise of left-wing radicals and communists in the wake of World War II. Political theorists such as Roy Johnston and Antony Coughlan helped Goulding develop a socialist platform.\textsuperscript{804}

The IRA’s espousal of Marxist ideology, however, clashed with the principles and values of both republican conservatism and Catholicism. Furthermore, the IRA’s lurch into politics was seen by many as legitimization of the parliaments in Belfast, Dublin, and London—in essence, a betrayal of the physical-force, abstentionist republicanism and the end of the IRA. The workers’ socialist republic envisioned by the IRA’s leaders was to be achieved in three distinct stages: the social, economic, and civil rights agitation and the unification of the Catholic and Protestant working classes across the North and South would lead to a revolution and the eventual triumph.

\textsuperscript{803} “Three Men Refuse to Plead” (no author), \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 7 October 1953; “Eight Years for IRA Men” (no author), \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 8 October 1953.
of the proletariat. “I believe the only way to have any kind of freedom in Ireland is when Catholics and Protestants are able to unite together for both their rights,” Goulding reiterated his position in 1989.  

However, because the IRA’s “Dublin leadership was out of touch with northern sectarian realities,” and its program was “without its feet on the ground of present-day reality,” the hopes that “links could be cultivated between the movement and the people” were dashed. The NICRA’s and PD’s spontaneous civil rights campaign aligned with the new strategy that the IRA’s leaders had developed, but the violent turn of events in the years 1968–69 caught this VSM unprepared to respond militarily. Moreover, the IRA’s leaders were convinced that the conditions in the North were not ripe for the kind of revolution they had envisaged. The IRA was discredited when it failed to put up defenses in Belfast and Derry in August 1969 and in Ballymurphy in April 1970 and August 1971 (the latter was an estate in West Belfast where the would-be PIRA leader Gerry Adams grew up). The IRA’s failure to protect the Catholic, nationalist population in the North and its leaders’ adoption of an alien ideology fragmented this VSM: “the IRA had always distrusted outsiders, especially those preaching foreign ideas,” therefore militant republicans would not allow the movement’s takeover by the “godless Marxists.” As the traditionally green republican movement began morphing into red, it split into the OIRA and PIRA. (From here forward, the IRA is used to denote the movement before the 1969 split). In May 1972, the OIRA’s leaders formally declared a cease-fire and, by investing their energies and resources in the Marxist-Leninist Workers’ Party (its earlier names were Sinn Fein the Workers’ Party and Official Sinn

Fein), sought to achieve the unification of Ireland through politics. In 1976, Goulding resigned as the OIRA’s chief of staff. Sean Garland assumed the leadership of the movement and focused on transforming it into a Leninist revolutionary party.

The Provisional IRA

“The resilience of the IRA as a viable movement has puzzled and fascinated observers. There can be few movements in Europe which have shown such powers of survival for over half a century.”

809 The PIRA’s rise and ability to sustain a violent campaign for three decades is even more baffling in light of two facts. First, a significant portion of Northern Ireland’s Catholic, nationalist population, the PIRA’s main constituency, was apathetic about the cause of a united Ireland and preferred constitutional over violent politics. Second, the British Army and Northern Ireland’s security apparatus relentlessly pursued and sought to eradicate this VSM. Still, the PIRA managed not only to survive but also to sustain a protracted campaign of collective violence—to the surprise of many who had initially dismissed the PIRA “as a bunch of hoodlums with machine guns,”

810 “a ragtag little body of petty thugs, a few idealists,” and “braggarts, fond of guns and black berets.”

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A group of dissidents led by Sean MacStiofain—a hard-liner concerned that the IRA “would end up a paper army both demilitarised and demoralised”—and a number of radical intellectuals with strong ties to the republican ideology through a line of descent or affiliation with

the IRA convened on 18 December 1969 and proclaimed a new organization, the Provisional Irish Republican Army.\textsuperscript{812} A month later, the split within the IRA was replicated within its political wing, Sinn Fein, and the Provisional Sinn Fein Party emerged on 11 January 1970 (henceforth, Sinn Fein is used to denote the party affiliated with the PIRA). The PIRA’s and Sinn Fein’s membership and leadership overlapped, as is often the case for VSMs’ organizational structure.

Although some of the PIRA’s would-be leaders themselves flirted with socialism, they saw socialism’s totalitarian, atheist version—communism—and its underpinning Marxist philosophy, which had been adopted by the OIRA’s leaders, as foreign ideologies that threatened traditional militant republicanism: “We say also that Irish freedom will not be won by involvement with an international movement of extreme Socialism.”\textsuperscript{813} In a similar vein, the PIRA of the earlier period equated political participation in either Irish or British state institutions with military weakness and an erosion of physical-force republicanism: “If you put meat into a sausage machine, you must inevitably get a sausage, and if you put a Republican into the Free State machine, then one day you will get a Free-Stater.”\textsuperscript{814} Unavoidably, “Republicans who take the by-roads into Imperial Institutions must end up as part of the system and must one day oppress their fellow Republicans and former comrades. This happened in the case of Fianna Fail, and of Fine Gael, and it will happen again to all those who accept British Institutions.”\textsuperscript{815}

Although the IRA fractured mainly because of its leaders’ irreconcilable differences over their movement’s ideological and strategic directions, developments occurring in the background—in particular, the unionist government’s and loyalist militias’ violent responses to the civil rights campaign and the Catholics’ assertiveness in demanding equality and justice—

heightened the tension within the movement by reinforcing the dissidents’ belief that the OIRA’s embrace of the politics of the national liberation front and of the atheistic communist international attenuated this VSM militarily and prevented it from defending the Northern Catholics when the Troubles erupted. Shortly after the split, Daithí O Conaill said:

The task of building up the Army as an effective force to defend the people of the Six Counties was intensified. After a while it became apparent that some of the then [OIRA] leadership were more obsessed with parliamentary action than in facing the realities of the Northern situation. A campaign to white-wash Stormont and present it as an Irish institution seemed more important than acquiring necessary means to make the IRA an effective force. The entire Belfast Brigade felt compelled to withdraw its allegiance from a leadership which was so much out of touch with reality.816

The founders of the PIRA were veteran republicans who had a common background: “lengthy prior involvement in the IRA, prison experience, family and local connections.”817 But it was Gerry Adams—a generation younger, coming from a “blue-blood line” of “republican aristocrats,” and with deep local roots in the North—who took control of the PIRA in the 1970s and through the decades-long armed struggle led the republican movement to the 1998 political settlement. Adams grew up in Ballymurphy, an impoverished area in West Belfast and “a base that he would use first to dominate the IRA in West Belfast, next the city, and then the entire organization.”818 He joined the D Company of the Belfast Brigade, which would become one of

the fiercest PIRA units, at the age of eighteen—although the rebel leader has never admitted his membership in the VSM.

A confluence of factors made Adams’s rapid rise in the PIRA’s ranks possible. His dynastic lineage placed him among the republican relatives who for generations had fought for Irish freedom. Family connections gained him allies among both the movement’s old guard and its new leaders. And the departure from the movement of some of its key figures and the arrests of others by the British authorities removed potential obstacles in Adams’s path. Most significantly, Adams’s own characteristics and aptitudes—strategic acumen, tactical astuteness, organizational skills, and “great media and PR skills, which he would put to good use throughout his career”—enabled him to exploit emerging opportunities, neutralize political rivals, and develop a new vision for the republican movement, which had slid into desuetude.819

Adams’s family background positioned him strongly within the republican movement, but his maneuverability to exploit as well as to shape opportunities was central to his ascent. A move that proved decisive was his emphatic opposition to the 1974–75 IRA cease-fire. At the time, many in the republican movement resented the truce—seen as an event that weakened the IRA by giving the British time to retool the military’s strategies to outmaneuver this VSM—“and the Adams camp expertly exploited the unease.” Adams harshly criticized the cease-fire from behind prison bars and “portrayed the struggle for the IRA’s soul as a battle between compromising, armchair generals pontificating from the safety of the South and those who actually had to take on the British in the mean streets of Belfast and Derry.”820 His caustic rhetoric targeted the legitimacy of the IRA’s giants, whose disagreements with Adams could potentially hinder him. Adams methodically neutralized his political rivals. Reportedly, he confided to a colleague: “You don’t confront

people,’ he would say. ‘You isolate and marginalize them and then get rid of them.’” Adams condemned to a virtual Siberia prominent IRA men like Ruairi O Bradaigh and Daithi O Conaill, both highly respected in the South but little known to the young volunteers in the North, as well as heavyweights in the North, including Billy McKee and Ivor Bell.

While Adams castigated his political adversaries’ methods and programs from the confines of Cage 11 in Long Kesh Prison (1975–77), he developed an alternative strategy for the republican movement—“the long war”—which his followers believed rescued the PIRA from annihilation. In the words of a former PIRA volunteer, “Adams was seen as the republicans’ ‘salvation,’” and his stature within the movement greatly enhanced. At the core of the long war doctrine was the recognition by the leaders that the PIRA could not defeat the British Army either quickly or militarily; therefore, it had to prepare for sustained armed resistance and engage in “other forms of political work that traditional IRA members frowned upon, such as producing local newssheets to deliver door to door.”

Adams reportedly became a member of the Army Council after his release from the prison in 1977, and he became the president of Sinn Fein in 1983. In his effort to shift the republican movement’s center of gravity from the South to the battleground in the North, he was assisted by a brother-in-arms, Martin McGuinness, a northern commander whom one former RUC commander and Scotland Yard investigator described as “ruthless, intelligent, articulate, loyal, and courageous.” Among his friends, colleagues, and enemies, McGuinness had earned a reputation as a fearless leader with talent and conviction: “People like McGuinness are no pushover. They

822 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 58), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 6 December 2014.
824 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former RUC commander and Scotland Yard investigator (interviewee 65), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 11 December 2014.
are not motivated by the desire for fame, fortune or political recognition. They are a lot more resolute, more capable of keeping their eyes on the big picture and a lot less corruptible than most constitutional politicians.\textsuperscript{825}

Because Adams was revered and loved by staunch PIRA and Sinn Fein supporters but despised by disgruntled republicans and dissidents, his character is painted in many subtly multicolored brushstrokes. But the portrait that emerges from various sketches has several consistent features—those of a gifted strategist, shrewd leader, agile politician, and compelling communicator whose actions and rhetoric helped him forge a strong bond with the Catholic, nationalist community. A former female volunteer, also one of the most wanted PIRA suspects in Great Britain in the 1970s, spoke affectionately of Adams, emphasizing his humility and humanity, and recalled incidents that proved to her “how much he cares about every one of us.”\textsuperscript{826} Another testimony echoes this sentiment: “He [Adams] would arrive at a house, for instance, where there had been a death in the family and sympathize, telling them that he and Colette [Adams’s wife] had prayed at Clonard for whoever it was, you know, showing a charming, personal touch. He made contact at a human level in a way his predecessors couldn’t, and that helped him to disseminate his message and win support.”\textsuperscript{827}

Others portrayed Adams as an Irish Machiavelli and expressed disillusionment over his engagement in peace politics:

Gerry saw anyone who didn’t believe in “gerryism” as an enemy. To remain relevant, he chose the political path. Adams was devious about the transition from the armed struggle to peace. . . .

\textsuperscript{826} Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 63), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 10 December 2014.
didn’t tell the volunteers that the cease-fire [of 1994] was permanent. . . . But while I have an appreciation [for] that the peace has happened, I also harbor the sense of betrayal. . . . In the end, Gerry got peace, but he didn’t get a united Ireland. . . . Gerry was clever, but in a devious way. He blackmailed the electorate through his message: “If you vote for us, you will get peace; if you don’t vote for us, the IRA will be back.” Peace appealed to the people. People wanted to live in a place where there was no army patrolling the streets. Gerry’s deviousness led to peace. He played the chess like a grandmaster.828

Another former volunteer critical of Adams for turning “our traditional belligerent left-wing republicanism that emphasizes force and principle” into an “American style right-wing republicanism,” acknowledged Adams’s merits as he evoked Ivor Bell’s [former chief of staff of the PIRA] remark: “Regardless of what one thinks of Gerry, no one can say that Gerry doesn’t have courage. He doesn’t shoot, but he always arrives on the scene to help when something happens. He takes risk.”829

Former members of the security forces emphasized the centrality of the Adams-McGuinness leadership to sustaining the armed struggle. Two former RUC commanders expressed strikingly similar views. One said that “both Adams and McGuinness had objectives and a vision. . . . The Provos had a cause, a motivation, a strategy. We [the RUC] were not fighting for a cause. We didn’t have the will. Our objective was short-term: to restore the law and order. We learned slowly and never knew what we were up against. . . . [Irish] republicanism is monolithic, with a cohesive political, military, and economic enterprise and a sophisticated propaganda machine.”830

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828 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 55), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 16 December 2014.
829 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 58), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 6 December 2014.
830 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former RUC commander and Scotland Yard investigator (interviewee 65), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 11 December 2014.
The other concurred that the PIRA fought for a cause, whereas “we [the RUC] were doing our daily duty to maintain public order.”  

Although both men strongly condemned the PIRA-perpetrated violence, they underscored that Adams, a brilliant strategist, and McGuinness, a ruthless operator, complemented each other in sustaining the armed struggle.

In contrast to the markedly polarized opinions of the former PIRA members and security officials, ordinary Catholics’ political preferences, both in the South and the North, were decidedly complex. During the Troubles, most Irish Catholics remained skeptical about Stormont’s policies and intents but simultaneously demonstrated a lack of unity in their political aspirations and constitutional preferences. For example, in a 1974 opinion poll, 55 percent of Catholics and 80 percent of Protestants preferred “full integration of Northern Ireland with the rest of the United Kingdom.” At the same time, 45 percent of Catholics and 4 percent of Protestants supported “a United Ireland outside the United Kingdom.” In terms of constitutional alternatives, 79 percent of Catholics and 72 percent of Protestants favored “direct rule with no Assembly or Executive at Stormont,” whereas 45 percent of Catholics and 20 percent of Protestants approved a “power-sharing” arrangement. (Notably, the majority of Great Britain’s public opinion consistently opposed continued direct rule, favored the withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland, and expressed very little interest in the province, considering it as “the least important problem facing the Government.”)

The pattern of diverse and at times contradictory opinions among Catholics with regard to political and constitutional arrangements in Northern Ireland continued into the 1980s and 1990s.

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831 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former RUC commander (interviewee 64), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 11 December 2014.
In 1989 and 1994, respectively, 93 and 90 percent of Northern Ireland’s Protestants agreed that the province should “remain part of the UK,” and fewer than 6 percent preferred reunification with Ireland. Catholics, conversely, continued to hold fragmented views. In 1989 and 1994, respectively, 32 and 24 percent of Northern Ireland’s Catholics agreed that the province should “remain part of the UK,” while 56 percent in 1989 and 60 percent in 1994 preferred a united Ireland. In 1998, 49 percent of Catholics (versus 4 percent of Protestants) preferred that Northern Ireland be reunified with the rest of Ireland.

A trend emerges from a review of multiple polls taken during the Troubles. Even though Protestants were divided internally over religious and cultural issues, they were homogenous in their political and constitutional preferences. In contrast, Catholics presented a unified front on matters of religion and culture but expressed heterogeneous political and constitutional preferences. This was also reflected in the fact that a significant majority of Northern Ireland’s Protestants (for example, 71 percent in 1989 and 76 percent in 1994) consistently identified themselves as “unionist,” whereas Catholics were split between the categories of “nationalist” or “neither” (for example, 59 percent in 1989 and 45 percent in 1994 identified themselves as neither unionist nor nationalist, while 40 percent in 1989 and 54 percent in 1994 identified themselves as nationalist). Notably, the ratio of Northern Catholics supporting a united Ireland varied considerably during the Troubles. One possible explanation for this variation are intervening factors. The periods of economic prosperity or decline in the Republic of Ireland, for example, might have influenced people’s preferences for or against reunification.

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Taking into account the Irish Catholics’ variegated political and constitutional preferences, the rise and longevity of the PIRA appear particularly puzzling. In spite of the persistent divisions in public attitudes toward Ireland’s reunification—the republican cause célèbre—the PIRA, unlike the OIRA, was able to gain popular support sufficient to sustain VCA for three decades. *Time* magazine reported in 1979: “‘IRA—I ran away!’ With that derisive taunt, British troops arriving in Ulster ten years ago dismissed the threat posed by the remnants of the old Irish Republican Army. Their laughter died quickly after the birth of the Provisional IRA. . . . Despite their small numbers—there are only 600 to 700 gunmen, organized into cells of four to six men each—they manage to tie down 30,000 troops and police.”\(^837\) Other estimates suggest that in 1971, the PIRA in Northern Ireland grew to between 1,000 and 1,500 volunteers, and its popular support continued to swell.\(^838\) In 1972, the OIRA leader Cathal Goulding noted the PIRA’s mounting support: “What helps the Provos most in the North is that every Catholic youth is a Provo at heart.”\(^839\) In 1978, British defense officials gauged the seriousness of the PIRA threat, expecting “the Provisionals to remain the dominant terrorist organization throughout the next 5 years. . . . Our evidence of the calibre of rank and file terrorists does not support the view that they are merely mindless hooligans drawn from the unemployed and unemployable. . . . They are continually learning from mistakes and developing their expertise. . . . The movement will retain popular support sufficient to maintain secure bases in the traditional republican areas.”\(^840\) By 1990, many experts had come to regard the PIRA as “the most formidable terrorist group in the world.”\(^841\)

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\(^841\) Henry Patterson, “Gerry Adams and the Modernisation of Republicanism,” *Conflict Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 3 (Summer 1990), p. 5.
External Assistance to the OIRA and the PIRA

Both the OIRA and PIRA received financial aid and weaponry from external sponsors, including United States–based Irish republican organizations; private donors, mostly Irish Americans; and states such as Libya and the countries of the former Soviet Bloc. In addition, the rebels who fought in Northern Ireland found sanctuaries in the United States and the Republic of Ireland. Lax visa regulations allowed many dissidents to relocate to the United States and evade prosecution by the British and Irish authorities.\textsuperscript{842} The tortuous border area between the South and the North of Ireland, with mostly undemarcated crossing points, served for the VSMs as both a smuggling route and a safe haven to train, plan, and recuperate: “The RUC believes that 90 percent of the explosives used in Northern Ireland are brought across the border.”\textsuperscript{843} The historical legacies of the Anglo-Irish conflict and deeply embedded, sedimented memories made it difficult for the Irish and British authorities to cooperate on cross-border security in order to counter the OIRA and later the PIRA: “The unspoken objection is that the heirs to the Irish liberators cannot work on Irish soil with the heirs to the oppressors.”\textsuperscript{844}

In addition to receiving external assistance, both VSMs generated funds by engaging in illicit activities, such as smuggling (cigarettes, alcohol, and cattle), extortion, protection racket, armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, social welfare and income tax fraud, tax exemption scams, and running shebeens (illegal drinking clubs) and gaming machines. Both the OIRA and the PIRA also manufactured weapons in clandestine bomb-making facilities across the border in both the South and the North. The OIRA and the PIRA complemented illicit activity with legitimate

\textsuperscript{844} “An Agenda for London and Dublin” (no author), \textit{Guardian}, 29 August 1979.
business, the PIRA on a larger scale than the OIRA. Legal business served a dual purpose: funding the armed struggle, and providing employment and cheap or free services to the community. For example, the PIRA operated the black taxi service in Belfast and the hackney cab service in Dublin and also managed construction firms, shops, security firms, restaurants, and pubs in the Republic of Ireland and, for a period, in the United States.845 Some income from those businesses was reported to the taxation authorities; most funds, however, were rechanneled back to the PIRA using fraudulent methods to evade taxes and maximize returns.

Estimates of the PIRA assets vary. According to the British Army and the RUC, the PIRA’s annual income approximated £900,000 in the late 1970s and £10 million by 1988.846 Data from the Northern Ireland Office indicate that in the early 1990s, the PIRA’s annual income totaled £5.3 million.847 And the security agencies estimate that in the late 1990s, the PIRA had £30 million in assets.848 Although a VSM’s capacity to finance its activities are essential, this study is concerned about external assistance and its potential contributing role to two functions: first, enabling a hand-to-mouth rebel group to maintain its operations until it grows into a self-financing VSM; and second, facilitating violent rivalry among the VSMs.

Immigrant Irish communities burgeoned across the United States in the wake of the Great Famine that plagued Ireland from 1845 to 1852. “Of the million Irish who were wrenched from their country in that period, a great number were filled with hatred of the British government and the Anglo-Irish landlord; a perceptible number were also filled with contempt for Irishmen.

themselves. The craven spirit of the people, their ignorance, their apathy, their despair, generated a fierce and permanent anger in the manlier Irishmen.” The “permanent anger” of the Irish people served as a conduit for action: some fought the British directly, while others logistically supported the armed struggle. Many raised money for the resistance through organizations (or their chapters) that emerged in the United States to promote the Irish cause. For example, the Fenian Brotherhood was established in 1858; its successor, the Clan na Gael, was formed in 1867; and the Friends of Irish Freedom were founded in 1916. Irish nationalism and sympathy for the armed struggle were imported to America through these organizations, which armed and funded resistance in Ireland and “will-o’-the-wisp bombings” in England.

The Clan na Gael’s support for armed resistance continued after World War II, the period on which this study focuses. During a fund-raising tour of the United States in 1963, the OIRA’s Cathal Goulding acknowledged the role of that organization: “I’m here to organize Irish societies and the Clan Na Gael to aid in the fight to free Ireland.” Individual donors and gunrunners like George Harrison—reportedly, one of the most prolific smugglers, as “there has not been a weapon sent to Northern Ireland in the last 25 years without Mr. Harrison”—for decades, until 1982, regularly transferred arms supplies to the OIRA and later the PIRA. When asked by a journalist how many arms he had procured for the IRA, Harrison replied: “Between 2,500 and 3,000 and a million rounds of ammunition.”

When the Troubles resurged in the 1970s, new sponsors stepped forward to support the frontrunner nationalist movement, the PIRA: the Irish Northern Aid Committee (INAC,

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850 Quoted in “IRA Chief Asks Americans to Assist Bombings in Britain” (no author), Sun, 16 June 1939.
851 Quoted in “Irish Army Opens Drive in US” (no author), New York Times, 12 November 1963.
853 Quoted in “PBS Series Explores Republican Ireland” (no author), An Scathan, 31 October 1997.

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colloquially known as NORAID), Friends of Sinn Fein, the National Association for Irish Freedom, the Irish Republican Prisoners Welfare Association, the Irish American Fenian Society, and the Irish American Defence Fund. NORAID, at the time the most influential among the organizations based in the United States, with nearly 70 chapters across the country, was founded in 1970 by Michael Flannery, an IRA man in the 1920s who became a member of Clann na Gael after immigrating to the United States in 1927. NORAID collaborated with charitable organizations based in Belfast and Dublin (such as An Cumann Garbhchrach and the Green Cross) to maintain relief programs for the dependents of political prisoners in Northern Ireland. Between 1970 and 1985, NORAID “provided the Republican movement in Northern Ireland with its largest regular source of American funds ($2 million to $3 million) and unstinting moral support from a vocal minority of Irish Americans who openly support the IRA. Irish, British, and American officials say the US has also been the IRA’s largest source of guns.”\textsuperscript{854} In 1981 alone (the year when 10 imprisoned republican hunger strikers died), NORAID was able to collect and remit $550,000 to the PIRA.\textsuperscript{855}

Although the organization’s leaders repeatedly denied the so-called NORAID connection (alleged money-laundering and gun-running operations for the PIRA), they openly expressed sympathy for the armed struggle. Matthew Higgins, a veteran of the 1920s IRA campaign who ran NORAID along with Michael Flannery, John McGowan, and Jack McCarthy, implied that the three goals—providing aid to the families of the republican prisoners, sustaining local support for the IRA, and forcing the British troops out of Northern Ireland—were interconnected. “We first


have to take care of the needs of the dependents,” he said. “If that fails, everything fails. If the dependents become disaffected, then the whole thing collapses like a house of cards. And that is to be avoided at all costs.” He clarified that NORAID had “no objections” if its funds were used to purchase weapons: “If the overall kitty is big enough to buy weapons, that’s their business. We were formed for the purpose of supporting the Irish freedom movement. We still support the Provisional IRA, no ifs, ands, or buts about that.”

Similarly, most NORAID contributors expressed no qualms about their donations possibly bolstering violent resistance: “Morally, if my money went to the Irish people and provided defense from an occupying army, that would be proper.”

The governments of the United States and Great Britain affirmed that NORAID illicitly diverted funds to procure weapons for the OIRA and later the PIRA. In 1975, US intelligence agencies claimed that “75 percent of the money sent by the committee, which is called Noraid for short, has gone to buy arms, and 25 percent for food, clothing and allowances for Catholic dependants [sic].” Both the American and British authorities stated that the weapons were smuggled to Ireland “on passenger and cargo ships, including the Queen Elizabeth 2, as well as through Aer Lingus, the Irish airline. Suitcases carried by Irish American tourists, specially designed cargo containers with false panels, crates, and even coffins have been used to slip weapons into Ireland, with the help of sympathetic—or bribed—longshoremen, crew members and airline customs personnel. . . . The favorite IRA weapon is the semiautomatic Armalite AR-15, which is sold over the counter in the United States . . . [and] is light and easy to break into

Wall graffiti in Belfast signaled the arrival of the Armalite: “God made the Catholics, but the Armalite made them equal.” In May 1981, a US District Court judge ruled “the uncontroverted evidence” that NORAID was “an agent of the IRA, providing money and services for other than relief purposes.” Additional evidence of the lethal assistance flowing from the United States to the PIRA surfaced in 1984, when the Irish authorities intercepted and seized a large arms cargo—7 tons of guns and ammunition—originated in Boston from a fishing trawler Marita Ann.

Two incidents appear to have triggered extensive investigations of suspected financiers and gun traffickers in the United States: the PIRA’s assassination of Lord Louis Mountbatten, a British statesman and close relative of the royal family, that collaterally killed several family members with him in Ireland; and the murder of 18 British soldiers north of the border on the same day, 27 August 1979. By the mid-1980s, the flow of weapons from the arsenal in the United States had begun to dry up. First, the Thatcher government exerted diplomatic pressure on the Reagan administration to prosecute the funders of the Irish armed struggle who were living in the United States. Second, the internationalization of terror campaigns provoked the international community’s vocal condemnation of violence, especially as a number of US citizens became victims of international terrorism in the 1970s and 1980s. Against this backdrop, the Irish

government’s denunciation of the PIRA-generated violence began to resonate with some Irish Americans: “There are still people in the United States who are failing to comprehend the situation in this country and are willing to give aid for the purpose of sending arms and ammunition to murder people, including members of our security forces here,” Ireland’s prime minister, Garret FitzGerald, declared in the wake of Marita Ann’s capture.864

The smuggling rings in the United States were not the PIRA’s sole source of weapons. This VSM sought and accepted assistance from states such as Libya. Seemingly strange bedfellows, the leaders of Libya and the PIRA had a common enemy. In the words of the Libyan ruler Muammar Qaddafi, “there is a history of English dealings with the Arabs which goes back for decades, even before my birth. So the reason for our support to the Irish guerrillas is justified. It is a little country which has taken up arms to defend its rights and its freedom. We have given it our support.”865 In 1986, for example, the Thatcher government allowed the United States to use air bases in Great Britain to conduct raids on Libya. The Libyans’ assistance to the PIRA became evident in May 1973, when the Irish Navy arrested Joe Cahill on a gunrunning charge aboard the tramp steamer Claudia that was importing 15 tons of arms from Libya.866 In 1987, the French Navy intercepted Eksund, which was carrying 150 tons of arms and ammunition, the largest shipment of weapons from Libya bound for the PIRA.867 Libya also allowed the PIRA volunteers to use its camps, where they trained in using specialized weapons.868 Despite several abortive operations, the PIRA received significant weaponry and funds during its three-year liaison with Libya.

864 Quoted in “Trawler’s Seizure Called Major Setback for IRA” (no author), New York Times, 30 September 1984.
On the whole, aside from occasional setbacks during arms procurement operations, the security officials recovered a relatively small proportion of weapons smuggled to the OIRA and the PIRA. In addition to state sponsors, the OIRA and the PIRA received material and training assistance from VSMs abroad, including the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). After the late 1980s, however, it became increasingly difficult for both VSMs to obtain arms and money from external sources. Growing international condemnation of terrorism in the wake of spectacular terror operations, such as the Munich Olympics massacre in 1972 and the Lockerbie plane bombing in 1988—in conjunction with shifts in the attitudes of the Irish American diaspora and progressively more stringent arms export control regulations and immigration and customs enforcement in the United States—undermined external assistance to the OIRA and the PIRA. The OIRA’s fund-raising activities, furthermore, came under additional scrutiny by the American and British intelligence agencies due to the VSM’s connections to communist states and organizations abroad. By the time external assistance to both VSMs began to ebb, the PIRA had developed significant capabilities to finance itself and to provide social services to certain segments of the population.

**Deadly Rivalry.** Just as the VSMs in Iraq engaged in battles over which movement was the authentic resistance, the OIRA and PIRA fought “violently and bloodily about whose members had the right to call themselves republican.”869 The rivalry between the OIRA and the PIRA split families,870 while the influx of weapons from external sources exacerbated the fratricidal feud that played out between 1970 and 1977.871 The confrontations—which spiked in 1971, 1975, and

1977—ranged from pub scuffles, kidnappings, and assassinations to street fights between the organized armed units of the OIRA and PIRA and prison brawls between the two rival factions. The British Army recorded multiple incidents of internecine fight between the Stickies (OIRA) and the Provies (PIRA). 872

Although the lethal duel unraveled primarily between the OIRA and the PIRA, a few fringe OIRA splinters—such as the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), the military wing of the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP), and the Irish People’s Liberation Organization (IPLO)—occasionally leapt into the intrarepublican fight, but they mainly battled their own offshoots. The latecomers to the scene—the Continuity IRA (CIRA) in 1986 and the Real IRA (RIRA) in 1997, both of which peeled off from the PIRA when Sinn Fein began to advocate a peace plan—largely avoided violent engagements with the PIRA that by the early 1990s had solidified its control over the republican areas. Even though the PIRA eventually came close to dominating other violent republican groups, its confrontations with the OIRA over seven years—and the fact that both VSMs did not decommission until the middle to late 2000s (the PIRA in 2005 and the OIRA in 2010)—demonstrate the difficulty for any VSM to establish hegemony when rivals have access to funds and weapons. For example, “in 1975, internal feuding in the republican movement saw the increasing use of handguns. Among the guns recovered were a large quantity of Czech model 74 self-loading pistols in .32 calibre. These pistols were so new to the market that they had not appeared in any reference work, and no arms dealer was known to have stocks of them.” 873

The competitive outbidding to establish radical credibility and delegitimize rivals manifested itself not only in violent street fights but also in polemics, symbolism, and mudslinging.

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To begin with, by adding the name “Provisional” to “IRA,” the Provos had reestablished “the direct lineal succession with the Provisional Government of 1916” and positioned themselves as the legitimate heirs of the Easter Rising rebels executing the historical mandate. The 1916 Easter Rising was for republicans the “apotheosis of the tradition of rebellion.” In the words of Gerry Adams, “I believe personally that to be a Republican in the true sense that you have to base it on the 1916 declaration. . . . Our form of Republicanism is radical Republicanism.” The PIRA claimed that they were “more revolutionary than the Stickies,” and that “to condemn the IRA involves condemnation of the men of 1916, the Tan War and back along to 1978.” To undermine the OIRA’s legitimacy, the PIRA painted it in the scarlet hues of communism: “Gradually into executive posts both in the IRA and Sinn Fein, the Red agents infiltrated and soon these men became the policymakers. Young men and girls were brainwashed with the teachings and propaganda of the new policymakers and well-trained organizers were sent into different areas to spread the teachings of the Red infiltrators.” Last, when the OIRA declared a cease-fire in 1972, the PIRA labeled it “rusty guns,” to cast doubt on the OIRA’s will to fight, at the same time denigrating it as a mere “criminal group” that engaged in “murder, arson [and] gangsterism” and brought “terror to the Nationalist community.”

878 “The IRA Justified” (no author), An Phoblacht, June 1972.
The OIRA, in turn, heaped calumny on the PIRA. Regarding themselves as the authentic resistance, the OIRA derisively dismissed the PIRA as the “armed Celtic [Football Club] supporters” and prognosticated its rapid demise.\(^{881}\) To repel the PIRA’s powerful verbal howitzer, the OIRA characterized the PIRA as a “neo-Fascist” organization that murdered fellow republicans,\(^{882}\) and as a group of counterrevolutionaries who acted like the “Queen’s own Provos.”\(^{883}\) Some who had parted ways with the PIRA joined the chorus of condemnation. For example, when the PIRA’s leaders demonstrated interest in politics, Ruairí Ó Bradaigh called Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness “damaged goods.”\(^{884}\) And when these leaders engaged in peace talks with the British government, many charged that the PIRA “forgot the Armalite and opted for the ballot box only. They sold out to the English.”\(^{885}\) The OIRA fired verbal jabs also at its more recent offshoots, calling the INLA “a criminal sectarian gang,” “assassins,” “a small, mad band of fanatical malcontents, the sewer rats,”\(^{886}\) and “power-hungry and confused malcontents.”\(^{887}\)

**Losing the People.** Unlike the OIRA—which sought support from a broad range of governments, including the Soviet Union, and a motley collection of subversive groups across Europe—the PIRA was more discrete in establishing liaisons and was cognizant of the possibility that acceptance of aid from foreign sponsors might undermine its legitimacy among the local populace.\(^{888}\) The British government noted this in its assessment of the PIRA’s external assistance:

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\(^{885}\) Quoted in “Follow the Cause, Not the Man” (no author), *Saoirse*, September 2008.


\(^{887}\) Quoted in “A Lifelong Revolutionary Forever Loyal to Socialism” (no author), *Irish Times*, 28 December 1998.

“The Provisionals fear that close association with other political ideologies would tarnish the essential Irishness of their movement. They will therefore probably refuse any material support which comes with political strings attached.”\textsuperscript{889}

Still, this external aid created problems for both VSMs. If external assistance in Iraq delegitimized its recipients in the eyes of the local population because people perceived foreign assistance as a sign of subservience to foreign powers, in Northern Ireland external aid undermined the legitimacy of the OIRA and the PIRA because it fomented a protracted fratricidal feud that entailed the destruction of civilian life and property in the Catholic, nationalist areas, where people organized protests and vociferously demanded an end to the strife. Indeed, “it was later conceded by the Provisionals that this period of self-destruction played directly into the hands of the British, whose ‘criminalisation’ propaganda was greatly boosted by what was widely portrayed as a gangland vendetta.”\textsuperscript{890} For the OIRA, the political ramifications of the internecine feud were reflected in the Republican Clubs’ failure to gain a seat during the 1975 Northern Ireland constitutional convention elections.\textsuperscript{891}

In this section, I have discussed two VSMs that competed to sustain VCA during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. The evidence indicates that external assistance was a considerable but only contributing factor in sustaining collective violence. The availability of arms discouraged both the OIRA and the PIRA from making concessions, precluded each from establishing hegemony, and fueled an internecine fight that extended into the domain of verbal warfare. Not enough evidence is available to corroborate part (b) of hypothesis 2—specifically, that external assistance to the OIRA and the PIRA tarnished these VSMs’ legitimacy because it was perceived

\textsuperscript{891} Access Research Knowledge, “Northern Ireland Constitutional Convention Elections 1975” (http://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/fc75.htm); accessed 15 June 2015.
by the Irish people as foreign influence. A possible explanation is that the bulk of external assistance for both the OIRA and the PIRA came from the Irish diaspora. In the next section, I discuss the necessary conditions that were jointly sufficient to sustain VCA in Northern Ireland.
Great Britain’s military presence and policies in Ireland were not new phenomena in the 1960s and 1970s. Since England conquered the island, Anglo-Irish relations had been punctuated by rhythms of violence and of calm; spasmodic Irish insurrections, and their brutal suppression by the British forces; and transformative events such as the Battle of the Boyne, the Easter Rising, and Bloody Sundays. Similarly, the Irish people’s resentment over historical injustices and socioeconomic conditions had always been present. Why, then, was the long-submerged Irish fury transformed into sustained VCA only between 1969 and 1998? And why was the PIRA, not the OIRA, able to maintain its violent mobilization? The OIRA’s border campaign (1956–62) coincided with the economic decline and hardship in Northern Ireland in the two decades following World War II, as discussed above. Yet the OIRA’s campaign failed when the microstructural conditions were conducive to sustaining VCA. In contrast, the PIRA effectively sustained the armed struggle even after security and socioeconomic conditions in the North began to improve in the mid-1980s.

Thus the intervention of British troops and Catholics’ long-standing grievances were necessary to trigger mobilization but not enough to sustain VCA. When asked what helped sustain the armed struggle from the late 1960s through the late 1990s, and why the modern Troubles were significantly longer than the previous Irish rebellions that revolved around the same issues, a significant majority of interviewees in Northern Ireland used the word articulate (verb as well as adjective) to explain what, in their view, was different in the 1960s: “the ’60s leaders were very
articulate in publicizing the grievances of the Catholic community.\textsuperscript{892} “we saw our leaders as people who had a vision and who could articulate a direction.”\textsuperscript{893} Along with the articulation of grievances, a few interviewees mentioned the role of the media and, to a lesser extent, education—both of which they felt enhanced Catholics’ awareness of their status and hardship. A former PIRA leader put it this way:

Although the resentment [of injustice] had been long-standing in Irish society, it had not been articulated before, in the ’50s, to the extent that it was in the ’60s and ’70s. In the ’50s resentment was narrowly defined in terms of national independence. In the ’60s popular grievances were articulated in broader terms, with greater input from the grassroots. Nearly everyone could identify [with] and personally relate to those grievances. There were also catalysts: education, for one. In the ’60s a new generation of highly educated Catholics came forward. These young leaders were able to articulate people’s grievances and discuss issues using facts and statistics. They verbalized people’s resentment, hitting the emotional as well as rational [buttons]. They argued that Great Britain’s unwillingness to address people’s grievances was a reason for the North [Northern Ireland] to break away from the United Kingdom. They contrasted democracy in the North with democracy abroad, including in Great Britain. They compared the civil rights movement in the North with the civil rights movement in the United States. Bernadette Devlin was a powerful speaker. Television, and media more generally, was another catalyst. Television reached a wider audience, including the Irish Americans. Liberals and democrats, including English [men and women], were outraged at the conditions in the North. Journalists like Mary Holland documented the brutality of the police and publicized the intolerable conditions in the North. The \textit{Guardian} and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 70), Newry, Northern Ireland, 16 December 2014.
  \item Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 59), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 8 December 2014.
\end{itemize}
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BBC began to report on extrajudicial killings. The media revealed that the regime in the North was so out of touch that it couldn’t even answer the questions put to them by the journalists.\textsuperscript{894}

In the following sections, I test hypotheses 4 and 5 in the cases of the OIRA and the PIRA to determine if leaders’ personal characteristics and their discursive arousal of emotions played a causal role in sustaining VCA during one of the longest intrastate conflicts in post–World War II Europe. Hypothesis 3 cannot be meaningfully tested in the context of Northern Ireland. Because no foreign VSMs and leaders are involved in the Irish conflict, where relevant I highlight potential surrogate variables for foreign VSMs and leaders—specifically, the dichotomy between the IRA’s southern and northern leaders; and the ideology of Marxism, which most Irish Catholics perceived as foreign. I do not test these proxy variables systematically, but briefly discuss their observable effects on the sustainment of VCA.

**Emotive and Evocative Frames in Sustaining Violent Collective Action**

In a communication smuggled from prison, Bobby Sands—the PIRA’s commanding officer in the H-Blocks, the first hunger striker to die during the 1981 prison protest, and the first prisoner elected a member of the British Parliament during incarceration— instructed his fellow republicans to reach out to a broader audience beyond relatives and friends. “We are preparing an army of propagandists on the ground . . . to stir people’s emotions and to arouse them and activate them. Now to tackle this broad spectrum of people in which we’ll be plunging we must create our own mass media. . . . Make our message simple—Smash H-Block, some details, a call for action and

\textsuperscript{894} Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former member of the PIRA GHQ (interviewee 69), Monaghan, Republic of Ireland, 15 December 2014.
plenty of emotion. . . . I envisage creating an atmosphere of mass emotion trying to use it as best we can and as soon as we can.”

Accentuating the emotional and discursive aspects of the armed struggle, the PIRA’s leaders developed an aggressive propaganda campaign directed against the British government and the local authorities. In so doing, they displayed sensitivity to both their domestic constituency and international public opinion. One of the architects of the PIRA’s publicity campaign epigrammatically summed up the objective of the propaganda: “We generated anger.” He then expounded: “We created the publicity wing to raise the awareness about the offenses against the nationalist community. The conflict [in Northern Ireland] was localized. The incidents occurred locally. Some of the incidents were not big enough to make it into the national media. We publicized local incidents in a way that the national media had not. By generating anger, we created empathy for the armed struggle in the counties untouched by the struggle as well as abroad.”

In early 1970, the PIRA took over and relaunched two republican newspapers—An Phoblacht (AP, published in Dublin), and the Republican News (RN, published in Belfast). The PIRA’s leaders merged the two publications for financial and symbolic reasons, to present a unified republican front. The first issue of An Phoblacht–Republican News (APRN) was released on 27 January 1979, under the editorship of Danny Morrison, an “able public relations guru.” The PIRA weaved a powerful narrative that rested on the thematic pillars of oppression, injustice, and legitimation of the armed struggle. The narrative had some roots in reality.

896 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former senior PIRA leader (interviewee 54), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 3 December 2014.
897 APRN is extensively cited throughout this chapter. This publication does not use the system of dates consistently. Even after APRN had become a weekly publication, some issues follow the day-month-year format while others use the month-year template. I cite the dates precisely as they appear in a particular issue.
The PIRA emerged to fill the security vacuum created by the OIRA’s inability and the security forces’ reluctance to protect the Catholics from loyalist pogroms and state repression. “The Provisional IRA did not create the northern conflict: the conflict created it.” Although most scholars of the Irish Republican Movement concur that the PIRA arose as a defensive organization, few disagree. “The IRA men were supposedly our defenders. Nearly everyone who has written about the IRA in that period agrees that it was a defensive organization. This is nonsense. You don’t feel defended—that is, made safer—when neighbours with guns are shooting at army patrols and retreating into your garden.” Both arguments are compelling, but missing from the scholarly debate is a discussion of the PIRA as a Janus-like organization that amalgamated defensive and offensive capabilities, having evolved from a small group of community defenders into a sizable VSM that sustained offensive operations against the state’s security forces and the British Army for three decades.

The PIRA’s first successful operation that established this VSM’s reputation as a defender of the Catholic community materialized during the 1970 Battle for the Short Strand (a Catholic, nationalist enclave in solidly Protestant East Belfast), popularly known as the Siege of Saint Matthew’s. Even after the PIRA had transitioned from defense to attack, its leaders continued to frame the VSM’s resistance as collective self-defense against the aggression of the British Army and the repression of the northern state. Headlines such as “British Troops Are Invaders,” “SAS Murder Squads,” “British Terror in Ireland,” “Savage and Vindictive Raids,” and “British

901 “British Troops Are Invaders” (no author), An Phoblacht, August 1970.
902 “SAS Murder Squads” (no author), An Phoblacht, 15 October 1972.
903 “British Terror in Ireland” (no author), An Phoblacht, 6 July 1970.
Torture Chambers”905 regularly appeared in An Phoblacht and later APRN, covering stories that exposed the excessive use of force by the British Army; what the PIRA called provocations by the security personnel; violence perpetrated by the loyalist militias; and the death and destruction these actions inflicted upon the civilian population. As An Phoblacht expressed the situation, “we must insure adequate protection and defence for them [our people] so that they are not left at the mercy of Crown Forces or sectarian bigots,”906 because “not alone is there danger from groups such as the UVF, there are also British assassination squads in action in the North.”907 The actions of the British Army and local security forces in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, discussed above, inadvertently validated the PIRA’s narrative. It therefore resonated with the Catholic, nationalist population: “People see the IRA as the only force of protection,” said a resident of Derry. A civil rights organizer in the same city concurred: “An Establishment in the normal sense doesn’t exist here. But there’s no anarchy. To most of us there’s more anarchy outside—where you can be picked up by soldiers or the Royal Ulster Constabulary—than inside.”908 As early as 1971, the Observer reported: “Thanks largely to the Provisionals, there is now a visible oneness between the IRA and Belfast’s Catholic working-class population, to whom the IRA seems the one sure barrier against the Protestant mobs who invaded the Ardoyne and Falls Road areas, burning and shooting, on that traumatic night in August 1969.”909

By portraying the British government and Stormont as the diabolical enemies and the Catholic, nationalist population as the “conquered” and “oppressed”910 victims of British imperialism and “cultural colonialism,”911 the PIRA’s leaders justified their armed resistance as

the logical choice to attain “a Britless Ireland.”” In “The IRA Justified,” a lengthy article published in *An Phoblacht*, the PIRA offered a detailed rejoinder to the accusations mounted against it as a “terrorist organization.” Specifically, it provided a “political justification” for violent resistance, arguing that it was also “justified on moral grounds” within the framework of “just war.” It also explained why, in Northern Ireland, “the sword is the only method of arbitration left to the oppressed.” Normally, the PIRA’s leaders presented it as a legitimate army, because in their interpretation its progenitor, the IRA, “was the Army of the lawfully constituted Government of Ireland, Dail Eireann, the Parliament of the Irish Republic.” Hence, the PIRA referred to its captured members as “Prisoners of War,” and its adversaries as “enemy personnel.” For the PIRA, a state of war legitimized violence. For the British authorities, violence was criminally punishable civil disobedience. As Martin McGuinness said in 1972, “the job, as far as I’m concerned, is fighting the British Army. Ours is an offensive role. No one likes to kill. I don’t. But we’re at war. These people are invaders. . . . [W]hat sin is there in a man fighting for his country?” According to Gerry Adams, “Republicans don’t see themselves involved in violence. They see themselves involved in a perfectly legitimate struggle . . . to resist armed takeover of our country.” APRN regularly ran a column titled “War News” that publicized the PIRA’s military operations, underscoring their effectiveness and glorifying the valor of the volunteers who defied the might of the British Empire through acts of terror. The headlines are illustrative: “Victory for

the IRA: How the British Army and British Policies Are Being Defeated in the North of Ireland,”“North Bombing Cost England £300,000,000,” “IRA Bomb Blitz,” and “IRA Blasts Brits Where It Hurts: Military Targets Hit London.”

The PIRA accentuated the victimization of the Catholic, nationalist population by regularly publishing the names and pictures of the prisoners and victims of violence, and by giving a roll of honor. Simultaneously, it underscored the resilience of the Irish nation, because “barbaric militarism had triumphed—but only for the moment—over a defiant people. . . . [W]ith a monstrous show of force, the sacking of homes and the terrorisation of men, women and children, with curfew, brutality and the taking of three Irish lives, British military might crushed [sic] the Falls—but not in spirit. The courageous conduct of its womenfolk on Sunday, July 5, showed the world that the Falls lives and will prevail.” To delegitimize its adversaries and make a rational claim that the enemy could be defeated, the PIRA depicted British soldiers as “mangy Marines” and “thugs,” and it portrayed the loyalist militants as “cowardly bullies.” The PIRA’s newsletters published analyses of successful revolutions to demonstrate the effectiveness of armed struggle in achieving political objectives: “The Boston Massacre of 1770 was quite analogous to the massacre that occurred in Derry, occupied Ireland, 202 years later. British-occupied America was seething at the time under repression from power-greedy English lords. . . . The Boston

920 “North Bombing Cost England £300,000,000” (no author), An Phoblacht, 21 December 1973.
923 “British Terror in Ireland” (no author), An Phoblacht, 6 July 1970.
925 “Are These UVF People Men?” (no author), An Phoblacht, 7 December 1973.
massacre . . . represents the physical sacrifice required to achieve independence; it represents the concept of Boston as the cradle of liberty.”\(^9^2^6\)

In a culture where the past drags at the future, rebel leaders emphasized selective traumatic episodes that drew intense ire from the Irish Catholics because they established haunting parallels between historical and current events. Articles published in the PIRA and Sinn Fein outlets reinforced the narrative of subjugation and suffering. For example, an article in *An Phoblacht* titled “50 Years of Terror under Pax Britannica” was accompanied by pictures of “houses burnt out in Belfast in 1921” and “houses burnt out in Belfast in 1969,” highlighting the similarities between earlier historical episodes and the modern Troubles.\(^9^2^7\) Another article, “The Same Enemy,” included photos of “British Troops: Dublin 1916” and “British Troops: Belfast 1971,”\(^9^2^8\) to emphasize what another article called “The Link with 1916.”\(^9^2^9\) This discursive technique was effective, not least because in Northern Ireland “folk memory plays its part in intensifying rumour: people look for and can find only too easily the patterns of other pogroms in today’s events.”\(^9^3^0\)

The PIRA’s leaders claimed a moral analogy between the British conquest of the Kingdom of Ireland in the 16th century and the entry of the British forces into Northern Ireland in 1969, comparing the insurrections of native Irish people against British domination in the previous centuries with the modern conflict. In so doing, they legitimized the anticolonial nature of the armed struggle, pointing out that “English imperialism, both in its old and new forms, has been the root cause of Ireland’s ills,” and calling “the Irish people for a final assault on the forces of imperialism and neocolonialism.”\(^9^3^1\) Margaret Thatcher, prime minister of the United Kingdom

\(^9^2^7\) “50 Years of Terror under Pax Britannica” (no author), *An Phoblacht*, March 1971.
\(^9^3^0\) Dick Walsh, “Arms and the Ulsterman,” *Irish Times*, 2 December 1969.
from 1979 to 1990, “had become a hate figure beyond parallel in Irish history”\textsuperscript{932} and “the biggest bastard we [ republicans] have ever known.”\textsuperscript{933} The administration in Dublin was depicted as “a puppet or at least a subservient government fearful of British military and economic power”\textsuperscript{934} that had “sold out the people of the Six Counties”\textsuperscript{935} but could “no longer contain the spirit which arose from the ashes of Bombay Street.”\textsuperscript{936}

The PIRA’s publicists distilled the tragic complexities of the communal strife that had spread across Northern Ireland into a straightforward conflict between the Irish people and their occupier. To make the Irish struggle against the British jackboot comprehensible to the international audience and cultivate global empathy, the PIRA’s leaders evoked military occupations and insurrections around the world, comparing “Belfast 1970” with “Budapest 1956,” “Saigon 1966,” and “Prague 1968.”\textsuperscript{937} In the words of Gerry Adams, “the British government saw America as British soil, India as British soil, Cyprus as British soil and half of Africa as British soil.”\textsuperscript{938} And “for political and strategic reasons England refuses to release its last colony.”\textsuperscript{939} Adams frequently evoked apartheid in describing the conditions in Northern Ireland: “This was an apartheid state in which a very substantial minority of the citizens were disenfranchised and denied social, economic, political and civil equality. It was a state fashioned by a sectarian power and privilege, a state which practised wholesale suppression and discrimination.”\textsuperscript{940} He pointed out the “curious parallels between Ireland and South Africa. It’s no surprise that South Africa’s former

\textsuperscript{935} “British Terror in Ireland” (no author), \textit{An Phoblacht}, 6 July 1970.
\textsuperscript{937} “British Troops Are Invaders” (no author), \textit{An Phoblacht}, August 1970.
prime minister, Mr Vorster, cited the British laws in Ireland in defence of the apartheid laws in South Africa. . . . I’ve said this conflict would be easier to understand if all the republicans were black and the loyalists white.”

The perennial Anglo-Irish conflict gave birth to an enduring tradition of Irish martyrdom and a pantheon of national heroes: the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising, Irish poets, and hunger strikers—all of whom through act or pen contributed to the struggle for national liberation. Ruairi O Bradaigh once noted that “we have no need of your Che Guevaras and your Ho Chi Minhs. We have Robert Emmett, O’Donovan Rossa, Cathal Brugha, Dan Breen.” New PIRA martyrs arose from the agony of the 1981 hunger strike, “the most emotive weapon in the armory of Irish nationalism.” The self-sacrificial deaths of 10 hunger strikers (7 from the PIRA and 3 from the INLA) generated solidarity and an outpouring of support for the PIRA, not only across the North and South of Ireland but also abroad, including in the United States, where “emotion was being translated directly into cash” for the PIRA. The PIRA used the hunger strike to focus the world’s attention on their struggle (Sinn Fein even opened an H-Block Information Center, which released data and communiqués for local and foreign journalists). Rival nationalist factions, however, including the OIRA’s Workers’ Party and the mainstream Social Democratic and Labor Party (SDLP), condemned the hunger protest—failing to appreciate its emotional capital and resonance in the nationalist community and abroad. Having elevated popular feelings to a fever pitch, the hunger protest transformed people’s latent sympathies into macabre enthusiasm and mobilized “massive support” to put an “end to the whole process of callous humiliation of Irish men and

942 Quoted in “Former Head of IRA Who Saw Himself as Successor to Wolfe Tone” (no author), Irish Times, 8 June 2013.
women, unjust laws, brutal interrogation, forced confessions, Diplock Courts, compliant judges and corrupt politicians and police—in a word, British rule.”

Both the past’s and contemporary Irish martyrs were remembered at the annual republican commemorations, such as those held at the gravesite of Theobald Wolfe Tone in Bodenstown, where rebel leaders delivered speeches honoring national heroes and evoking the collective Irish suffering. The speeches, steeped in symbolism and imagery, were then printed in the republican outlets under headlines such as “14,000 Honour Tone.” These commemorations, inculcated into younger generations as part of national folklore, served as an important local conduit for mobilizing popular sentiment. Joe Cahill noted in 1971:

There are many people to whom I would like to address remarks to and there is one group in particular—it is those who are on the sideline. I feel that the time has now come when they must get off the fence. Surely our deeds and our actions are proof that we are determined and sincere, the time has come when every one must put his or her shoulder to the wheel, not tomorrow, but today. . . . I tell you here and now that we will hold on, make no mistake about it. This is our final struggle for freedom and independence. Our task will be made much easier and the day will dawn quicker when everyone plays their part.

The newspapers affiliated with the PIRA regularly covered commemorations and stories about historical Irish figures (for example, “Mac Diarmada Honoured in Leitrim,” “Sean

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945 Document “National H-Block / Armagh Committee,” 15 January 1981, Hunger Strikes Box no. 5 (H-Block / Hunger Strikes; National Smash H-Block / Armagh Committee; Prisoners’ Statements and Letters), Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland; accessed 21 November 2014.
948 “Mac Diarmada Honoured in Leitrim” (no author), An Phoblacht, July 1970.
Russell: A Life and Death for Ireland,”949 and “Soldiers of Cumann na mBan”950). The passions of the Troubles transpired also through the murals lionizing republican martyrs. By eulogizing the past, immortalizing the Irish patriots, and recognizing the sacrifice of their families, the PIRA created emotionally imbued content that encouraged continuation of the armed struggle.

The PIRA waged an effective psychological war solely using publicity. It concocted factoids and swiftly made propaganda capital from its adversaries’ blunders in order to isolate the Catholic, nationalist population from the British Army and local security forces. If the adversary’s mistakes involved collateral civilian fatalities or miscarriages of justice, the PIRA grasped the opportunity to present itself as the moral counterpoise. And even though this VSM itself committed atrocities and engaged in retaliatory sectarian attacks, its leaders rhetorically condemned both targeting civilians and sectarianism. As Gerry Adams described the situation in 1982: “I don’t think that sectarian shootings or killings, or bombings, or tit-for-tat from a moral position, from a strategic position, has any part to play in any political struggle. . . . Noncombatants should not be singled out as targets. People who are not involved should not be singled out.”951 Adams later reiterated his position: “The IRA must avoid circumstances and conditions in which civilians and non-combatants will be killed or injured. I think the onus is always on the IRA to do that. The other forces can kill civilians as a matter of policy but the IRA cannot.”952 He clarified that although the armed struggle sought to achieve a united Ireland, “we have no interest in a Protestant Ireland or a Catholic Ireland, just one Ireland.”953 Privately, some former volunteers acknowledged that the PIRA engaged in retaliatory sectarian attacks; but they were quick to point out that

“sectarian violence was a distraction”\textsuperscript{954} and that the circumstances “forced the [Provisional] IRA into sectarian fights.”\textsuperscript{955} Others admitted that the PIRA’s “kidnapping of the people who worked for the British Army and forcing them to drive bombs into the barracks, assassination of businessmen, and sectarian killings were appalling acts of desperation. The 1975 cease-fire and the feud with the Officials demoralized the PIRA. These kidnappings and assassinations were a way of letting off steam and keeping active.”\textsuperscript{956} In spite of its own ruthless brand of violence, however, “Sinn Féin / PIRA successfully hijacked the force of the deed turning the public relations potential to their advantage. They engineered a shift in the way communities understood ‘what’s going on.’”\textsuperscript{957}

The effectiveness of the PIRA’s discourse was reflected in its ability to attract recruits unrelated to the republican movement. Most volunteers who joined the PIRA (often referred to as the 69ers) were motivated not by the republican ideology or rebel chic but rather by anger and a sense of revenge. One of them recalled that “in the ’60s and ’70s we saw new families that didn’t have a prior IRA affiliation coming forward to join the movement.”\textsuperscript{958} Another underscored the emotions that propelled him to join the PIRA: “In the early 1960s I was committed to joining the British military. But that changed around 1969 and 1970. Anger, hatred, revenge motivated me to join the [Provisional] IRA instead. Those were not irrational emotions. The brutality and racism of the British Army fed those emotions. It was humiliating to be called ‘Irish bastards,’ to see our

\textsuperscript{954} Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 59), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 8 December 2014.
\textsuperscript{955} Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 63), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 10 December 2014.
\textsuperscript{956} Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former senior PIRA leader (interviewee 54), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 3 December 2014.
\textsuperscript{958} Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 70), Newry, Northern Ireland, 16 December 2014.
religious [Catholic] icons destroyed, and to be systematically beaten by the screws [prison guards].”

The composition of the PIRA recruits—especially their youth and lack of criminal record—attest to the VSM’s communal nature. According to one survey, of all the republican defendants who were convicted in the Diplock Courts in 1975, 70 percent were under the age of 21; 13 percent were between 21 and 25; and only 5 percent were older than 30. In addition, 55 percent had no prior conviction, and 22 percent had only misdemeanors. This pattern remained consistent among the republican defendants who appeared in the Diplock Courts in 1979: 53 percent were under the age of 21; 19 percent were between 21 and 25; only 11 percent were older than 30; and 43 percent of all defendants had no prior convictions. By way of contrast, significant majorities of loyalist Diplock defendants in 1975 and 1979 were both older than 25 and had criminal records.

Additional assessments of the effectiveness of the PIRA’s discourse in mobilizing and sustaining VCA come from public attitudes toward the PIRA and evaluations by experts, the security forces, and rival VSMs. For instance, in 1979 the Guardian reported:

The IRA could not operate with its present impunity in either part of Ireland unless it had much more popular sympathy than either the British or the Irish Governments will admit. It is conventional to say that outrages like those of Monday [the assassination of Lord Mountbatten] will sicken and disgust all Irish people. Unfortunately, that is not true. Many, yes, but not all. A few will be delighted, and more than a few will not go out of their way to prevent atrocities or inform on those who commit them. Between 5,000 and 7,000 people demonstrated for the IRA in

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959 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 58), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 6 December 2014.
960 “Who Are the Terrorists?” (no author), Fortnight, 7 May 1976.
Belfast on August 12. Each of those would willingly harbour a gunman or bomber. It is a safe assumption that many more would do so with less conviction but still with a feeling that they ought not to let down the boys. If that is the position in the North, why should it be markedly different in the South, where the claim to Irish unity is stated in the Constitution and, in many a republican house, drunk with the mother’s milk? If 3 percent support the IRA and another 5 percent give it acquiescence, there are 250,000 people ready to turn a blind eye. Those may not be the true figures, but they are small enough to be realistic. Add to those the mass of people in any society who shy away from involvement in things they do not like and the sea is large enough for many a guerrilla to swim in.962

Attitudes toward the PIRA in the Republic of Ireland reveal peculiar dynamics. According to a 1978 survey, many (61 percent) rejected the violence perpetrated by the PIRA, a minority (21 percent) supported the VSM’s activities, and some (19 percent) expressed neutrality. At the same time, 42 percent sympathized with the PIRA’s aims and motives, 33 percent rejected this VSM’s cause, and 25 percent expressed neutrality.963 These numbers indicate only modest active allegiance to the PIRA, but they clearly demonstrate considerable passive acquiescence. Tacit support is significant on at least three counts. First, it allows a VSM to operate freely in the areas where it enjoys the population’s sympathy. Second, passive support can affect voting behavior during political elections. A former member of the Army Executive explained: “the [Provisional] IRA survived underground for as long as it did because of the widespread popular support: active support as well as benevolent neutrality. The SDLP [Social Democratic and Labor Party]

962 “An Agenda for London and Dublin” (no author), Guardian, 29 August 1979.
condemned the IRA, but their voters never betrayed us [PIRA / Sinn Fein].964 And third, tacit support or neutrality can be swiftly translated into action as a result of traumatic events that affect a person (such as the murder of a family member by security forces or militias) or transformative events that afflict the community (hunger strikes, ethnosectarian pogroms, and military raids). Indeed, hindsight enables the pinpointing of a surge of support for the PIRA in 1969, when the civil rights marches spiraled into violent confrontations; in 1971, when internment was reintroduced and the Bloody Sunday massacre occurred; and in 1981, when the hunger strikes crescendoed.

In addition, testimonies of former PIRA leaders and volunteers confirm that sustaining armed resistance would have been impossible without the support of the Catholic, nationalist population. “The community fed us, provided vehicles, helped clean up after an operation, assisted with logistics. Those who were not active members of the IRA were, at the very least, proactive,” one volunteer recalled.965 Another said that “the [Provisional] IRA had to be in the population: that’s where the INTEL came from. Even people who didn’t engage actively were sympathetic [toward the PIRA]. We wouldn’t have been able to carry out an operation if the population were not sympathetic. You need a phone, a car after a shooting to escape. We took shelter in people’s houses. People fed us. That was a remarkable sign of support. Even people who might have not liked us [PIRA] were tolerant of us, because they saw the British Army and the RUC as greater threats.”966 A third former volunteer viewed the PIRA and community as inseparable: “The people fed us. They put their children out of bed to give us a place to sleep. It wasn’t like the community

964 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former member of the PIRA GHQ (interviewee 69), Monaghan, Republic of Ireland, 15 December 2014.
965 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 61), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 8 December 2014.
966 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 58), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 6 December 2014.
supported the [Provisional] IRA. The IRA was the community, and the community was the IRA.”967 A former PIRA leader offered similar observations:

It was hard to differentiate the people from the [Provisional] IRA. In a conventional army, one can do math. In the IRA, it was hard to quantify the support. We were popular resistance, we were one. . . . People didn’t see the IRA as a separate entity. Our community called us “the IRA boys.” They didn’t call us “fighters,” not even “volunteers.” They called us “boys.” And that says a lot about how they felt about us. We were part of families. I know that I was treated as a family member when after an operation someone else’s mother and father gave me a shelter, fed me. We were not different or separate from the community.968

Assessments by experts, the security forces, and rival VSMs are also compelling indicators of the effectiveness of the PIRA’s discourse in mobilizing civilian support. In evaluating the longevity of the PIRA, the British soldier and academic Richard Clutterbuck concluded that “its propaganda arm (Sinn Fein) has therefore always been more vital to its survival, and hence more effective, than its combat arm.”969 The effectiveness of the PIRA’s propaganda can also be gauged from the reforms that the British military undertook to offset its effects. The British Army engaged in PSYOPS against the PIRA, which were belatedly recognized as indispensable. A former member of the security forces noted: “The [Provisional] IRA produced ferocious propaganda, especially under Danny Morrison. But we [RUC] never tried to seriously counter the Provo

967 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 63), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 10 December 2014.
968 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former member of the PIRA GHQ (interviewee 69), Monaghan, Republic of Ireland, 15 December 2014.
propaganda.”970 Traditionally, the British military eschewed involvement in PSYOPS, because it deemed political warfare “a civilian task.”971 It was therefore utterly unprepared to counter the PIRA’s aggressive information campaign or deal with the reality that the British involvement in the modern Irish Troubles received extensive media coverage. Experts criticized the British Army “for not having taken enough steps to protect itself against a weapon just as injurious as the petrol bomb: namely ‘calumny,’” although they also acknowledged that “it would take an advertising campaign of genius to sell the British Army in the Catholic ghettos.”972

To counter the PIRA’s propaganda and improve relations with the news media, the Ministry of Defence undertook reforms in the early 1970s. It added new chapters on public relations to the army’s manuals, introduced media training for the military personnel in an attempt to restore and enhance the army’s image and to rectify its relations with journalists, included information services courses in the curricula of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and Joint Warfare Establishment, and—most important—established an Information Policy Office at Lisburn to study and analyze the PIRA’s propaganda campaign. Although the military’s investment in public relations achieved some results—particularly among the domestic audience in Great Britain—the British Army struggled to beat “the PIRA propagandists” or to “make any inroads among the Northern Ireland Catholic minority—the water in which the PIRA fish swim.”973

970 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former RUC commander and Scotland Yard investigator (interviewee 65), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 11 December 2014.
The leaders of loyalist militias also acknowledged the devastating impact of the PIRA’s publicity blitz. In the words of a former UDA commander, “the [Provisional] IRA’s publicity campaign was simple yet powerful: it portrayed Catholics as the oppressed and Protestants as the triumphant.”974 A former senior member in the UVF expressed a similar view: “The [Provisional] IRA’s media campaign focused on the collateral damage borne by the civilians. We couldn’t compete with the IRA’s media campaign. Nor did we have the money to establish an alternative media. The IRA waged a relentless propaganda war.”975

**The Relation of Message to Messenger**

Involvement in militant republicanism entailed risks and, hence, “a special, exclusive sense of shared suffering” among the movement’s adherents.976 Although Gerry Adams inherited a solid family legacy, coming from “one of the spinal Republican families in Northern Ireland,” he also earned credibility and legitimacy within the broader republican family through his engagement in the armed struggle.977 The thread that connected Adams with nonrepublican Catholics was “poverty, deprivation, and the consequences of state-sponsored anti-Catholic bigotry.”978 These attributes, inherited and earned, positioned Adams strongly to influence the direction of the republican movement.

Historically, armed resistance was the IRA’s raison d’être, and the movement acted in accordance with its cornerstone principles of doctrinaire militarism and parliamentary

974 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former UDA leader (interviewee 71), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 17 December 2014.
975 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former UVF leader (interviewee 56), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 4 December 2014.
abstentionism. The OIRA’s militant mind transpires in the words of the hard-liner Joe Cahill, who had parted company with the OIRA and helped found the PIRA when he saw the 1969 disturbances as an opportunity to revive the atrophying physical-force republicanism: “By tradition, I am a gunman. Talking will get us nowhere.”979 Despite the IRA’s long-standing tradition of armed resistance, in January 1962 Cathal Goulding called off the six-year border campaign and made a volte-face toward parliamentary politics, espousing Marxism and reframing the republican struggle in socialist and communist terms. The OIRA’s either/or approach, reflected in its inability to entwine within a cogent framework military tactics and political agenda, proved ineffectual. The VSM was discredited when it drifted into left-wing philosophy and failed to defend the Catholics in Belfast, Derry, and Ballymurphy in the years 1969–71.

Adams rhetorically exploited the OIRA’s blunder, chastising the leaders who had laid down arms and agreed to continue the 1974–75 cease-fire. The PIRA’s leaders repeatedly drew distinctions between themselves and the “Southerners who had no feeling for those fighting the war in the North.”980 This rhetoric resonated with the ordinary population that felt let down by the IRA when the civil rights protests in 1969 turned violent:

The majority of local [northern] Republicans has become disillusioned with the IRA leadership in Dublin and has severed contact with them. . . . The attack on the Falls in August surprised the IRA and caught them without adequate defence. The Belfast Republicans blamed the leadership in Dublin for the shortage of arms and, afterwards, for dragging their heels in the business of rearming. . . . Dublin has, apparently, insisted on a strictly political rather than defensive approach to Belfast’s

979 Quoted in “Obituary of Joe Cahill” (no author), Daily Telegraph (London), 26 July 2004.
problems. . . . The great majority, however, supports the local leaders. Membership is estimated at 25 groups of between 100 and 150 each.\footnote{Dick Walsh, “Arms and the Ulsterman,” \textit{Irish Times}, 2 December 1969.}

Many northerners at the time derided the Dublin leadership—“When did the O’Bradaighs ‘do’ their last soldier?”\footnote{No author, “The IRA Death Machine,” \textit{Observer} (London), 10 October 1971.}—and “claimed that Goulding had fiddled while Belfast burned, and that what they needed was guns and not quixotic dreams of uniting Catholic and Protestant workers in a new utopia.”\footnote{David McKittrick, “Obituary: Cathal Goulding,” \textit{Independent} (London), 29 December 1998.}

Like Goulding before him, in the 1980s Adams recognized the necessity and value of political participation. Unlike Goulding, Adams did not relinquish armed resistance when he began contemplating engagement in politics. At its inception, the PIRA eschewed involvement in politics—indeed, its founders broke away from the IRA in protest against the leadership’s abandonment of the armed struggle and embrace of politics. The developments in the 1980s, however, led the PIRA’s leaders to acknowledge both the limits of armed struggle and the criticality of political participation. Hence, the PIRA nimbly turned to political and “economic resistance” when the microstructural conditions had become uncongenial to continuing collective violence.\footnote{Quoted in Ed Moloney, “Adams Denies ‘Marxist’ Tag,” \textit{Hibernia}, 25 October 1979.} But instead of abandoning armed resistance, they formulated a two-pronged approach that integrated violence with politics and a military strategy with a political program. The VSM continued to fight “the long war” while pursuing politics: “Who here really believes that we can win the war through the ballot-box? But will anyone here object if with a ballot paper in this hand and an Armalite in this hand we take power in Ireland?”\footnote{Quoted in Patrick Bishop and Eamonn Mallie, \textit{The Provisional IRA} (London, UK: Heinemann, 1987), p. 301.}
To execute this new political-military strategy, the PIRA’s leaders restructured the VSM (previously modeled after the British Army’s brigades, battalions, and companies) into compact, mobile secret cells; developed and published political and economic programs advocating social and economic radicalism; and established new departments (such as for counterintelligence, civil administration, and publicity). Contravening the long-standing IRA tradition of leaders fighting alongside volunteers, the PIRA’s leaders, who by then had solidified their resistance credentials, decided to refrain from operational activity in order to be able to assume public roles as the leaders of Sinn Fein.

Significantly, and unlike the OIRA leaders, the PIRA’s leaders realized that the shift in strategy required rhetorical adjustments—a construction of discourse centered on political and social action. Although in the 1970s, Gerry Adams had lambasted the OIRA leaders because “instead of pursuing the war to its bitter end come what may, they allowed unscrupulous politicians and so-called ‘Peacemakers’ to gain the upper hand,” he tried to avoid exposing himself to a similar critique when he embraced politics.986 Toward this end, Adams gradually changed the PIRA’s discourse to acclimatize and prepare his followers for the possibility of political engagement. To maintain the leadership’s legitimacy among both militant republicans and moderate nationalists, Adams justified the opening of a political front as an effort to buttress the armed resistance: “The British don’t just fight on a military front. Our people aren’t just affected by the British Army. They’re affected by high rents, unemployment, bad houses.”987 As leaders of Sinn Fein, the PIRA framed political participation in terms of expansion of the revolutionary struggle, retained the armed militia as an active deterrent force for at least 10 years after the 1994 cease-fire, and

regularly warned that the peace was “conditional” and the campaign of violence could resume. The volunteers backed this rhetoric by carrying out acts of violence, including spectacular attacks in England (such as the 1984 bombing of the Brighton hotel, the 1991 attack in Whitehall, and the 1996 Docklands bombing), to deflect the speculations about the PIRA’s flagging military capabilities and to prove that the VSM’s selective attacks were an indication of self-imposed restraint, not weakness. In the end, the PIRA’s twin-track strategy, which stood in stark contrast to the OIRA’s either/or approach, proved effective in achieving political objectives through sustained VCA. Still, a question arises about how the PIRA’s leaders avoided the trappings of political engagement that had undermined the OIRA’s legitimacy.

Several factors converged to enable the leaders of the PIRA to shift the balance of power from the armed struggle to politics and, by extension, from the PIRA to Sinn Fein, without undercutting the movement’s legitimacy among the broader Catholic, nationalist population. Foremost, Adams rode out political storms by demonstrating strategic patience as he navigated the movement away from the armed struggle and toward peace negotiations. Sensing that the structural environment had become propitious for a shift to politics and the war-weary population had become ready for peace, Adams addressed his interlocutors thus: “As the political conditions change so must republican strategy change. . . . We all must share the daunting and massive task of interpreting and applying republicanism to changing and changed political conditions. . . . We have to develop a coherent social and political philosophy which provides a rationale for consistent political as well as armed action. Such a process is one of continual reinterpretation and refinement in response to constantly changing social and political reality.”

Equally important, Adams had

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gradually degraded the opposition to politics within the movement by ostracizing potential dissenters and outmaneuvering the older staunch believers in armed resistance. In contrast, the OIRA’s radical shift to politics and abrupt repudiation of the armed struggle neglected both to coopt or marginalize the potential insurgents within the movement (who would split to form the PIRA) and to meet the needs of the population demanding defense against the security forces’ and loyalist militias’ violent onslaught.

Critically, the leaders of Sinn Fein rationalized their shift to politics and publicly communicated their goals, even though details that could have sabotaged their position or the peace talks were kept in secret. Although Sinn Fein maintained the loyalty of a significant segment of Northern Catholics, Martin McGuinness acknowledged that gaining the support of the people of the Republic of Ireland would require political participation: “We must accept the reality that 65 years of republican struggle and sacrifice have signally failed to convince the majority of people in the 26 counties (of the republic) that the republican movement has any relevance to them. By ignoring that reality, we remained alone and isolated on the high altar of abstentionism, divorced from the people in the south.”990 Adams, too, urged Sinn Fein to end its self-imposed isolation: “For too long the political pygmies of Leinster House [seat of Dail Eireann, parliament of the Republic of Ireland] have had things too easy. For too long they have been allowed a monopoly upon what passes for politics in this part of Ireland and for too long a very sizeable section of Irish citizens have been denied the opportunity to shape and build a relevant, radical, and principled alternative to partitionist rule.”991

Sinn Fein—widely perceived as the mouthpiece for the PIRA—increasingly used legal language and cast the Irish struggle as the right of every nation to self-determination, a principle enshrined in the United Nations Charter.992 “We are a republican party committed to the struggle for national self-determination, committed to the overthrow of British rule in Ireland and to the end of partition and committed to bringing about the political and economic changes necessary for the well-being and security of this nation.”993 The word peace gradually entered the republican lexicon: “For too long Republicans had permitted others to hijack the word ‘Peace’ . . . . They needed to be confronted on their stance. . . . This required republican political initiative and a Sinn Fein offensive in the battle of ideas.”994

At the same time, Adams and other Sinn Fein leaders communicated about the state of the armed struggle and acknowledged “the actions of Oglaigh na hEireann, the spearhead of republican resistance in Ireland.” In 1986, Adams confirmed that “the IRA is . . . still around. The Volunteer soldiers of Oglaigh na hEireann . . . are unbeaten and unbroken. Their tenacity, in the face of a numerically stronger and much better equipped enemy, has become a legend among freedom-loving people throughout the world.”995 When the leaders decided to decommission the PIRA, they publicly announced the decision. This move contrasted with the OIRA’s approach. Specifically, although Goulding preserved what remained of the OIRA when he turned to politics, this VSM quickly devolved into a small, secretive terrorist group; was renamed Group B; and was disavowed by the leaders of the Workers’ Party (Group A), who never communicated the militia’s status to the public, even after they had made the decision to demobilize it.996

The events that preceded the PIRA’s shift to politics facilitated the move. The armed resistance, which had contributed to the 1972 downfall of Stormont (one of the PIRA’s principal objectives, which the Northern Catholics ardently supported), the 1975 British policy of Ulsterization, and the population’s war weariness gradually moderated nationalist public opinion. Furthermore, the 1981 hunger strike and some H-Block candidates’ participation in political elections cracked the traditional republican taboo on electoral participation.\footnote{See Robert A. Erlandson, “IRA Terrorist Who Is on Hunger Strike Wins House of Commons Seat,” \textit{Sun}, 11 April 1981; “IRA Prisoner Near Death from Hunger Wins Election,” \textit{Globe and Mail}, 11 April 1981.} The pragmatists within the movement recognized that the armed struggle had reached a stalemate. A PIRA leader explained how politics had entered the leadership’s thinking:

In the mid-1970s, there was lots of reflection in the movement on how this struggle should move forward. We felt that we had not reached a conclusion. And because we had not defeated the Brits by 1975, we believed that we had to continue the armed struggle. But we also recognized that we had never had the ability to beat the Brits into the sea. When we began the struggle, we thought that fury would make the North ungovernable and the Brits would leave. Well, the Brits didn’t leave. The thinking in the [Provisional] IRA was that if we get weapons, then we can prevail. God was on the side of the biggest battalion! We had weapons shipped to us from Libya and the United States, and we didn’t prevail. With weapons and the people’s support we couldn’t beat the Brits. See, when a boxer hits an opponent with his best punch and fails to [produce] impact, then he knows he is unable to damage his opponent.

There was debate and disagreement within the movement in the late 1970s. The movement and the community were feeling the effects of attrition. There was a recognition that we needed to amend our strategy and that publicity was necessary if we were to continue the fight. The leadership was feeling the pressure to make changes in the direction of the struggle. The hunger strikes were
a fortuitous opportunity to redirect the movement. The hunger protest gave a great impetus to the [Provisional] IRA and brought in a mass of fresh recruits. We couldn’t admit all. There was a moment of stopgap, holding the situation until we developed a new strategy. The new strategy was to intensify publicity and channel the mass support into politics.998

When Sinn Fein’s leaders engaged in peace talks, they had to balance two acts: establish themselves as credible negotiating partners internationally, and to maintain their resistance credentials domestically. To reassure the domestic audience, Adams explained that “the illusion that we have run down the military struggle and replaced it with a political one is a false one. What we did and are doing is to politicise and develop the struggle. Previously we organised only one aspect of the struggle—the armed struggle—and everyone else was a spectator.”999 Concomitantly, the PIRA’s leaders forcefully confronted the dissidents and potential spoilers within the rank and file, portrayed the pro-peace volunteers as good republicans, and publicly disowned the heretical offspring who opposed the peace process. Adams was talking peace while waging an internal war. When the hard-liners criticized the Provos for going Stick, Adams vehemently denied the claims and, when necessary, his lieutenants intimidated the dissenters.1000

To compare us with the Stickies is an obscenity. . . . For anyone who has eyes to see, it is clear that the Sticky leadership had abandoned armed struggle as a form of resistance to British rule as part of their historic new departure into British and Free State constitutionality. . . . For our part, this leadership has been actively involved in the longest phase ever of resistance to the British presence.

998 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former member of the PIRA GHQ (interviewee 69), Monaghan, Republic of Ireland, 15 December 2014.
Our record speaks for itself. We have led from the front and from within the occupied area. We have learned that to be victorious a struggle for freedom must be a struggle of the people. We have said many times that even the most successful armed struggle in the 6 Counties—and the struggle there is not merely an armed one—cannot achieve the Republic. The aspiration for the Republic has never been defeated.\footnote{Gerry Adams, “Presidential Address,” Sinn Fein Ard Fheis, Dublin, Ireland, 31 October–2 November 1986.}

His message beamed at potential dissidents, Adams said: “To leave Sinn Fein is to leave the struggle. This phase of the struggle is the greatest one republicans have ever been engaged in. We all have a part to play in it and those of us who remain committed to it will ensure, regardless of the dangers it holds for us, that this struggle is going to continue until Irish independence is won. That is no idle boast.”\footnote{Gerry Adams, “Presidential Address,” Sinn Fein Ard Fheis, Dublin, Ireland, 31 October–2 November 1986.} The PIRA’s leaders’ opprobrium was directed at both types of dissidents: those who, after the peace agreement was reached, advocated the continuation of violence; and those who did not support the armed struggle but opposed Sinn Fein’s policies. Those who publicly disapproved Sinn Fein’s engagement in the peace process were dubbed “traitors” and “touts”—defamatory labels in the Irish republican circles that Sinn Fein used to smear and ostracize the militant opponents of the peace process and to deter political detractors. By deploying vile epithets such as “enemies of Ireland and opponents of progress,”\footnote{Henry McDonald, “Martin McGuinness Accuses Dissident Republicans of Being Enemies of Ireland,” \textit{Guardian}, 26 May 2012.} Sinn Fein discursively separated “the ‘just’ violence of the PIRA and the ‘treacherous’ violence of those who have chosen to pursue the tactic of armed struggle” after the Good Friday Agreement,\footnote{Sophie A. Whiting, “‘The Discourse of Defence’: ‘Dissident’ Irish Republican Newspapers and the ‘Propaganda War,’” \textit{Terrorism and Political Violence}, vol. 24, no. 3 (2012), p. 487.} thus marginalizing the opposition to its policies and undermining public support for alternative
nonviolent republican voices. Some have noted that the “peace process has developed into . . . a powerful and invasive discursive formation, with its own regime of truth.”\textsuperscript{1005} Sinn Fein’s oratorical offensive effectively reinforced the legitimacy of the PIRA as the unadulterated paragon of republicanism and portrayed it as “the good and peaceable IRA.”\textsuperscript{1006}

Sinn Fein’s rhetorical offense was matched by a similarly effective discursive defense. For example, the leaders effectively rebutted allegations of Sinn Fein and the PIRA becoming Marxists. These assertions were often made by the British authorities, which had calculated that a “Marxist taint” would undercut financial support for this VSM that “duped simple-minded Irish Americans into supporting them.”\textsuperscript{1007} Adams said in a 1979 interview: “One thing which should be said categorically—there is no Marxist influence within Sinn Fein, it simply isn’t a Marxist organisation.”\textsuperscript{1008} A decade later, he reiterated his standpoint: “Sinn Fein is not Marxist. Sinn Fein stands for the right of the Irish people to govern themselves. We want democracy.”\textsuperscript{1009} Danny Morrison offered a similar rejoinder: “Sinn Fein would like the whole of Ireland united in a democratic-socialist republic. Now, having been to the States, I know immediately what people think when they hear ‘socialist.’ Even Irish Americans demand some explanation. I explain it this way: If you’ve grown up in the environment that we’ve grown up in, you would probably be expressing a similar point of view. And if I had grown up in Boston or the Bronx, I would hold to your views. Sinn Fein supports a democratic national government supported by all of the people of Ireland.”\textsuperscript{1010}

\textsuperscript{1006} John A. Murphy, “Three IRAs Make One Unholy Trinity,” \textit{Sunday Independent} (Dublin), 29 April 2001.
As the PIRA shifted from a unidimensional military approach to violent politics and to peace, they cushioned each move rhetorically. From its revolutionary apex, the PIRA’s discourse moderated to pragmatism and to pacifism. Adams proclaimed in 1986: “If at any time Sinn Fein decide to disown the armed struggle they won’t have me as a member.”\footnote{1011} But in 1992, he said: “Sinn Fein does not advocate violence. Our party is committed to dealing with the central issues, to challenging the causes of conflict in Ireland and by so doing to create the conditions in which real and lasting peace can be established.”\footnote{1012} And in 2005, the year the PIRA was demobilized, he addressed his colleagues thus:

> For over 30 years the IRA showed that the British government could not rule Ireland on its own terms. You asserted the legitimacy of the right of the people of this island to freedom and independence. Many of your comrades made the ultimate sacrifice. Your determination, selflessness and courage have brought the freedom struggle towards its fulfillment. That struggle can now be taken forward by other means. I say this with the authority of my office as President of Sinn Féin. In the past I have defended the right of the IRA to engage in armed struggle. I did so because there was no alternative for those who would not bend the knee, or turn a blind eye to oppression, or for those who wanted a national republic. Now there is an alternative. I have clearly set out my view of what that alternative is. The way forward is by building political support for republican and democratic objectives across Ireland and by winning support for these goals internationally.\footnote{1013}

Along with rhetorical maneuvering, a critical element that sustained popular support for the PIRA and then Sinn Fein was their leaders’ sensitivity to Catholic, nationalist attitudes. According to one PIRA leader, “the [Provisional] IRA was always sensitive to the public sentiment. Initially, the [Provisional] IRA’s strategy was defensive. But when the public opinion in the community began to change in the 1970s, the IRA was able to switch from a defensive to an offensive strategy. The IRA couldn’t have shifted from defense to offense unless the public attitudes had permitted that.”\footnote{Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former senior PIRA leader (interviewee 54), Belfast, Northern Ireland, 3 December 2014.} Indeed, the PIRA’s leaders manifested strategic patience when they advocated restraint in the rank and file during the civil rights campaign to allow emotional support for the armed struggle to ripen: “Had the IRA opened fire on the first day, the trouble would have possibly been over in a few hours and could have ended with the IRA’s defeat at the hands of superior British firepower and Ballymurphy’s substantial Catholic community rendered less angry, less willing to take up guns.” The PIRA’s calculus paid off: when the PIRA stepped in to defend the Catholics, “the people were cemented together; the British Army was humiliated and demoralised; alienation between the people and the state was complete and irreversible.”\footnote{Ed Moloney, \textit{A Secret History of the IRA} (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2002), pp. 88, 93. Also see Ciaran de Baroid, \textit{Ballymurphy and the Irish War} (London, UK: Pluto, 2000), pp. 41–57.} Conversely, the PIRA could no longer advocate intransigent militarism when public opinion began to moderate. Initially, Adams explained, “there was a natural reaction to say [sic] away from social issues and to keep zeroing in on the national question. As confidence has grown people have realised that you also have to push on social and economic issues—that you can’t simply project the position of British occupation and imperialism without trying to show people how it affects their everyday lives.”\footnote{Quoted in Ed Moloney, “Adams Denies ‘Marxist’ Tag,” \textit{Hibernia}, 25 October 1979.} The PIRA’s leaders’ directive to use force selectively and strategically
differed from other republican movements that used gunfighting either unconditionally in response to every problem or abandoned the armed struggle altogether.

Other examples of the PIRA’s sensitivity to the communal opinion are its abandonment of kidnappings for ransom, violent reprisals against Protestant civilians (such as the Kingsmill massacre in January 1976 and the Stronge killings in January 1981), and attacks against noncombatants in general (such as the 1978 bombing of La Mon Hotel in Belfast and the 1983 attack on Harrods department store in London). The kidnapping and killing of civilians spurred outrage among the Irish people across both the South and the North and injured the PIRA’s reputation as a nonsectarian force that drew its values from traditional Irish republicanism founded by Protestant Wolfe Tone. Learning from its own blunders, the PIRA increasingly applied a “clinical and carefully directed use of force” against what it called legitimate targets—namely, the British Army, local security forces, embodiments of Western capitalism and British imperialism, loyalist militants, and informants. \(^{1017}\) Even though, occasionally, a military operation would go wrong, the PIRA calibrated the application of violence to a level that was tolerable for the local population, enough to attract international attention, and not enough to provoke a massive retaliation by the security forces. \(^{1018}\) Reportedly, the PIRA also eschewed involvement in highly profitable drug dealing. \(^{1019}\) Instead, it initiated an antidrug campaign—Direct Action Against Drugs (DAAD)—in the areas under its control, recognizing that such a stance would generate political support as well as avert security threats to the VSM if it were to engage in narcotics trafficking.

Perhaps the strongest evidence of the PIRA’s leaders’ sensitivity to public opinion was their recognition of the war fatigue among the Catholic, nationalist population as well as within the movement itself and the resultant search for a peaceful settlement: “We must attune ourselves to the popular feeling and get into parliament,” Adams said in 1986. He explained that “our struggle—and this affects every aspect of the struggle for national liberation—cannot be built merely on the republican perception of things. We have had to consistently pitch our struggle at the level of people’s understanding. . . . [R]epublicans must be realistic, especially about the people’s perception (as opposed to our perception) of things.”

The PIRA’s leaders’ ability to exploit the microstructural conditions, their aggressive publicity campaign to arouse collective emotions, and their sensitivity to the domestic Catholic, nationalist constituency were indispensable to sustaining VCA until the PIRA decided to navigate away from the turbulent waters of war to a peace settlement. These elements were conspicuously missing from the OIRA’s strategy.

Comparing the OIRA and the PIRA

The variation in the OIRA’s and the PIRA’s abilities to sustain VCA is puzzling for a number of reasons. Both VSMs drew inspiration from the same republican ideology; both operated in similar microstructural environments; both pursued the shared goal of achieving a united Ireland; both violently resisted their mutual enemy, Great Britain; and both advocated military and later political and economic programs with some commonalities. Eventually, both the OIRA and the PIRA

transitioned from armed struggle to political, economic, and cultural resistance, tilting the balance of power from the VSMs’ military wings to the respective political parties. Rooted in the republican tradition, both VSMs invariably evoked in orations, commemorations, and publications the sacrifice of Irish martyrs, shared suffering of the nation, and collective memory of subjugation and injustice. In spite of these similarities, however, the VSMs differed in several critical respects that affected their ability to sustain VCA.

As discussed, the PIRA strategically aligned its political and military objectives with the grievances of the local population and shifted its discourse in response to the popular sentiment, deftly taking advantage of the microstructural conditions on the ground. In contrast, the OIRA’s leaders failed to foster a symbiotic relationship between the movement and the local population and to exploit the microstructural conditions prevalent in particular historical periods. The leaders synchronized their discourse with the movement’s philosophy, not with popular attitudes. For example, in the 1950s and 1960s, when economic hardship afflicted the majority of ordinary people living in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, as detailed in the earlier sections, the OIRA’s border campaign centered on reuniting the South and North of Ireland by waging a guerilla war. Proinsias De Rossa, the former president of the Workers’ Party, observed that the OIRA was so out of touch with ordinary people during the 1957 electoral campaign that Sinn Fein’s representatives were “knocking on doors” only to find out that “people didn’t know who we were.”

In the 1950s and 1960s, the OIRA’s singular focus on politically arid military force—coupled with its elite-centered, dispassionate rhetoric inciting violence devoid of clear political

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objectives—were not sufficient to mobilize the local populace for armed resistance. An OIRA political and military plan stated that the army was the backbone of the movement and “army recruits [were] to be chosen from the best and most conscious members of the organisation. Under no circumstances should the army recruit from outside on the basis of the emotional appeal of arms.” Having underestimated the power of communication, emotion, and popular support in sustaining an armed struggle, the OIRA’s leaders neglected to explain their goals to ordinary people. “It was never made plain at the start of the [border] war, either to the nationalist population or the wider public, exactly what the violence was meant to achieve politically,” and “no effort was made to retain and nurture nationalist confidence through an effective propaganda offensive in order to explain the motives of the IRA’s strategy, or through the formulation of economic and social programmes to appeal to the population at large”—hence, “to many others outside the movement, its strategy was incomprehensible.”

The OIRA attracted recruits through the example of violence, not by communicating to the people a response-shaping agenda. Even when the OIRA’s leaders began to communicate, their message failed to strike a chord with ordinary folk because it was intended for “great brotherhood of heroes and martyrs that mark 700 years of struggle to drive the British forces out of Ireland.”

A 1966 autopsy of the border campaign acknowledged this:

One of the principal facts which emerge from an analysis of the late campaign is that the people were not, by and large, in complete agreement with the Movement. And it also emerges that the

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man in the street was not able to see that the ending of Partition would be in his interest. The average Irishman was not allowed to see this. . . . Accordingly, the Republican Movement must reach the people in a way that the newspapers and other media of propaganda cannot interfere with. Members of the Movement must establish our own direct line of communication with the people through working with them on every conceivable project which affects their interests. . . . Only in this way will we arrive at the day when the use of force will succeed.1027

An OIRA document obtained by the RUC in 1968 contained a similar admission: “If the minds of the Irish people are to be influenced in any significant numbers towards national objectives, it is going to be necessary to reform the structure of the Movement in order to reach them. . . . The present form of recruit training will be changed. This change will replace the emphasis now placed on arms and battle tactics to a secondary position and be replaced by an emphasis on Social and Economic Objectives.”1028

In 1969, when the Catholic, nationalist population was left defenseless in Belfast and Derry, the OIRA, which by then had undergone a dramatic transformation and adopted a Marxist-Leninist ideology, was pursuing the formation of a national liberation front in alliance with local and foreign left-wing organizations to defeat imperialism and capitalism through social agitation, industrial sabotage, and parliamentary politics. But, as one former PIRA volunteer remarked, “if the people want their houses defended, you can’t offer them dialectical materialism instead. That is what the Officials’ Marxist ideology offered. The PIRA’s discourse, on the other hand, was

aggressive and defiant. Essentially the PIRA said ‘shoot them to defend our communities.”

Allegedly, Cathal Goulding instructed the IRA Army Council that “it is not our job to be Catholic defenders” and that it was the task of “the official forces, the British Army and the RUC, to defend the people,” although he retrospectively acknowledged that in 1969 “the only defence was armed defence.” Therefore, “anyone who kills a British soldier is ‘a good fuckin’ man’ in the Catholic eyes,” Golding said. “They [PIRA] may be more popular too in a military sense, people say—‘well they’ve shot more of the bastards than you lot have’, or, ‘you people are not half as good in an aggressive sort of way as the Provos.”

The PIRA mobilized collective anger against a concrete enemy and articulated “the long war” strategy to defeat the foe. Its leaders portrayed Great Britain as an exploitative foreign occupier and “a pawnbroker and guarantor of unionist hegemony.” They blamed the British for the economic stagnation, poverty, and social discrimination in Northern Ireland—as they saw it, “a massive indictment of British rule in the 6 Counties.” They then argued that “it was in their own [British] interests that they forcefully colonised half the world.” Last, they maintained that “British interference has been and continues to be malign because its presence has been and continues to be based on its own self interests. . . . Britain’s massive military and financial commitment is in fact a reflection of her continuing strategic, economic and political interests in Ireland.”

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1029 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 72), Dublin, Republic of Ireland, 20 December 2014.
and more repressive and has shown [itself] to be incapable of reform. . . . The abolition of Stormont has been one of the foundation stones of our policies over the past two years.\footnote{1036 Quoted in Richard English, \textit{Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA} (London: Macmillan, 2003), p. 127 (brackets in the original).} Most important, the PIRA demonstrated that it could deliver. The downfall of Stormont was perceived “as primarily the achievement of the [Provisional] IRA.”\footnote{1037 David McKitterick and David McVea, \textit{Making Sense of the Troubles} (Belfast, UK: Blackstaff Press, 2000), p. 82.}

Public vilification of the enemy and its dastardly acts was crucial in justifying the PIRA’s use of violence. Sean MacStiofain stated that “killing is inevitable and is going to continue until the British withdraw. . . . The end is in sight. We’re going to win.”\footnote{1038 Bernard Weinraub, “An IRA Chief Defends Ulster Terrorism,” \textit{New York Times}, 7 December 1971.} Danny Morrison stated: “When it is politically costly for the British to remain in Ireland, they’ll go. British public opinion wants them to get out. But the tragic thing is that it won’t be triggered until a large number of British soldiers are killed, and that’s what’s going to happen. . . . So you run into a bloody period when they’re going to die and we’re going to die. That can be avoided—\textit{if} the British aren’t too pigheaded and too racist to negotiate.”\footnote{1039 Quoted in Morgan Strong, “Playboys: Making War Not Love,” \textit{Magill}, March 1989 (emphasis in the original).} The presaged bloodshed was to serve concrete objectives: to reunite Ireland and to lift the disadvantaged from the depths of destitution. The PIRA adeptly linked the armed struggle against the British intervention with the Northern Catholics’ daily struggle over inequality, unemployment, and poverty. As the security and socioeconomic conditions began to improve and public opinion moderated, the PIRA augmented the military strategy with political, economic, and social programs as well as adjusted the discourse: “We are committed to the reconquest of Ireland by the Irish people. This means the expulsion of imperialism in all its forms, political, economic, military, social and cultural. It means the establishment of a real Irish republic and the organisation of the economy so that all its resources
are under Irish control and organised to bring maximum benefit to the people in a 32-county state in which Irish culture and national identity is strong and confident.”

Not until the advent of the Goulding leadership did the OIRA seriously contemplate developing an alternative to armed struggle. The alternative—Marxism-Leninism and the creation of a national front for liberation to spark an all-Ireland revolution—constituted too radical a shift from traditional Irish republicanism and nationalism, however. In a symbolic move to signal their intent to engage masses, the OIRA renamed Official Sinn Fein as the Workers’ Party, but invested little effort to effectively articulate how the party’s political platform was related to potential supporters’ grievances. Although the Workers’ Party outlined its programs in publications such as *The Irish Industrial Revolution*, those esoteric communiqués were designed for the intellectuals in republican circles and centered on ideological and philosophical debates, rather than the practical, socioeconomic concerns of the Irish people. Both ordinary people and “many activists had little formal education and had to struggle to keep up with the new concepts” espoused by the Workers’ Party that appeared in the movement’s public outlets, such as the *United Irishman*. The Workers’ Party’s socialist revolutionary policies failed to resonate in a conservative Catholic society because the rhetoric tinged with the notions of Marxism, Leninism, Stalinism, communism, scientific socialism, and progressivism was perceived as foreign by the Catholic, nationalist population (though the socialist influences in Irish republicanism in the 1920s and 1930s are worth noting).

The PIRA’s discourse, conversely, plucked at Irish nationalist heartstrings. According to the declassified assessments by the British government, “in Ireland the appeal of sectarian and

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nationalistic sentiment has always been stronger than that of left wing ideology.”1043 Therefore, the effort that would be required to interpret the programs of the Workers’ Party for the ordinary people was similar to “trench warfare in every Catholic street in west Belfast.”1044 The Belfast Telegraph noted this in a 1975 commentary about the feud between the OIRA and its splinters: “There is a temptation to regard the feud between the Official Republicans and the Irish Republican Socialists almost as something happening in another country. They speak a political language known only to themselves, and their violence has been fairly accurately directed at each other. . . . Watching this deadly game of tit for tat, outsiders can only conclude that for professed ‘socialists,’ these feuding factions show little consideration for the people they seek to lead.”1045

In a 1972 postmortem analysis of the movement he had led, Goulding underscored the centrality of effective communication with the people and their support to sustaining resistance: “[T]he [Republican] Movement as a whole had never given a thought to winning a war. They only thought of starting one. What we lacked was the support of the people. The reason we didn’t have their support was that the people didn’t understand what we meant by freedom. They fought it was a sort of Brian O’Higgins type glorious vindication of the Irish race. This wasn’t our idea at all. Our struggle must be a socio/political one. Something to do with the ordinary people. . . . [W]e had to make it plain to the people. To do this we had to involve ourselves in their everyday struggles for existence.”1046 In a statement put forth in the January 1969 issue of the United Irishman, the OIRA expounded “that it was no longer an ‘elitist force, divorced from the struggles

1045 “Deadly Feud” (no author), Belfast Telegraph, 4 March 1975.
of the people’ but a revolutionary army, whose role was to ‘assist the people in what is THEIR
liberation struggle.’"\(^\text{1047}\)

Thus, in the 1970s, the vintage OIRA began emulating the successful aspects of the fast-
fashion PIRA, especially in publicity and propaganda. In 1973, the Workers’ Party launched a new
publication, the *Irish People*, and in 1977 the newspaper’s new editorial team started to cover
social and economic problems that were of concern to the ordinary public. The Workers’ Party’s
*Irish People* weekly (later relaunched as *Northern People*) quickly eclipsed the OIRA’s *United
Irishman* monthly that had maintained a markedly republican tenor and focused on the theoretical
and philosophical issues pertinent to the republican ideology. Imitating Sinn Fein’s politically
rewarding outreach to the young Irish, the Workers’ Party launched the Workers’ Party Youth
organization in 1984.

But the Workers’ Party’s disavowal of the armed struggle entailed costs. The OIRA’s
legitimacy as a resistance movement collapsed when Goulding announced that “get the British
troops out of the North” was no longer the movement’s policy. Instead, its policy was to build “a
party of the working class” to “defeat imperialism and capitalism in all of Ireland.”\(^\text{1048}\) In justifying
the OIRA’s shift to politics, Goulding later drew parallels between the OIRA and the PIRA, saying
that “we [OIRA] were probably right too soon.”\(^\text{1049}\) Proinsias De Rossa made a similar comment:
“What’s the difference between the Stickies and the Provos? Twenty-five years.”\(^\text{1050}\) These
comparisons miss a critical element: the PIRA’s adept amalgamation of violence and politics.

\(^{1047}\) Quoted in Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, *The Lost Revolution: The Story of the Official IRA and the Workers’
\(^{1048}\) Quoted in “A Lifelong Revolutionary Forever Loyal to Socialism” (no author), *Irish Times*, 28 December 1998.
\(^{1050}\) Quoted in David Sharrock, “Divided Family’ Remembers Its Dead in the Drizzle of Belfast’s Milltown
Although Goulding sanctioned “defence and retaliation” after shifting to politics, that reactive tactic was not a substitute for a coherent military strategy. In his own words,

> It is our earnest wish . . . that the full emancipation of the Irish people could be achieved by peaceful means, but unfortunately it is not within our power to dictate what action the forces of imperialism and exploitation will engage in to suppress, coerce and deny ordinary people their God-given rights, and when their answer to the just demands of the people are the lock-out, strikebreaking, evictions, coercion, the prison cell, intimidation or the gallows, then our duty is to reply . . . in the language that brings these vultures to their senses most effectively, the language of the bomb and the bullet.\(^{1051}\)

To reverse its plummeting military relevance in Northern Ireland, which was engulfed in flames, the OIRA occasionally engaged in fratricidal violence with the PIRA and smaller republican rebel groups during the 1970s and 1980s.

The credibility of the OIRA and the Workers’ Party was also damaged because of the disjuncture between the leaders’ rhetoric and actions. A case in point is the communication of the Workers’ Party leaders about the OIRA: “SFWP’s [Sinn Fein the Workers’ Party] position was that it had no knowledge of the OIRA’s existence, and the party showed an increasingly marked reluctance to acknowledge that it had ever existed.”\(^{1052}\) Asked about the OIRA, the party members maintained that “we don’t know, it doesn’t exist, we have nothing to do with it, never had anything to do with it.”\(^{1053}\) By 1977, the Workers’ Party had banned color parties during republican

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\(^{1051}\) Quoted in “A Lifelong Revolutionary Forever Loyal to Socialism” (no author), *Irish Times*, 28 December 1998.


remembrance ceremonies and had begun to call the OIRA volunteers party members. In 1980, Sean Garland, general secretary of the Workers’ Party, denied knowledge of any OIRA activity: “Where did it happen? When? I don’t know of them and if anybody has information, why don’t they go to the police?” This duplicity hurt the Workers’ Party’s credibility because people in the nationalist community knew that the OIRA remained active by engaging in fighting, weapons smuggling, killing, robbery, racketeering, and fund-raising. Many wondered: “Are they [the Workers’ Party] treating us like total idiots?” Even “the dogs in the street know the WP’s history, . . . that pisses the hell out of most people, and they’re right.”

Sinn Fein’s attitude toward the PIRA stood in stark contrast to the Workers’ Party’s position vis-à-vis the OIRA. Although Adams had never acknowledged his leadership of the PIRA, he consistently supported “the right to resist British occupation of our country.” As a newly elected, abstentionist member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, in 1982 he reaffirmed his support for the armed resistance: “Sinn Fein and the IRA have the same objectives. The IRA is engaged in armed struggle. Sinn Fein would not only defend the IRA’s right to wage armed struggle but have the job, increasingly, of popularising support. I honestly see no other way by which the British can be forced to withdraw from this country, except by a mixture of struggle which involves properly controlled, interactive armed struggle.” He affirmed his position after the 1983 general Westminster elections by justifying the PIRA’s actions as “a necessary and morally correct form of resistance.” And he lent support to a military campaign not only in the North but also in

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mainland Britain: “Even the Loyalists have to admit that one bomb in Britain is worth 20 in the north; . . . without military actions in Britain, there would be little discussion of Ireland outside of political groupings.”

Although the PIRA’s actions also at times belied its leaders’ messages, the VSM’s evocative propaganda made the inconsistencies explicable. Its leaders promptly justified them or expressed regrets. Adams often accepted responsibility, even for the PIRA’s most appalling acts, such as the Veterans’ Day ceremony bombing in Enniskillen on 8 November 1987, which fomented widespread public outrage. “In politics, you can shoot yourself in the foot. The IRA has shot itself in the head,” commented the Irish journalist Eamonn Mallie. Despite the gravity of the PIRA’s offense, Adams accepted the responsibility and apologized: “I do not try to justify yesterday’s bombing. I regret very much that it happened.” At the event’s commemoration a decade later, he said: “I am deeply sorry about what happened in Enniskillen.” A former PIRA volunteer observed that Adams “was a leader who didn’t run away from a difficulty or a mistake. . . . After the Shankill Road bombing [in 1993], Adams could have conveniently gone away to some meeting abroad and avoided showing up at the funeral of the [Provisional] IRA man who had carried out the bombing that caused civilian deaths and condemnation from all circles. But Adams was in Ardyone, helping to carry the [volunteer’s] coffin.” Although Adams apologized for the PIRA’s blunders, he has refrained from publicly criticizing the movement: “I am certainly not going to leap into print condeming, or even publicly criticising anything the IRA has done. That isn’t helpful, it doesn’t achieve anything. One does not expect Thatcher to be critical of

1062 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former PIRA volunteer (interviewee 70), Newry, Northern Ireland, 16 December 2014.
anything British Forces did in this country.”

Yet Adams showed no reservation in reprimanding individual republicans who dared to challenge Sinn Fein’s policies or leadership.

The analyzed differences between the leaderships of the OIRA and Workers’ Party, on the one hand, and the PIRA and Sinn Fein, on the other hand, confirm the hypothesized mechanisms accounting for the decline of the OIRA and the rise of the PIRA “as a serious force” in Northern Ireland. Sinn Fein’s steady electoral gains further attest to the republicans’ growing influence in Irish politics. It is not possible to conduct a meaningful comparison in terms of electoral achievements between the Workers’ Party and Sinn Fein because the former’s main constituency was in the Republic of Ireland, and the latter’s among the Catholic, nationalist population in Northern Ireland. In some years, however, the political parties affiliated with the OIRA contested elections in the North (such as the Republican Clubs’ participation in the 1973 local elections in Northern Ireland), and the parties associated with the PIRA contested the elections in the South (such as Sinn Fein entering the 1987 elections in the Republic of Ireland). Three other factors complicate a comparison: first, by 1972 the separation between the Workers’ Party and the OIRA had been complete, and the party publicly disowned the militia; second, since its establishment the Workers’ Party has undergone a number of splits and mergers; and third, Sinn Fein entered electoral politics only in 1982.

In spite of these asymmetries, the outcomes of Sinn Fein’s electoral participation in the context of Northern Ireland deserve at least a brief analysis. Notably, Sinn Fein’s electoral gains and losses roughly coincide with the shifts in the microstructural conditions. More precisely, when the microstructural conditions were conducive to violent resistance (between 1969 and 1982), Sinn

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Fein achieved sizable political gains (such as the downfall of Stormont and the 1982 elections). However, when the microstructural conditions began to improve (between 1983 and 1998) and violent resistance became less appealing to the Catholic, nationalist population, Sinn Fein experienced political losses until it announced a cease-fire in 1994. Since then, Sinn Fein, which was initially subservient to the PIRA, has become the dominant partner in the movement, largely because Adams recognized that electoral contests had become as important as violent resistance.

A compelling indicator of how the PIRA’s resistance influenced public support are the results of the political elections, such as the “stunning Sinn Fein performance”\textsuperscript{1065} in the October 1982 elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly that had gained the party “a startling 10.1% of votes”\textsuperscript{1066} (specifically, 64,191 votes; and 5 seats out of 78)\textsuperscript{1067} to the newly formed parliament. The \textit{New York Times} reported that “this showing was widely regarded as an important psychological victory for the party, which . . . campaigned on a slogan of ‘a ballot in one hand and a gun in the other.’”\textsuperscript{1068} The \textit{Financial Times} published a similar analysis of the 1982 elections results: “Provisional Sinn Fein, which is the political wing of the Provisional IRA, won five seats and 10 percent of the vote. All the evidence is that those who supported it knew what they were doing. There is considerable sympathy for republicanism in both its political and military aspects.”\textsuperscript{1069} The June 1983 general Westminster elections had won for Sinn Fein the support of more than 13 percent of the electorate (specifically, 102,701 votes and 1 MP)\textsuperscript{1070}—“nearly 40,000

more than they got in last October’s Assembly election, and 12,000 more than they themselves were aiming for. . . . The unpalatable fact is that over 100,000 people, in the face of exhortations from the whole British, Irish, Catholic, Protestant and Unionist establishment, voted for the party of violence.”

In contrast, the Workers’ Party failed to win a seat in either 1982 or 1983, gaining 17,216 votes (or less than 3 percent of the vote) in 1982, and 14,650 votes (or less than 2 percent of the vote) in 1983.

Sinn Fein’s electoral success merits contextualization. After World War II, Sinn Fein did not participate in political elections. Instead, it adopted the physical-force path. Aside from contesting the Dail Eireann elections in 1918, 1921, 1922, and 1923, the party adhered to its cornerstone principle of abstaining from participation in state institutions. Thus, in the 1980s, Sinn Fein was a newcomer to the Northern Ireland political scene. And though it traced the established mainstream nationalist SDLP Party, Sinn Fein’s electoral gains in 1982 and 1983 were considerable, and the moderate SDLP lost seats to it. Between 1985 and 1994, Sinn Fein experienced electoral setbacks (such as in the 1984 European elections), although in most electoral contests (including the district elections) the party consistently maintained slightly more than 10 percent of the total vote, which was significantly higher than the Workers’ Party’s gains of under 3 percent in the same period. Notably, one of the objectives of the 1985 Anglo-Irish agreement was to marginalize Sinn Fein and mobilize the Catholic, nationalist vote behind the SDLP.

Against such odds, from 1995 onward, Sinn Fein’s representation steadily grew in the Northern Ireland Assembly. In 1998, the party won 18 percent of the total vote (142,858 votes and 18 seats out of 108).1075 In 2001, it eclipsed the SDLP when Sinn Fein became the largest nationalist party in the parliament, and Adams was recognized as “one of the most prominent political figures of our time.”1076 Some statistical analyses have determined that “the main explanation for Sinn Fein’s mobilization of the Catholic vote in the 1998 election was the personal influence of Gerry Adams, who was widely trusted by Sinn Fein voters.”1077 Such findings underscore the significance of movement leaders’ personal characteristics that political scientists tend to overlook but this study has aimed to highlight.

I have examined whether and how the interaction of the messenger, message, and microstructural conditions through emotional mechanisms enabled the VSMs to sustain VCA in Northern Ireland. By defending the Catholic, nationalist community, the PIRA established strong local legitimacy and then used it to incite collective emotions. It developed an aggressive publicity campaign that exploited the inadequate security and socioeconomic conditions in Northern Ireland, framed the presence of the British troops as an oppressive military occupation, and delegitimized rival VSMs. Sensitive to the attitudes of the local population, the PIRA’s leaders aligned their message with the Northern Catholics’ grievances—stressing historical injustice and shared suffering—and deftly adapted their discourse to changing public sentiment. PIRA leaders monopolized the discourse of resistance and backed up their rhetoric with selective violence. As the PIRA grew into a collective social force, the OIRA’s historical legitimacy and credibility

etiolated. The OIRA’s disconnect with the social, economic, and security realities in Northern Ireland and failure to communicate effectively with the local population led to this VSM’s fragmentation and decline. The leaders’ rhetorical disarmament, contrasting with the OIRA’s continued violence, created a say/do gap that further undermined the VSM’s credibility. The OIRA’s leaders’ acknowledgment of the significance of coupling resonant, prompt communication with congruent action and the subsequent attempt to emulate the PIRA in this respect proves that discursive emotional appeals are central to sustaining popular support for VSMs.
In this chapter, I test the VSM theory in two cases of Palestinian movements: repatriated Fatah-PLO and homegrown Hamas. I examine Fatah-PLO’s decline as a national liberation movement and Hamas’s rise as an Islamic resistance force under Israel’s military occupation of the Palestinian territories between 1967 and 2015.

I start by analyzing the security and socioeconomic conditions in the Palestinian territories and the role of external assistance in sustaining VCA. I demonstrate that inadequate security and socioeconomic conditions in the Palestinian territories in the course of Israel’s military occupation supplied Fatah-PLO and Hamas with similar discursive opportunities to sustain VCA. The availability of external assistance to the VSMs contributed to both collective violence and fratricidal strife. I subsequently process-trace how Hamas was able to sustain its capability to mobilize VCA—even in the mid-1990s when, as a corollary of the Oslo Accords, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), in conjunction with the Palestinian Preventive Security Force (PSF), sought to decapitate and eradicate the VSM. I argue that the Hamas leaders, unlike the Fatah-PLO leaders, sustained VCA because of their strong local legitimacy, organic bonds with the populace, and robust resistance credentials. Israel’s aggressive military and counterterrorism operations supplied Hamas with incendiary propaganda material, which the VSM adeptly used to incite collective emotions. The Hamas leaders whipped up public passions by effectively integrating domestic grievances, religious fervor, and lacerating resistance discourse within a coherent ideological framework. Because Hamas was acutely sensitive to popular sentiment, it was able to choreograph
both its rhetoric and actions to align with the shifting public mood. Operating behind a smokescreen of rhetoric, Hamas worked to maintain a united front, consistent discourse, and symbiotic relationship with the local population. As a result, it emerged as a viable counterpoint to Fatah-PLO and a resilient resistance force that commands the support of masses.

I contrast this outcome with the negative case of Fatah-PLO. Though it had once been the pulsing heart of Palestinian nationalism, Fatah-PLO failed to sustain its battle-forged legitimacy and popular support. Its leaders began as revolutionaries, but their quest for power and international recognition at the expense of good governance and local legitimacy severed Fatah-PLO from the grassroots. Fatah-PLO’s credibility and popular support attenuated because of its leaders’ inertia, their inability to communicate a clear vision and a coherent political program to the Palestinians, and their reluctance to reform the movement to uproot corruption and infuse fresh blood. Fatah-PLO lost it identity and moral force when it abjured armed resistance but could not secure peace and economic prosperity for the Palestinian people.

An Overview of Gaza’s and the West Bank’s Economic and Security Conditions

The Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917 is regarded by the Israelis as the beginning of their statehood and by the Palestinians as the beginning of their tribulations. The declaration supported “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people,” stipulating that “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.” In September 1923, the League of Nations granted Great Britain a mandate to administer Palestine until May 1948. The mandate affirmed the implementation of the Balfour Declaration by facilitating Jewish immigration. Later, however, the British authorities attempted to curb this immigration, especially the unauthorized entry and settlement of Jewish travelers, because of the political problems it was creating. Specifically, the influx of the Jews into the Promised Land—which accelerated between 1933 to 1936 due to the spread of anti-Semitism in some European countries and the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany—stirred anxiety among the Palestinian Arabs, whose growing resentment at the swelling Jewish community, the Yishuv, erupted into a rebellion in 1935. Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam, a Syrian, led the guerrilla operations against the British forces until his martyrdom in November 1935, which sparked the Great Arab Revolt of 1936–39. The British forces extinguished this insurrection in 1939,

1079 “Palestine to Act on Entry of Jews” (no author), New York Times, 15 November 1933.
shortly before the outbreak of World Word II. Great Britain’s proposal to divide Palestine, following the recommendations of the Peel Commission and Woodhead Commission, into two states based on the proportion of the Jewish and Arab communities inhabiting the territories—the latter nearly twice as large as the former—was met with opposition from the Arabs, who expected to gain control of all of Palestine with the help of Nazi Germany and the Arab states; and also from the Zionists, who rebelled against the British Mandate in 1945–46, although the Jewish leaders were sundered over the issue of dividing Eretz Israel. In April 1947, the British officials announced their plan to hand over the Palestine Mandate to the United Nations, which had replaced the League of Nations.

On 29 November 1947, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 181 (II) recommending the partition of Palestine into an Arab state and a Jewish state and the creation of an international regime, *corpus separatum*, for Jerusalem. Rejecting the partition plan, which allocated 55 percent of the land for the Jewish state and 45 percent for the Arab state, the Arabs of Palestine launched guerilla attacks on the Jewish settlements, culminating in 1948 in a year-long war between the newly founded State of Israel and a coalition of Arab states united by pan-Arab nationalism. Along with establishing Israel’s independence, one of the most consequential outcomes of the defeat of the combined Arab armies (including those of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria), was *al-nakbah*, or the catastrophe—an event that “created enormous anger and bitterness in the Arab world” and shaped the Palestinian national liberation struggle for years to come. *Al-nakbah* uprooted nearly 730,000 Palestinians, who fled or were expelled from an estimated 450 Palestinian Arab villages: “Peasants without land, workers without jobs, and

notables without honor, they were deprived of self-respect, hope for the future, and the security of citizenship.”

Many of these Palestinian refugees have never been resettled, and for generations they have lived in camps, without home and citizenship. The exodus turned the Palestinians into the “new Jews of the Earth” and created the Palestinian diaspora (shatāt).

The remaining Palestinian lands—the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem—fell under the control of Egypt and Jordan, respectively. In October 1956, Israel’s military forces invaded Egypt and occupied the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip, but they withdrew under pressure from the United States.

The territorial configuration changed once again during the 132 hours of the Six-Day War in June 1967, which began with an air offensive by Israel. Israel annexed and reunited East Jerusalem with its capital, West Jerusalem (the United Nations has not recognized Israel’s formal reunification of Jerusalem in 1980), and also captured Gaza and the West Bank, along with Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula and Syria’s Golan Heights—42,000 square miles of territory in total.

“Nourished by the shame of defeat,” the Arab governments encouraged guerilla warfare against Israel through proxies, such as the rival Palestinian groups Fatah and the PLO. “We think only of revolution and victory. We will win back our country from the Jews,” explained Yasir Arafat, then a young Fatah field commander.

The cross-border skirmishes were followed by a surprise Egyptian-Syrian attack on Israel on the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur on 6 October 1973. The war ended in a cease-fire agreement in November of the same year. In 1979, Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula in exchange for a peace treaty with Egypt that began with the signing of the 1978

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Camp David Accords. In the absence of a peace agreement with Syria, significant parts of the Golan Heights remain under Israel’s control. The captured Palestinian lands—East Jerusalem, Gaza, and the West Bank—are known as the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel imposed military rule and law on the Palestinian territories in June 1967, granting the Israeli area commander full executive, legislative, and judicial authority.\footnote{Israel Defense Forces, “Proclamation Regarding Law and Administration,” 7 June 1967.}

Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian lands, the West Bank (1967–present) and the Gaza Strip (1967–2005), ossified the two nations’ claims—Israel’s right to exist, and the Palestinians’ right of return to the lands lost in 1948 and recognition of Palestinian statehood—into the bedrock of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Just as Israel became a fact, so did Palestinian nationalism. Liberating historic Palestine and reinstating the rights of the Palestinians was the raison d’être for the emergence of Fatah, the PLO, and later Hamas.

The 1967 Six-Day War not only demarcated new territorial borders but also erected economic barriers across the Palestinian territories, which became severed from Egypt, Jordan, and major commercial and industrial hubs. The West Bank lost both access to the ports on the Mediterranean Sea and tourism, the backbone of the Palestinian economy until 1967. Due to the influx of refugees, its population nearly doubled, from 465,800 in 1946\footnote{Maya Rosenfeld, 
land and destruction of infrastructure. The tumultuous political situation from 1967 to 1993—coupled with the lack of economic integration between Israel and the Palestinian territories, in the absence of an independent Palestinian economic organ to counteract the unilateral Israeli and international economic policies toward Gaza and the West Bank—has adversely affected both the overall economic growth in the Palestinian territories and the socioeconomic conditions at the household and individual levels. The Israeli Civil Administration (CA)—which worked with the IDF in managing political, economic, and security affairs in Gaza and the West Bank—regularly suppressed economic initiatives that could potentially threaten the competitiveness of Israeli producers and imports; determined the terms of the customs union; controlled the essential factors of production, such as land, labor, and capital; and also limited access to vital natural resources such as water. These restrictive policies inhibited the development of the Palestinian territories’ productive economic capacity and infrastructure and eroded their domestic economic base, instead fostering de-development and an unhealthy dependence on Israel’s economy.

In the 1970s and 1980s, data on the Palestinian economy were not collected systematically. Therefore, statistics and indicators generated using uniform rigorous methods do not exist. The data for the period from 1967 to 1993 come from the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics. From 1993 onward, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and the World Bank, along with other international organizations, began to collect more systematic data. Still, the available episodic statistics paint an economy in turmoil in Gaza and the West Bank after 1967. Before the Palestinian

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The economy began to slide from bad to worse, however, it experienced a decade-long period of relative prosperity. Some accounts document that the economies of Gaza and the West Bank grew between 1968 and 1980—with an average increase of 7 percent in real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita—largely due to the opening of economic relations with Israel, absent before the 1967 War, the boom in the Middle East spurred by climbing energy prices in other parts of the world, and remittances from the Palestinians who found employment in the oil-abundant Gulf states.1094

The economic growth of the 1970s was short-lived, however. It slowed down in the 1980s and declined precipitously in the wake of the 1987 uprising, known as the intifada (shaking off). Moreover, the growth was uneven and counterbalanced by other factors. In particular, the 1970s growth was characterized by skewed development patterns, underprovision of public services, concentration of investment in housing, weak domestic productive activity, and large-scale exporting of Palestinian labor (unskilled to Israel and skilled to the Gulf states). In addition, the growth was distorted by the Palestinian economy’s structural imbalances, its susceptibility to external shocks, and its diminishing base of natural resources and was constrained by occupation policies, especially the asymmetric trade relations favoring Israel’s economy.1095

Between 1968 and 1984, the economy of the West Bank operated, in effect, without a banking system, which shut down in 1967 and reopened in the late 1980s—an atypical situation that can be remotely compared to the bank strikes in the Republic of Ireland between 1966 and 1977 and the shutting down of the banking systems in some republics of the former Soviet Union in the wake of its collapse in the early 1990s. Fully dependent on the Israeli banks, the Palestinians

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received limited services and loans. To make matters worse, the steady devaluation of the Israeli shekel, following the 1973 War, affected the consumer price index (CPI) in the West Bank, inflating it by 360 percent in the 1983–84 fiscal year.\textsuperscript{1096}

The shortage of capital, investment, and financial intermediaries stifled the development of agriculture, industry, and other economic activity in the West Bank, making the region heavily dependent on foreign aid, the transfer of funds by the PLO from abroad, and other external remittances. Between 1975 and 1981, the West Bank’s GDP stagnated, growing by merely 0.2 percent annually (at constant 1975 prices).\textsuperscript{1097} Concomitantly, Gaza and the West Bank’s per capita GDP, which increased from $670 in 1970 to $1,310 in 1980 (in 1991 US dollars) stopped growing.\textsuperscript{1098} The hardships in the economic sectors were paralleled by the hardships in the labor market. In particular, more Palestinians found employment outside Gaza and the West Bank than domestically. For illustration, from 1972 to 1990, the Palestinian labor force grew by 64 percent, yet domestic employment increased only by 28 percent—an indication that nearly half the Palestinian workforce was employed abroad.\textsuperscript{1099} And because the Palestinian economy was heavily dependent on outside employment and sensitive to external shocks, it was further disrupted by the region’s economic recession in the mid-1980s (which was precipitated by the oil glut and exacerbated by the 1987 intifada), the 1991 Gulf War (because of which many Palestinians lost employment in Israel and the Gulf states), and the renewed violence in the 2000s.

The 1987 intifada generated severe shocks to the economies of Gaza and the West Bank. The introduction of personal exit permits and mandatory work permits for employment in Israel; a reduced demand for Palestinian labor and exports in Israel; blockage by the Israeli authorities of fund transfers to the Palestinian territories; border closures, internal curfews, and the ensuing higher transaction and movement costs—all decreased employment, trade, and other income-generating opportunities for the Palestinians. (Border closures by the Israeli authorities materialized in movement restrictions between the Palestinian territories and Israel, between Gaza and the West Bank, and within the West Bank through checkpoints and roadblocks.) Another shock to the Palestinian economy resulted from the 1990–91 Gulf War. Yasir Arafat’s support of Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait resulted in the expulsion of many Palestinian workers from the Gulf states, suspension of aid to the Palestinians from Arab donors, and reduction in money transfers from the cash-strapped PLO.1100

The socioeconomic difficulties that an average Palestinian experienced as a result of these events transpire in personal accounts. “People feel they are in one boat—unfortunately, a sinking boat,” said a Palestinian economist in the West Bank. “We have to cut down our standard of living to what’s compatible with our indigenous economic base.” Many Palestinians did just that. “When I walk past the butcher shop these days, I have to turn my face away,” said a stonemason who lost his job in Israel because of the intifada.1101 A journalist witnessed a similar grim reality in the Gaza Strip in the 1980s: “The Abdullah Rabah clan lives in three rooms off a four-by-four courtyard in the Khan Yunis camp. Each brother has one room—for his entire family. The brothers’ elderly parents also live, somehow, in this tiny agglomerate of hovels at the end of a two-metre-wide alley.

The kitchen is a cave-like cell; the lavatory a hole in the ground. No quiet corner. As soon as children in Gaza can walk, they walk away from their homes, away from the camps, and to the wide, breeze-swept beaches, the one esthetic element in their blighted environments.¹¹⁰²

Generally, economic recessions have hit the Gaza Strip especially hard. With an area of 139 square miles that is about 28 miles long and 5 miles wide, Gaza is one-fifteenth the size of the West Bank. Roughly 80,000 people lived in the Gaza Strip in 1948. Due to the inflow of refugees displaced by the wars of 1948 and 1967, Gaza’s population quintupled to 450,000 in 1967.¹¹⁰³ The only shelter that most of the refugees ever found, however, was one of the eight camps in the Gaza Strip. With a population of 590,000 in the late 1980s, Gaza became one of the most densely populated territories in the world, akin to Hong Kong and Singapore, which, in contrast to Gaza, pulsated with prosperity.¹¹⁰⁴ In 2014, nearly 1,817,000 people lived in the overcrowded enclave—approximately 13,070 people per square mile.¹¹⁰⁵

Physical infrastructure, natural resource availability, and financial investment are all significantly worse in Gaza than in the West Bank; therefore, its economy is less resistant to shocks and downturns. Before 1967, Gaza’s economy was primarily agricultural, with a small service sector and an industry specializing in the production of crafts, textiles, and food. The massive influx of refugees inflicted a heavy toll on the structure, growth, and performance of Gaza’s economy, however. These economic conditions were aggravated by the Israeli authorities’ taxation policies; control of Palestinian exports and imports to protect the Israeli market; and military orders

to curtail the cultivation of certain crops in order to preempt competition with Israeli farmers and to administer scarce water supplies. As a result, agriculture’s share of total GDP declined by 50 percent, from 28 percent in 1968 to 13 percent in 1984. Notably, Gaza’s agriculture sector shrunk not because of the economy’s shift to industrialization induced by modernization but because of both natural and imposed constraints. Gaza’s industry—lacking structural and technological innovations and also marketing and investment opportunities—has historically been the smallest contributor to GDP.

The prospect of peace ensuing from the 1993 Oslo I Accord briefly revived hopes among the Israelis and the Palestinians alike, leading to an ephemeral period of calm and economic prosperity. There was a real estate boom in the Palestinian territories and increased demand for construction in Israel (and hence for Palestinian labor). The Palestinian Authority (PA), the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), and other national institutions were established during the peace process. It was also agreed to transfer security responsibilities from the Israeli police and military forces to the Palestinians. In actuality, however, the PA exercised little autonomy over major policy decisions and no control over its territory. The divergent interpretations and fundamental misconceptions of the 1993 Oslo I Accord and the 1995 Oslo II Accord put forward by both the Israeli government and the PA stymied the implementation of the “land-for-peace” agreement and did little to ease the tensions between the Jewish and the Palestinian communities.

The stalled peace process exacerbated the already-inadequate socioeconomic conditions in Gaza and the West Bank. And the progressively stricter policies of border closure and work permits, implemented since 1993, posed additional challenges to the economic development in the Palestinian territories. Their effects were clearly demonstrated in the decrease in Palestinian employment in Israel from an average of 116,000 people in 1992 to 28,100 in 1996; the 28 percent unemployment rate in 1996; the 15 percent drop in per capita real consumption between 1992 and 1996;\textsuperscript{1109} and the 30 percent decline in real per capita gross national product between 1993 and 1998.\textsuperscript{1110} During the period 1993–96, direct and indirect losses incurred by the closure and permit policies amounted to $2.8 billion (in 1995 prices), or the equivalent of one year’s GDP—thus undermining the private sector and pushing the Palestinian economy toward autarky.\textsuperscript{1111} The combined per capita GDP (at current prices) remained virtually at the same level between 1994 ($1,327) and 2005 ($1,470), indicating a chronic recession in the Palestinian territories. Notably, in most years in the indicated period, the per capita GDP fluctuated in the West Bank but steadily decreased in Gaza, especially when the peace negotiations dissolved into the second Palestinian uprising in 2000.\textsuperscript{1112}

The opinions of the Palestinian people reflected the economic downturn in the mid-1990s. In a survey conducted in September–October 1994, 50 percent of Palestinians felt that “one year after the signing of the Declaration of Principles (DOP) their economic conditions did not change.”

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A considerable segment of the population (41 percent), however, believed that the “economic conditions have deteriorated since the signing of the DOP.” And only 9 percent observed some improvement in the economic conditions. Significantly, 49 percent of respondents in Gaza (13 percent more than in the West Bank) believed that “their economic conditions have deteriorated since the signing of the DOP.” Another poll conducted in February 1995 revealed high levels of unemployment among the Palestinian labor force—more than 50 percent, including 57 percent in Gaza and 48 percent in the West Bank. And if the number of the respondents who were willing to work but stopped looking for employment were added, the rate would rise to 60 percent. These indicators were considerably higher than the official statistics.

On 28 September 2000, violence in the Palestinian territories burst out with renewed force. Precipitated by then Likud Party leader Ariel Sharon’s visit to the Haram al-Sharif—Islam’s third-holiest place, which Jewish people believe is the site of their first and second temples and the Holiest of Holies—the outbreak of violence marked the beginning of the Al Aqsa Intifada. The intifada triggered another economic recession in Gaza and the West Bank. Many Palestinian workers permanently lost their jobs with Israeli companies, as Israeli employers began to replace Palestinians with foreign guest workers from Eastern Europe and Asia to keep businesses running during the uprising. The combined economic growth in Gaza and the West Bank, which picked up modestly during the peace negotiations, slowed down in the mid-1990s and dropped dramatically in the early 2000s to negative 15 percent. Between 1994 and 2000, the regime of border closures

and internal curfews choked economic life, causing expenditure to exceed domestic production by 150–165 percent of GDP.\textsuperscript{1116} The attendant welfare impact was manifested in the 33 percent decline in real per capita gross national income (GNI), which dropped from $1,922 in 1999 to $1,296 in 2003 (1997 being the base year).\textsuperscript{1117} With imports between 70–85 percent of GDP and exports at 20 percent, the Palestinian economy incurred a deficit of 50–65 percent of GDP in its trade balance between 1994 and 2000.\textsuperscript{1118} This renewed economic crisis in the Palestinian territories in the early 2000s was triggered by the occupation policies and by heavy-handed counterinsurgency measures intended to contain the intifada. But it was further exacerbated by the PA’s mismanagement, rent-generating strategies to create public revenue, and public-sector corruption. In the absence of statehood and independent institutions, meaningful economic reforms, effective development strategies, and autonomous trade and monetary policies could not be implemented in order to reverse the economic decline or mitigate the adverse path dependence.

In 2005, Israel withdrew its forces from the Gaza Strip. This withdrawal increased the Gazans’ internal mobility, but Israel’s enforcement of rigorous external border closures had effectively imposed a full embargo on the Gaza Strip and crushed what there was of its economy. The economic blockade precluded passage of people and goods; caused severe shortages of fuel, electricity, and food; and encouraged the development of an illicit tunnel economy underneath the seven-mile border with Egypt. Residents of Gaza call their homeland “an open-air prison.” In addition, when Hamas assumed governance of Gaza in 2007, many international organizations and foreign countries that designated Hamas or its military arm, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, a


\textsuperscript{1117} Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, “Per Capita GDP, GNI, GNDI by Region for the Years 1994–2003 at Constant Prices: 1997 Is the Base Year” (http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_Rainbow/Documents/caa8d8cf-3ef0-4772-a5c3-0a304ae4f7d.htm); accessed 18 April 2014.

terrorist organization cut aid to the Hamas government, further aggravating the economic crisis. In the Gaza Strip, per capita GNI declined from $1,342 in 2005 to $868 in 2008, recovering only partially, to $1,065, in 2011 (2004 being the base year).\textsuperscript{1119} By contrast, in the West Bank per capita GNI increased from $1,587 to $1,929 in 2008 and to $2,190 in 2011.\textsuperscript{1120} As the West Bank experienced modest but unstable economic recovery after 2007 (largely due to the injection of massive international assistance), Gaza’s economy underwent severe contractions and recurrent recessions. GDP growth in the Gaza Strip decreased by 20 percent in 2006, 8 percent in 2007, and 10 percent in 2008.\textsuperscript{1121} Between 2000 and 2008, Gaza’s economy was kept afloat through donor assistance from Arab states, while its civilian population subsisted by receiving social aid from humanitarian organizations.

Overall, the Palestinian economy remained anemic in the period between 1987 and 2015. Starting in 1982, the economy steadily declined, and it experienced severe shocks as a result of the 1987 intifada, the faltering peace process in the 1990s, the 2000 Al Aqsa Intifada, the 2006 formation of the Hamas government in Gaza, and the 2006–7 Palestinian civil strife—along with the Gaza-Israel confrontations that occurred in between these transformative events. In general, growth and labor market trends have resembled the developments on the political front: the periods of peace negotiations temporarily stabilized the economy, while the conflicts set in motion spirals of instability. As discussed, socioeconomic conditions in Gaza have consistently been worse than those in the West Bank; and in both territories, positive trends in growth or the labor market have


been ephemeral and thus insufficient for a robust, sustainable recovery. Even without statehood, the Palestinian territories displayed the symptoms of a failing state—in the economic sector as well as in the security arena.

Since the partition, security has become a focal issue for both the Israelis and the Palestinians. The fight between the two communities, which unfolded in the regional framework of the Arab-Israeli conflict during the 1960s and 1970s, was transformed into an Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the 1980s. As the center of gravity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict shifted from outside the occupied territories to Gaza and the West Bank, the PLO replaced the Arab states as the Palestinian people’s representative and continued armed struggle against Israel from abroad. The tensions between the two communities reached a boiling point on 8 December 1987, when a traffic accident involving an Israeli truck killed four and injured seven more Palestinian workers at the Erez Crossing in the Gaza Strip. At a stroke, spontaneous riots consumed Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. The first Palestinian intifada, sustained by a combination of violent, nonviolent, and symbolic methods—such as stone-throwing, tire-burning, hurling of Molotov cocktails, civil disobedience, labor strikes, economic boycotts, hoisting of Palestinian flags, and display of national emblems—continued until the 1993 Oslo peace initiative was announced.

From the onset of the first intifada in December 1987 until the beginning of the second intifada in September 2000, more than 1,500 Palestinians and 400 Israelis were killed.\footnote{1122}{B’Tselem, “Fatalities in the First Intifada” (http://www.btselem.org); accessed 22 December 2015.} The Al Aqsa Intifada, fiercer than the first, involved terrorist attacks and suicide bombings by the Palestinians and ferocious Israeli reprisals. More than 3,240 Palestinians and 990 Israelis died during the Al Aqsa Intifada, from September 2000 through January 2005.\footnote{1123}{David A. Jaeger and M. Daniele Paserman, “The Cycle of Violence? An Empirical Analysis of Fatalities in the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict,” \textit{American Economic Review}, vol. 98, no. 4 (September 2008), p. 1592.} The Palestinian civil
strife in the summer of 2007, in which Fatah lost the battle against Hamas for control of Gaza, resulted in an additional 350 Palestinian deaths and more than 2,000 injured. The three-week-long Operation Cast Lead (2008–9), an Israeli incursion into the Gaza Strip to stop Hamas rocket fire, led to the deaths of 1,398 Palestinians and 4 Israelis. Israel’s bombs, live ammunition, and plastic-coated metal bullets killed more than 700 Palestinians during the period after Operation Cast Lead until the beginning of Operation Protective Edge (2014), arguably the most lethal Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip since 1967. Palestinian terrorism and rocket and mortar fire killed more than 40 Israelis in the same period. In 2014, the Gaza-Israel conflict claimed the lives of nearly 2,300 Palestinians and 87 Israelis. Tens of thousands of Palestinians were injured, and many more were internally displaced in the same year. On a smaller scale, the recurring violence between the Jewish settlers and the native Palestinians in the occupied territories still steadily augments the death toll in both communities.

Unlike in Iraq (2003–11) and Northern Ireland (1969–98), it is difficult to identify distinct and lasting periods of improvement or deterioration in security in the Palestinian territories (1987–2015). Instead, security in Gaza and the West Bank has remained precarious, punctuated by spikes in violence. Modest improvements in security in the West Bank have typically been eclipsed by wars between Hamas and Israel. In Gaza, during the 15-year period from 2000 through 2014, on

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average 478 Palestinians, mostly civilians, died every year as a result of security incidents. The highest numbers of fatalities were suffered in 2004 (623 deaths), 2006 (531 deaths), 2008 (806 deaths), 2009 (1,055 deaths), and 2014 (2,256 deaths)—which were the years coinciding with the escalation of hostilities between Hamas and Israel.\footnote{1128} Violent confrontations between Gaza and Israel have also caused the displacement of tens of thousands of Palestinians.

### Social Ramifications of the Deteriorating Economy and Security

The economic growth in the Palestinian territories in the 1970s was accompanied by improvement in household conditions, including an increase in income levels, school enrollment, and life expectancy, as well as decreases in poverty and infant mortality.\footnote{1129} But the political volatility in Gaza and the West Bank—coupled with regional economic instability and domestic economic fragility—counterbalanced the effects of the 1970s growth. The lethargic economy of the 1980s entailed acute hardships for most Palestinian households in the form of high unemployment, deep poverty, substandard health care, and a lack of educational opportunity.

The unemployment rate in Gaza and the West Bank in 1968 stood at 11 percent and 17 percent, respectively,\footnote{1130} dropped to low single digits in the 1970s, and climbed to double digits in the late 1980s.\footnote{1131} The rising levels of unemployment in the 1980s forced further emigration of the Palestinians, including skilled workers, many of whom were never able to return to Gaza or the

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnote{1128} The calculations were made using the data from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Fragmented Lives: Humanitarian Overview 2014” (Jerusalem: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, March 2015), p. 6.
\end{itemize}}
West Bank because of the stringent reentry rules enforced by the Israeli authorities. More Palestinian workers had to be employed outside than inside the territories between 1967 and 1987, due to the lack of opportunity domestically. Nearly 66,000 Palestinians worked in Israel in 1975 and 109,000 in 1987, making up 35 percent of the West Bank’s employed population and 45 percent of Gaza’s.\textsuperscript{1132} While this formation of wage labor inside Israel allowed the Palestinians (including many who were highly educated) to secure income by performing semiskilled or menial jobs, it also made the Palestinians’ earnings exceedingly dependent on the host country’s economic and political climate, as became evident during Israel’s economic recession in the 1970s and the intifadas in 1987 and 2000.

In the wake of the 1987 intifada, the imbalance in labor supply and demand significantly widened in the Palestinian territories. For example, between 1987 and 1991 the labor force increased by 10 percent but employment opportunities improved by only 3 percent.\textsuperscript{1133} With the advent of the regime of border closures and work permits, Palestinians incurred substantial losses in earnings and exports. Data from the early 1990s corroborate this: “Every day of complete closure to labor and products leads to a loss in income of almost $700,000 in labor earnings and $250,000 in exports for Gaza, out of a daily national income of $3 million. For the West Bank, every day of closure leads to a loss of income of $1.1 million in labor earnings and almost $600,000 in exports, out of a daily national income of $7 million.”\textsuperscript{1134} During the 1990s, the unemployment rate in Gaza and the West Bank continued to grow and remained high, even when closures were


In the decade following the 2000 intifada—which set off a series of economic crises that were further intensified by hard-fisted Israeli security countermeasures and economic sanctions—Palestinian unemployment and poverty worsened. The combined unemployment rate among labor force participants in Gaza and the West Bank increased dramatically during the Al Aqsa Intifada, peaking at 31 percent in 2002 and remaining well above 20 percent through 2011.\footnote{Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, “Unemployment Rate Among Labour Force Participants in the Palestinian Territory by Governorates and Sex, 1999–2011” (http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_Rainbow/Documents/Unemployment%20Rate.htm); accessed 27 November 2015.} Notably, in Gaza the unemployment rate fluctuated between 35 and 40 percent during the decade following the intifada. And in 2014, the year of another Gaza-Israel conflict (Operation Protective Edge), one in six people in the West Bank and every second person in the Gaza Strip was jobless.\footnote{World Bank, “Economic Monitoring Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee” (Washington, DC: World Bank, 22 September 2014), p. 4.} Significantly, the official unemployment rates do not reveal either the extent of underemployment or the decline in youth employment and overall labor force participation.

Chronic unemployment fed the poverty trap. The World Bank, using a subsistence poverty line—a measure of extreme poverty defined as “NIS [new Israeli shekel] 205 per month per capita” or “$280 per month for a family of six” required for the minimal levels of caloric intake, housing, and clothing—established the Palestinian poverty rate at 16 percent (or 607,000 people) in 2003, pointing out that the actual rate would have been 22 percent, almost a third higher, without emergency assistance.\footnote{World Bank and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, “West Bank and Gaza: Deep Palestinian Poverty in the Midst of Economic Crisis” (Washington, DC: World Bank, October 2003), pp. 10–13, 25.} In the same year, 63 percent of the population in Gaza and the West
Bank lived below the poverty line of $2.3 per person daily, encompassing the 16 percent who subsisted in extreme poverty, that is, below $1.6 per person per day. High levels of deep poverty persisted through 2005—totaling 15 percent in the Palestinian territories in 2004 and 2005 (or 17 percent in Gaza and roughly 14 percent in the West Bank), and rose to 19 percent in 2007 (or 33 percent in Gaza and 10 percent in the West Bank). Although large segments of the Palestinian population have constantly remained at high risk of falling into destitution, the increase in poverty in 2006–7 occurred in large part because of Hamas’s assumption of power in Gaza, which prompted the international community to suspend aid and the Israeli government to terminate the transfer of tax revenues collected on behalf of the PA (a punitive measure regularly exercised by the government of Israel, especially at times of conflict).

A Gaza resident’s plight was shared by many others in the Palestinian territories: “My father is diabetic, which means my daughter no longer goes to university because I need to choose between his medication and her transportation costs to and from Gaza City. If we hadn’t stopped eating meat, I couldn’t afford either.” In 2007, nearly half of Gaza’s population still lived under the poverty line. Although the overall poverty rate in Gaza dropped to 34 percent in 2009, from 50 percent in 2007, studies suggest that the economic rebound that mitigated the poverty rate was the result of resuming wage payments in the public sector in 2009 and an upsurge in social aid to households from humanitarian organizations. Alarmingly, the structural drivers of poverty—the

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1140 World Bank, “Coping with Conflict: Poverty and Inclusion in the West Bank and Gaza” (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011), p. 15. Deep poverty indicates how far below the poverty line the poor people, on average, are.


lack of employment, educational opportunities, and productive private sector—remained largely unchanged, and Gaza’s economy was still isolated and fragile. A human rights activist based in Gaza shared his perception of its economy: “At least in prison, and I’ve been in prison, there are rules. But now we live in a kind of animal farm. We live in a pen, and they dump in food and medicine.”

Over the years, inadequate socioeconomic conditions have decimated the Palestinian people’s living standards. For instance, an electricity shortage is the norm in the Palestinian territories. In the years 1992–94, only 13 kilowatts (KW) of electric power was allocated per 100 people in Gaza and the West Bank (in the same period, the equivalent Israeli power distribution was 82 KW per 100 people), and barely 25 percent of Palestinian households had sanitation.

Although its own power plant generates some electricity, for its electricity supply Gaza depends on Israel. In response to Hamas’s firing of rockets into Israel, Israel’s Ministry of Defense often cuts Gaza’s electricity supply or targets Gaza’s vital infrastructure, including its power plant. Every day, Gazans experience power outages, which, in turn, affect the provision of clean water, sanitation, and health care. The quality of Gaza’s available water does not meet the standards set by the World Health Organization. Socioeconomic conditions typically worsen in the wake of Gaza-Israel confrontations. Commenting on Gaza’s devastation and the lack of reconstruction to alleviate civilian suffering in the wake of the 2014 Gaza-Israel War, a foreign diplomat compared Gaza to “a dirty diaper. No one wants to touch it.”

The World Bank’s findings confirm the fact that poverty in Gaza and the West Bank is not a function of poor human capital or human development. In fact, Palestinians outperform developing or middle-income countries with a similar or higher per capita GNI in life expectancy at birth, literacy, and education. For example, Gaza and the West Bank yield stronger childhood nutrition indicators than Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, or Turkey, as well as maintain achievements in human development, high school enrollment, and literacy rate.\footnote{World Bank, “Coping with Conflict: Poverty and Inclusion in the West Bank and Gaza” (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011), pp. 89–90.} Indeed, many international organizations underscore the Palestinians’ high-quality human capital, professional skills, and entrepreneurial talent, all of which remain underutilized due to political and economic instability, regulatory constraints, and antediluvian infrastructure. Hence, poverty in the Palestinian territories is correlated with weak labor market outcomes.\footnote{World Bank, “Coping with Conflict: Poverty and Inclusion in the West Bank and Gaza” (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011), pp. 9–11.}

Since Israel occupied Gaza and the West Bank, these territories’ inadequate microstructural conditions—which transcend the social, economic, and security realms—have had dire consequences for aspects of the Palestinians’ well-being that are unrelated to income and consumption. Destitution and despair have caused rampant health and psychological problems within Palestinian society, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression. “I get frequent panic attacks. It feels as if my heart is going to stop. I have teenage boys. There are no opportunities for them here [in the West Bank]. I constantly worry about how to keep them off the streets and from joining any militia,” said a Palestinian father in Ramallah, sharing his anguish.\footnote{Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a Palestinian journalist (interviewee 40), Ramallah, West Bank, 21 December 2013.} “Our husbands don’t work, my kids are not in school, I get nervous, I yell at them, I cry, I fight
with my husband. My husband starts fighting with us and then he cries: ‘What am I going to do? What can I do?’” a young mother of eight told the *New York Times*.\(^{1151}\)

The deteriorating Palestinian economy and the ensuing poverty under military occupation—coupled with the PA’s authoritarian governance and inability to provide and protect—have unraveled the social fabric of Palestinian society, reviving once-dormant clannism and tribalism. Although modern Palestinian society has not been plagued by intrasectarian or ethnic cleavages, the rise of tribal politics over the past couple of decades has led to a high incidence of internecine violence. A Palestinian psychiatrist observed in 1998 that “tribal identity seems to be reemerging, as opposed to the latter years of the occupation, when we defined ourselves first and foremost as Palestinians. As the internal political map is redrawn, people are regrouping into their tribal affiliations. And even political groups like Fatah are behaving today like tribes. Palestinian feelings of insecurity are being augmented by widespread disillusionment with the peace process, a deteriorating economy and dwindling hope.”\(^{1152}\) Indeed, the hopelessness that permeates Gaza and the West Bank has induced many Palestinians to support or join the factions that promise radical change. Next, I discuss how the Israeli occupation has created opportunities for the VSM leaders to mobilize civilians for VCA.


A Shared Discursive Opportunity: The Israeli Occupation and Collective Emotions

In a 1988 interview, Yasir Arafat told the American journalist Marie Colvin: “We are an occupied people. Will you not give us the right to resist? The resistance fought the Nazis. Your George Washington fought the British. Was he a terrorist?”1153 In June 1967, Israel became the sovereign power governing the Palestinians, who were relegated to the status of an occupied minority without political or civil rights, statehood, or citizenship. The global community and international institutions—inter alia, the UN General Assembly, UN Security Council, UN Human Rights Commission, and International Court of Justice—regard Israel’s military occupation of Gaza (until 2005), the West Bank, and East Jerusalem as inadmissible. Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits an occupying power from transferring its own civilian population into territory it has occupied, and thus renders the expansion of Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories illegal.1154 Israel’s continued land, aerial, and naval blockades of the Gaza Strip also violate international law.1155

As discussed, Israel’s nearly five-decades-long occupation has led to steadily deteriorating economic, security, and living standards in the Palestinian territories. But as one Palestinian school principal noted, “it is the loss of human dignity that is the worst part of occupation. We are treated like a herd of sheep.” She continued: “occupation is the everyday harassments; the army stopping you at the checkpoint, checking your ID. . . . You know, they have these handheld machines that they could just wave in front and back of you. . . . But they choose to strip you, simply in order to

humiliate you."”1156 “The occupation has destroyed the foundation of the Palestinian family,” said a colonel in the PSF. “By arresting Palestinian men and demolishing our houses, Israelis have shattered the backbone of the Palestinian family—the father figure. They have undermined the power and the image of Palestinian fathers as protectors of their families. They have made us appear impotent in front of our wives and children. Therefore, when Hamas retaliated against the Israeli army, a Hamas suicide bomber became our children’s role model. Hamas projected power.””1157

The IDF’s military campaign in the Palestinian territories has centered on coercing the occupied population into submission while seeking to limit fatalities among the Israeli military and security forces.1158 To achieve these objectives, the IDF has employed an amalgam of strategies and modalities: conventional offensive warfare (for example, the use of artillery and air force bombardment in civilian areas, territorial incursions, and the destruction of Palestinian security forces, military installations, and civilian infrastructure), hard counterinsurgency (for example, raids and searches by masked Israeli soldiers, deportations, house demolitions, border closures, checkpoints, imprisonment without trial, shoot-to-kill, curfews, and town, village, and house arrests), and counterterrorism (for example, aggressive intelligence collection, intrusive surveillance, targeted assassinations of resistance leaders and terrorist operatives, and torture).

Generally, the IDF has responded to Palestinian provocations with overwhelming and disproportionate lethal force, producing large-scale collateral damage to civilian life and property.

and it has also launched multiple unprovoked attacks, such as during the Al Aqsa Intifada.\textsuperscript{1159} In so doing, Israel has neglected the political and social ramifications of its military and counterterrorism operations.\textsuperscript{1160} Examples of Israel’s preponderant reliance on military force in dealing with Palestinian upheavals include Yitzhak Rabin’s “iron fist” strategy, to quash the intifada through “force, might, and beatings” and to “break the bones of Palestinian inciters”,\textsuperscript{1161} and Ariel Sharon’s “strong hand” approach,\textsuperscript{1162} rooted in his belief that “Judea and Samaria [the West Bank] are Israel! And so is the Gaza Strip.”\textsuperscript{1163} The Israeli authorities have also employed defensive strategies, such as the collection of actionable intelligence and the construction of the security wall—a concrete scar that snakes through the West Bank to separate it from Israel and is considered highly controversial by many experts because it is “taking Palestinian lands” and “helping turn Palestinian communities into dungeons, next to which the bantustans of South Africa look like symbols of freedom, sovereignty and self-determination.”\textsuperscript{1164}

Israel’s predominant approach to the conflict, however, has been characterized by offensive military operations, such as the 2002 Operation Defensive Shield, 2006 Operation Summer Rains, 2008–9 Operation Cast Lead, and 2014 Operation Protective Edge—all of which inflicted heavy casualties on the Palestinians, as discussed above. Over the years, the IDF has shown a disinclination to shift to a soft, population-centric counterinsurgency. Domestic constituencies,  

settler politics, and Israel’s aversion to casualties have all played a part. A former Israeli senior intelligence official noted that “Israel continually falls into the trap of [Hamas] provocations because we have to react strongly when terrorism exceeds acceptable levels.”\textsuperscript{1165} An Israeli defense analyst explained the resistance within Israel’s military and intelligence communities to engaging in full-spectrum counterinsurgency: “When there is no violence, no need to compromise; when there is terrorism, no concessions, period.”\textsuperscript{1166}

The IDF’s military approach—bereft of a guiding political blueprint to address the roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—has failed to prevent the recurrence of Palestinian violence. In the short run, Israel’s military reprisals and overpowering physical control have been tactically and operationally effective. In the long run, however, these draconian methods have exacerbated the radicalization of the occupied population, binding the Palestinians with anger and frustration in support of VCA. A panorama of Palestinian attitudes reveals that almost every Gaza-Israel war has boosted popular support for Hamas, even among those Palestinians who had previously disapproved of Hamas’s ideology and governance. For example, in March 2009, in the wake of Operation Cast Lead, Hamas’s popularity rose to 33 percent, from 28 percent in December 2008; “positive evaluation of the performance of Haniyeh’s [Hamas-led] government” increased from 36 percent to 43 percent; and 35 percent of Palestinian respondents accepted the legitimacy of the Haniya government, compared with the 24 percent who thought that the Fayyad government, which had been appointed by Fatah-PLO, was legitimate. Disturbingly, support for attacks against the Israelis rose from 48 percent in December 2008 to 54 percent in March 2009.\textsuperscript{1167} In a similar

\textsuperscript{1165} Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former Israeli senior intelligence official (interviewee 19), Tel Aviv, Israel, 9 December 2013.
\textsuperscript{1166} Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with an Israeli military and defense analyst (interviewee 21), Tel Aviv, Israel, 10 December 2013.
\textsuperscript{1167} Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, “With the Popularity of Abbas and Fayyad Declining Sharply and the Popularity of Haniyeh and Hamas Increasing Significantly, the Public Becomes More Hawkish” (Ramallah, West Bank: Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 5–7 March 2009).
manner, Operation Protective Edge led to an upsurge in support for Hamas and its leaders. A December 2014 poll indicated that 79 percent of Palestinian respondents “support Hamas’ way of confronting [sic] Israeli occupation”; 62 percent “favor the transfer of Hamas’ armed approach to the West Bank”; 80 percent “support attempts by individuals to stab or run over Israelis”; and 77 percent found acceptable “the launching of rockets from the Gaza Strip at Israel if the siege and blockade are not ended.” (The indicated percentages were even higher in an August 2014 poll, which was taken in the immediate aftermath of the Gaza conflict.\(^{1168}\)) Furthermore, in Gaza and the West Bank, 54 percent and 53 percent, respectively, approved of prime minister–elect Ismail Haniya, while 44 percent and 41 percent approved of President Mahmoud Abbas. In the same poll, 83 percent of Palestinians thought that “Israel’s long-term aspiration is to annex Palestinian territories and expel its population.”\(^ {1169}\) An Israeli counterterrorism expert offered an explanation for such spikes in popular support for Hamas:

In [the realm of] counterterrorism operations, Israel’s military and intelligence have been both proactive and reactive. With respect to motivational aspects of terrorism, Israel has been neither proactive nor reactive. First, few people appreciate the importance of motivation. Second, when terrorism is at peak, nobody is concerned about motivation because the focus is on the military aspect of the fight. When terrorism declines, it is not practical to invest resources into thinking about long-term [issues] such as reducing motivation or countering Hamas’s propaganda. But terrorism is an equation: motivation plus operational capability. Therefore, the solution to terrorism

\(^{1168}\) Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, “Gaza War Ends with a Victory for Hamas Leading to a Great Increase in Its Popularity and the Popularity of Its Approach of Armed Resistance” (Ramallah, West Bank: Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 26–30 August 2014).

\(^{1169}\) Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, “Four Months After the Gaza War, Optimism About National Reconciliation Decreases While the Popularity of Hamas and Ismail Haniyeh Remains Higher Than That of Fatah and Abbas” (Ramallah, West Bank: Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 3–6 December 2014).
is to lower both factors at the same time. Israel has focused on the second. In trying to destroy Hamas’s operational capabilities, we have increased [Palestinians’] motivation for violence.\footnote{Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with an Israeli counterterrorism expert (interviewee 12), Herzliya, Israel, 3 December 2013.}

The most frequently used punitive measures that have afflicted the Palestinian people—building up their collective ire—are checkpoints and border closures, administrative detentions without trial or charge, arbitrary indefinite incarcerations, forcible deportation of Palestinians from the occupied territories, house demolitions, settlement construction on the confiscated Palestinian land, discriminatory application of the law, destruction of crops, and targeted assassinations. In what follows, I briefly discuss each form of individual or collective punishment and its effects.

As the Palestinian journalist Zuhair Kurdi remarked, “the legal father of the suicide bomber is the Israeli checkpoint, while his mother is the house demolition.”\footnote{Quoted in Matthew Gutman, “Destruction, Constructively Speaking,” Jerusalem Post, 10 January 2003.} For the Palestinians, checkpoints are places of “ritual humiliation.”\footnote{Derek Brown, “Eyewitness: Ritual Humiliation on the Road to Nowhere,” Guardian, 20 October 1994.} Most are convinced that behind the checkpoints, roadblocks, and border closures is “calculated humiliation.”\footnote{Jon Immanuel, “Closure Tops Palestinians’ List of Grievances,” Jerusalem Post, 7 February 1995.} These perceptions are not unfounded, even if a checkpoint protects innocent Israeli civilians from terrorism on the other side of the fence. For instance, I crammed inside the narrow, prison-like metal passageways of the Qalandiya checkpoint, together with hundreds of Palestinians anxious to get from Ramallah to Jerusalem for and after work, school, or a doctor’s appointment. There was only one metal detector operating, no matter the length of the line or the number of lines; and there was only one person checked at a time. A reclining Israeli soldier’s boots, pressed against the window designated for identification checks, greeted me. All of a sudden, he straightened up—perhaps because my ID...
card was American? “This is our life, every day,” said the smiles to me of two sisters returning home from Birzeit University.

According to the Palestinian organization Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, between 1967 and 2014 the Israeli authorities cumulatively detained more than 800,000 Palestinians—equivalent to 20 percent of the total Palestinian population in the occupied territories and 40 percent of all Palestinian males. The detainees include 10,000 women (since 1967) and 8,000 children (since 2000). Administrative detentions—pursuant to Military Order 378 and, later, Military Order 1651, along with the Emergency Powers (Detention) Law 5739–1979—have typically spiked in the periods of civilian unrest. For example, from the onset of the first intifada in December 1987 until June 1989, the Israeli authorities administratively detained more than 5,000 Palestinians—including students, professors, journalists, trade unionists, and PLC members. One Palestinian journalist, a refugee born in the Balata camp, was detained while conducting research for his doctorate: “I was imprisoned for doing research; kept in jail for 10 months, without legal proceedings.” Although he used the time in prison to complete his dissertation—and had four incarcerated professors as his advisers—for many wrongfully detained young people, he noted, “prison becomes the push, the motivation to join the resistance. Prison educates and prepares for resistance. Prison strengthens resolve.”

Comparing prison with a “state,” he detailed the interactions among various Palestinian factions, leaders’ decision-making and power-sharing, and the process of indoctrination. Another imprisoned Palestinian journalist

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1176 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a Palestinian journalist, formerly a resident of the Balata camp (interviewee 37), Nablus, West Bank, 20 December 2013.
did join the resistance: “I became a member of the PFLP [Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine] in an Israeli jail and myself began to recruit.”

Investigations conducted by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) confirm that in spite of the reforms initiated by the Government of Israel, “ill-treatment of Palestinian children in the Israeli military detention system appears to be widespread, systematic and institutionalized.” Detained Palestinian children are subjected to physical violence, painful restraining, verbal abuse, intimidation, solitary confinement, sleep deprivation, blindfolding, strip searches, and other grave violations of children’s rights. They lack access to medical care, toilet facilities, water, and food. Child detainees are not allowed to be accompanied by parents or lawyers, and they are rarely informed of their rights. Some offenses entail extremely harsh punishments; for example, a 14-year-old or 15-year-old teenager can receive the maximum penalty of 20 years in prison for “throwing an object, including a stone, at a moving vehicle with the intent to harm.”

International and local human rights organizations have recorded even more “cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment” of adult Palestinian detainees and “the use of torture,” including the methods of “painful shackling and binding, immobilization in stress positions, sleep deprivation, the use of threats against family members, threats and verbal abuse.” The Israel Prison Service often punishes prisoners who go on hunger strikes by putting

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1177 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a Palestinian journalist (interviewee 40), Ramallah, West Bank, 21 December 2013.


them in solitary confinement, prohibiting contact with lawyers, chaining them to a hospital bed, and physically assaulting them.\textsuperscript{1181} As of January 2014, 16 of the 17 prisons in which the Palestinian detainees were held were located inside Israel,\textsuperscript{1182} in violation of Article 76 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which provides that “persons accused of offences shall be detained in the occupied country, and if convicted they shall serve their sentences therein.”\textsuperscript{1183} The violation of this principle precludes both—detainees cannot meet with Palestinian defense attorneys; and family members cannot visit imprisoned relatives due to the stringent restrictions on movement imposed on the Palestinians residing in Gaza and the West Bank.

In addition to detentions, the Israeli authorities have often deported Palestinian terrorists and also activists, politicians, lawmakers, and academics. A case that generated an international outcry was the 1992 expulsion, carried out in secrecy and under the IDF’s censorship, of 415 Palestinians, who were allegedly affiliated with Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), to the Marj al-Zuhour no-man’s-land in South Lebanon, where the deportees were stranded on a desolate strip between the Israeli and the Lebanese army checkpoints. This mass deportation, which lasted up to a year, was a reprisal for the Hamas-claimed murder of six Israeli security personnel. But the punishment backfired: it “strengthened Hamas politically, and many of the exiles went on to become prominent leaders.”\textsuperscript{1184} Equally consequential, the deportees established

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contacts with Lebanese Hizballah and honed Hamas’s suicide and car-bombing skills to a fine edge.\textsuperscript{1185}

The deportations thrust Hamas into the spotlight and increased sympathy for the movement. One of the 1992 deportees, a Hamas member affiliated with Al Quds TV, recalled that “Palestinians began to make pilgrimage to our camp in Lebanon.”\textsuperscript{1186} According to a former senior PA official and PLC member, “from the camp in Marj al-Zuhour, Hamas was sending messages to the world via CNN. When the Israeli government allowed the exiles to return to Palestine, people greeted them as national heroes. A cat had turned into a tiger,” he said of Hamas.\textsuperscript{1187} Furthermore, the 1992 deportation demonstrated to the Palestinians how little leverage Fatah-PLO’s external leaders had with their Israeli peace partners. Yasir Abd Rabbo, at the time head of the PLO Executive Committee’s Information Department in Tunis, voiced deep alarm: “People like Ariel Sharon and Rabbi Kahana have been very outspoken about their dream to deport hundreds of Palestinians, and here comes Rabin and does it for them. This is a grave precedent. I believe Rabin lost the credit he has gained on the Palestinian street.” For the peace negotiations, the deportation “is tantamount to a blow to the head. . . . Handing down collective punishments, even if they apply to extreme elements, will only bring us to a dead end and will make the negotiations further lose on the popular support.”\textsuperscript{1188}

In another form of punishment, the Israeli government demolishes Palestinian real estate to retaliate against a family whose member is suspected of committing a violent act. The authorities


\textsuperscript{1186} Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a producer at Al Quds television station (interviewee 38), Nablus, West Bank, 20 December 2013.

\textsuperscript{1187} Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former senior PA official and PLC member (interviewee 32), Ramallah, West Bank, 19 December 2013.

have also destroyed Palestinian houses and structures as part of state-sponsored archaeological
digs and construction projects.  

Between 1967 and 2013, “Israel has demolished more than 28,000 Palestinian homes, businesses, livestock facilities and other structures vital to Palestinian life and livelihood in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.” Punitive demolitions, however, have proven an ineffective deterrent against Palestinian militancy. Palestinians explain that by demolishing their homes, the Israelis breed more anger and Hamas recruits: “Demolitions do little but fuel the rage of future bombers.”

“They are creating a whole generation filled with hatred by doing this.”

As Israel razes Palestinian houses and infrastructure, the expropriation of land and construction of Jewish settlements continues in East Jerusalem and the West Bank—and the Israeli presence in the West Bank is evolving, in the eyes of many Palestinians, into a dual military-settler occupation. Initially, between 1967 and 1977, the Israeli government built Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories that were deemed vital to the state’s security; 5,000 Jews settled in the West Bank and 33,000 in East Jerusalem in that period. But with the coming to power of the right-wing Likud Party in 1977, the construction of Jewish settlements expanded on the lushest land in the Palestinian territories. By the end of the Likud administration in 1992, more than 4,300 Jewish settlers resided in Gaza, 105,000 in the West Bank, and 141,000 in East Jerusalem. Many Jews choose to live in the occupied Palestinian territories because the Israeli government provides them with substantial housing subsidies, loans, tax breaks, and security services. For other Jewish

1190 Emily Schaeffer, Jeff Halper, and Itay Epshtain, “Israel’s Policy of Demolishing Palestinian Homes Must End: A Submission to the UN Human Rights Council by the Israeli Committee against House Demolitions (ICAHD)” (Jerusalem: Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, 22 March 2013). Also see fact sheets and reports published by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (http://www.ochaopt.org/).
settlers, the relocation is religiously and ideologically motivated. “For me, to live in Judea and Samaria [the West Bank] is to return home in the deepest sense,” said a resident of the Ofra settlement. “The attachment to the land is almost erotic.” The number of Jewish settlers steadily grew over time, including during the Oslo peace process, and by 2000 had reached 7,000 in Gaza, 197,000 in the West Bank, and 174,00 in East Jerusalem. Even after Israel had removed its forces and settlements from the Gaza Strip in 2005, the number of Jewish settlers had risen to 268,000 in the West Bank and 190,000 in East Jerusalem by 2006. From 2009 to 2014, the growth rate of the Jewish population in the settlements was more than twice as fast as in Israel proper. As a result, between 2013 and 2015, the number of Jewish settlers exceeded 350,000 in the West Bank and 197,000 in East Jerusalem.

Although Jewish settlers build significantly more unauthorized structures in the occupied territories than native Palestinians, the Israeli government demolishes disproportionally more Palestinian constructions. According to the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, “Israel is practicing a discriminatory policy: It is more lenient on illegal construction by Jews than by Palestinians.” Indeed, the Jewish settlers in the West Bank are subject to Israeli civil law; the Palestinians, conversely, are governed by Israeli military law. The Israeli government’s application of different legal standards to the Jewish settlers and the native Palestinians in the occupied territories transcends the realm of building and construction. A Palestinian lawyer in Ramallah complained

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that the justice system “allows Jewish terrorists to get light sentences when they do violence to Arabs and Arabs to get heavy sentences when they do violence to Jews.”\(^{1199}\) The discriminatory practices continue to date. The Israeli human rights organization Yesh Din reports a failure rate of more than 85 percent for investigations of ideologically motivated crimes committed by Israelis against Palestinians and an indictment rate of less than 8 percent ensuing from complaints by Palestinian victims against Israeli suspects.\(^{1200}\)

Israel’s continued building of settlements in the Palestinian territories and frequent settler violence against the native Palestinians—coupled with culturally offensive acts—have contributed to the Palestinians’ support for violent mobilization. Indeed, many regard the 2000 intifada as the “settlements intifada.”\(^{1201}\) According to Hamas founder Ahmed Yassin, “the general condition of the Palestinian people, by which I mean their economic, political and social suffering and hardship” led to the outbreak of the intifada. But the “direct cause was the intrusion by Ariel Sharon into al-Aqsa; this desecration of the holy mosque by a man with a history of aggression against the Palestinians was a gross provocation of Muslim sensibilities.”\(^{1202}\)

Along with house demolitions, Israel’s policy of bulldozing Palestinian olive groves in the occupied territories has destroyed the livelihoods of countless Palestinian farmers. Olive cultivation is a source of employment and income for more than 100,000 Palestinian farming families.\(^{1203}\) Between 1967 and 2013, the Israeli authorities and settlers felled more than 800,000

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Although some Palestinian homes and olive orchards inside the occupied territories are older than the State of Israel, the occupation authorities often claim that the houses and trees are illegally planted on the state land or interfere with state-sponsored development projects. One of my interviewees, a Hamas member, invited me to join him on the balcony of his house, which was located across the street from a Jewish settlement. “See,” he said, pointing to the settlement, “this Jewish settlement is built on a Palestinian mountain. Palestinian farmers cannot approach the forest to harvest olives from the trees they had grown for generations without being shot at by the settlers. What do Israelis expect from us for what they have done to us? Flowers? Violence is not our desired way of life. Hamas carries Islam, not weapons. If the West gave us rights, if international law protected us, why would we resist?”

Targeted killing has become essential part of the Israeli way of war. The effectiveness of targeted assassinations—let alone their moral and legal justification—is highly disputable. Even a strict cost/benefit calculus reveals that Israel’s targeted assassinations of Palestinian leaders have been counterproductive in terms of uprooting Palestinian terrorism and undermining public support for VSMs. On the one hand, these operations have eliminated several Hamas masterminds and hard-to-replace terrorists with specialized skills; have disrupted small, centralized terrorist groups, temporarily reducing terror incidents; and have appeased domestic hard-liners demanding a forceful response to Palestinian violence. On the other hand, targeted killing has created new Palestinian martyrs; produced collateral civilian fatalities; failed to subdue the intifadas; and provoked retaliation against Israeli civilian, political, and military targets by terrorist groups.

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1205 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a producer at Al Quds television station (interviewee 38), Nablus, West Bank, 20 December 2013.
The assassinations carried out during cease-fires or the peace process, furthermore, have trampled on the credibility of moderate Israelis and Palestinians. A case in point is the 1996 killing of Yahya Ayyash—Hamas’s master bomb-maker, known as the Engineer—which occurred shortly before the first Palestinian elections under self-rule, in accordance with the Oslo Accords. “How can I talk about a civil society, about a rule of law, now? I have to speak of revenge,” said a moderate Hamas member running as an independent candidate in the elections. Simultaneously, conservative Israeli commentators, accusing the moderate Israelis of naïveté, interpreted the Palestinians’ calls for retribution as evincing the adversary’s true sentiments about peace. (Hamas’s suicide bombings had similar detrimental effects on the peace process.) An IDF general explained that some targeted assassinations had proved to be “effective deterrence,” but others had been countereffective, because “Israel often eliminates the target just because an opportunity arises”—as in the case of Raed Karmi, a militia chieftain in the West Bank city of Tulkaram who, after surviving an assassination attempt, vowed to “keep killing and keep resisting until the liberation of Palestine.” Karmi’s assassination in 2002 upset the cease-fire during the Al Aqsa Intifada, which the Palestinian militant groups had observed in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States.

Of greater consequence, targeted killings have incensed ordinary Palestinians, deepened public sympathy for the militants, and inspired new recruits. “The people are blind with anger because of this terrible terrorist act by Israel,” said a participant in the funeral procession for the Hamas military leader Salah Shehada and his daughter, who were wiped out, along with a number


1208 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a retired IDF brigadier general (interviewee 17), Tel Aviv, Israel, 5 December 2013.

1209 Quoted in “Two Palestinians Killed in Israeli Helicopter Attack” (no author), USA Today, 6 September 2001.

360
of civilians, by a 2,000-pound bomb that an American-made Israeli F-16 had dropped on the militant’s residence in 2002. “We will bring hell to every home in Israel,” thundered the funeral marchers in unison. “Hamas is leading the Palestinian people in this fight and we are ready to give our lives.”

Israel’s 2004 assassinations of Ahmad Yasin and his successor, Abdul Aziz al-Rantisi, resulted in a similar outpouring of “rage and sympathy” across the Palestinian territories and “continuing rise of Hamas’s popular legitimacy set against the continuing decline of that of the Palestinian Authority.”

On balance, the evidence suggests that collective punishments vis-à-vis the Palestinians have failed to pacify the restive territories and have frequently backfired, alienating ordinary Palestinians, reinforcing their resolve to resist, and generating support for militancy. “Palestinians are just tired of dealing with all of the humiliations of the occupation,” said a Palestinian whose family had been forced out of Beersheba after the establishment of Israel. “The settlers make this a double occupation. On the one hand, you have a traditional military occupation with an army that wants to exploit the country. On the other hand, you have the settlers, who want to take the land and want the indigenous people out. . . . It does seem that every generation of Palestinians has its own Intifada.”

In addition to being counterproductive, some of the government’s policies toward the occupied Palestinian population have fundamentally contradicted the democratic foundations of the State of Israel and have caused divarication in Israeli society. During the first intifada, or the

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war of the stones, less than 5 percent of Palestinian activity involved the use of firearms. But the IDF reacted with excessive, lethal force and severe beatings of civilians that led to hundreds of deaths and thousands of fractured Palestinian limbs and skulls. This heavy-handed approach affected the IDF on both the institutional and individual levels. Though the IDF was a professional military force that performed enviably in regional wars, it was bogged down in a domestic political-ideological quagmire and its rank and file were demoralized by the stresses of ruthless policing performed in the Palestinian territories. Zeev Schiff, one of Israel’s most authoritative defense analysts, published an incisive analysis in 1989 about the effects of the 18-month-long intifada on the IDF:

The erosion in the IDF’s stature is taking place at both ends of the political spectrum: From uncontrollable right-wing extremists to the wild left. . . . The leftist camp . . . has spearheaded the campaign to prove that the IDF has in fact lost its human and moral image in the territories. The rightist camp, on the other hand, which includes the settlers’ leaders, condemns the attacks on the IDF soldiers, but at the same time emphasizes the IDF’s failure in the territories with rhetoric meant to justify the establishment of armed Jewish militias alongside the IDF. . . . Politicians have nudged and pressured the army to stop saying that the solution to the intifadah must be political. Their argument is that whoever says so, in effect states in advance that the war has been lost because every political solution involves concession and compromise. . . . The intifadah’s influence is felt more and more as one descends to the level of individual forces and units. . . . Feelings of hatred, desire for revenge, yearning to use more force, up to unlimited use of live ammunition—all run rampant even among the many soldiers who understand that more should be done to achieve a political solution. . . . The dulling of senses and loss of sensitivity are another striking phenomenon.

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among the troops. Few of them are bothered by the fact that over 500 Palestinians have been killed so far, among them dozens of children and even infants. Only a few care. This dulling of senses is, however, shared by all Israelis, including the media. . . . The intifadah has brought about the brutalization of an entire generation of soldiers.1214

Referring to the 1992 deportation, the leading Israeli legal commentator Moshe Negbi wrote: “If a military commander can now tear hundreds of people away from their families and dump them across the border, without prior solid proof of their guilt or without giving them a reasonable chance to prove their innocence, then the army’s power becomes virtually absolute.”1215 Perhaps the strongest indictment of Israel’s occupation policies came from two hawkish Israeli prime ministers. Recognizing that there was no purely military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Yitzhak Rabin engaged in political negotiations that led to the 1993 Oslo Accord. Ariel Sharon, “a champion of an iron-fisted, territory-expanding Zionism,”1216 acknowledged: “You cannot like the word, but what is happening is an occupation—to hold 3.5 million Palestinians under occupation. I believe that is a terrible thing for Israel and for the Palestinians.”1217 Even though the IDF has adapted its tactics over the course of 50 years, Israeli political and military officials and society at large continue to disagree over the government’s policies in the occupied territories. Recently, for example, 43 officers from Unit 8200 of the Israeli Intelligence Corps refused to participate in “the abusive gathering of Palestinians’ private information—for example,


363
sexual preferences or health problems ‘that might be used to extort people into becoming informants.’”

The occupation’s quotidian hardships and humiliations—occurring against the backdrop of the moribund peace process—converged to arouse the Palestinians’ collective anger. As in Iraq and Northern Ireland, the routinization and legitimization of violence in the course of protracted armed struggle facilitated ordinary Palestinians’ mobilization for VCA, as seen during the intifadas in 1987 and 2000. As one Palestinian explained, “revenge is part of Arab culture. Humiliation requires revenge. If you don’t respond to humiliation, you lose your honor.”

According to a Palestinian psychiatrist, “our tradition of revenge and our culture of violence are deep-rooted.”

An Israeli sociologist, interviewed during the first intifada, made a similar remark about how both the Israelis and the Palestinians had grown used to violence: “Twenty years ago, the shooting of a Palestinian student or the firebombing of a settler would set everyone here on fire. Now most people just accept it. Events happen. They are written on your memory, but you don’t let the feelings sink in. It is a terrible analogy, but I can’t help thinking of what they said about the people who lived near Auschwitz. They just didn’t smell the smoke anymore. We don’t either.”

Many others, both participants and observers, noted that “people do not show the same level of rejection of violent acts as they did before,” because “the culture of the Palestinian world had succumbed to a terrifying cult of violence.”

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1219 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a Palestinian journalist (interviewee 40), Ramallah, West Bank, 21 December 2013.
In this section, I have explored the security and socioeconomic conditions in the Palestinian territories under the Israeli occupation. Unlike in Iraq (2003–11) and Northern Ireland (1969–98), it is difficult to identify distinct and lasting periods of improvement in security and the economy in the Palestinian territories (1987–2015). Instead, both security and the economy in Gaza and the West Bank have been, to a greater or lesser degree, characterized by loss of life, property, income, freedom, and mobility. The evidence that has been examined demonstrates that these inadequate security and socioeconomic conditions, in combination with Israel’s policies, have provoked emotional reactions from the Palestinians and created similar discursive opportunities for the would-be resistance leaders to stoke the fervor of the people fed up (zahqān) with the ignominious occupation. Why did Fatah-PLO initially gain and then lose the ability to mobilize violence, and how did Hamas sustain popular support for VCA? The following sections address this question.
Contending Violent Social Movements in Gaza and the West Bank and the Role of External Assistance in Sustaining Fatah-PLO and Hamas

Fatah-PLO

Harakat al-Tahrir al-Watani al-Filastini (the Palestinian National Liberation Movement), or Fatah (meaning conquest), is the largest faction that dominates the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The PLO was founded at Egypt’s initiative during the 1964 Arab summit, and for the time being it remained under the control of the Arab states. The PLO’s proclaimed goal was to reverse the losses that the Palestinians had suffered as a result of the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948 and 1967 and to create an independent Palestinian state. In reality, its architects, the Arab governments, envisioned the PLO as a conduit for streamlining and containing the influences of the variegated Palestinian factions. As an umbrella organization, the PLO encompassed the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF), the Palestine Communist Party (PCP), and the Black September Organization (BSO), as well as several smaller groups. The PLO’s constituent factions espoused a potpourri of ideologies, ranging from Islam and pan-Arabism to Marxism-Leninism and communism.

In the late 1950s, at the time of the PLO’s gestation, a young Palestinian activist, Yasir Arafat, born (most likely) in Cairo in December 1929 (and also known by his full name,

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1225 Yasir Arafat’s birthplace is disputed. Some suggest Cairo, others Gaza, while Arafat himself claimed to have been born in Jerusalem.
Muhammad Abdel Raouf Arafat al-Qudwa al-Husseini, as well as the nom de guerre Abu Ammar, chosen after the Prophet Muhammad’s aide, Ammar ben Yasir) joined efforts with three Palestinian fellows—Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad), Khalil al-Wazir (Abu Jihad), and Faruq al-Qaddumi (Abu al-Lutf)—to mobilize the Palestinian shatāt in Kuwait. Arafat befriended Khalaf and al-Wazir in Egypt, where he moved from Gaza shortly after Israel’s founding in 1948 to study engineering at King Fuad I University (later renamed the University of Cairo). Arafat became politically active in Cairo. He was elected president of the Palestine Students’ Federation in 1952 and fostered ties with the Society of Muslim Brothers (Al Ikhwān Al Muslimūn), which had been established in Egypt in 1928, although he also demonstrated interest in Marxism. When, in 1954, President Gamal Abdel Nasir outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the regime began to harass individuals who had a liaison with the Brothers. In consequence, Arafat left Cairo to work for the Kuwaiti government.

Having regrouped in Kuwait, Arafat, Khalaf, al-Wazir, and al-Qaddumi, together with the brothers Khaled and Hani al-Hasan, founded the Fatah movement in 1959 to advance the Palestinian national cause. Simultaneously, the group launched a Beirut-based magazine, Filastinuna (Our Palestine), in which it publicized its ideas. Fatah sought to appeal to a wide range of potential supporters, by amalgamating the traditional precepts of Islam with contemporary political ideas like Marxism, but eschewed strict adherence to a particular ideology. As a member of the rival Popular Front noted, “Fatah is a blank sheet. Anyone may write on it what he wants.” Fatah’s leadership—which had been influenced by the teachings of the revolutionary philosopher Franz Omar Fanon and inspired by Algeria’s anticolonial struggle for independence—adopted the strategy of guerrilla warfare to liberate historic Palestine. Despite its military defeat,

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1226 The Society of Muslim Brothers is commonly known as the Muslim Brotherhood, or the Ikhwan.
1227 Quoted in “Arafat in Command” (no author), Economist, 8 February 1969.
the armed struggle of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) against France—from 1954 until the French flag was lowered in Algiers in July 1962—served as a model for many post–World War II liberation movements that sprang up from the ashes of fading empires.

In the 1960s, Fatah was a small group, made up of young intellectuals and commandoes who plotted and executed incursions into Israel from the bases in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria; conducted acts of sabotage in the Israeli-controlled West Bank; and received training and funds from the Arab states that resented Israel’s creation. Depicted as “traditionalists and elitists who had little interest in mass organizing during the early years of Fatah or the PLO,” the fidā’īyīn (freedom fighters) received little support from the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, and their attempts to stage popular uprisings in the occupied territories in the wake of the 1967 war signally failed: “The PLO’s natural constituency—Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip—would cheer on the PLO’s fighters but were neither ready nor able to support a protracted guerrilla war.”

Reportedly, Fatah commandoes captured by the IDF “reached the conclusion that they stuck out like sore thumbs in the villages, that the villagers were betraying them to the Israelis and that their activity bred hostility among the population because of Israel retaliation, in the form of imposing curfews and blowing up the houses known to have afforded the fedayeen shelter.” In assessing Fatah’s mistakes, Israeli intelligence officers (some former guerrillas of Haganah and Irgun who fought the British in the Mandatory Palestine) observed that while “faneying themselves like the Vietcong,” Fatah infiltrators “were unable to follow the cardinal rule to ‘swim like fish in the ocean’ of the local population. . . . The fedayeen found no ‘ocean’ in which to swim.” But while Israel’s military and intelligence services were “less worried about the fedayeen becoming a new Vietcong” that could threaten Israel’s existence, they were duly concerned “about the

A compelling example of Fatah’s rhetorical prowess was its framing of the 1968 Battle of Karamah. An unequivocal military defeat, Karamah turned into a political triumph of mythical proportions in the Arab world accustomed to sweeping, humiliating defeats at the hands of the IDF. “We were some 297 persons to be exact,” Arafat told the author Alan Hart. “Many were young boys. Really some of them were children still.” To the Iraqi commander who advised him to withdraw from the base at Karamah to the mountains in order to escape an attack by the IDF forces building up near the Jordanian border, Arafat replied: “After the Arab defeat of 1967, there must be some group to give an example to the Arab nation. There must be some group who can prove that there are people in our Arab nation who are ready to fight and to die. So I am sorry. We will not withdraw. We will fight and we will die.”

On the morning of 21 March, the IDF forces launched Operation Inferno and surrounded Karamah. Fatah’s fierce resistance caught the Israeli soldiers by surprise, and Arafat’s strategy to engage them in a man-for-man, street-by-street fight worked—until the IDF’s superior firepower overwhelmed the guerrillas who, after suffering significant losses, retreated under the cover of the Jordanian army’s artillery fire.

The 15-hour-long Battle of Karamah lifted Fatah from the depths of obscurity and generated en masse support for the group. Even though the Israeli troops captured the camp and endured fewer losses—the fatalities are estimated at 120 on the Palestinian side and 21 on

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the Israeli side (some sources suggest that between 30 and 401233 Israelis were killed)—Karamah became a legend among the Palestinians. A Fatah official recalled that after Karamah, “the Palestinian people saw Fatah as their savior. In Palestine we say ‘God is with those who have power.’ Fatah proved itself, and people flocked to Fatah.”1234 Karamah brought Fatah publicity, electrified the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, and inspired more young men and women to join the group than it was ready to accept. According to Abu Iyad, “out of the 5,000 candidates who tried to enlist in the forty-eight hours following the battle of Karameh, . . . we recruited only 900.”1235 Another Fatah leader recalled that “after Karameh, people started to join Fateh by thousands.”1236

From a compact guerrilla force, Fatah rapidly grew into a VSM. In less than a year after the Battle of Karamah, Arafat was elected chairman of the PLO. Fatah officially took control of the PLO (henceforth, Fatah-PLO) at the fourth Palestinian National Council (PNC) meeting held in July 1968 in Cairo. In February 1969, Yasir Arafat became chairman of the PLO Executive Committee. Though the PLO was at first obsequious and beholden to the whims of its Arab patrons under the leadership of Ahmad Shukairy, it evolved into an independent force under Arafat, who had earned the respect of the Arab leaders and their generous financial support for the VSM. In 1974, the Arab summit recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Of greater consequence, the aura of success that shrouded Karamah justified armed resistance. Emboldened Palestinian fighters unleashed a campaign of terror internationally. Between 1968 and 1980, the PLO’s constituent factions committed more than 300 acts of terrorism

1234 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a retired brigadier general in the Palestinian General Intelligence Service (interviewee 41), Ramallah, West Bank, 21 December 2013.
abroad. Airplane hijackings, hostage taking, and the murder by the BSO of 11 Israeli athletes on 5 September 1972 at the Summer Olympic Games in Munich propelled the Palestinian question to the international arena. Fatah-PLO burst into global consciousness.

Fatah-PLO’s goal of liberating Palestine was rooted in uncompromising radicalism. In a 1981 interview, the head of the PLO’s Political Department, Faruq al-Qaddumi, explained the organization’s position on Israel’s occupation: “One cannot expect the Palestinians to talk with their enemy. Israel has occupied our country for 32 years, . . . and the primary precondition is that it retreat from the occupied territories.” He added: “We shall never recognize Israel, never accept the usurper, the colonialist, the imperialist.” To the question of whether his remark meant the destruction of Israel, al-Qaddumi retorted: “Yes, I want to destroy the enemy who keeps my homeland occupied, who has murdered my parents, my brothers and sisters.”

This intransigence reverberated down to the rank and file. A Fatah *fidā‘ī* explained the goal of the armed struggle: “To recover the homeland.” Asked if an internationally negotiated settlement would be acceptable, the fighter replied: “No; only the recovery of all Palestine, as it was before the 1948 war.”

Fatah-PLO’s militancy began to abate in the 1980s, as a result of major regional developments. In 1971, the VSM was expelled from Jordan following a confrontation with the Jordanian authorities in the civil war known as Black September (1970–71). Having moved its headquarters to Lebanon, by 1973 the PLO had solidified its control of the country’s southeastern areas, commonly known as Fatahland, a virtual statelet inside Lebanon. But the PLO’s cross-border raids from 1971 through 1982 embroiled Lebanon in a conflict with Israel, leading to

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Israel’s invasion of that country in 1982 (Operation Peace for Galilee) and the PLO’s expulsion. Just as King Hussein drove Fatah-PLO out of Jordan in 1970 and the Israelis and the Lebanese ended its autonomy in Beirut in 1982, so the Syrians stifled the VSM’s influence in Damascus in 1983. After finding a temporary refuge in the former Israeli Embassy in Tehran, Fatah-PLO again relocated as the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88) unfolded, this time securing a sanctuary in Tunisia, where it remained until the launch of the peace process.

Since the mid-1980s, Fatah-PLO’s strength had begun to attenuate. The VSM’s use of terrorism alienated many sympathetic governments; its 1982 expulsion from Lebanon deprived Fatah-PLO of a major operational base; the 1987 intifada signaled the rising influence of local Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank; Arafat’s support for Iraq’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait turned him into a regional and international pariah; the PLO fragmented; and the Palestinian question remained unsettled. These developments compelled Fatah-PLO to make a dramatic turn from armed struggle to political negotiation and from intransigent belligerence to compromise. The end of the Cold War and the great powers’ waning interest in the Middle East purportedly pushed the Israelis and the Palestinians to commence negotiations in order to avoid bloody ethnonationalist wars waged in other parts of the globe in the aftermath of the bipolar international system’s demise.1240

In 1994, pursuant to the 1993 Israeli-Palestinian Oslo Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, the PA—a subsidiary body of the PLO and a prospective sovereign entity—was formed and given the mandate of governing Gaza and the West Bank. On 1 July 1994, after nearly 27 years in exile, Yasir Arafat returned to the occupied Palestinian territories, and in January 1996 he was elected president of the PA. At the same time, the PLO

moved its headquarters to Ramallah. The Palestine Liberation Army (PLA), the PLO’s military wing, was transformed into the PA’s National Guard, although Fatah continued to command militias such as Tanzim (formed in 1995) and the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades (formed in 2000). Arafat remained the unchallenged leader of Fatah-PLO and the president of the PA until his death on 11 November 2004. He was succeeded by Mahmoud Abbas (also known as Abu Mazen), a Palestinian refugee who returned to the occupied territories in the 1990s.

Hamas

Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya (Islamic Resistance Movement), or Hamas (meaning zeal), announced its existence in 1987, during the early stages of the first Palestinian intifada. As an offshoot of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas’s roots extend to 1945, when the first Ikhwan branch was established in Jerusalem. Over time, the Muslim Brothers in the Jordan-controlled West Bank assimilated with the Ikhwan in Jordan, while the members in the Egypt-controlled Gaza Strip maintained ties with the Ikhwan in Egypt but remained an autonomous entity. This implicit split in the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood generated two distinct approaches to the liberation of Palestine.\textsuperscript{1241} The Brothers in Gaza, influenced by the proponent of revolutionary Islam Sayyid Qutb, adopted a military strategy—hence, many would later join Fatah—while the Brothers in the West Bank embraced the teachings of the Ikhwan founder Hassan al-Banna and advocated social and religious service. When Fatah was at the peak of its revolutionary activity, from the late 1960s through the early 1980s, the Palestinian Ikhwan was spreading its influence through social service and was proselytizing for Islam—activities known

as daʿwah (the call to Islam). Sheikh Ahmed Ismail Hassan Yassin, the founder and spiritual leader of Hamas and a 1948 refugee who found residence in the Gaza Strip, believed that Palestinian society had strayed from the prototypical community established by the Prophet Muhammad; therefore, it needed a transformation before it was ready to launch jihad to free historic Palestine. Indoctrinating Palestinian society through education to “instill true Islam in the soul of the individual” and reviving sunnah (traditional ways) was Sheikh Yassin’s chosen path.¹²⁴²

Between the 1960s and 1980s, the Ikhwan’s daʿwah activities proliferated beyond religious education. By providing health care; opening libraries and sports clubs; running schools and kindergartens; establishing the Islamic Center (al-Mujammaʿ al-Islāmī) and student associations; building mosques and charity organizations; and distributing zakāh (alms) to thousands of poor Palestinians, the Islamic movement cultivated a dedicated popular base. Additionally, the Ikhwan penetrated important organizations that used to be the PLO’s exclusive domain. In particular, institutions of higher education—such as the Islamic University in Gaza, Birzeit University in Ramallah, and Al Najah University in Nablus—played a crucial role in educating and training future Hamas activists and in disseminating the ideas of leading Islamists like Hassan al-Banna, Abd al-Qadir Awda, Sayyid Qutb, and Izz al-Din al-Qassam.

The Ikhwan’s initial eschewal of violent resistance, coupled with an emphasis on Islamicizing and reforming Palestinian society, cost the movement some adherents who supported Fatah-PLO’s militancy and secular nationalism. It also led to the emergence of the PIJ, whose members, including its founders Fathi al-Shiqqaqi and Abd al-Aziz Awda, broke away from the Ikhwan in the early 1980s to fight the Israeli occupation. But the Ikhwan’s seeming shortcomings became assets when disillusionment with Fatah-PLO’s inability to bring about either a military

conclusion or a diplomatic breakthrough to resolve the Palestinian question began to sink in among the population that was witnessing a successful Islamic revolution in Iran that deposed pro-Western Muhammad Reza Shah.

By the time the first intifada broke out, Sheikh Yassin had solidified the Islamist movement in the Palestinian territories and, in preparation for a possible military action, had formed several military units and a security apparatus, al-Munazzamah lil-Jihād wa-al-Da‘wah (Organization for Jihad and Dawa, or the Majd, meaning glory) that engaged in violent activities as well as protected the Islamic networks from the occupying forces, rival factions, and social deviance. At the urging of the movement’s younger and politically active cadres to partake in armed resistance—and threatened by the prospect of losing those members to operationally active rivals—the leadership gave in to the upsurge of popular emotion and formally announced Hamas at the beginning of the 1987 intifada.

As Fatah-PLO abjured violence, Hamas assumed the mantle of resistance. Hamas’s goal, the liberation of historic Palestine, and its tactic, jihad, are both rooted in Islam. According the 1988 Hamas Charter, “Islam is its [Hamas’s] system. From Islam it reaches for its ideology, fundamental precepts, and world view of life, the universe and humanity; and it judges all its actions according to Islam and is inspired by Islam to correct its errors. . . . Allah is its Goal. The Messenger is its Leader. The Quran is its Constitution. Jihad is its methodology, and Death for the sake of Allah is its most coveted desire.” Hamas “believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf [Trust] upon all Muslim generations till the day of Resurrection. It is not right to give it up

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nor any part of it.” Hamas’s religious ideology justifies “Jihad when an enemy lands on the Muslim territories. Fighting the enemy becomes the individual obligation of every Muslim man and woman.”

In the late 1980s, Hamas put jihad into practice by conducting military operations against the occupation. Its kidnapping and killing of Israeli soldiers brought Hamas into a direct confrontation with the IDF. As a result, Hamas’s leaders became targets of Israel’s intelligence agencies—the Aman, Mossad, and Shin Bet (or Shabak). To avoid detention and assassination and thus prevent the VSM from obliteration, Hamas decentralized and moved its Political Bureau headquarters overseas, while the members of Hamas Consultative Council (Majlis al-Shūrā) continued to reside both inside and outside the occupied Palestinian territories. Amman hosted Hamas’s offices and leaders in the early 1990s. But by 1995, a succession of events had made Hamas’s presence in the Hashemite Kingdom inconvenient for the Jordanian authorities. First came the realization by the Jordanian officials (as well as the Fatah-PLO leaders) that Hamas had evolved into a significant military and political force and hence a potential threat. Then, on 13 September 1993, Fatah-PLO and Israel signed the Oslo I Accord in Washington, followed by the Oslo II Accord signed on 28 September 1995 in Taba, Egypt. Another historic event occurred between the two Oslo Accords. On 26 October 1994, Israel and Jordan sealed a peace treaty at Wadi Araba. (Jordan was the second Arab country to make a pact with Israel following the Egypt-Israel peace treaty concluded on 26 March 1979 in Washington.) In addition, Hamas gradually lost the support of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood as a result of fraternal tensions. By the conclusion of the Wye River Summit between Israel and the PA on 23 October 1998, aimed at

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reviving the stalled Oslo peace process, the Jordanian authorities had forced Hamas out of the Kingdom.

After expulsion from Jordan, Hamas resettled its Political Bureau’s headquarters in Damascus and, at the same time, maintained representation in several Arab and European capitals. The Arab Spring uprisings—which roiled the Middle East and North Africa between 2010 and 2012 and deepened the region’s sectarian cleavages—presented new, serious challenges for Hamas. The Syrian civil war (2011–present), in which the Alawite regime is fighting the predominantly Sunni opposition, compelled Hamas, a Sunni Islamist movement, to take a stand and relocate its offices to Cairo and Doha. In the aftermath of the 2013 Egyptian coup d’état that deposed President Mohammed Morsi, a senior member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Cairo banned Hamas activity in Egypt. Hamas’s external leadership is presently based in Doha, but its center of gravity are the local leaders in the Gaza Strip. Hamas’s local leaders and leaders-in-exile make decisions collectively, through the Consultative Council that encompasses representatives from abroad, Gaza and the West Bank, and Israeli prisons.

**External Assistance to Fatah-PLO and Hamas**

Both Fatah-PLO and Hamas have received extensive external assistance from states that sponsor or facilitate terrorism, organizations, and militant groups, in spite of Israel’s attempts to prevent such assistance from flowing to the VSMs by controlling the borders of Gaza and the West Bank. After Fatah-PLO had denounced terrorism and become the core of the PA, it began to receive formal assistance from the government of the United States, countries of the European Union, and humanitarian organizations. In this section, I survey external assistance to Fatah-PLO (until the
1994 establishment of the PA) and to Hamas. The Palestinian case involves several idiosyncrasies: Palestinian statehood has not been internationally recognized, an independent Palestinian economy does not exist, vast swaths of the Palestinian territories (with the exception of Gaza, since 2005) remain under occupation, and Gaza is under economic quarantine. Because of these circumstances, most Palestinians’ welfare depends on foreign assistance, which they view—regardless of its legitimate or illicit origins—as media for stimulating the lethargic economy and alleviating pervasive poverty. Thus, most Palestinians do not differentiate between humanitarian aid and assistance that directly or indirectly supports political violence—a task that in certain instances presents challenges even to experts. In the context of the Palestinian case, therefore, only parts (a) and (c) of hypothesis 2 can be meaningfully tested. Part (b), on whether external assistance alienates certain domestic constituencies, if they perceive the assistance as a sign of foreign influence that delegitimizes a VSM and its leader, is less pertinent because of the peculiarities of the Palestinian situation and is, therefore, discussed only briefly.

Fatah-PLO generated funds from a number of sources. It received financial, military, and logistical assistance from states; levied taxes of 5 percent\textsuperscript{1245} to 10 percent\textsuperscript{1246} on the salaries of Palestinian workers abroad; and engaged in legal and illicit economic and financial transactions. Fatah-PLO’s financial muscle grew in Lebanon in the 1970s through the Samed enterprise, which was founded in 1969 and served as the VSM’s economic arm. Samed employed nearly 6,500 full-time and another 4,000 part-time workers (separately from Fatah-PLO’s 15,000 guerrilla fighters).\textsuperscript{1247} In 1980 alone, Samed generated $40 million from its firms manufacturing textiles.

shoes, furniture, and other consumer products; construction companies; agricultural projects and farms; and a film studio. Through the Arab Bank, Fatah-PLO made financial investments in France, Germany, Great Britain, Japan, Mexico, Switzerland, and the United States. The VSM generated additional funds from racket, forgery, robbery, and other illicit activities. By the 1982 Israeli invasion, Fatah-PLO had grown into a financially self-sufficient VSM that provided employment and essential services to the Palestinians in Lebanon and also transferred funds to the occupied territories. After expulsion from Lebanon, Fatah-PLO continued its economic activities in Syria through the Palestine National Fund, which was established in 1964 and acted as the VSM’s “finance ministry.” Fatah-PLO’s self-generated income, taxation, and investment, together with private donations and assistance from sponsor states, added up to an annual budget of $1 billion to $2 billion, thus exceeding the budgets of some developing countries. As the Financial Times reported in 2005, however, the VSM “raised billions of dollars but much was spent or squandered in corruption and bad investments.”

When Fatah took over the PLO, it established contacts with both Arab and foreign governments. Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Syria provided funding, training, and safe havens to Fatah-PLO. Because of shared borders with Israel, Jordan and Lebanon served as key bases for Fatah-PLO’s operations and recruitment. Through pro-Baath PLO factions, such as the PLF and the Arab Liberation Front (ALF), Saddam Hussein’s regime distributed funds to the families of Palestinian militants affiliated with different strands, including Fatah-PLO and Hamas. For example, families of suicide bombers were granted a $25,000 reward, while families of other

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operatives received stipends of $5,000 or $10,000. In addition to assistance from the Arab states, Fatah-PLO received financial and military aid from China, the Eastern European countries, North Korea, and the former USSR, where some Palestinian fighters also underwent training.

Some Fatah-PLO patrons exploited the VSM for political and security purposes: to compensate for the lack of conventional military capabilities or domestic legitimacy; to promote specific political agendas; or to gain leverage against Israel, the West, and rival Arab states. Syria, for example, opposed both a strong, unified Palestinian movement and a negotiated settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Hence, the Syrian regime worked to undermine both Fatah-PLO’s cohesion and the peace process, by providing logistical and military assistance to rejectionist groups, such as the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP), PFLP-GC, Al Saiqa, and even Islamist factions such as Hamas and the PIJ. Arafat’s inability to control acts of terrorism perpetrated by the rejectionist groups discredited the supporters of peace negotiations in both Israel and Palestine and served Syria’s goals.

One momentous consequence of the shattered pan-Arab unity—which, arguably, began with the dissolution in 1961 of the United Arab Republic, the political union between Egypt and Syria formed in 1958—was the retrenchment of the Arab regimes. Steeped in military defeat and political turmoil, the Arab leaders increasingly placed national over pan-Arab interests, reneging on their commitment to assist Fatah-PLO to regain the Palestinian lands and secure the refugees’ return. Instead of promoting the Palestinian cause—once the symbol of pan-Arab solidarity—Arab leaders began to use it both as a bargaining chip in dealing with regional rivals and international

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powers and as a diversionary alibi to distract domestic constituencies from internal problems. The question of Palestine became a sideshow for the region’s more pressing issues. Fatah-PLO lost its safe havens and welcome in many Arab capitals. And after ostracized Arafat threw in his lot with Saddam Hussein by publicly supporting Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990, he antagonized even the regional mainstays Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Arafat’s support of Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait (encouraged by some Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank who were frustrated over the occupation and disillusioned by the outcome of the intifada, but opposed by the Palestinian community in Kuwait and some Fatah-PLO officials) was disastrous for Fatah-PLO diplomatic and financial affairs and for the Palestinian cause more broadly. Fatah-PLO abstained from voting on the Arab League resolution of 3 August 1990 that condemned the invasion and urged the withdrawal of the Iraqi troops from Kuwait; voted, together with Iraq and Libya, against another Arab League resolution of 10 October 1990 that denounced Iraq’s aggression; and refrained from approving the decision by the Organization of the Islamic Conference on 4 August 1990 to condemn Iraq’s actions.1253 (In contrast, Hamas leaders adopted a pragmatic position during the Gulf War and sought not to alienate the Arab donors. Hamas supported Kuwait’s sovereignty and demanded the withdrawal of the Iraqi Army from Kuwait and of the foreign forces from the Gulf region.)

Although Arafat and other Fatah-PLO officials retrospectively denied their solidarity with Saddam Hussein, grave damage had been inflicted on the VSM’s finances. Key Gulf state donors cut off both political and financial support for Fatah-PLO and also direct donations to schools and hospitals in the occupied Palestinian territories. Moreover, some Arab states, Egypt and Saudi Arabia in particular, sought to establish bilateral relations with the United States to deter potential


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threats of aggression emanating from regional neighbors. Once the standard-bearer of secular Arab nationalism and the champion of the Palestinian cause, Egypt adopted the role of a conciliator between the Israelis and the Palestinians. As a result of the Gulf crisis, Fatah-PLO lost more than $100 million in annual contributions from the Gulf states. In Arafat’s own assessment, “the PLO had lost at least $72 million a year from Saudi Arabia ($6 million a month), $24 million from Kuwait ($2 million a month) and $48 million from Iraq ($4 million a month).” According to Arafat, the Palestinians expelled from Kuwait had lost at least $11 billion in income, and those in the occupied territories lost nearly $1.4 billion.\textsuperscript{1254} As the Kuwaitis turned against the prosperous local Palestinian community, ousting hundreds of thousands from the country—only between 30,000\textsuperscript{1255} and 70,000 Palestinians of the original population of 400,000 remained\textsuperscript{1256}—scores of Palestinian workers lost jobs and income in other Gulf states. The Gulf War also affected 1.6 million Palestinians in Jordan, costing the community nearly $2.5 billion in losses in 1990 and 1991.\textsuperscript{1257} Residents of Gaza and the West Bank—dependent on remittances and impoverished by the economic consequences of the 1987 intifada—were subjected to a new curfew imposed by Israel on the occupied territories from January through March 1991. By some estimates, the Palestinians’ financial losses amounted to $10 billion between 1990 and 1992—not including the costs of forfeited Palestinian assets in Kuwait and those incurred by the residents of Gaza and the West Bank.\textsuperscript{1258}

At a strategic level, international support for Palestinian statehood declined. For decades, Fatah-PLO had fought the Israeli occupation but was suddenly seen by the world as supporting the occupation of Kuwait. Arafat’s attempts to rhetorically manipulate the situation—blaming the United States for condemning Iraq’s invasion but condoning Israel’s—rang hollow. Financially insolvent, Fatah-PLO was compelled to shut down many of its offices around the world and discontinue financial assistance to thousands of Palestinians, including families of martyrs. The crisis shook Arafat’s position, with many Palestinians calling for his resignation as the head of Fatah-PLO. Although the Palestinian leader painted a different reality—saying that “among our people we are at a peak; with the Arab masses, at a peak; with the Muslim nation, we’re at a peak, and throughout the third world”—his precarious footing pushed him closer toward negotiations with Israel. Arab retrenchment, the Gulf War, and the international community’s increasingly vocal opprobrium of terrorism eventually forced Arafat to engage in negotiating peace with Israel.

Hamas has received assistance from an array of sources: foreign foundations and global charities based in the Middle East (including in Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) and in Western Europe and North America (including in Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States); sponsor or facilitator states (such as Egypt, Iran, Qatar, Sudan, Syria, and Turkey); and private donors. Like most of the VSMs discussed in this study, Hamas also generates funds independently, through illicit financial and economic activities. Before the US authorities clamped down on Hamas, its criminal enterprises to generate funds in the United States included drug trafficking and credit card fraud, production of counterfeit items and fraudulent documents, and also cigarette tax fraud and stolen infant

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formula. Domestically, by running a tunnel economy and taxing goods that enter Gaza via the underground, Hamas collects an annual revenue of about $200 million at the peak of trade. The so-called “Hamas tunnels” are used exclusively by the VSM and its affiliates, while Gazan entrepreneurs use the “public tunnels” licensed and supervised by Hamas. In addition to injecting money into Gaza’s economy, tunnel construction and maintenance provide employment for thousands of Gazans. In 2003, the US government’s intelligence estimated that Hamas’s annual budget exceeded $50 million. Since Hamas came to power in Gaza, its annual budget has increased exponentially, ranging from $500 million to $1 billion as a result of self-generated income, taxation, state sponsorship, and private donations.

Funds transferred to Hamas from foreign foundations and global charities have, on average, amounted to between $15 to $20 million a year. In the United States, the FBI identified the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development (HLFRD)—established by an alleged Hamas member, Shukri Abu Baker, and headquartered in Texas—as the lead source that funded Hamas’s interlinked charitable and terrorist activities. The FBI subsequently froze the HLFRD’s assets in December 2001.

According to the US Department of the Treasury, in 2000 alone the HLFRD

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raised $13 million in the United States.¹²⁶⁸ Moussa Mohammed Abu Marzook, deputy chief of the Hamas Political Bureau, funneled large sums of money to Hamas through the HLFRD, until the US authorities detained him in New York in July 1995 and extradited him to Jordan in May 1997, from which he had been expelled in 1995. Marzook declared that “the jihad will continue. It will remain as long as the Israeli occupation of our land is continuing.”¹²⁶⁹ In 2004, a US court indicted Marzook in absentia for his role in coordinating and financing Hamas activities. Other US-based organizations suspected of abetting Palestinian terrorism include the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and KindHearts, which was dissolved in 2012.

In May 2003, the US Department of the Treasury identified the Al Aqsa International Foundation, based in Germany, as a financier of terrorism, a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) organization.¹²⁷⁰ In August of the same year, the Treasury Department designated five other Hamas fund-raising organizations operating abroad for asset freezing: the Association de Secours Palestinien (ASP) in Switzerland, the Comité de Bienfaisance et de Secours aux Palestiniens (CBSP) in France, the Palestinian Relief and Development Fund (or Interpal) in the United Kingdom, the Palestinian Association in Austria, and the Sanabil Association for Relief and Development in Lebanon.¹²⁷¹ Subsequently, in 2007 the Treasury Department sanctioned the Al Salah Society, one of the largest Hamas-affiliated charities located in the Palestinian

In addition to the financial resources received from foreign foundations and global charities, Hamas amassed funds from states, some of which (such as Iran, Syria, and Sudan) the United States has designated as sponsors of terrorism. During the presidency of Mohamed Morsi, a senior member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt served as a key conduit for Hamas funding. Under the regime of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, however, the Egyptian authorities both expelled Hamas leaders and also targeted Hamas’s tunnel economy. With land, sea, and air blockades imposed on Gaza since 2007 by Israel and Egypt, Hamas and the Gazans rely heavily on subterranean tunnels running from Egypt to Gaza through the city of Rafah for basic goods such as food, medicine, fuel, and construction materials. Hamas also uses the tunnels to smuggle weapons and contraband and to conduct attacks inside Israel. Reportedly, by July 2014, the el-Sisi government had destroyed 1,639 main-stem and tributary Hamas tunnels.

Iran has bankrolled many violent movements, including Hamas, since the early 1990s. The Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps–Qods Force (IRGC-QF) has also trained Hamas cadres in Iran, Lebanon, and Sudan. In 2006, Ismail Haniya announced that “Iran is our

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From 2006 to 2011, Iran annually contributed between $250 million and $300 million to Hamas’s funds. According to the US government, Hamas has used Iranian technology to launch thousands of rockets into Israel. The Israeli authorities have regularly intercepted shipments of Iranian arms to the Palestinian territories (for example, the Karine A freighter in 2002 and the Klos C cargo vessel in 2014, both ferrying Iranian weapons and missiles for Fatah-PLO and Hamas, respectively). In violation of a UN Security Council resolution, Iran has allegedly supplied Hamas with Syria-manufactured M-302 long-range missiles that can reach deeper into Israeli territory. Iran has channeled some of its military assistance to Hamas through Sudan, which harbors depots for Hamas rockets—including Fajr-5s, produced in Iran—and dispatches them (often in disassembled form) to Gaza via Egypt. The Sudanese government allows Hamas members to fund-raise and live in the country. On several occasions, Israel’s air force bombed Hamas weapons warehouses in Sudan. Iran’s support for Hamas seemingly declined over the disagreements about Syria’s civil war—Iran and Hamas found themselves on opposite sides in the battle between the Alawite Assad regime and the predominantly Sunni Syrian rebels—but picked up again in the wake of Israel’s 2014 Operation Protective Edge.

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After the international agreement on Iran’s nuclear program came into effect in July 2015, Hamas appears to have chosen “the Saudi–Qatari–Turkish–Muslim Brotherhood axis” over the Tehran–Damascus–Hizballah alliance.\textsuperscript{1287} For years, Qatar has supported Hamas financially and politically, as well as provided a safe haven for its leaders, including for Khaled Meshal after he had left Syria, Hamas’s political base from 1999 until 2011. In 2012, Qatar’s emir pledged $400 million to rebuild Gaza’s infrastructure.\textsuperscript{1288} Like Qatar, the Turkish government has sheltered senior Hamas leaders, including Saleh al-Aouri, who is believed to be the founding commander of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades in the West Bank and whom the Israeli authorities deported in March 2010.\textsuperscript{1289} Historically, the Turkish public has been sympathetic to the Palestinians’ plight, and some Turkish factions, such as the Justice and Development Party, have promoted staunchly anti-Zionist policies. Ties between Hamas and Turkey strengthened in the wake of the 2008–9 Operation Cast Lead, Israel’s incursion into Gaza that caused extensive destruction in the enclave and nearly 1,500 Palestinian deaths. Reportedly, Turkey has pledged $300 million to Hamas.\textsuperscript{1290} Saudi Arabia’s support for Hamas comes mainly from private organizations and individual donors, but makes up nearly 50 percent of Hamas’s external funding.\textsuperscript{1291} Additionally, Hamas raises significant funds during the Hajj, Muslims’ pilgrimage to Mecca.

\textsuperscript{1287} “Mideast Arabic Press Still Ponders on Effects of Iranian Nuclear Deal,” Middle East Arabic press review, translated from Arabic and distributed by BBC Monitoring, 23 July 2015.
\textsuperscript{1290} Nidal al-Mughrabi, “Hamas Quietly Quits Syria as Violence Continues,” Reuters, 27 January 2012.
Deadly Rivalry. Substantial external assistance to both Fatah-PLO and Hamas over the period 1987–2015 precluded the VSMs from establishing hegemony and in 2006–7 locked the protagonists in a year-long naked power struggle that escalated into a fratricidal war in the summer of 2007. As a consequence of this interfactional cleansing, Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip (Hamastan), ousted Fatah-PLO from the enclave, and was itself expelled from the West Bank (Fatahland).

After Hamas had won the January 2006 parliamentary elections and in March formed a government without Fatah-PLO (the latter refused to join the Hamas-led coalition), the Middle East Quartet (the United States, Russia, the EU, and the UN) cut off assistance to the Hamas-led PA because of its rejection of the Quartet’s conditions: recognition of Israel, renunciation of violence, and adherence to existing Israel-PA agreements. Concurrently, the Israeli government suspended the transfer of the $50–$60 million monthly revenue collected on behalf of the PA. Along with the economic crises described in the previous sections, the sanctions against the Hamas-led government precipitated a security breakdown in the occupied territories. According to one report, before Hamas came to power “the PA police was in a state of near collapse. This is indisputably due in part to the systematic Israeli onslaught on police facilities and equipment since late 2000, hugely diminishing its morale, cohesion, and operational capacity, but it is also due to the PA’s continuing failure to seriously address problems of structure and command.”

In the conditions of near anarchy, violent contestation for power and access to scarce resources became commonplace in Palestinian society.

In early 2007, violence spiraled out of control. Hamas’s Izz-al-Din al-Qassam Brigades battled Fatah-PLO’s Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades; the Executive Support Force (ESF), a unit within

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the Palestinian security forces established by the Hamas-led government in April 2006, clashed with other PA units loyal to Fatah-PLO; while families and clans affiliated with Hamas and Fatah-PLO carried out vendettas in the streets of Gaza and the West Bank. In addition to the demonstrable deployment of military units, the mask-wearing foes carried out high-profile assassinations, abductions, revenge killings, kneecappings, and extrajudicial summary executions; tossed handcuffed prisoners off high-rise apartment buildings and shot enemy patients in the hospitals; and also razed rival factions’ symbols of power by raiding, vandalizing, and occupying their opponents’ offices and military installations.1293 As one Palestinian woman bemoaned, “the security situation has become so bad that we’ve stopped complaining about the lack of money. Our ambition has been reduced to seeing our children return safely from school and being able to cross the street without having to worry about getting shot.”1294

The adversaries took their verbal gloves off. A Fatah legislator called the Hamas government “racist, fascist and terrorist.”1295 Hamas “claimed it was fighting infidels, with a holy sanction to kill.”1296 Both factions accused each other of being “putchists”1297 and “coup plotters”—Fatah-PLO for trying to overturn Hamas’s electoral mandate and trample the Hamas-led government (eventually replacing the national unity government formed in March 2007 with an emergency government formed in June 2007); and Hamas for forcefully seizing control of government institutions, including the Gaza City presidential compound, and ousting Fatah-PLO

1297 “Factional Fighting Flares in Gaza” Al Jazeera, 2 February 2007.
from the Gaza Strip, which Abbas called an “emirate of evil.”\textsuperscript{1299} Hamas flung allegations of a Fatah-PLO conspiracy with Israel and the United States to paralyze Hamas’s ability to govern. In turn, Fatah-PLO denounced Hamas’s connections with Iran and Syria that abetted terrorism. The media, which was controlled by Fatah-PLO, portrayed Hamas as “killers and criminals,” “murderers and traitors,” and its military forces as “gangs” that were “bloodthirsty.” Hamas returned this rapid-fire diatribe, accusing Fatah-PLO’s news agencies of spreading “scandalous lies” about Hamas and calling the PA security forces “Presidential Guard mercenaries” and “black militias and bloody Fatah gangs” who use “new Zionist-American weapons” against Gazans.\textsuperscript{1300}

In addition to battling each other, Fatah-PLO and Hamas have both historically faced dissenters within their own ranks. Fatah had to deal with the PLO’s constituent factions. In particular, the PFLP, DFLP, and PFLP-GC, which were sponsored and manipulated by the Arab states, frequently challenged Arafat’s authority and policies from the 1960s to the 1980s. The factions attempted to outrival one another by conducting spectacular terrorist acts internationally (for example, the PFLP’s 1968 hijacking of the Rome-bound flight of Israel’s El Al airline) and by engaging in fratricidal fights domestically. Hamas, conversely, has had to confront the Salafi-jihadist factions infesting the Gaza Strip, such as Jaysh al-Islam, Jaysh al-Umma, and Tawhid wa al-Jihad, collectively known as Jaljalat. Although intrafactional clashes periodically occurred within Fatah-PLO and Hamas, none has escalated into the civil strife that Fatah and Hamas waged in 2006–7.

\textit{Losing the People.} The political and military confrontation between Fatah-PLO and Hamas in 2006–7 had deleterious consequences for the factions’ popular standing. In disgust, ordinary


\textsuperscript{1300} Quoted in Peter Feuilherade, “Hamas-Fatah War of Words Rages as Clashes Continue,” BBC Monitoring, 18 May 2007.
Palestinians blamed the dueling, power-hungry governments for the economic and security collapse. “These people can never agree, because the chair they are fighting over seats only one,” said a resident of Ramallah. Others called the fratricidal war “the second catastrophe,” the first being the 1948 al-nakbah. The infighting demoralized Palestinian society. A participant in the first intifada said this: “It was always our choice to be fuel for the struggle. But our problem now is that the car burns the youth as fuel but doesn’t move. There’s a problem in the engine, in the head. . . . When I was younger I thought, if I die, that’s natural, it’s for a cause. And today I think differently. To die? For what? For these people who can’t agree? That’s what this generation fears. It’s lost, and its sacrifices are meaningless. Is the Palestinian dream dying? In these circumstances, yes.”

The internecine struggle dented popular support for both Fatah-PLO and Hamas, having exposed the factions’ quest for power and disregard for the civilians. According to a 2007 poll, 59 percent of respondents believed that Fatah-PLO and Hamas were “equally responsible for the infighting” and 73 percent did “not feel secure in their homes.” Significant majorities expressed negative attitudes toward the leaders of both factions; 84 percent disapproved of Fatah-PLO’s Mahmoud Abbas, and 74 percent of Hamas’s Ismail Haniya. Dissatisfaction with the national unity government since its formation in March 2007 stood at 81 percent. Cognizant of their plummeting public support, the Hamas leaders both inside and outside the Palestinian territories admitted to making mistakes. One Hamas official stated: “We know our people [Hamas] made many mistakes. We apologised for this and will make up for them. We will rebuild what was

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1304 Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, “Anger and Lack of Confidence Prevails in the Palestinian Street” (Ramallah, West Bank: Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 14–20 June 2007).
destroyed.” In a scathing editorial, then–Hamas spokesman Ghazi Hamad implored the armed factions: “Please have mercy on Gaza. Have mercy on us from your demagogy, chaos, guns, thugs, infighting. Let Gaza breathe a bit. Let it live. . . . I’m not interested in discussing the ugliness and brutality of the occupation, because it is not a secret. Instead, I prefer self-criticism and self-evaluation.”

Because of the peculiarities of the Palestinian case underscored above, it is difficult to establish definitively how external assistance to Fatah-PLO and Hamas has affected public attitudes toward these VSMs. A review of the existing polls, however, suggests that the Palestinians welcome assistance to Hamas from Arab countries and view aid from the United States negatively. In a 2006 poll, for example, more than 63 percent of the Palestinians preferred that Hamas reject Israel and accept funding from the Arab states. At the same time, the majority of the Palestinians progressively rejected the United States’ involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For instance, in a 2004 poll, 70 percent of the Palestinians opposed accepting funding from the United States to rebuild Gaza. In a survey conducted in 2008, 88 percent of Palestinian respondents were dissatisfied with the role that the United States had played in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. More broadly, the majority of Palestinians “see the role of every US president since the Oslo signing as destructive” for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process: 58 percent view Bill Clinton negatively; 73 percent, George W. Bush; and 70 percent, Barak Obama. It is

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1306 Quoted in Steven Erlanger, “From Hamas Figure, an Unusual Self-Criticism,” New York Times, 28 August 2006.
1307 April 2006 poll by Birzeit University (Ramallah, West Bank: Birzeit University, 19 April 2006), Polling the Nations database; accessed 28 January 2016.
1308 June 2004 poll by Birzeit University (Ramallah, West Bank: Birzeit University, 21 June 2004), Polling the Nations database; accessed 28 January 2016.
1309 November 2008 poll by Jerusalem Media and Communication Center (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Media and Communication Center, November 2008), Polling the Nations database; accessed 28 January 2016.
therefore not surprising that Fatah-PLO’s cooperation with the United States—in the absence of tangible progress toward peace—generates popular resentment of its subservience to the United States. As one Palestinian analyst characterized the Abbas administration, “this is a government of international consensus, not national consensus.”1311

In this section, I have examined the role of external assistance in sustaining the VSMs in the Palestinian territories. The examined evidence demonstrates that external assistance was only a contributing factor in sustaining VCA. Fatah-PLO (until the establishment of the PA) and Hamas were both able to sustain VCA in the periods when the sponsors withdrew or reduced military and financial aid to the VSMs or denied sanctuary to their leaders. External assistance, however, facilitated violent rivalry between Fatah-PLO and Hamas and precluded each from totally dominating Palestinian politics. In 2007, the contest over power, legitimacy, and resources climaxed in civil strife that split the Palestinian polity and compounded the nation’s geographical division. The struggle continued in the ambit of incitement and propaganda after military combat had ceased. The existing evidence permits to cautiously conclude that the US and EU military and financial assistance to the PA—in conjunction with Fatah-PLO’s failure to change the political status quo, govern effectively, and reduce the corruption plaguing its ranks—had, to a degree, delegitimized Fatah-PLO. In the following section, I discuss the conditions that jointly made sustainment of VCA in the Palestinian territories possible.

Sustaining Violent Collective Action: The Interaction of Microstructural Conditions and Discursive Psychological Variables

Hamas’s ascendancy in the shadow of Fatah-PLO, in a relatively secular Palestinian society, is significant. Historically, Fatah-PLO commanded strong legitimacy among the Palestinians. Yasir Arafat—the leader who became “Mr. Palestine”—was revered and beloved by his people. More apposite to this study, Fatah-PLO created, and in the 1970s and 1980s dominated, the discourse on Palestinian resistance. Arafat, a forceful speaker and a maestro of public relations, had a genius for coining tempestuous slogans and singsongy rhymes that electrified masses. A few examples: “Millions of shahids marching to Jerusalem!” with a vigorous, charging rhythm in Arabic; “revolution until victory” that became the Palestinians’ mantra for decades; and “an olive branch and a freedom-fighter’s gun,” with which Arafat debuted at the United Nations in 1974.

Fatah-PLO and Hamas have both evoked the collective memories and cultural symbols of the Palestinian community. The motifs of lost homeland, dispossession, and armed struggle have permeated the repertoires of both Fatah-PLO and Hamas leaders. To illustrate, the PLO’s Ahmad Shukairy said in 1963: “The notion of home is the oldest, the most ancient, of the notions in the world. When man was almost a beast he had a house in the trunk of a tree; he had a house amongst the stones; he had a house in a cave. . . . [B]efore civilization, before the League of Nations and before the United Nations, man had the right to live in a home, whether it be in a cave or the trunk of a tree. . . . [W]e invoke our right to live in our homes in our homeland.” And Hamas founder Ahmed Yassin said in 1997: “I want to proclaim loudly to the world that we are not fighting Jews because they are Jews. We are fighting them because they assaulted us, they killed us, they took

our land, our homes, our children, our women, they scattered us, we became scattered everywhere, a people without a homeland. We want our rights.” The leaders drew parallels between the Israeli occupation and Western colonialism. Yasir Arafat noted in 1973: “References to imperialism and colonialism in their new and old forms lead us to talk about the most dangerous kind of colonialism, which has afflicted the peoples of Rhodesia, South Africa and Palestine. It is settlement colonialism which is based on racism, chauvinism and fascism. The danger of this type of colonialism lies in the fact that it depends on driving peoples away and occupying their land.”

Khaled Meshal explained in 2015: “We are insisting with our people to finish this apartheid regime. This racist occupation should be put to an end.” In their original Charters, both VSMs sanctioned armed resistance. The 1968 Palestinian National Charter stated: “Armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine. This it is the overall strategy, not merely a tactical phase.”

According to Hamas’s 1998 Charter, “there is no solution to the Palestinian Problem except by Jihad.” Finally, both VSMs have published newsletters, maintained websites, and controlled radio and TV stations, making effective use of these media to promulgate specific agendas.

In the following sections, I explore the differences in the VSM leaders’ characteristics and discourses in order to determine which personal attributes and rhetorical frames played a causal role in sustaining VCA during the longest post–World War II military occupation. I test hypotheses 4 and 5 in the cases of Fatah-PLO and Hamas. Part (c) of hypothesis 3 cannot be applied to the

VSMs in the Palestinian territories because of the absence of foreign movements and leaders.¹³¹⁸ Therefore, I test only parts (a) and (b) of hypothesis 3, by juxtaposing repatriated Fatah-PLO with homegrown Hamas and local leaders with the leaders-in-exile to observe the effects of these variables on the sustainment of VCA.

**Emotive and Evocative Frames in Sustaining Violent Collective Action**

A combination of external and internal factors facilitated popular acceptance of Hamas’s ideology that rests on the pillars of social service and jihad and adopts both as equally important methods for achieving an Islamic Palestinian state. (The connection between communal service and jihad is underscored in Hamas’s original pledge of allegiance, bay’ah: “I swear by the Almighty to obey and persist in disseminating the call (‘dawa’) of the Muslim Brothers, and to commit myself to it and to the jihad.”¹³¹⁹) 

The sociopolitical landscape of the Arab world underwent consequential changes in the 1970s and 1980s. The defeats of the Arab armies in the regional wars—coupled with the inability of Arab leaders to act on the promises of political, economic, and social reforms—discredited secular ideologies of pan-Arab nationalism and Arab socialism. Under pressure from rapidly growing populations, economic edifices of the Arab regimes began to crumble, causing a loss of popular confidence in the national governments and leading to political upheavals. Against this backdrop, the successful Islamic revolution in Iran and the advances of the Afghan mujahedeen against the Soviet occupation forces created an opening for the revival of political Islam. From the Arab Maghreb to the Persian Gulf, Islam offered solace to the aggrieved

¹³¹⁸ A few leaders of the PLO constituent groups were of foreign descent or Christians. For example, the PFLP’s George Habash was an Arab Christian, and the DFLP’s Nayef Hawatmeh was a Jordanian.
Arab populations, captivated the imagination of youth, and provided a viable channel for expressing political dissent and economic grievances. The waning Arab interest in the Palestinian question and Fatah-PLO’s weakened position after its expulsion from Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, along with its failure to change the status quo in the occupied territories through politics, spurred doubts among the Palestinians about the feasibility of attaining statehood with the help of external leaders or Arab nations. All along, the Israeli administration’s obstructive policies and heavy-handed counterinsurgency fed the Palestinians’ resentment of the occupation.

When the spontaneous uprising swept through Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem in 1987, it caught by surprise the Israeli authorities and the Fatah-PLO leaders in Tunis “engaged in promoting their image to the world as peacemakers.”\textsuperscript{1320} Local Palestinians, however, had anticipated the outburst of collective rage. The former mayor of Gaza city remarked: “One should expect such things after 20 years of miserable occupation. The people have lost all hope. They are absolutely frustrated. They don’t know what to do. They have taken a line of fundamentalists, being the last resort that they can look up. They have lost hope that Israel will ever give them their rights. They feel the Arab countries are unable to accomplish anything. They feel that the PLO, which they regarded as their representative, has failed to accomplish anything.”\textsuperscript{1321} The younger generation, too, felt that “life in Gaza is like a nightmare. There is a feeling that there is nothing to live for. The religious movement is growing out of despair.”\textsuperscript{1322}

Although the pandemic of poverty and despair created propitious conditions for Hamas’s advent, a less obvious factor at least did not prevent its emergence. Until the 1980s, Israel’s military and intelligence services had singularly focused on eradicating Fatah-PLO. Aware of the

\textsuperscript{1320} Azzam Tamimi, \textit{Hamas: Unwritten Chapters} (London, UK: Hurst, 2009), p. 53.
\textsuperscript{1322} Quoted in James Travers, “Poverty and Despair Fuel Islamic Fundamentalism in Gaza Strip,” \textit{Ottawa Citizen}, 7 November 1987.
Islamist movement sprouting in Gaza and the West Bank, the Israelis saw it as a potential counterweight to Fatah-PLO’s secular nationalism.\textsuperscript{1323} Supporters of this argument cite Israel’s granting autonomy to the Al Mujamma‘ center in September 1979 to manage its administrative and financial affairs.\textsuperscript{1324} Critiques contend that the Israeli authorities did not suppress the Islamic movement because Sheikh Yassin eschewed violent resistance at the time when Fatah-PLO waged a struggle for national liberation (although they did imprison him in June 1983 after discovering weapons in his mosque).\textsuperscript{1325} In a 1987 interview, the spokesman for Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir said: “It’s true fundamentalism is rising. . . . We have to deal with the situation, but it is not something that threatens us.”\textsuperscript{1326} Palestinians equate such dismissals to embarrassment on the Israelis’ part to admit that their capable intelligence services had failed to foresee the rise of militant Hamas. These divergent interpretations, however, do not change the outcome: Israel did not preempt Hamas.

As a result, when the intifada broke out in December 1987, Hamas was ready to take advantage of the insurrection. “The loudspeakers of the mosque minarets filled the air with Quranic recitations and nashid (a form of patriotic singing without accompanying music),” as Hamas leaders called on ordinary Palestinians to take up arms and carry out jihad against the occupation.\textsuperscript{1327} Sheikh Yassin’s gradualist, methodical work of Islamicizing Palestinian society in preparation for jihad was paying dividends. As Hamas ratcheted up its political and military

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[1324]{Jean-Pierre Filiu, “The Origins of Hamas: Militant Legacy or Israeli Tool?” Journal of Palestine Studies, vol. 41, no. 3 (Spring 2012), p. 64.}
\footnotetext[1326]{Quoted in James Travers, “Poverty and Despair Fuel Islamic Fundamentalism in Gaza Strip,” Ottawa Citizen, 7 November 1987.}
\footnotetext[1327]{Azzam Tamimi, Hamas: Unwritten Chapters (London, UK: Hurst, 2009), p. 54 (parentheses in the original).}
\end{footnotes}
activities—from stone-throwing and Molotov cocktails to suicide bombings and rocket attacks—it could rely on a solid social network that the Ikhwan had built up: “these Islamic recruits brought with them little apart from zeal, determination, and longing for martyrdom.” Hamas’s call to arms also resonated with many Palestinians unaffiliated with the Ikhwan. As one IDF general pointed out, “leaders’ messages should suit society’s zeitgeist. Hamas’s message combined nationalism with ‘Islam is the solution.’ Hamas was in the right place, at the right time, with the right message.” In a 1986 poll, 30 percent of Palestinians already favored an Islamic regime for Palestine. Another survey showed growing support for political Islam among the Palestinians in the 1990s and 2000s.

Hamas reframed the Palestinian struggle for national liberation in Islamic terms, by adopting an anticolonial, antisecular, and anti-Zionist discourse rooted in the precepts of the Quran and the symbolism of Islam. Hamas’s 1988 Charter quoted above—an unequivocally anti-Jewish document—is illustrative. It is noteworthy that Yasir Arafat often sprinkled his speeches with Quranic verses, especially in the 1990s, when Fatah-PLO aspired to outbid Hamas’s religiosity and resistance. The gist of his message, however, remained “true to the nationalist tradition of secular Arab leaders.” He rhetorically montaged Quranic verses to ignite passions, not to reshape the Palestinian political system; he was “interested in imagery and visceral emotion to mobilize a

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1329 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a retired IDF brigadier general (interviewee 17), Tel Aviv, Israel, 5 December 2013.
partially dispersed people in the achievement of Palestinian statehood”; and he used “religion on behalf of a nationalist cause.”

Hamas depicted the Palestinian national struggle as a contest between Islam and the West, rather than a conflict over territory and borders: “The current Zionist invasion was preceded by many invasions of the Crusading West and others, including Tartars from the east. As the Muslims confronted those invasions and prepared for fighting and defeating them, they should be able to confront and defeat the Zionist invasion.”

This theme pervaded the weltanschauung, speeches, and sermons of Hamas’s leaders and sympathizers. Thus, in a 1988 interview, a deported Hamas leader interpreted the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: “From a Koranic, Islamic standpoint the conflict is ideological and religious. We are not the ones who impose it in this way. The Jews came to Palestine according to a Torah call and out of religious and ideological considerations. They are even fighting us from a religious viewpoint. I . . . emphasize the Islamic character of the Palestinian cause, that the Palestinian soil is pure, and that it will only be liberated by pure hands. No filthy occupation will remain on it.”

“Our problem isn’t a Palestinian problem; it’s an Islamic problem,” said Jerusalem’s former deputy mufti, who was accused by Israel of inciting riots. “Islam has destroyed Western invaders in this land before. Allah knows, we can do it again.”

Using specific references from Quranic verses (āyāt) and Quranic chapters (suwar) and maligning Jews as kāfir (unbelievers), Hamas called for “holy war of attrition.”

An excerpt from a 1989 Hamas communiqué is explicatory: “O sons of blessed Palestine: Here your steps unite with the

steps of the strugglers who came before you on the path of the holy jihad to raise the banner of truth—the banner of ‘There is no God but God’—in all skies.”

Invocations of a struggle of good versus evil appealed to the sensibilities of youth, awakening young Palestinians’ belief in transforming their lives, in sacrificing for a common good, and in defeating evil, no matter the cost. A story drawn from the Quran—the tale of the birds and the stones—was popularized during the intifada. “Centuries ago, a powerful warlord from Yemen sought to destroy the Ka’bah, the shrine in Mecca thought to house a divine black stone from heaven. But God intervened to preserve Mecca. Heavenly birds armed with stones met the enemy host. Where the stones fell, plague broke out in the enemy army, and Mecca was saved.” In that story, “the threatened Ka’bah is Palestine. The people of Mecca are Palestinians. The Yemenis are Israelis. The stones are those hurled every day in this camp [Bureij] by Palestinian kids. And God is on the Palestinians’ side.”

Even the genre of intifada graffiti (šiʿārāt) metamorphosed, exuding religious ardor: “Islam is the only answer, and Hamas is the foundation”; “Palestine is Islamic from the river (Jordan) to the (Mediterranean) Sea”; “the foot soldiers of Hamas are guards for Al Aqsa”; and “Hamas is stronger than bullets.” Scrawled against the backdrop of the green color of Islam, the Dome of the Rock, or the index finger pointing heavenward to Allah, slogans read: “Islamic! Islamic! This is Hamas the high-minded. Neither East nor West. Neither Communist nor Druze. We want Islamic state!” and “He who desires money becomes a spy. He who desires salvation follows Hamas.” In the same spirit, another graffito proclaimed: “The destruction of Israel is

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Qur’anic inevitability.” The nationalist term “armed struggle” translated into “jihad” in the Hamas slogans: “The only language which talks with the son of Zion is violence. So let’s deal with him in the language of Islamic jihad.”\textsuperscript{1342} Like the murals in Northern Ireland, graffiti and countergraffiti in the Palestinian territories expressed more than the narrative of resistance. They revealed intricate and shifting power relationships between the Israelis and the Palestinians and also among rival Palestinian factions,\textsuperscript{1343} often becoming a source of violent confrontation or ignominy when the IDF, “sometimes in a humiliating fashion,”\textsuperscript{1344} forced elderly Arabs to erase graffiti from the walls of their property.

Hamas’s leaders stressed the themes of shared suffering, collective belonging, and sacrifice, evoking concepts such as \textit{ṣumūd} (steadfastness, stoicism). \textit{Ṣumūd} is an essential attribute of being a Palestinian, although sometimes \textit{ṣumūd} is characterized as a strategy for defying the occupation through mere survival—an unyielding physical, political, economic, social, and cultural presence in the land. Originally an Islamic practice, \textit{ṣumūd} has been evoked by secular movements such as Fatah-PLO to extol the bravery and fortitude of the Palestinian people and \textit{fidā ʿiyīn} (a term with a secular overtone). Hamas’s leaders, however, have re-Islamized \textit{ṣumūd} and have used it in conjunction with other cultural-religious signifiers of resistance, such as \textit{mujāhid}, \textit{shahīd}, and \textit{istishhādī} (those who sacrifice their lives in jihad). In so doing, Hamas has endeavored to unite the Palestinians in the occupied territories as a community of jihad warriors performing the religious duty of liberating \textit{waqf} (an Islamic Trust, the land of Palestine).\textsuperscript{1345} Hamas’s leaders typically address the Palestinian people thus: “O sons of our Muslim, patient, and

steadfast Palestinian people”\textsuperscript{1346} and “our steadfast masses.”\textsuperscript{1347} In a 2006 address before the parliament, newly elected Prime Minister Ismail Haniya praised the Palestinians’ resilience: “Our people have shown all creativity in their resistance to the occupation and set an example of patience, sacrifice, and steadfastness.”\textsuperscript{1348} In a 2008 rally, he called Palestine “the land of steadfastness and jihad.”\textsuperscript{1349}

Religious language allowed Hamas to legitimize the use of violence in a way that a strictly nationalist message could not. “When an enemy occupies some of the Muslim lands, Jihad becomes obligatory for every Muslim. In the struggle against the Jewish occupation of Palestine, the banner of Jihad must be raised.”\textsuperscript{1350} Hamas’s leaders consistently stressed self-defense. In the words of Ismail Abu Shanab, a senior Hamas leader, “when the Israelis inflict damage on the Palestinians, they have to understand that the Palestinians will respond. We are not attacking the Israelis, we are defending ourselves, and our actions are a reaction to Israeli attacks on us.”\textsuperscript{1351} Abdul Aziz al-Rantisi justified suicide bombings: “In killing our civilians, our kids, Israel has used F-16s, Apache helicopters, missiles, tanks, they even demolished houses burying people alive in Jenin. So, if we had weapons like F-16s and Apaches, we would use them, but we haven’t, and so we are left with two choices. Either we surrender and accept quiet death, or we defend ourselves using our own means of struggle. And one of our most effective means, which can rival the impact

\textsuperscript{1346} “Palestinian Hamas Issues Statement on Participation in Local, Parliamentary Polls,” translated from Arabic and distributed by BBC Monitoring, 2 November 2005.
\textsuperscript{1349} “Palestinian Hamas Leader Haniyah Addresses Gaza Anniversary Rally,” Al Aqsa TV, translated from Arabic and distributed by BBC Monitoring, 15 December 2008.
of F-16s, is martyr operations.”\textsuperscript{1352} (Hamas uses the term “martyr operation” because Islam proscribes suicide.) Sheikh Yassin pronounced Israeli civilians a legitimate target: “The Israelis killed by Hamas in cafes and bars are military people. They are either in the army or are reservists. They have worn army clothes. Just because they are dressed in casual clothing when they go out doesn’t mean they are civilians. If someone is stronger than you and takes your home and kills your family, how do you respond? You fight back.”\textsuperscript{1353}

Israel’s punitive counterinsurgency and economic sanctions, analyzed in previous sections, supplied combustible propaganda material to Hamas. By portraying Israel’s actions as “racist” and “terrorist,” Hamas justified its own xenophobic tendencies and terrorist acts. Hamas leaders evoked the shared suffering of the Palestinians by equating Israel’s policies in the occupied territories with “Nazi crimes,”\textsuperscript{1354} often referring to the IDF as IOF, “Israeli Occupation Forces.”\textsuperscript{1355} Israel, one Hamas leaflet reads, “has exceeded the Nazis in burying people alive and has outdone South Africa in its racism and in the crimes of the settlers against our people which outdo those of Hitler and Nero.”\textsuperscript{1356} Another communiqué states: “The [Israeli] army roams every area, provoking the unarmed people; fires live bullets and all forms of bombs; removes citizens from their homes and families; storms houses, sowing terror in the hearts of children and women; arrests young men and brings them to trial before mock fascist courts; deprives them of their most basic rights; imposes curfews on camps, villages, and cities; places innocent citizens under house arrest . . . and desecrates the sanctity of places of worship by storming mosques and damaging

\textsuperscript{1355} “Hamas Figure Says Palestinians Entitled to Retaliate Against Israel,” Palestinian Information Centre website in English, distributed by BBC Monitoring, 8 November 2006.
their contents.”

Hamas’s leaders depicted Israel’s “pernicious economic policy” in the Palestinian territories—including “the imposition of restrictions on labor and workers; the collection of ridiculous taxes and fines” and “the obstruction of crop harvesting, uprooting trees, and destroying and confiscating land”—as “ugly and terrorist economic measures.”

Al-Rantisi, one of the deportees, described the 1992 expulsion as a “Nazi policy” that drove out “university lecturers, professors, doctors, engineers, pharmacists, nurses, and intellectuals” from the Palestinian land “in order to remove from it people who are able to think.”

Just as Hamas’s leaders saw deportations as a continued attempt to uproot Palestinians, they viewed Israel’s closures of Palestinian educational institutions as a calculated effort to degrade Palestinian human capital. Hamas, therefore, has placed a strong emphasis on education as a form of resistance. Throughout the 1987 intifada, Hamas’s leaders repeatedly called “to preserve the course of the educational process and to compensate students in houses, mosques, and everywhere for what has been missed. Also to fight the policy of stultification and to endeavor with all possible means to open universities and educational institutions” that had been closed “at the orders of the Nazi authorities. . . . The policy of stultification that is brandished in our faces is as dangerous as the bullet, the bomb, and the barbed wire.” Notably, schools and universities have served as indoctrination and recruitment grounds for Hamas. Although the VSM did not participate in political elections until 2004, Hamas cadres and sympathizers actively engaged in student and

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professional union elections, making significant advances against Fatah-PLO in that arena in the 1990s. Hence, even during the most economically difficult years, such as 2006–8, Hamas “decided to increase the salaries of teachers” and “offer speedy aid to 3,000 university students.”

While depicting the Palestinian people as victims “reeling under the yoke of Zionist oppression, occupation, and siege,” Hamas’s leaders simultaneously portrayed the “the Zionist enemy,” as caitiff and defeatable. Excerpts from Hamas’s communiqués distributed during the first intifada are telling: “Patience, patience, stand firm, stand firm, in the face of [the Jews], the most cowardly and pusillanimous of people. Hundreds of them are refusing to join their military units.” “Palestinian people, the cowardly occupier is stupefied. He barely believes that his army, which has carried out military adventures, now devotes its attention to stalking children and women. This army works around the clock to achieve the impossible dream of bringing calm to the [occupied] territories.” Another Hamas statement reads: “Forward to the arena of confrontation with the enemy and forward to escalating this blessed intifadah [uprising] so that God may make us achieve this, for He is capable of expelling the Zionist Jews from our land as He has driven the atheist Russians from the land of Afghanistan.”

Hamas’s leaders have interwoven elements of the human and the divine to portray the Palestinian people as active participants in the unfolding historic struggle of the just against

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injustice, in which the righteous will eventually prevail. At a rally in 2008, Ismail Haniya called Hamas’s survival under the Israeli occupation a “political miracle.”

The blood of the martyrs has been sprayed on the streets, the body parts of our great leaders have been strewn all over the walls, the blood of families and tribes has been spluttered as a result of the Zionist air raids, the Palestinian people have been besieged and the noose tightened round their neck. However, o brothers and sisters, we say that despite this injustice—the injustice by the occupation, the kinfolk, and the international wills—despite the killing, the assassinations, and the siege; despite the pursuits in the West Bank, the criminalization of the resistance there, and security cooperation; despite all this, they have not succeeded in striking Hamas militarily or politically. For this reason, O brothers and sisters, we say with great faith in the Almighty God, that on the occasion of its 21st anniversary the Hamas Movement represents a political miracle, yes, a political miracle. . . . [W]e tell the occupation and the world that we stand steadfast on our land and will defend ourselves, our land, our honour, and our right, with the Blessed God’s permission.1367

In an interview about the 2014 Gaza-Israel war, Khaled Meshal was asked how the Palestinians could prevail, considering their mass fatalities: “We are stronger than they are in the justness of our cause. We are the rightful owners of the land, and they are the thieves of the land. We are the victims and they are the murderers. But despite this, we might not win a battle or two completely, but at the end we will win the war. Our steadfastness is a victory. For us to kill their soldiers while they kill our civilians is also a victory for the Palestinian cause and Hamas.”1368

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Over the course of time, Hamas has augmented the emotional valence of its resistance discourse with allusions to the themes comprehensible to external audiences. For example, Hamas’s leaders began to make references to international law to justify their actions and reactions, pleas and demands. Responding to the killing of Palestinian civilians by the IDF in Gaza’s Bayt Hanun in 2006 and Zaytun in 2008, a Hamas spokesperson pleaded with the international community: “What is taking place is a crime. The international community should intervene to stop the crimes that are taking place and these massacres that the world sees but does nothing about.” In 2008, Ismail Haniya condemned Gaza’s blockade as a violation of international law: Gaza’s “siege is not only a siege on a people and a movement, but is also a siege on an entire cause. . . . [T]his siege does not only target Hamas and the government, but targets the Palestinian people” and “reflects the proportions of the crime committed by the international community, which remains silent about this siege. . . . There is also the UN Human Rights Council’s report, which considered the siege a war crime.” A 2010 Hamas communiqué denounced Israel’s demolition of a mosque in Rahat (an Arab city in Israel) as “shameless aggression” and “racist behaviour that runs counter to divine laws and freedom of worship.” Hamas called to action the Palestinians as well as the international community: “In light of the escalation of the frenzied Zionist aggressions against mosques and places of worship, we call on the Palestinian people to reinforce their ranks and resolve in order to confront the Zionist occupation’s projects and aggressions. We also call on the Arab and Muslim nation and human rights organizations to apply pressure in order to protect God’s houses and places of worship and to dissuade the Zionist entity

from continuing its crimes against the freedoms guaranteed by international conventions and laws.”

Anchoring its message in Islam and recasting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in religious terms enabled Hamas to cultivate a distinct political-religious identity, advocate a coherent ideology, legitimize armed resistance (muqāwamah), and maintain a consistent narrative. This message appealed to the Palestinians, who had been embittered by decades of occupation, destitution, and political stalemate. “The world has lost interest in our problem,” said a Palestinian man. “It’s time to fight with weapons, to see them [Jews] die like we die.” Another man expressed readiness to defend Palestine in the name of Islam: “The Jews have their Torah that tells them to come in this land. We have to fight them with our holy Koran.” Even moderates questioned the wisdom of inaction: “The battle over tactics isn’t just Hamas vs. the PLO. It’s inside the moderate camp, inside Fatah, even inside me, a lifelong pacifist. I feel the forces of nonviolence and moderation retreating, and the arguments for extremism on the rise.”

“I’m not living like a human being. This is not a dignified life. Either an honorable life or martyrdom,” said a Gazan high school student. “We (are) left with no alternative or choice but to make the entire Jewish people a captive of fear and terror. If our humane demands are not met, we will continue our heroic missions, for there are many young men who love jihad . . . and would love to die for the sake of God,” a young baker and construction worker turned Hamas suicide bomber said in his recorded message, before detonating himself on a bus in Tel Aviv and claiming 22 lives.

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1371 “Hamas Says Israel’s Mosque Demolition ‘Shameless Aggression,’” translated from Arabic and distributed by BBC Monitoring, 7 November 2010.


The Relation of Message to Messenger

Hamas’s leaders have invariably demonstrated keen perceptivity to the needs and aspirations of the Palestinian people. In contrast, Fatah-PLO has focused on preserving power. While Hamas has pursued local legitimacy, Fatah-PLO has sought international recognition. Hamas’s deep, local roots in Palestinian society and sensitivity to the domestic constituency have enabled its leaders to synchronize important decisions with local public attitudes—or at least not to contradict the popular mood. Fatah, born abroad and methodically shaped by exiled Palestinians, and the PLO, molded by the leaders of Arab states, have both focused on the broader Palestinian diaspora, not just the people in occupied Gaza and the West Bank. Hamas’s main constituency has been impoverished, working-class Palestinians and refugees, although many of its members are middle-class professionals such as doctors, teachers, and engineers. Many Fatah-PLO members belong to prominent Palestinian clans (such as Nashashibi and Husseini), and in spite of social cross-pollination, the faction has largely represented the middle and upper strata of Palestinian society.

The geneeses of Fatah-PLO and Hamas shed light on these VSMs’ divergent approaches to communal sentiment. Fatah-PLO evolved from a small group of guerrilla fighters into a VSM. In the 1970s and 1980s, Arafat believed that “it is the commandos who will decide the future” and that the “key instrument in combatting the Israeli presence was what the PLO did best, if not well—military operations and rallying Arab states.” The distance of exile and reliance on guerrilla war often created tension between the Fatah-PLO’s external leaders and local cadres. A former West Bank mayor commented: “In Diaspora, people do not understand the Israeli mentality in the

same way as those who are living in the occupied territories. We have to deal with the Israelis day and night, and we come to understand what is the best way to tackle the problem of relations between the Arabs and Israelis.‖1377 In 1983, the Fatah leader Khaled al-Hassan said: “I think now that the people inside, they have more weight than we have. Their support to us gives us the international legality. . . . They are the only source left to resist.”1378 Furthermore, unlike in Jordan and Lebanon, where Fatah-PLO protected the Palestinian communities and provided a variety of socioeconomic services to them—from operating hospitals, schools, and orphanages to running police and judicial systems—the VSM had limited direct contact with the Palestinian people in the occupied territories until the 1990s.

Hamas, with roots in the Ikhwan, began as a homegrown social movement that later became politicized and militarized. A comment made by the member of the Change and Reform Party explains Hamas’s community-centric agenda.

Our strength is our dedication to ideology and our people. One ideology, one message, one people. We are working together against the same target and toward the same goal. Our leaders come from our people. The connection between the people and the leaders is what has sustained Hamas and resistance. Resistance is not our goal; it is a tactic. If we stop resisting, the world will forget that Palestinians are an occupied nation. The Quran prohibits occupation, but it allows jihad [against an occupation]. We have to remind the world and our younger generations that we are under occupation. Being part of a resistance movement like Hamas is not easy. There is no prize. People know that joining Hamas requires sacrifice. Anyone who joins Hamas, inside or outside, becomes a target for Israel. Many of our brothers and sisters have been persecuted, jailed, and killed. Loyalty

to ideology and to people, therefore, is key. And so is honest service. We are honest with our people, and we work hard to match what we say with what we do. Palestinian people judge us by what we do. Service to people is our Islamic duty, not a political tool.”

In spite of the two VSMs’ distinct interactions with the local community, Fatah-PLO enjoyed significant popular support among the Palestinians in ancestral Gaza and the West Bank in the 1980s. Some ascribe Fatah-PLO’s popularity to its practices of coercion and international terrorism. The coercion argument does not explain why and how exiled Fatah-PLO leaders rather than local leaders were able to exercise coercion and is rebutted by experts who argue that “while it may be possible to coerce people into expressing lukewarm support in a carefully contrived situation, what level of coercion could bring large numbers of people of all walks of life to risk imprisonment, ill-treatment, and sometimes death at the hands of the occupation authorities in support of the PLO, not once, but repeatedly over the course of two decades?” Although international terrorism did raise Fatah-PLO’s profile, it also invited the international community’s condemnation and Israel’s reprisals against the local Palestinians. A more plausible explanation, therefore, points to the two-decades-long military occupation that aroused the Palestinians’ nationalism, then spearheaded by Fatah-PLO and personified in Arafat, whose supporters, as one Palestinian pointed out, “in the inside are much more numerous than the Fatah supporters.”

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1379 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a representative of the Change and Reform Party in the PLC (interviewee 33), Ramallah, West Bank, 19 December 2013.
If Fatah-PLO has taken people’s support for granted, Hamas has arduously invested in its social capital. The following aperçus from interviews corroborate this point. A professor at Al Najah University said: “Hamas respects people and their dignity, and its leaders are dedicated to the people. Hamas knows its people and works closely with them. During gatherings and rallies, Hamas takes note of who comes and who goes, who participates and who doesn’t. Fatah doesn’t care about such things. Fatah is about promoting personal interests and egocentric agendas.”

Outside observers agree that “it is this grassroots network, a leadership which is perceived as authentically emanating from the population, a financial base independent of the PLO and PA, and a strong religious appeal, that have enabled Hamas to endure challenges from Israel, including a mass deportation of leaders in 1992, and from the PA.”

In an unusual self-criticism, several Fatah-PLO members pointed out that the party needed to draw closer to the people. A general formerly with the Palestinian General Intelligence Service recalled that “when they returned to the [Palestinian] territories after decades of exile, Fatah [members] did not show respect for local people or appreciation for people’s suffering and dignity. Even well-known local leaders they considered to be dilettantes.”

A former commander in the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade and a current PLC member who had worked with Arafat in Tunis said: “Fatah has not taken care of the people. It has not used the US and European aid to create the infrastructure necessary to provide services for the people. Fatah has not prepared new leaders or recruited young, talented, tech-savvy Palestinians. Fatah could use today’s media and technology to candidly communicate with the Palestinian people to regain their trust.”

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1383 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a professor at Al Najah University and a former PA minister (interviewee 26), Nablus, West Bank, 17 December 2013.


1385 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a retired brigadier general in the Palestinian General Intelligence Service (interviewee 41), Ramallah, West Bank, 21 December 2013.

1386 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former commander in the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade and a current PLC member (interviewee 25), Nablus, West Bank, 17 December 2013.
leaders stressed that the PA should focus more on people and less on power contest: “We need leaders who struggle for a national cause, not a factional cause.”

The 1987 intifada changed the nature of the Palestinian armed struggle from a conflict evolving outside the occupied territories and sustained by Arab states and Palestinian elites to a local grassroots struggle that drew its strength from mass participation and domestic resources. A young generation of Palestinians, educated in universities or indoctrinated in Israeli prisons, presented a challenge to Fatah-PLO. “Loyal to the PLO but disappointed with it,” the Palestinians “inside have sent a clear message that the uprising isn’t the PLO’s revolution, but their revolution.” Arafat’s preoccupation with preserving Fatah-PLO’s unity and international profile, at the expense of adapting the VSM’s strategy to the changing socioeconomic realities in the occupied territories created an opportunity to step forward for both homegrown nationalist leaders (like Hanan Ashrawi, Marwan Barghouti, and Haidar Abdel Shafi) and homegrown Islamist factions. Hamas, which had put down far-reaching social roots in Gaza and the West Bank through the Ikhwan’s da’wah system, ably took advantage of the intifada, riding the tide of popular sentiment. Its founder, Ahmed Yassin, was later recognized as “the sheikh of the intifada.”

The uprising provided Hamas with an opportunity to implement what its ideology espoused: jihad in conjunction with the provision of social services. In Gaza, the uprising rapidly spread from the Jabalia refugee camp to Khan Yunis. In the West Bank, “Balata was the womb of

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1387 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a senior official of the Fatah Commission for International Affairs (interviewee 31), Ramallah, West Bank, 18 December 2013.
the intifada,” as the camp’s resident put it.\textsuperscript{1391} The mass civil disobedience that conflagrated the Palestinian territories did not abate until the 1993 Oslo Accord, and was followed by the even more violent Al Aqsa Intifada, which ebbed only in 2005. Having been left empty-handed after the 2000 Camp David peace talks, Arafat was attempting to reclaim his revolutionary legacy and to signal to the Israeli and the American negotiators that the Palestinian public would not allow him to compromise on issues such as Jerusalem and Haram al-Sharif.\textsuperscript{1392} He did so by furtively encouraging the uprising. Concurrently, Israel’s 2000 withdrawal from Lebanon, 18 years after the invasion, inspired militant Palestinians, who saw the departure of the occupying forces as a Hizballah victory. The Al Aqsa Intifada, however, triggered a forceful response from the Israelis that culminated in the 2002 Operation Defensive Shield, Israel’s largest military assault on the West Bank since 1967. The IDF nearly decimated the PA, concomitantly inflicting death and destruction on the civilian population. During the economically costly years of both intifadas and the Oslo interlude (1993–96), Hamas provided social services to “tens if not hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, helping them to survive. They provided services that the Palestinian Authority was unable to provide adequately, if at all.”\textsuperscript{1393} The Palestinians’ collective suffering during the intifadas further enhanced the symbiotic relationship between Hamas and the people.

By the end of the second intifada, domestic Palestinian arena had undergone major changes: Fatah-PLO was weakened both physically, as a result of Israel’s onslaught against the PA, and morally, as a result of the peace process fiasco and internal strife that intensified after Arafat’s death in 2004. The spread of unruly militias during the Al Aqsa Intifada and the

\textsuperscript{1391} Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a Palestinian journalist, formerly a resident of the Balata camp (interviewee 37), Nablus, West Bank, 20 December 2013.
Palestinian security forces’ failure to protect ordinary civilians from both local militants and Israel’s reprisals attested to Fatah-PLO’s inability to deliver peace, governance, and security. Hamas, in the meantime, had asserted itself as a major military and political force. The Palestinian public, in turn, emerged palpably fatigued by decades of violence.

Crucially, since the mid-2000s the Palestinians’ views on negotiations and resistance have grown complex, no longer resembling the either/or attitudes of the 1990s. Most Palestinians (for example, 52 percent in 2003 and 40 percent in 2006) prefer politically negotiating with Israel while violently resisting it. Some people interviewed for this study explained the seeming paradox: Israel’s harsh response to the 2000 intifada convinced many Palestinians that armed resistance could not prevail, just as the stop-and-start negotiations alone proved insufficient to achieve a political settlement. The transformed political domain and people’s war-weariness impelled Hamas to pursue a political path alongside resistance.

In preparing for the 2004–5 municipal and 2006 parliamentary elections, Hamas attuned its discourse to the pulse of the street. The name of its political party, Change and Reform, echoed popular demands to take action against corruption and lawlessness, and, at the same time, combined “a political message with a reference to two passages from the Quran that encourage personal development in order to deepen faith.” “Islam is the solution, and it is our path for change and reform,” stated Hamas’s 2006 electoral program. Opinion polls taken during the five years before the 2006 parliamentary elections consistently indicated that more than 80 percent

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1394 Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre, “Public Opinion Poll on Palestinian Attitudes towards the Palestinian Situation after the Third Anniversary of the Intifada,” Poll no. 49 (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre, October 2003).


of the Palestinians believed that the PA was corrupt.\textsuperscript{1398} After four years of intifada, 86 percent of the respondents expressed concerns about security, while 93 percent called for “fundamental reform in the PA.”\textsuperscript{1399} Hamas’s electoral discourse tapped into this popular frustration. Leaders like Osama Hamdan promised “an administration that believes in transparency, fighting corruption” with the goal of “putting the Palestinian domestic front in order.”\textsuperscript{1400} Ghazi Hamad explained: “The priority was reform and change in the way we are governed. How can we promise Jerusalem and the right of return when we can’t deliver our people a loaf of bread?”\textsuperscript{1401} Hamas’s electoral program promised to “fight corruption in all its forms because it is one of the main causes contributing to weakening our internal front and shaking the foundation of national unity.”\textsuperscript{1402}

Among the younger generation of Palestinians, Hamas had established strong resistance credentials and could afford to construct its electoral discourse with the themes of inadequate security and socioeconomic services. At Fatah-PLO rallies, by contrast, leaders were reminding the intifada-fatigued people who the authentic resistance was long before Hamas: “We are the ones carrying the olive branch and the gun. We are the ones who fought first. We are the ones who used the first stones and the first bullets. We wrote our struggle with blood.”\textsuperscript{1403} Hamas, however, correctly deciphered the popular mood. Mahmud Zahar, a top Hamas leader, reacted to the results of the 2004–5 municipal elections: “People voted for the Islamic program, the program of


\textsuperscript{1399} Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, “After Four Years of Intifada, An Overwhelming Sense of InsecurityPrevails among Palestinians” (Ramallah, West Bank: Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, September 2004).

\textsuperscript{1400} “Palestinian Authority, Hamas Officials Discuss Post-Pullout Phase,” Al Jazeera TV, translated from Arabic and distributed by BBC Monitoring, 24 August 2005.


resistance, of change and reform.”

According to a February 2006 postelection poll, 43 percent of respondents voted for Hamas with the “hope to end the corruption” and only 19 percent for “religious factors.” Simultaneously, 68 percent confirmed that “the elected members represent their viewpoint.”

Because the majority of Palestinians prefer reaching a political solution with Israel, during the past decade Hamas has toned down its rhetoric of destroying Israel and opposing a two-state solution. In so doing, however, Hamas framed this seeming shift to fit its ideological framework, specifically using the Islamic concepts of truce (hudnah) and calm (tahdi’ah). Hudnah differs from tahdi’ah in that the former presupposes a long-term period of armistice, while the latter is a short-term lull. In 1988, Yassin stated: “It is not enough for us to have a state in just the West Bank and Gaza. The only solution is to let everyone—Christians, Jews and Moslems—live together in Palestine, as an Islamic state.”

From the outset, he rejected the Oslo Accords as “an unjust and a bad agreement that will not fulfil our people’s aspirations and goals” and that “sowed the seeds of disunity among the Palestinian people.”

Even before the Oslo agreement, Yassin saw Fatah-PLO’s accommodation to Israel as subservient, and he rejected “the ideas of a government-in-exile, of recognizing Israel,” saying that “the PLO is accepting now what it used to reject. They are bowing to Israel.” Hamas leaflets circulating in the 1980s urged the Palestinians to protest “a humiliating peace.”

Hamas backed its leaders’ rhetoric with action as the peace process

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1407 Quoted in “The Life and Death of Shaikh Yasin” (no author), Al Jazeera, 24 March 2004.
unfolded. In the years 1994–96, for example, Hamas and the PIJ orchestrated a series of suicide bombings in Israel that contributed to the termination of the peace talks.¹⁴¹⁰

In 1997, however, Yassin raised the possibility of a cease-fire. He said: “It’s permitted in Islam to do a temporary truce with the enemy, for a limited period of time. It is prohibited in Islam to make a permanent reconciliation with the enemy.”¹⁴¹¹ And in the mid-2000s, some Hamas martinets began to signal a measure of flexibility. “The charter is not the Koran,” said a Hamas leader in the West Bank.¹⁴¹² Mahmud Zahar explained that “negotiation is not a taboo.”¹⁴¹³ In 2008, Khaled Meshal went a step further: “The movement accepts a state within the 1967 borders and a truce . . . The Zionist entity exists in reality and I have to give it legitimacy and recognize its legitimacy . . . But as a Palestinian, I should not recognize the legitimacy of the occupation.”¹⁴¹⁴

Evidence of Hamas’s evolving pragmatism can also be extrapolated from its electoral platform. Before the 2006 parliamentary elections, Hamas issued a document, “Electoral Platform for Change and Reform,” that focused in great detail on domestic affairs and civilian issues—ranging from “our principles,” “administrative reform and fighting corruption,” and “public freedoms and citizen rights,” to “women, children, and family issues,” “health and environment policy,” and “economic, financial, and fiscal policies.” The document also addressed the questions most central to the Palestinians and controversial for the Israelis—land and the refugees’ right of return: “Historic Palestine is part of the Arab and Islamic land and its ownership by the Palestinian

people is a right that does not diminish over time. No military or legal measures will change that right. . . . The right of return of all Palestinian refugees and displaced persons to their land and properties, and the right to self-determination and all other national rights, are inalienable and cannot be bargained away for any political concessions.”  

Significantly, however, the 2006 electoral platform made only a few references to resistance. One such reference sought to justify Hamas’s decision to engage in electoral politics. “This participation [in the elections] will be a means of supporting the resistance and the intifada program, which the Palestinian people have approved as its strategic option to end the occupation.” Absent from the document were belligerent statements calling for Israel’s destruction.

In fact, in another document, Hamas implicitly acknowledged the two-state solution and the borders of Israel and Palestine based on the pre-1967 lines, before Israel’s occupation of Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. Article 5 of Hamas’s postelectoral “National Unity Government Program” called for “cooperating with the international community for the purpose of ending the occupation and settlements and achieving a complete withdrawal from the lands occupied [by Israel] in 1967, including Jerusalem, so that the region enjoys calm and stability during this phase.”

Cognizant of the international community’s demands that Hamas recognize the Israeli-Palestinian and international agreements on Palestine, Hamas also attempted to assuage the concerns of the global community. Article 9 of the same document stated that “the government will deal with the signed agreements [between the PLO/PA and Israel] with high responsibility and in accordance with preserving the ultimate interests of our people and maintaining its rights

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without compromising its immutable prerogatives," while Article 10 declared that “the
government will deal with the international resolutions [on the Palestine issue] with national
responsibility.” In the subsequent “Cabinet Platform” speech delivered before the parliament
on 27 March 2006, Prime Minister Haniya made no references either to the armed struggle or to
liberating historic Palestine in stages.

Hamas’s leaders affirmed their position after the 2006 elections. In postelection interviews,
Abu Marzook and Khaled Meshal made similar remarks. In February 2006, Marzook said:
“There’s no doubt about our realistic recognition of Israel, that Israel exists, and there is no signing
of agreements with an imaginary body—only with one that exists. . . . We are facing changes and
every movement will make changes according to the reality. But there are three principles we will
not compromise on: government according to the laws of the sharia (Islamic law), our right to live
in Palestine, and our right to resist the occupation.” In October 2006, Khaled Meshal said that
if “the signed agreements . . . serve my people’s interests, then I will implement them.” And in
December 2006, he stated: “We are prepared for a Hudna, a 10-year truce with Israel, during which
period a Palestinian state will be established in the territories occupied in 1967. Then it will be up
to subsequent generations to decide their future. . . . [T]here are lots of states in the world that live
side by side without recognizing each other: China and Taiwan, for instance.” Hamas’s written
and verbal declarations imply a shift from the 1988 Charter, providing the Israelis grounds for

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1420 Quoted in Orly Halpern, “Hamas Leader-in-Exile Gives Rare Interview to Israeli Media,” *Jerusalem Post*, 21 February 2006 (parentheses in the original).
1422 “Hamas Leader Rejects Early Elections, Says Ready for 10-Year Truce with Israel,” translated from Italian and distributed by BBC Monitoring, 18 December 2006.
cautious optimism. Critics, however, believe that these statements are in line with Hamas’s proclaimed objective to liberate the historic Palestine in stages, by establishing a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank as the first step, and to “free Jerusalem inch by inch, stone by stone.”

Although Hamas has engaged in politics and seemingly worked to reconcile its dogmatic principles with political realities, it has still maintained the stature of the vanguard of resistance. Thus, on the 21st anniversary of Hamas’s foundation, Ismail Haniya said: “Through its launch, Hamas restored status to the resistance, jihad, and steadfastness programme after many thought that handshakes, kisses, and embraces could return Jerusalem, liberate the prisoners, or return the usurped rights. Hamas has restored the prominence of the resistance, jihad, and steadfastness programmes.” While Hamas’s leaders have invariably condemned the PA’s negotiation and cooperation with the Israeli authorities—and called for “rejecting the behaviour of the Authority in the West Bank which is based on criminalizing the resistance” Fatah-PLO members could not criticize the negotiations and ensuing cooperation with the government of Israel as astringently as did Hamas because the faction was part of the peace process. Its leaders’ attempts to deliver conciliatory messages to the international audience and belligerent rhetoric to the domestic constituency only undermined their credibility. But Hamas’s opprobrium of Fatah-PLO over the bankrupt peace process resonated with many Palestinians in the 1990s, just as it struck a chord in the 2000s. A father of two imprisoned intifada leaders said: “Our children who have spent years in prison or who have lost limbs in the resistance movement have not fought so that the PLO and

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other Arab leaders surrender our rights; they fought so we can keep our land.”

A Palestinian mother of four imprisoned sons said: “Most of what we are suffering from today was caused by the Palestinian Authority. They forgot them [detainees] back in Oslo. . . . Before we liberate the land, we must liberate the people.”

Notably, though Hamas’s leaders have excoriated Israel’s occupation in the sharpest tones and colors, they have used relatively measured language to repugn Fatah-PLO and the PA. From a political perspective, Hamas has sought not to alienate Fatah-PLO’s supporters and independents. From an ideological standpoint, Hamas has stressed unity and reconciliation (and, on the flip side, has condemned fitnah, or civil strife): “We would like to clarify to the Palestinian people our policies. . . . These are first to work towards realizing national reconciliation. We are keen on that, on the unity of the land, people, and real reconciliation, but we want true national reconciliation that stems from the will of the people and is viable.” Since the 2006–7 civil strife, Hamas’s leaders have been especially careful not to explicitly denounce the PA, making elliptical allusions to the “the hypocrites who have become infidels,” the West Bank’s “illegal government,” or “the other party” that “used to evade the dialogue in the past due to well-known wagers and considerations, as well as the US and Israeli veto.” Nor did they miss an occasion to point out that “Ramallah’s government has failed to protect the people, liberate the land or allow the people to defend themselves. For those reasons, our support base there remains solid.” On religious matters, however, Hamas’s rebukes of Fatah-PLO have been as blistering as they have been

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1428 “Palestinian Authority, Hamas Officials Discuss Post-Pullout Phase,” Al Jazeera TV, translated from Arabic and distributed by BBC Monitoring, 24 August 2005.
minatory. In 2010, in response to the PA’s banning of the centers for teaching the Quran and a long-standing practice of broadcasting recitations of the Quran ahead of the call to prayer, Hamas issued a warning to Fatah: “We warn the Fatah authority in Ramallah against waging war on religious people and institutions in the West Bank. Those who are waging this war on Islam and Allah will have to bear the consequences of their actions.”

In accentuating Palestinian unity, Hamas has consistently blamed Israel and the United States for sowing divisions among the Palestinians. In the view of Hamas’s leaders, the goal of US officials has been “to support the occupation from the security, political, and military perspective, and to apply pressure on the Palestinian negotiator and President Abbas to continue their commitments to the Israelis.” Although Hamas has directed jihad against Israel and refrained from conducting acts of international terrorism, its leaders regard Israel and the United States as the same entity. Said Sheikh Yassin: “America is Israel, and Israel is America.”

In the 1980s and 1990s in particular, Hamas generated truculent anti-US rhetoric and demanded that Fatah-PLO “stop dialogue with the US enemy, which, as it has been proved to us, tries to maneuver and gain time for the benefit of the Zionists in order to enable them to crush our people’s determination inside Palestine; to anesthetize the Arab and Muslim peoples around us and distance them from the scene of battle . . . [and] to abort the flaming intifadah.”

Hamas leaders effectively contrasted the “futility” of the peace talks with the “achievements” of resistance, rhetorically exploiting “victories” such as the kidnapping of IDF corporal Gilad Shalit, whom Hamas had held in captivity for five years, until 2011, and released.

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him in exchange for more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners. Israel’s 2005 departure from Gaza is another case in point. Referring to the 2005 withdrawal, Mahmud Zahar said:

This withdrawal, actually, is the result of the actions of the resistance, which succeeded in convincing the Israeli enemy that its continued presence in this area was a costly thing. . . . [T]he departure of the Israeli enemy from this land is an achievement for the Palestinian people. . . . The Hamas Movement, which has shed its blood and the blood of its leaders in these settlements and on this land has the right to appear with its weapons in a symbolic and important gesture to show that these simple weapons used by the resistance have succeeded to defeat the Israeli presence in the Gaza Strip, that this Israeli strategy was defeated and Israel did not leave as a result of negotiations or as a result of a good gesture by the Israeli entity towards the Palestinian people.\textsuperscript{1435}

Osama Hamdan echoed that statement: “The resistance and the steadfastness of the Palestinian people are what achieved the liberation [of Gaza], and it is the resistance and the steadfastness of the Palestinian people that will liberate the rest of the land.” Celebrating “the defeat of the occupation of the Gaza Strip,” Hamas vowed to “continue the liberation process by resisting the occupation anywhere it may still be.”\textsuperscript{1436} According to a poll taken on the eve of the Israeli withdrawal, 84 percent of Palestinian respondents considered the pullout a “victory for armed resistance,” and 40 percent gave “Hamas most of the credit for that achievement.”\textsuperscript{1437}

\textsuperscript{1435} “Hamas, Palestinian Officials Discuss Gaza After Israeli Withdrawal,” Al Jazeera TV, translated from Arabic and distributed by BBC Monitoring, 13 August 2005.
\textsuperscript{1436} “Palestinian Authority, Hamas Officials Discuss Post-Pullout Phase,” Al Jazeera TV, translated from Arabic and distributed by BBC Monitoring, 24 August 2005 (brackets in the original).
\textsuperscript{1437} Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, “On the Eve of the Israeli Withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, 84% See It as Victory for Armed Resistance” (Ramallah, West Bank: Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, September 2005).
By calibrating its resistance discourse to align with popular sentiment—yet remaining true to its ideological weltanschauung—Hamas projected rhetorical consistency. Indeed, most Hamas leaders seem to maintain fidelity to discourse in the shifting sands of war and politics, and promptly explain to the public the acts that might appear out of tune with the movement’s ideology and narrative. The 2008–9 Israel-Gaza war is illustrative. In June 2008, Hamas’s leaders and Israeli officials agreed to a hiatus, after a string of skirmishes. When the cease-fire expired in December 2008, Hamas resumed rocket fire, with the aim of breaking Gaza’s blockade. In response, Israel launched Operation Cast Lead, which had a debilitating effect on Hamas and caused many Palestinian fatalities. Ready to halt military operations, Hamas nonetheless framed its acceptance of *tahdi‘ah* “as an act of defiance, while in fact it moderated its demands.”

In particular, Hamas’s terms for previous cease-fires had normally included the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails. Sensing that this time Israel would not free any detainees (unless Hamas released captured IDF corporal Gilad Shalit—a high prize with which Hamas was not ready to part), yet needing a respite in order to convalesce, Hamas’s leaders excluded the issue of prisoners from the terms of cease-fire. Publicly, however, they pronounced that “even if it takes 20 years, we will not make concessions on the conditions and demands of the imprisoned factions.”

Even though Hamas deviated from its customary practice, it did maintain narrative coherence. Its media arm ably facilitates its leaders’ rhetorical choreography. Thus, the director of Hamas’s Al Aqsa Radio claimed that “we are the leading reason behind Hamas’s popularity. In any Hamas action, we spread the word about it and then stop any rumors about the party.”

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Comparing Repatriated Fatah-PLO and Homegrown Hamas

Arafat was a master of rhetoric and a consummate actor. As his close associate noted, “Abu Ammar could convert defeat into victory and present chaos as order.”

A telling example is his framing of the Battle of Karamah, referenced above. The competing Israeli, Jordanian, and Palestinian historical narratives about Karamah converge on two accounts. First, Arafat demonstrated genuine leadership, bravery, and a willingness to sacrifice his life in the battle. To lift the morale of his fighters before the engagement at Karamah, “Arafat made the speech of his life. But it was not the speech of a commanding general or a politician. ‘He was speaking from his heart and as the head of the Palestinian family,’ said Abu Jihad. And that is when Arafat can move mountains.”

Second, in a remarkable feat of rhetoric, Arafat turned a military defeat into a psychological victory. After surviving the battle against the overwhelming odds, he perpetuated the saga of Karamah. Because Karamah occurred in the operational environment of the 1960s, which lacked today’s multimedia technologies, a fog of rhetoric shrouded actions in the theater and the battle’s outcome. By all accounts, “the El Fateh propaganda machine and Arab publicity media exploited to the full the moral and psychological aspects of the Battle of Karama.” Arafat firmly wove the Karamah strand into the tapestry of the Palestinian resistance by delivering fiery speeches, dramatizing the reality, and imbuing the battle with emotional symbolism. He glorified the fidā ‘tyīn martyrdom and rhetorically dispelled the IDF’s invincibility. And so Karamah became

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1441 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a retired brigadier general in the Palestinian General Intelligence Service (interviewee 41), Ramallah, West Bank, 21 December 2013.
etched in Palestinian poetry and art.\textsuperscript{1445} Younger generations who fought the Israelis during the intifadas would invoke the battle: “This is our Karameh.”\textsuperscript{1446}

Fatah’s account of the battle resonated with Palestinians because at the time it aligned with the core grievances of a defeated, displaced, and demoralized people. Karamah produced a defender, Fatah, and a national hero, Arafat. It revived the Palestinians’ patriotism, honor (\textit{karāmah} in Arabic), and hopes for nationhood. Said Arafat: “What we have done is to make the world . . . realize that the Palestinian is no longer refugee number so and so, but the member of a people who hold the reins of their own destiny and are in a position to determine their own future. As long as the world saw the Palestinians no more than a people standing in a queue for UN rations, it was not likely to respect them. Now that they carry rifles, the situation has changed.”\textsuperscript{1447} Karamah became a byword for valor, and Fatah was the spear of the Palestinian resistance. But as one Birzeit University professor pointed out, “important as the Battle of Karamah was, a movement can’t draw lots of mileage out of one event; it has to engage in other activities to sustain itself.”\textsuperscript{1448}

Arafat’s attempts to rhetorically manipulate the outcomes of other Fatah-PLO campaigns and “to reshape an unacceptable reality to his own design through words” were less successful.\textsuperscript{1449} A case in point is Fatah-PLO’s expulsion from Lebanon in the summer of 1982 and the concomitant massacre of hundreds of Palestinians in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila perpetrated by the Lebanese militias collaborating with Israel. With his power base shattered and

\textsuperscript{1448} Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a professor at Birzeit University (interviewee 28), Ramallah, West Bank, 18 December 2013.
his men scattered, Arafat “transformed the 1982–83 defeats in Lebanon into a fantasy triumph.”

The Palestinians in the occupied territories, “united in the pride of desperation at the PLO’s survival,” had, however, grown restless with the uncertainty of their situation. Arafat’s double-talk kept the Palestinian cause on life support, but the widening disjuncture between words and actions, and between promises and achievements, began to diminish Fatah-PLO’s legitimacy and credibility.

Fatah-PLO drew its legitimacy from armed struggle to regain Mandatory Palestine. As Yasir Arafat used to say, “he didn’t need the legitimacy of elections, since he had the legitimacy of the gun.” In the words of Salah Khalaf, “Fatah’s historic value is that it was the first bullet.” The VSM’s popular acceptance further expanded, due to its inclusivity: “We do not have any ideology—our goal is the liberation of our fatherland by any means necessary,” Arafat said. Without a guiding ideology or philosophy, the Fatah-PLO membership resembled a microcosm of Palestinian society (although, in the late 1990s, the PA marginalized the Islamists and the so-called young guard, local Fatah leaders who sought to reform the movement). The same attributes that bolstered Fatah-PLO’s legitimacy and popular support in the 1970s and 1980s undermined its credibility when it became the dominant faction of the interim Palestinian government after the signing of the Oslo Accords. To make Fatah-PLO kosher, in December 1988 Arafat formally recognized Israel and denounced violent struggle: “I repeat for the record that we

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totally and absolutely renounce all forms of terrorism, including individual, group and state terrorism.”

Yet in transitioning from revolutionaries to custodians of a Palestinian proto-state, the leaders of Fatah-PLO did not formulate a new political program and communicate to the Palestinian people what Fatah-PLO stood for in its new role. Though it was now a governing body involved in state building, Fatah-PLO still claimed to be a national liberation movement: “Rather than explaining to its followers that mutual concessions were necessary to reach a compromise peace settlement, the PLO told Palestinians that total success would soon come if they only stood firm. Rather than prepare its supporters for a major change in policy, the PLO assured them that no real alteration was necessary.” More often than not, “the vainglorious Yasir Arafat refused to tell his people the basic truths of their political life. Amid the debacles, he remained eerily joyous; he circled the globe, offering his people the false sense that they could be spared the consequences of terrible decisions.”

Without a robust political platform, Fatah-PLO also “always lacked a social agenda, subordinating it to the national struggle and postponing its articulation to the day after liberation, and it failed to adapt itself to current voter concerns.” In the fast stream of events, Fatah-PLO’s discourse remained frozen in the past. Its leaders’ statements “were replete with pan-Arab ideological rhetoric—such as oil as a strategic Arab weapon and the need to confront Western imperialism and conspiracies. These pan-Arab notions were current in the 1950s and 1960s,” but had become stale and irrelevant in the 1980s.

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The lack of a political compass and a coherent ideology entailed consequences. For one, it stymied Fatah-PLO’s decision-making. To straddle its variegated constituency with heterogeneous interests, Fatah-PLO’s leaders often opted for a suboptimal common denominator to maintain the movement’s unity at the expense of adopting pragmatic decisions for the Palestinian people. Arafat often exercised authoritarianism to overcome Fatah-PLO’s episodic decision-making crises, but the leader himself was irresolute and had “a long and frustrating history of fudging or postponing hard decisions.”1460 Said one Palestinian journalist: “Every hero has his flaw. Arafat’s is indecisiveness.”1461 In the words of an American diplomat involved in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, “Arafat always succeeded far more as a symbol than as a leader. As a symbol, he had only to excite passions; as a leader, he had to make hard decisions and choices, and in that he was far more a decision avoider than a decision maker.”1462

Fatah-PLO’s chronic vacillations and inability (or perhaps reluctance) to bring the armed struggle to a political or military conclusion diminished its credibility both locally and internationally. Domestically, Fatah-PLO lost its identity. When Israel turned on the PA during the second intifada, destroying its institutions and security apparatus, Fatah-PLO was paralyzed—unable to either govern or resist. As a supporter of Arafat intoned, Fatah-PLO had become a movement of politicians, “no longer fighters [munadilin] but clerks [muwazzafin].”1463 On the international stage, Arafat’s political coyness and duplicity made him a mercurial partner. For these qualities, Arafat “has paid a price, becoming at once a consensus builder and a prisoner of consensus, and too often smoothing over differences with a kind of rhetorical hide-and-seek that

1460 “Yasir Arafat’s Last Chance” (no author), New York Times, 4 December 2001.
sapped his credibility in much of the West.”

Although the Palestinians and the Israelis both share responsibility for failing to reach an agreement in the course of the byzantine peace process, Arafat’s indecisiveness earned him the reputation of “a master of ambiguity.”

Palestinians, the Israeli statesman Abba Eban claimed, “never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity.”

Fatah-PLO’s legitimacy and credibility also suffered because of the corruption that metastasized throughout the movement over the years. While Arafat himself led an “ascetic lifestyle,” and “used every occasion to demonstrate that he was one of the people, often taking food from his plate and feeding people with his fingers,” he allowed those surrounding him to engage in corruption and self-aggrandizement. Abu Iyad, who as security chief was second in command to Arafat, admitted that “we came to love offices [and] ostentation.”

A journalist’s depiction of Arafat’s return to Gaza in 1994 is illustrative: “He arrived from the Sinai in a long caravan of Chevrolet Blazers and Mercedes-Benzes and BMWs, 70 or 80 cars packed to the rooflines with men with guns. The caravan roared up the thronged roads and down the mobbed streets, with the overfed, leather-jacketed, sunglassed thugs of Arafat’s bodyguard detail all the time screaming and shooting off their Kalashnikovs to make their beloved people scurry out of their beloved leader’s way.”

Fatah-PLO leaders settled in luxurious villas, created a vast bureaucracy, and controlled and granted monopolies, all along “benefiting from the privileges that

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1467 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with Yasir Arafat’s former press secretary (interviewee 35), Ramallah, West Bank, 19 December 2013.
1468 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with an Israeli journalist (interviewee 18), Tel Aviv, Israel, 6 December 2013.
1469 Another interviewee made the same point. Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former senior PA official and PLC member (interviewee 32), Ramallah, West Bank, 19 December 2013.
their supposed adversary, Israel, was eager to provide them.”

These Fatah-PLO nouveau riche formed a new stratum in society—ā’idīn (returnees), as the Palestinians called them. Furthermore, the PA led by Arafat prioritized “tribal politics over a meritocracy. To get anywhere, you have to be either from a big family or belong to Fatah, the ruling party. The security forces function above the law, to the point that they even ignore decisions of the Palestinian High Court of Justice. This is all compounded by the fact that the loyalty of the thousands of armed soldiers is also tribal.” The post-Arafat leaders were slow to infuse new blood into the movement and to reverse the institutional decay, internal feuding, and malfeasance because Arafat’s “domestic legacy of patronage-based politics and bloated bureaucracy had time to solidify during his decade as president of the Palestinian Authority.”

Most Hamas leaders, in contrast, have maintained reputations for leading “clean,” “pious,” and “disciplined” lifestyles. Ahmed Yassin’s hut in a tattered Gaza neighborhood was not different from the dwellings of the Palestinian refugees in the camp. And “his way of life offered a stark contrast to the leaders of Fatah, many of whom had made fortunes and built empires in the margins of the peace process with the Israelis.” A former chief intelligence officer of the Israel Prison Service who crossed paths with Sheikh Yassin described the man as “smart and brave. Cruel but credible.” Contrary to Fatah-PLO’s nepotism (wāṣṭah), Hamas stresses merit. An IDF general pointed out that, consistently, “Hamas has chosen the right people to lead. As a social movement, Hamas knows its cadres and cultivates their loyalty and discipline. . . . Hamas is less

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1475 Irena L. Sargsyan, interviews in Israel and the West Bank, November–December 2013.
susceptible to corruption. It has been difficult for the IDF and the Mossad to buy Hamas cadres to make them informants. Islamic ideology to some extent guards against corruption. Fatah has been easier to coopt.\footnote{1478} Although the Israeli and the PA officials both attempt to delegitimize Hamas, pointing to some “Hamas tycoons”\footnote{1479} and exiled leaders who live lavishly abroad, “its members are not yet implicated in the extent of personal graft and venality that characterized Fatah.”\footnote{1480} By all accounts, Hamas punishes corruption. For example, former Hamas spokesperson Ayman Taha was suspended in 2011 on allegations of corruption\footnote{1481} (and was reportedly executed in 2014 for collaboration with the enemy\footnote{1482}), while “a few less-senior figures in Hamas—some of whom were suspected of corruption, and others of whom tried to report such affairs—have undergone peculiar accidents.”\footnote{1483}

Fatah-PLO’s corruption became more problematic when it was perceived by the people to cross the boundary into moral corruption—when “peace process” morphed into “police process,” whereby the PA collaborated with the Israeli authorities in persecuting, arresting, and killing members of Hamas, the PIJ, and other Islamist factions in the West Bank. Many, including people affiliated with Fatah-PLO, felt that “Fatah was being transformed from a national liberation movement into a weapon used by the Israelis and Americans to undermine an alternative Palestinian liberation movement [Hamas] that had won the confidence of the Palestinian public.”\footnote{1484} Not just the Palestinians but also other Arabs in the region viewed Fatah-PLO and the

\footnote{1478} Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a retired IDF brigadier general (interviewee 17), Tel Aviv, Israel, 5 December 2013.
\footnote{1479} Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a retired IDF brigadier general (interviewee 15), Tel Aviv, Israel, 4 December 2013.
\footnote{1481} “Hamas Official Suspended Over Allegations of Corruption” (no author), \textit{Haaretz}, 18 March 2011.
PA as “American lackeys.” In the wake of the 2006 parliamentary elections, the leaders of Fatah-PLO, together with other factions, rejected Hamas’s platform for the national unity government; most felt that “Hamas should be made to ‘dirty itself’ in power politics” and stripped “of the ‘oppositional purity’ it had long enjoyed while outside the system.”

Hence, since Hamas’s takeover of Gaza in 2007, the PA worked to undermine its institutions as well as military and financial capabilities. Some Fatah and PA officials considered declaring Gaza a “rebellious region” and imposing “real sanctions” on Hamas in order to discontinue the PA funding and salaries to the Hamas establishments in Gaza. In the West Bank, “Fatah fired Hamas and other Islamists from charity organizations. It too took over our charity infrastructure. Since 2007 the Islamist movement has been under siege by both Israel and Fatah,” said an Islamist parliamentarian.

Islamists based in the West Bank and also local and international human rights organizations have raised allegations of politically motivated illegal detentions, prisoner abuse, and torture by the PSF and General Intelligence Service. In the words of a human rights activist, “the prisons controlled by [PA President] Mahmoud Abbas and [Prime Minister] Salaam Fayad have become centers for torture.” According to one human rights attorney, the Fatah-PLO-led “government is pursuing a policy of political cleansing. If you do not support the government

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1489 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with an Islamist PLC member (interviewee 36), Ramallah, West Bank, 20 December 2013.
politically, there is no place for you in government service.” The PSF employed humiliating methods, including shaving off Islamists’ beards and heads and forcing them “to sit on bottles and thus sodomize themselves.” During the postelectoral strife between Fatah-PLO and Hamas, PSF members scorned Prime Minister Haniya: “The time of the bottle is returning!” Although the Fatah-PLO, in turn, accused Hamas of harsh treatment of its own members in Gaza—while human rights organizations have documented instances of the Hamas security forces carrying out extrajudicial killings of Palestinians suspected of collaboration with Israel—the local population tends to view the PA’s actions against Palestinians through the prism of the Abbas administration’s security coordination and intelligence sharing with Israel and as a concerted effort to suppress Hamas, Israel’s archenemy and Fatah’s foremost political rival. References by some Palestinian security officials to Hamas as their “common enemy” with Israel—coupled with the Israeli authorities’ occasional commendations of the PA security forces because they have “far exceeded our expectations” in combating Hamas—have hardened popular attitudes toward Fatah-PLO. It is widely believed that “Palestinian forces lose the trust of local communities when they are seen as enforcing the illegal occupation and the losses of land and rights that go along with it. With no prospect of a just peace on the horizon, a subcontracted Palestinian jailer is little better than an Israeli jailer, and may even be more psychologically humiliating.” Moreover, “the behavior of the Palestinian Authority security sector has also helped to reinforce popular support for Hamas and Islamic Jihad, because they are seen as carrying the banner of Palestinian resistance.”

Palestinian remarked, “the occupation runs in two shifts: the PA by day, Israel by night.” Another felt that the Israel-PA cooperation “is not about law and order. It’s a political campaign against Hamas.” These attitudes reverberate across Palestinian society. In a 2014 poll, for example, 80 percent of Palestinians opposed the PA’s security coordination with Israel.

In consequence, some people switched allegiance and joined Hamas, branding Fatah-PLO a “mafia” that betrayed the national cause, because “Oslo is a project for treason, not for peace.” One said: “The government that is an enemy to Israel but chosen by the people is the one able to make peace.” Fatah “achieved nothing but the apartheid wall,” a Palestinian man voiced his disgruntlement. Another said: “We want change. We want our leaders to be people who fear God. We were Fatah supporters, but we are demanding new faces. The PA is full of criminals and there is unbelievable lawlessness.”

A woman who used to work for the PA felt that “Abu Mazen has conceded more than he ever received in return from Israel. He coordinated security with the Israelis, disarmed the Palestinian militias, and trained forces that do not belong to the Palestinian people but are loyal to Abu Mazen. People can’t even defend themselves. . . . Under Israel’s occupation, it’s not the leaders who suffer, it’s the people.” A former associate of Arafat felt the same way: “The [Palestinian] Authority confiscated all weapons from people, promising instead economic prosperity and peace. Abu Mazen didn’t deliver peace, but he did kill the soil

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1501 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a Palestinian woman (interviewee 24), Ramallah, West Bank, 17 December 2013.
for resistance.”¹⁵⁰² Some Fatah members even expressed respect for rival Hamas. One of them remarked: “Though we in Fatah were the fathers, I feel jealous of Hamas and their inspiration. They respect the young and the old, they’re very secretive and disciplined, unlike Fatah. Don’t consider them a stupid terrorist group. They’re educated, organized, and they were elected. They distinguish between military and political and social work, and they are very honest with themselves.”¹⁵⁰³

Most Palestinians would probably have overlooked Fatah-PLO’s satchel of real and perceived sins if the peace negotiations had succeeded in creating a modicum of security and economic normalcy for the people. Of all Fatah-PLO’s missteps, the endless peace processing without tangible results perhaps hurt its legitimacy and credibility the most. Fatah-PLO has been on the frontlines of diplomacy since the Oslo Accords, and the Palestinian public strongly supported Yasir Arafat and the peace initiative. In 1994, 61 percent of Palestinian respondents in Gaza and the West Bank supported an agreement between Israel and the PLO, and 62 percent felt “confident and optimistic of the future” because of Arafat’s return. In the same poll, 39 percent supported Fatah and only 14 percent Hamas.¹⁵⁰⁴ In 1996, 77 percent of the Palestinians supported the “peace process,” and 45 percent rated Arafat’s performance “good.” At the same time, 33 percent expressed trust in Fatah and 8 percent in Hamas.¹⁵⁰⁵ Four years later, the excitement over a potential peace deal had vanished, and angry disgruntlement erupted into the second intifada. In December 2000, only 39 percent expressed “support for the Oslo Accords,” against 70 percent who supported the intifada. Fewer Palestinians (26 percent) expressed trust in Arafat and more

people (12 percent compared to 6 percent in June 2000) in Sheikh Yassin. Simultaneously, 66 percent of respondents approved of suicide bombings as a “suitable response within the current political conditions.” The stalled peace process led many Palestinians to view Hamas “as the alternative to Fatah, which, they believed had lost its way.” In 2003 and 2006, respectively, 23 percent and 39 percent of Palestinians trusted Hamas.

These sentiments were mirrored in the 2004–5 municipal and 2006 parliamentary elections in the Palestinian territories that heralded Fatah-PLO’s decline and Hamas’s ascendancy. Until 2004, Hamas rejected electoral participation. For example, the VSM boycotted the 1996 presidential and legislative elections, because they took place within the framework of the Oslo Accords. In a similar vein, Hamas did not take part in the 2004 presidential elections. (Hamas also boycotted the elections held after 2006.) Its members, however, participated in student and professional union elections, which are considered an important arena of electoral contest in the Palestinian territories, and they made substantial gains between 1995 and 2006. As discussed above, sensing the shifts in popular mood, Hamas entered politics in December 2004. Its Change and Reform Party won roughly one-third of the available seats during the four rounds of municipal elections held in 2004 and 2005, the first since 1976, and made inroads even into Fatah strongholds in the West Bank. Because Hamas gained votes in the densely populated urban districts—while Fatah won more municipalities (121 against Hamas’s 81)—nearly 1,000,000

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Palestinians resided in Hamas-governed municipalities, and roughly 700,000 in Fatah-governed municipalities.\textsuperscript{1512} The 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council elections, the first since 1996, crowned Hamas’s electoral surge by unseating Fatah-PLO. Change and Reform won 74 of 132 seats, against Fatah’s 45 seats (other contenders gained 4 or fewer seats).\textsuperscript{1513}

In both municipal and parliamentary elections, Fatah-PLO officials competed not only against Hamas members but also against Fatah-PLO independents. Fatah-PLO’s factionalism split the vote and rewarded Hamas’s discipline. A former Arafat associate expressed frustration over the outcome: “If the elections were held under Abu Ammar, he would have not tolerated this kind of internal bickering. He would have ordered who should run and who should not run. He would simply say: ‘Do as I say or I will shoot you.’”\textsuperscript{1514} While the Fatah-PLO leadership failed to organize and heed the concerns of the electorate, Hamas’s leaders “displayed great electoral savvy.” They strategically listed well-regarded candidates who were likely to win, forged cross-religious alliances, and “showed acute awareness that gaining power in electoral system depends on winning the grassroots vote . . . and presenting a platform people can identify with.”\textsuperscript{1515} Hamas cadres studied public opinion polls; consulted the grassroots, as prescribed by Islamist doctrine (shūrā); and weaved local grievances into the movement’s political program. Hamas thus astutely amalgamated domestic discontent and Islamic ideology within a pragmatic political agenda.

In interpreting the 2004–6 elections results, it is important to take into consideration a few pertinent factors in the context of Palestinian politics. Most Palestinians normally expect the Israeli government to intensify punitive measures against the Palestinian population, if Hamas wins

\textsuperscript{1512} Meir Litvak, “Hamas’ Victory in Municipal Elections,” Tel Aviv Notes, no. 156, 26 December 2005.
\textsuperscript{1514} Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with Yasir Arafat’s former press secretary (interviewee 35), Ramallah, West Bank, 19 December 2013.
elections. Likewise, many Palestinians believe that a Hamas victory may solidify the split between Gaza and the West Bank. It is not unreasonable to assume, therefore, that Hamas might command slightly more passive than active public support, which was expressed in elections. Conversely, some analysts point out that Hamas’s strong electoral performance was a reflection of both Fatah-PLO’s dysfunctions and the fruitless peace process, rather than an endorsement of Hamas, citing Hamas’s gain of 45 percent in the popular vote against Fatah’s 41 percent in the 2006 parliamentary elections. There is, however, a consensus that “Fatah, the leaderless, failed the test and Hamas did not,” and “the consequences were revolutionary,” “little short of epochal.”

The electoral debacle revealed both the abyss separating Fatah-PLO from ordinary people and the disarray within the movement. “Fatah is finished. It cannot revive itself,” said one of its leaders. Another concurred: “We have a leadership we can’t replace and a base that we can’t satisfy.” Several Fatah activists made similar remarks: “We lost our relationship with the people. . . . We lost the connection with our base and the people more broadly,” said one. Another felt that “we need to return to our roots, to working among and reaching out to the people.” “The truth is that we have been behind the curve in popular organizing,” remarked the third. Others expressed optimism. Having undertaken initiatives to emulate Hamas, one Fatah member declared: “Fatah is becoming the new Hamas. We are speaking with one voice, whereas in Hamas you are

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1516 See Khalil Shikaki, “The Palestinian Elections: Sweeping Victory, Uncertain Mandate,” Journal of Democracy, vol. 17, no. 3 (July 2006), pp. 120–22. Some sources rounded off Hamas’s 44.5 percent popular vote to 44 percent, others to 45 percent.
starting to see divisions.” Hamas, in turn, dismissed Fatah-PLO as “a dead body in need of renovation.”

External assessments of Fatah-PLO painted a hopeless picture. In March 2007, former director of the Shin Bet, Yuval Diskin, stated: “I’m not optimistic about Fatah. Fatah is disintegrated and nearly destroyed, with no strong leadership. Abu Mazen is a good negotiator but doesn’t know how to deal with internal party affairs, and he has done nothing to revive Fatah, either its institutions or its military power. He wanted to become the national leader of the Palestinian people, but he forgot that he needs a strong Fatah to do it.” The Financial Times reported in 2009: “Fatah today resembles nothing so much as a bloated gerontocracy, a loose aggregate of colliding, ego-driven agendas. More interested in the trappings of statehood-without-a-state than the difficult practice of statecraft, its leaders, mostly over 70 and in their gleaming cars and suits, bear no relation to a young population struggling in poverty and walled into the shrinking residue of Palestine.” Its leaders are unable to prevent “its further slide into corruption and irrelevance after being trashed by the Islamist (but honest) Hamas in the 2006 general elections. . . . Fatah, which kept Palestinian hopes alive and put Palestine on the world’s agenda, is heading for the dustbin of history unless it quickly re-articulates a national platform and comes up with a credible leadership.”

Fatah-PLO’s decline began with Yasir Arafat at the helm. Yet his passing lay bare the extent to which Fatah-PLO hinged on his persona—his battle-forged legitimacy, popularity, and authoritarianism. A seasoned fighter in military fatigues, topped by his trademark kūfiyah

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1524 “The Agony of Fatah” (no author), Financial Times, 9 August 2009 (parentheses in the original).
(Palestinian headscarf), always carrying a rifle, and married to a cause—“a woman called Palestine”—Arafat succeeded in propelling the Palestinian cause onto the global stage. Among the Palestinians, “he has been lionized as nothing less than the father of the Palestinian national movement.” And he made himself indispensable to the West as well: “With whom will the Americans make peace? With ghosts?” Even when his popular standing took a plunge—over the abortive peace process, “inept stewardship, the brutal, arrogant methods of his 14 security services, his crackdown on dissenters and the corruption among the ‘outsiders’ who had accompanied him from Tunis,”—Israel’s 2002 siege of the presidential compound in Ramallah created “a widespread sympathy for Abu Ammar” and “restored his standing in the eyes of many of his own people, who praised his ‘steadfastness’ in the face of Israeli and international pressure to yield.”

Arafat’s successors, who were unwilling to shake off the past because it legitimized them, neglected to reform the movement to maintain its relevance and prevent its fragmentation. Indeed, “Abbas is careful to stake his own claim to leadership on the basis of being Arafat’s heir, rarely addressing his own people without a large portrait of his predecessor as part of the backdrop.” But Abbas is no Arafat: “while Arafat could control the internal squabbles thanks to his charisma and manipulation, his successor, Mahmud Abbas, lacks both stature and a personal power-base, and he has failed to exert authority on the warring factions within Fateh or carry out the reforms

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1526 “Who was Yasser Arafat?” Al Jazeera America, 6 November 2013.
1529 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a Palestinian woman (interviewee 24), Ramallah, West Bank, 17 December 2013.
1530 “Who was Yasser Arafat?” Al Jazeera America, 6 November 2013.
1531 “Who was Yasser Arafat?” Al Jazeera America, 6 November 2013.
necessary to salvage the movement.” For the Palestinians, Arafat was a unifying figure. “Arafat was a leader for all Palestinians but Fatah is not,” said a Hamas member. A political chameleon, Arafat had no trouble adapting himself. As one of his colleagues reminisced, “Abu Ammar could deal with anybody. He could talk to a world leader and connect with a fallāḥ (peasant, farmer). He knew how to behave in a five-star hotel and how to sleep in a cave. . . . Abu Ammar was the father of kisses. He used to tell us: ‘Fight, you don’t have anything to lose, you possess nothing! Fight, what are you afraid of losing, an Israeli checkpoint?’ He spoke in rhymes he had created: ‘You still will have my qublah [kiss], even if we lose our qiblah [the direction a Muslim should face during salāḥ (prayer); like Kaaba in Mecca, Haram in Jerusalem is qiblah].’ But while indulging in humor and banter, “Arafat had the aura of haybah [respect and love for a leader out of fear] which Abbas lacks,” as one Israeli expert on Palestinian affairs put it. Speaking about Arafat’s revolutionary legacy, an IDF general compared Arafat with Israel’s founder: “Arafat was Palestinian Ben-Gurion. There have been no Arafats after Arafat.” Indeed, since Arafat’s death, “no one within the Fatah organization seemed able to emulate the historic and revolutionary legitimacy or the popularity enjoyed by ‘the old man’ (al-Ikhtiyar), as the Palestinians called him.”

1533 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a producer at Al Quds television station (interviewee 38), Nablus, West Bank, 20 December 2013.
1534 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a former senior PA official and PLC member (interviewee 32), Ramallah, West Bank, 19 December 2013.
1535 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with an Israeli expert on Palestinian politics (interviewee 20), Tel Aviv, Israel, 9 December 2013.
1536 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a retired IDF major general (interviewee 22), Tel Aviv, Israel, 11 December 2013.
Hamas, by contrast, “is not a one-man show.” \(^{1538}\) At the core of Hamas’s decision-making process are two principles: \(shūrā\), a leader’s consultation with people to shape policy; and \(ijmā‘\), the requirement to attain a consensus. \(^{1539}\) Although schisms also exist within Hamas, even its opponents acknowledge that Hamas’s consultative decision-making and effective division of labor enable the movement to present a unified front, contain dissent, and maintain a consistent position on key issues. For analysts, the internal workings of Hamas’s collective leadership are difficult to decrypt; its spokesmen consistently deny any discord. \(^{1540}\) Significantly, Hamas has few external leaders, and they are well regarded by Palestinians for their pivotal role in deal making and fundraising on behalf of the people in Gaza and the West Bank. Fatah-PLO’s leaders-in-exile, conversely, have been marginalized. \(^{1541}\) The Mossad’s 1997 botched attempt to assassinate Khaled Meshal in Amman, in retribution for suicide attacks in Israel, catapulted him to the pinnacle of leadership. (At the demand of Jordan’s King Hussein, and intervention by Bill Clinton, the Israeli government supplied the antidote to the poison sprayed into Meshal’s ear as well as freed Jordanian and Palestinian prisoners, including Sheikh Yassin, in exchange for the Mossad agents trapped in Amman.) To Palestinians, Meshal is “the living martyr.” The incident “showed to our people that Hamas’s outside leaders suffer and sacrifice for the Palestinian cause,” said a professor at Al Najah University. \(^{1542}\) In the words of Itamar Rabinovich, Israel’s former ambassador to the United States, “in a movement like Hamas, being the target of a political assassination is a medal of honor, and

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\(^{1542}\) Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a professor at Al Najah University and a former PA minister (interviewee 26), Nablus, West Bank, 17 December 2013.
he [Khaled Meshal] wore that medal on his chest.”1543 Israel’s removal between 2002 and 2004 of local colossi like Salah Shehada, Ibrahim Maqadma, Ismail Abu Shanab, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, and Abdul Aziz al-Rantisi further enhanced Meshal’s stature.

After assuming the presidency, Arafat and his successor, Abbas, both blurred the lines between Fatah-PLO and the PA. Hamas, however, managed to keep a considerable distance between the VSM and the government after winning the premiership. Although the membership overlaps to a degree, certain decisions are strictly the purview of the Hamas movement, while others are the government’s. For example, a high-level Hamas government official cannot simultaneously advise the VSM’s decision-making body, Majlis al-Shūrá. This approach has given Hamas tactical as well as rhetorical flexibility. Thus, on the issues such as Israel’s recognition or the borders of a potential Palestinian state, some Hamas-affiliated government officials have implied that Hamas’s position has been evolving on the principles entrenched in its Charter, while senior VSM leaders have maintained a consistent, religiously and ideologically motivated popular message that attracts an ardent following. Of greater significance, whenever the Hamas-led PA sank into the quicksand of governance—especially during the 2006–8 international boycott and fiscal strangulation—the movement was able to deflect the responsibility for the deterioration in security and the economy onto Israel and the international community, blaming both for enforcing punitive measures and economic sanctions. The people empathized. In the words of a Gaza resident, “the problem is not that they’re [Hamas-led PA] stuffing their pockets with the people’s money like those before them [Fatah-led PA], but that all of our pockets are being emptied by Israel, the US, and the Europeans.”1544

As a final point, Fatah-PLO appears to have consistently failed to learn from its blunders. Under Arafat, the VSM ignored “a long-overdue process of self-criticism and reform.”\footnote{Patrick Seale, “Paymasters Desert Beleaguered Arafat,” Observer (London), 22 June 1986.} After Arafat, the PA has continued that tendency. If, in exile, geographic distance separated Fatah-PLO leaders from the Palestinians in the occupied territories, after returning to Gaza and the West Bank, an emotional abyss severed the PA from ordinary folk. As one Palestinian woman saw it, “the Palestinian Authority is one thing and the people are another. . . . The Palestinian Authority is in a different world.”\footnote{Quoted in Steven Erlanger, “In Fatah-Governed West Bank, Solidarity with Hamas,” New York Times, 5 January 2009.} Even in the wake of the 2004–6 electoral debacle, Fatah-PLO failed to grasp the significance of gaining the trust of the local people and continued to rely on its thinning revolutionary legacy. A resident of Ramallah criticized Fatah “which has learned absolutely nothing from its electoral defeat. They seem to be on a campaign to convince people they are unreformable and can only get worse.”\footnote{Quoted in International Crisis Group, “After Gaza,” Middle East Report no. 68 (Brussels, Belgium: International Crisis Group, 2 August 2007), p. 10.} In stark contrast, Hamas, it seems, analyzes its missteps. Hamas interviewees, for instance, readily discussed what they perceived to be the movement’s mistakes. Some pointed out that it was premature for Hamas to assume governance in Gaza, given the severe structural constraints, and because “the world was not ready to accept an Islamist government.”\footnote{Irena L. Sargsyan, interviews in the West Bank, December 2013.} “The United States says ‘we accept moderate Islam,’ but that message comes from lips, not from heart.”\footnote{Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a producer at Al Quds television station (interviewee 38), Nablus, West Bank, 20 December 2013.} An Islamist sheikh, who is also an imam and a PLC member, criticized the violent zealotry of younger Hamas members: “the extremists are suicide for Islam.” He expatiated: “As per our religion, we criticize mistakes, regardless of who makes them.”\footnote{Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with an Islamist PLC member (interviewee 36), Ramallah, West Bank, 20 December 2013.}
Hamas appears to follow this tenet and to conscientiously learn from experience. In the military arena, Israeli security experts observe that over the years, Hamas has learned to calibrate violence to specific political goals: “Before, Hamas didn’t know when to stop violence. It has become more flexible and adaptable.” Hamas has also made significant strides in politics. For example, amid the 2004–5 municipal elections and in preparation for the parliamentary elections, Hamas convened “the cream of Gazan civil society—writers, intellectuals, human rights activists,” in order to learn to further improve its performance as a political party. “Hamas leaders explained their platform but said they had come mainly to listen and learn and hear criticism. ‘Nobody in the Palestinian political arena ever did that,’ said one participant.”

Even high-level leaders within the movement do not shy away from learning. According to one analyst, “few who have met Khalid Mishal question his leadership qualities. A senior Arab official with decades of experience came away particularly impressed with his ‘willingness to learn,’ which he noted was rare indeed for those at Mishal’s level.”

Ironically, Hamas has also taken heed of Fatah-PLO’s fiascos. Asked why Hamas would not accept the Quartet’s conditions, Khaled Meshal rejoined: “Some acknowledged them. But what did they get? Nothing. . . . Why should we repeat the others’ experiences, especially if they had reached dead end?”

In the less than two decades since its inception, Hamas has solidified its position as a viable counterpoise to Fatah-PLO. In 2010, the New Statesman magazine named Khaled Meshal one of the 50 most influential people.

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1551 Irena L. Sargsyan, interview with a retired IDF brigadier general (interviewee 17), Tel Aviv, Israel, 5 December 2013.
In this section, I have examined the differences in leader and message characteristics in order to determine if the interaction of the messenger, message, and microstructural conditions through emotional mechanisms has enabled the VSMs to sustain VCA in the Palestinian territories. As a homegrown VSM, Hamas has forged strong bonds with a sizable segment of the Palestinian population over security and socioeconomic grievances. Through developing significant military capabilities, assuming defensive functions, and defying the IDF, Hamas has established robust resistance credentials. Hamas’s leaders have reinforced the VSM’s local legitimacy by generating a potent discourse that has fused domestic discontent and Islamic ideology. Hamas has centered its narrative on delegitimizing Israel’s military occupation and the Palestinian factions that have cooperated with it, and has accentuated the Palestinian people’s collective suffering as a result of historical injustice and poor socioeconomic conditions. Consistently, Hamas has demonstrated acute sensitivity to domestic public sentiment and has nimbly attuned its actions and rhetoric to the emotional pulse of the masses. The microstructural conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories facilitated Hamas’s rise, and Hamas swiftly dislodged Fatah-PLO as the vanguard of Palestinian resistance.

Relying on its revolutionary legitimacy, repatriated Fatah-PLO neglected to work toward consolidating and sustaining its popular support. Notably, in the case of Fatah-PLO, the variables VSM type and leader’s background played a less salient role in determining the outcome: sustained or failed VCA. The process-tracing has revealed that most Palestinians (many themselves refugees, deportees, and expatriates) judge repatriated leaders and leaders-in-exile by the actions these leaders undertake to promote the Palestinian cause. Yasir Arafat and Khaled Meshal spent most of their lives in exile. Yet the Palestinians hold both leaders in high regard. It was the Fatah-PLO leaders’ attenuating legitimacy and their inability to maintain a consistent, resonant message that
led to the VSM’s decline as a national liberation movement. The growing dissonance between the leaders’ rhetoric and actions; their failure to bring the Palestinian struggle to either a military or political conclusion; and their reluctance to reform, update political discourse, and adapt to the changing sociopolitical environment severely undermined Fatah-PLO’s credibility. Having lost the mantle of resistance, Fatah-PLO failed to assume the stewardship of peace.
Predicting which individuals are likely to mobilize and sustain collective violence to attain lasting political influence in states undergoing civil conflict or military occupation is crucial to successful policy interventions and conflict resolution. Yet the United States has repeatedly backed former exiles who failed to gain local legitimacy and popular support, and overlooked homegrown leaders who sustained violent mobilization and became potent political actors. These missteps contributed to the radicalization of social movements and empowerment of anti-US forces, as seen in Afghanistan (2001–14), Iraq (2003–11), Libya (2011), and Syria (2011–present).

My dissertation has addressed the questions of why VSMs rise or fail during military occupations, and why some leaders are able to overcome the collective action problem and sustain violent campaigns that require voluntary risky actions, but others are not. How do episodes of contention evolve into sustained civilian participation in collective violence? Why are only some leaders effective in achieving political objectives through sustained VCA?

Scholars have identified several possible solutions for the problem of collective action. The alternative explanations discussed in chapter 1 can be grouped into four broad strands. First, emphasizing structural conditions, realists argue that a hegemon can provide public goods directly or motivate contributions through positive inducements or coercion. Second, neoliberal institutionalists contend that rebel leaders impel participation by striving to lower their own transaction costs and to raise those of their adversaries. Third, constructivists focus on ethnic entrepreneurs’ use of discourse and identity to stigmatize free riding and mobilize collective
violence. And fourth, in explaining the microdynamics of collective violence, civil conflict scholars stress rationalist solutions to the “rebel’s dilemma.” In contrast, discourse and emotion have received little attention in theories explaining how leaders and followers overcome rational inhibitions to collective action.

My dissertation has examined the role of discourse and emotion in sustaining VCA. The middle-range theory of VSMs explains the sustainment of VCA by focusing on the constructivist pathway—leaders’ use of discourse to evoke strong psychological commitments to identity groups—and by integrating mechanisms from psychology—leaders’ arousal of the collective emotions of anger, humiliation, and fear. The VSM theory does not discount structural conditions, material power balances, and rationalist factors. Discursive emotional appeals alone have a limited capacity to produce VCA. But while the existing alternative theories and mechanisms significantly enhance our understanding of the causes that trigger violent mobilization, they do not explain how VCA is sustained.

In its broad contours, the VSM theory complements the extant alternative explanations and adds explanatory power by demonstrating that a leader’s discursive arousal of the emotions of anger, humiliation, and fear is critical to sustaining VCA. It is the interaction of discursive psychological variables and microstructural conditions through emotional mechanisms that allows only some leaders to sustain VSMs. In specifying the discursive variables and emotional mechanisms that sustain VCA, however, the VSM theory juxtaposes the alternative explanations.

The predominant focus within the civil conflict literature on structural, material, and rationalist factors impedes predicting or explaining the sustainment of VCA when structural conditions, material power balances, and utilitarian calculations presuppose contrary courses of action and outcomes. For example, inadequate microstructural conditions in Iraq, Northern Ireland,
and the Palestinian territories helped explain the initial mobilization of the respective VSMs, but they did not explicate how the Sadrist Trend and the Provisional IRA sustained VCA after the security and socioeconomic conditions had improved and become inauspicious for continuing armed struggle. Nor did they account for Hamas’s sustained violent resistance when the Israel Defense Forces, in conjunction with the Palestinian Preventive Security Force, sought to degrade and destroy the VSM. Similarly, one of the most compelling alternative explanations for sustaining VCA—external assistance—failed to account for the continuation of VCA in Iraq, Northern Ireland, and the Palestinian territories after the sponsors’ withdrawal of political, military, and financial aid to the rival VSMs. The VSM theory has proven that external assistance is a contributing cause of, rather than a necessary condition for, sustaining VCA. Rational choice mechanisms—such as coercion, selective incentives, and costly nonparticipation—partly accounted for the eruption of violence in Iraq, Northern Ireland, and the Palestinian territories. These mechanisms, however, could not explain the instances when rebel-induced coercion backfired—as it did in nearly all seven case studies and especially in the case of AQI-ISI—or why civilians joined the VSMs to become targets for the US military, the British forces, and the IDF as well as local security forces.

Departing from extant scholarship and focusing on the discursive and psychological dimensions of collective violence, the VSM theory has argued that favorable microstructural conditions and emotional appeals from credible leaders with legitimacy among domestic audiences are necessary and jointly sufficient to sustain VCA. In what follows, I address the validity of the VSM theory by revisiting the seven case studies and briefly summarizing whether the hypothesized variables and mechanisms led to the observed outcomes in each case. Next, I consider how
additional research might further enhance our understanding of sustained VCA. I conclude by discussing the policy implications of the theoretical findings.

The Case Studies and the Mechanisms

Table 3, imported from chapter 1, encapsulates the explanatory microstructural and discursive psychological variables central to the VSM theory. Through the emotional mechanisms of shared suffering, cultural tolerance of violence, and collective emotions of anger, humiliation, and fear, the microstructural and discursive psychological variables listed in table 3 interact to sustain VCA.

Table 3. Cases and Typological Space

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VSMs</th>
<th>Microstructural Variables</th>
<th>Discursive Psychological Variables</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Security Conditions</td>
<td>Socioeconomic Conditions</td>
<td>Military Occupation, Counterinsurgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AQI-ISI</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISCI</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadrist Trend</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OIRA</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIRA</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatah-PLO</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamas</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**VSMs in Iraq.** In chapter 2, I tested the VSM theory for three cases in Iraq—the homegrown Sadrist Trend, the repatriated ISCI, and foreign AQI-ISI—during the US-led military occupation (2003–11). The inadequate security and socioeconomic conditions between 2003 and 2007 and the presence of the US-led occupation created a shared discursive opportunity for the VSMs. External sponsors’ provision of arms, manpower, and finances discouraged the VSMs from making compromises, prevented any one of them from establishing hegemony, and exacerbated violent fights over legitimacy, resources, and recruits. Because of its strong domestic legitimacy, the homegrown Sadrist Trend turned the shared discursive opportunity into sustained VCA. The repatriated ISCI’s dearth of legitimacy among Iraqi Shias precluded it from gaining wide popular support. AQI-ISI’s initial mobilization of Sunnis collapsed because the VSM lacked ideological ties to the Iraqi population, local social and religious networks, and cultural sensitivity—all indispensable for sustaining popular resistance.

The leaders’ ability to articulate resonant messages and their choice of frames, values, and symbols played a central role. Muqtada al-Sadr produced forceful messages emphasizing his family legacy; exploited inadequate security and socioeconomic conditions, both in discourse and the provision of services; used the US-led military occupation as a rhetorical target; delegitimized his rivals; and capitalized on people’s shared experiences of suffering, anger, humiliation, and fear. By monopolizing the discourse of resistance—and demonstrating readiness to use arms to achieve political objectives—al-Sadr sustained VCA against the occupation. In contrast, the al-Hakims’ intensely sectarian discourse—coupled with their reticence to denounce the occupation and their perceived interest in power and riches—repulsed many Iraqis. Although al-Zarqawi’s searing anti-Shia rhetoric, inspired by a foreign ideology and accompanied by brutal behavior, appealed to the hard-liners in the short run, it failed to resonate with the broader Iraqi population in the long run.
The outsiders who had not sacrificed for the national cause failed to gain the legitimacy, credibility, and domestic popular support necessary to incite collective emotions and to become effective VSM leaders. The efforts of both ISCI leaders to downplay their long-standing relationship with Iran and AQI-ISI leaders to reduce the number of foreign fighters and incorporate Iraqis into the VSM’s leadership corroborate this argument.

A high degree of consistency between the hypothesized variables and mechanisms and the outcomes is observed in the cases studies in Iraq. It was the interaction of the messenger, the message, and microstructural conditions through emotional mechanisms that enabled only some VSMs to sustain VCA in Iraq during the US-led military occupation.

**VSMs in Northern Ireland.** In chapter 3, I examined two homegrown VSMs in Northern Ireland—the OIRA and the PIRA—during the period of the Troubles (1969–98) and the British intervention. The inadequate microstructural conditions in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1982 and the presence of British troops provided the OIRA and the PIRA with a similar discursive terrain to sustain VCA, while the influx of external assistance to the VSMs contributed to collective violence and internecine fighting.

The PIRA sustained VCA even after the microstructural conditions had become less conducive to violent mobilization between 1983 and 1998. By defending the Catholic, nationalist community, the PIRA established strong local legitimacy, which it then used to generate powerful messages that incited anger, humiliation, and fear. The PIRA developed an aggressive publicity campaign that exploited the inadequate security and socioeconomic conditions in Northern Ireland, framed the presence of the British troops as an oppressive military occupation, and delegitimized rivals. Sensitive to the attitudes of the local population, the PIRA’s leaders synchronized their
message with the Northern Catholics’ grievances—stressing shared suffering and historical injustice—and continually attuned their discourse to popular sentiment. The PIRA backed up its resistance discourse with selective violence. Gerry Adams’s family background and resistance credentials—coupled with his compelling communication skills—enabled him to craft messages that plucked at Irish nationalist heartstrings.

The leaders of the OIRA, in contrast, failed to maintain legitimacy and credibility among Northern Catholics. Initially, the OIRA’s singular focus on a politically sterile military campaign precluded it from developing a coherent sociopolitical program that would strike a chord with Northern Catholics. When the OIRA abjured armed struggle and made a volte-face toward parliamentary politics, its leaders neglected to communicate to the people the movement’s new ideological and political direction. The OIRA’s disconnect from the social, economic, and security realities in Northern Ireland—and the dissonance between its rhetoric and action—undermined the VSM’s influence among Northern Catholics. The OIRA leaders’ retrospective acknowledgment of the significance of cultivating ties with the local people and of communicating and acting in unison—as well as their subsequent attempt to emulate the PIRA in those respects—attest to the centrality of discursive psychological appeals in sustaining popular support for VSMs.

In the two case studies in Northern Ireland, the hypothesized variables and mechanisms led to the observed outcomes, with two minor deviations. First, there was insufficient evidence to corroborate part (b) of hypothesis 2—that external assistance to the OIRA and the PIRA tarnished the VSMs’ legitimacy in the eyes of the Irish people. One possible explanation is because external assistance to both the OIRA and the PIRA came predominantly from the Irish diaspora, it was not perceived by the local Irish as a sign of foreign influence. Second, hypothesis 3 on movement type could not be applied to the case studies in Northern Ireland due to the absence of foreign VSMs.
and leaders. Still, the brief analysis of the surrogate variables revealed friction between the IRA’s southern and northern leaders and also popular rejection of Marxism, which most Irish Catholics deemed an alien ideology.

**VSMs in the Palestinian Territories.** In chapter 4, I tested the VSM theory on two Palestinian movements—repatriated Fatah-PLO and homegrown Hamas—and process-traced Fatah-PLO’s decline as a national liberation movement and Hamas’s ascent as a potent Islamic resistance force under the Israeli military’s occupation of the Palestinian territories between 1987 and 2015. As in Iraq and Northern Ireland, the inadequate security and socioeconomic conditions in the Palestinian territories supplied Fatah-PLO and Hamas with similar discursive opportunities to sustain VCA. The availability of external assistance to both VSMs exacerbated collective violence and fratricidal strife but was not sufficient to explain Hamas’s ability and Fatah-PLO’s inability to sustain VCA.

Hamas sustained VCA when the IDF together with the PSF sought to decapitate and eradicate the VSM, and also during the periods of international boycott, economic blockade, and fiscal strangulation. A homegrown VSM, Hamas forged strong bonds with a sizable segment of the Palestinian population over security and socioeconomic grievances. By developing significant military capabilities, assuming defensive functions, and defying the IDF, Hamas has established robust resistance credentials and local legitimacy. Israel’s aggressive military and counterterrorism operations supplied Hamas with incendiary propaganda material. Hamas used its rhetorical legerdemain to delegitimize the military occupation, discredit Palestinian factions that were cooperating with Israel, and evoke shared suffering and historical injustice. Hamas’s leaders discursively amplified collective anger, humiliation, and fear to incite violence. Acutely sensitive to popular sentiment, Hamas choreographed its rhetoric and act to suit the public mood. In the final
analysis, by effectively integrating domestic grievances, religious fervor, and lacerating resistance discourse within a coherent ideological framework, Hamas sustained VCA.

Fatah-PLO, in contrast, failed to sustain its battle-forged legitimacy and capability to mobilize popular support. Fatah-PLO’s quest for power and international recognition at the expense of good governance and local legitimacy severed the movement from the grassroots. Its leaders’ failure to articulate a clear vision, reform the movement, and develop political and socioeconomic programs to address the Palestinians’ grievances has attenuated Fatah-PLO’s credibility. As the leading faction of the Palestinian Authority, Fatah-PLO could not criticize the Israeli occupation and the peace process as acerbically as did Hamas. Its leaders’ attempts to deliver conciliatory messages to the international audience and belligerent rhetoric to the domestic constituency deepened the dissonance between discourse and action, and between promises and achievements. Fatah-PLO lost its moral force, when, having abandoned armed resistance, it failed to secure peace and economic prosperity for the Palestinian people. The note that finalized the movement’s requiem was its inability to bring the Palestinian struggle to either a military or political closure.

Two of the hypothesized variables—VSM type and leader’s background—played a less salient role in determining the outcome, sustained or failed VCA, in the cases of Palestinian VSMs. The process-tracing has revealed that the Palestinian people—many of them deportees and expatriates themselves—judge repatriated leaders and leaders-in-exile by actions these leaders undertake to promote the Palestinian cause. Unlike the Iraqi people, who harbor markedly negative attitudes toward repatriated leaders and leaders-in-exile—and have even developed a specific lexicon to describe such leaders—Palestinians appear sympathetic to the external leaders who assume risks on behalf of the Palestinian people and cause.
The Emotional Mechanisms. This study has identified three emotional mechanisms through which discursive psychological variables and microstructural conditions interact to sustain VSMs: collective anger, humiliation, and fear; shared suffering; and cultural tolerance of violence. In all seven case studies, these three mechanisms drove the interaction among the independent variables and also underpinned the relationship between the independent variables and outcomes. Cultural tolerance of violence—manifested in the legitimization and routinization of violence and numbness to violence as a result of protracted armed conflict—proved to be a more salient mechanism than initially hypothesized. My field research and interviews in Iraq, Israel, Northern Ireland, and the Palestinian territories have revealed that cultural tolerance of violence is more than just a conduit of collective violence. Rather, cultural tolerance of violence can shape the scale, intensity, form, and duration of VCA. As such, the mechanism merits further exploration as well as testing in additional cases and contexts.

Several competing mechanisms considered in this study—such as the family tradition of joining militant groups (akin to carrying on the family tradition of serving in the nation’s armed forces), the prestige and status that militant groups confer on their members, material incentives, as well as idealism and rebel chic—all appear to facilitate initial mobilization for violence rather than enable the sustainment of costly VCA. I have determined the significance of the hypothesized mechanisms vis-à-vis the competing mechanisms using two criteria. The first is how often different interviewees provided similar reasons for continuing to support armed struggle or for remaining in the VSM. I also took into account what VSM leaders, government officials, military and security personnel, analysts, and ordinary civilians said about why they thought people joined and remained in the VSM. Second, I tracked the recurrence of a particular mechanism in the
discourse and content analyses. In sum, repetition across different interviews and texts served to validate the hypothesized mechanisms and to evaluate them against the competing mechanisms.

**Future Research**

The evidence and thick data collected in the course of this study have confirmed that sustaining VCA is a function of discursive emotional appeals as well as of microstructural factors and material power balances. There was a high degree of consistency between the hypothesized variables and mechanisms and the expected outcomes in the seven case studies. Discourse and emotion played a causal role in sustaining VSMs and therefore cannot be reduced to epiphenomena, aberrations, or by-products of structural conditions and rational choices.

On the basis of these findings, I argue for additional microfoundational research that focuses on the discursive and psychological dimensions of collective violence. Because discourse and emotion are at the center of human interaction—and because modern social media and digital technologies facilitate the diffusion of discursive emotional frames—the need is urgent to conduct interdisciplinary studies that explore the psychological motivators of mobilization and emotionally driven causes, processes, and outcomes of VCA. VSMs are shaped and influenced by political as well as by social, economic, security, cultural, discursive, and emotive processes. Insights from the fields of sociology, psychology, anthropology, communication, and neuroscience can enrich and meaningfully inform the work of academics and policymakers who deal with security, military, diplomacy, conflict, and foreign policy.

Interdisciplinary studies will necessarily lead to testing additional variables and mechanisms. The research carried out for this study, for example, pointed to ideology as a possible
factor in sustaining VCA. It would be useful to systematically test ideology to determine its analytical leverage: if ideology per se plays a causal role in sustaining VCA or if ideology acquires significance only when leaders evocatively articulate and interweave ideology with popular grievances. For instance, the ISCI and the Sadrist Trend both espoused Shia Islam. Unlike the ISCI, however, the Sadrists popularized Islamic ideology and rhetorically framed the US-led occupation as a threat to Islam. The OIRA and the PIRA also adhered to similar ideologies. But while ideology was a matter of esoteric philosophical debates among the OIRA’s intellectuals, the PIRA fused ideology with issues germane to the Northern Catholics’ daily life. Likewise, Hamas adroitly amalgamated the emotive aspects of Islamic ideology with domestic grievances. Although the majority of Palestinians enabled Hamas’s electoral victory in 2006, only 19 percent voted for Hamas out of ideological considerations. Some studies of terrorist groups address ideology, but it is worth exploring what role, if any, ideology plays in sustaining VSMs with heterogeneous popular bases.

Studies of the discursive and psychological aspects of substate political violence pose methodological challenges to scholars who use case- and mechanism-oriented comparison, process-tracing, and fieldwork in conflict zones. How can scholars measure more robustly causal mechanisms, especially those involving emotion or discourse? How can the ethical dilemmas that inevitably arise during fieldwork in conflict or postconflict environments be mitigated? Significant work remains to be done to increase the rigor and policy relevance of mechanism-based microfoundational theories and to ameliorate the risks associated with research in volatile regions.
Policy Implications

Most civilians naturally prefer normal life in a country with a functioning government that can provide security, economic prosperity, employment, and other essential services to its citizens. VSMs, therefore, have limited popular support. But whether the support comes from 15 percent, 25 percent, or grows to 40 percent of the population, it is sizable enough to disrupt the government, spark civil war, destabilize the homeland and regional states, and undermine diplomatic processes. Hence, predicting the rise of violent leaders and movements is critical.

My analysis has clear policy implications for anticipating which leaders are likely to mobilize and sustain VCA in states undergoing civil conflict or military occupation. Foreign-backed exiles encounter substantial challenges in this regard. Although exiles have at times risen to power through VCA—such as Ayatollah Khomeini, whose arrest in 1962 by the shah’s security services transformed him into a national hero—as a rule, these individuals have had other advantages. Most important, they established solid legitimacy prior to exile, maintained bonds to indigenous social networks while abroad, and returned to power through their own efforts. Without one or more of these attributes, exiles typically fail to cultivate the legitimacy, credibility, and feel for local politics necessary to galvanize masses, as seen in Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, and Syria. Western governments should therefore be skeptical about exiles’ capabilities to generate domestic change and pay close attention to homegrown leaders who command legitimacy among their compatriots—recognizing that if Western support is not sensitive to local politics and culture, it can delegitimize potential leaders and allow rivals to discredit them.

My findings also inform the ongoing operations against movements that use discourse as a battlefield weapon and manipulate collective emotions to sustain violent mobilization. As the
United States and its allies work to decipher the appeal of the Islamic State, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and the Al Nusra Front, they should look beyond material incentives that these movements offer to attract followers and focus on their discursive and emotional valence. Understanding causal mechanisms that sustain VCA and recognizing the attributes that lend legitimacy and credibility to homegrown leaders and resonance to their messages among domestic audiences is essential to devising effective conflict-resolution strategies to contain political violence, prevent failed states, and maintain stability. Effective strategies should involve measured military tactics as well as compelling counternarratives to delegitimize and defeat violent nonstate actors that imperil regional stability and international peace.
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