RESTORING MEDINAT AL-SALAAM
THE RISE OF MUQTADA AL-SADR'S JAYSH AL-MAHDI

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ABSTRACT

Though the United States-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003 aimed to rapidly topple authoritarian leader Saddam Hussein via decisive victory, the unintended consequences of this historical event resulted in full-fledged sectarian warfare. Emerging out of this incident, the captivating populist figure Muqtada al-Sadr moved promptly to capture the spotlight for the Iraqi Shi'a. Muqtada al-Sadr’s personal militia ultimately consolidated power under the designation Jaysh al-Mahdi with the sole objective of pushing Coalition Forces out of their cherished homeland.

The central question, and the problem examined in this thesis, is whether Jaysh al-Mahdi’s composition is that of violence-charged reactionaries (in other words, irrational actors), or one of rational actors pursuing what they perceive to be their duty and religious obligation in light of the current state of affairs. This thesis investigates the importance of Muqtada al-Sadr’s rise to power and the formation of his militia, Jaysh al-Mahdi, in the following manner: a brief historical examination of the role of Muqtada al-Sadr's familial ties; and an assessment of Jaysh al-Mahdi utilizing social movement theory.

Despite its revolutionary disposition and use of violent tactics in the interim,
Jaysh al-Mahdi is indeed a mere tool of Muqtada al-Sadr's strategic objectives, one that can be characterized as an Islamic activist movement striving to restore order to Iraq. After the Iraq invasion, Muqtada al-Sadr likely recognized the unfolding situation as the ideal opportunity to assume authority, in a lack thereof, in order to pursue his family's political goals for the Iraqi Shi'a. Militia members are fighting to win control of Iraq to install a Sadrist strain of governance, which would ensure their safety and protection from other elements of Iraqi society thereafter.
The research and writing of this thesis could not have been possible without my thesis advisor and mentor, Dr. John O. Voll, who spent significant time reviewing drafts. I am also indebted to my father, Dr. Ronald G. Naramore, who provided valuable feedback throughout the writing process.

This thesis is dedicated to my husband Joe, my mother, and my entire family, who have always been there no matter the circumstance.

_Insha'Allah_ the people of _Medinat al-Salaam_ will, once again, live in peace.
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CHAPTER I: WHO IS MUQTADA AL-SADR?

The Iraqi people will remain my sole advisor, Islam my religion, Iraq my homeland, and my protectors ‘the two Sadr’s’ (may God hallow their gracious spirits).
—Muqtada al-Sadr

Introduction

Baghdad, once known as Medinat al-Salaam, the City of Peace, so named because of its circular layout intended to shield inhabitants from intruders, is now headquarters to its greatest fear\(^1\)—outsiders. Though the United States-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003 aimed to rapidly topple authoritarian leader Saddam Hussein via decisive victory, the unintended consequences of this historical event resulted in full-fledged sectarian warfare. The mission designated as Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) opened Pandora’s box to the emergence of homegrown insurgency and outside influences, intent on destroying and banishing the subsequent foreign occupation.

Emerging out of this incident, the captivating populist figure Muqtada al-Sadr moved promptly to capture the spotlight for the Iraqi Shi'a.\(^2\) Though Coalition Forces were initially unfamiliar with him, Muqtada al-Sadr made a name for himself almost instantaneously. Defense and national security writer, Greg Bruno, points out that "virtually unknown before the collapse of Saddam Hussein's government in 2003, Sadr

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\(^2\) In news reporting, Muqtada al-Sadr is commonly referred to as Muqtada, Sadr, al-Sadr, MAS, and sometimes, Mullah Atari, based on his supposed preoccupation with video games.
has since emerged as one of the most important Shiite leaders in the country. While Muqtada al-Sadr holds no official Iraqi government title, he comes from a line of extremely influential Iraqi Shi’a clerics and is viewed as a legitimate political and religious figure by his followers.

After the American invasion, Muqtada al-Sadr relied on his prominent family name to rally formerly oppressed Iraqi Shi'a in a campaign of resistance against the aggressors. The Iraqi Shi'a perhaps determined that they had little to lose after years of marginalization and repression at the hands of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath regime. Accordingly, Muqtada al-Sadr successfully pressed this point, as he "fashioned a populist-Shi'i political platform that ha[d] deep resonance among Iraq's long oppressed Shi'i underclass…."

He captured their attention and was quick to present himself as the sole protector of the Shi'a inhabitants of Iraq. Such a move was fairly easy, as no one else stepped forward to assume this position.

As the mounting conflict ensued and full-out war began to rage, the United States' unsubstantiated claims (in the eyes of some native Iraqis) for entering the country served as substantiated justification to Iraq’s various insurgent elements and extremists groups to commence plots to push the infidels out of their cherished

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homeland.\textsuperscript{5} Though initially Muqtada al-Sadr sought only political recognition as the new Iraqi government began to take shape, his own marginalization from this process eventually resulted in the pursuit of violence to achieve his goals. The escalation of violence was gradual, but culminated in the form of a notoriously hostile militia.

Muqtada al-Sadr’s personal force of resistance ultimately consolidated power under the designation Jaysh al-Mahdi, or JAM, otherwise known as the Mahdi Army.\textsuperscript{6} Jaysh al-Mahdi was by no means an organized military unit, nor was it ever intended to be such. Instead, the militia "…emerged as a loose coalition of young imams and armed volunteers rushing to fill a power vacuum."\textsuperscript{7} Such a vacuum existed due to political destabilization after the invasion, and later Saddam Hussein’s capture, which resulted in the outbreak of pandemonium and anarchy among the Iraqi populace. Jaysh al-Mahdi surfaced during the disorder, as did other Shi’a and Sunni insurgent groups, yet Jaysh al-Mahdi quickly gained the reputation as one of the most dangerous militias in Iraq.\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{5} The term \textit{infidel} is used to describe non-believers, or those without faith, and is commonly used by devout Muslims to reference non-Muslim westerners.

\textsuperscript{6} Translated as the Army of the Mahdi, the name of Muqtada al-Sadr’s militia is significant for Shi’a, as it references the return of the Mahdi, the twelfth imam, who Shi’a believe will eventually emerge to lead them.

\textsuperscript{7} Bruno, "Muqtaba al-Sadr." Though Jaysh al-Mahdi may not have grown out of a formal organized structure, it is important to realize that an informal network of individuals who had supported Muqtada al-Sadr’s father existed.

\textsuperscript{8} Phil Williams, \textit{Criminals Militias, and Insurgents: Organized Crime in Iraq} (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2009), 234.
In order to entirely grasp the role of Jaysh al-Mahdi in fulfilling Muqtada al-Sadr’s strategic objectives, one must carefully examine the militia from the lens of an Islamic activist movement striving to restore order to Iraq, despite its revolutionary disposition and use of violent tactics in the interim. Again, it was not Muqtada al-Sadr’s initial intention to engage in battle. Though some media outlets originally displayed Jaysh al-Mahdi as nothing more than an irrational gang of street thugs, one would be greatly mistaken to cast the militia aside as such. Its roots are directly tied to the history of al-Sadr family political activism in Iraq.

Jaysh al-Mahdi merely pursues violence as an effective tool to protect the Iraqi Shi’a in a war-torn country. Already suffering from lack of basic services and enduring the collateral damage of combat, the Iraqi Shi’a are also targets of a volatile Sunni insurgency that is simultaneously vying for power. With no stable government to fulfill their basic needs, many Iraqi Shi’a feel that they have few options. Thus, by examining Jaysh al-Mahdi’s actions as one component of an overarching movement, one may resolve that the group is more than just a handful of Islamic radicals.

This thesis investigates the importance of Muqtada al-Sadr’s rise to power and the formation of his militia, Jaysh al-Mahdi, in the following manner: a brief historical examination of the role of Muqtada al-Sadr's familial ties; and an assessment of Jaysh al-Mahdi utilizing social movement theory. By characterizing both Muqtada al-Sadr's role as tied to his familial lineage and analyzing Jaysh al-Mahdi as an operational tool, functioning under the umbrella of a larger social movement, this thesis offers an
explanation for Muqtada al-Sadr's achievements and Jaysh al-Mahdi's aptitude to rapidly organize for a common cause. In doing so, one may discover that Jaysh al-Mahdi’s composition is not primarily that of violence-charged reactionaries (in other words, irrational actors); but instead, the group consists of rational actors pursuing actions that they perceive to be their duty and religious obligation in light of the current state of affairs.

**Iraqi Shi'a Politics**

After the Iraq invasion, Muqtada al-Sadr likely recognized the unfolding situation as the ideal opportunity to assume authority, in a lack thereof, in order to pursue his family's political goals for the Iraqi Shi’a. As previously mentioned, the combination of favorable circumstances seemed too good for the Iraqi Shi'a to pass up, especially after years of being socially ostracized by the Iraqi Sunnis. Though the Iraqi Shi'a constitute a majority of the Iraqi population, they have never been afforded the opportunity to fully exercise basic human rights. Such is particularly true during their years under Saddam Hussein's rule, a figure that consistently castigated the Iraqi Shi'a.\(^9\)

A true populist, Muqtada al-Sadr's charismatic presence substantially aided his efforts to unite the Iraqi Shi'a who believed in the Sadrist cause. He is certainly one of the most prominent leaders in present-day Iraq, and remains in the spotlight as he postures to obtain legitimate political representation for his Iraqi Shi’a following. Still,

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one cannot fully appreciate Muqtada al-Sadr's motives without exposing his family history, a history that has naturally postured Muqtada al-Sadr to assume a position of leadership in the near future.

Muqtada al-Sadr’s familial lineage arguably contributes to both his current mission in Iraq and his relative successes hitherto, as he is the descendent of two highly revered Iraqi Shi'a clerical figures: Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr (1931-1980) and Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr (1943-1999). Each of these men contributed immensely to Iraq's overall religious and political landscape through the pursuit of Shi’a Islamic movements, movements tied to the traditional Shi’a clerical establishment. Indeed, their ideologies inspired a mass following that culminated in the Sadrist movement.

Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr, a descendent of the Prophet Muhammad, and Muqtada al-Sadr's cousin and father-in-law, distinguished himself early in life. He was the student of Muhsin al-Hakim, the marja', or top authority, of the hawza based in Najaf, Iraq. Though a junior cleric, Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr authored an array of significant works, on topics ranging from economics and philosophy to Islamic

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10 Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr is also referred to as the First Martyr, or Sadr I. Similarly, Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr is known as the Second Martyr, or Sadr II. See Patrick Cockburn, Muqtada: Muqtada Al-Sadr, The Shia Revival, and The Struggle for Iraq (New York: Scribner, 2008), 27.

11 Cockburn, Muqtada, 29. Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr traces his ancestry to the Prophet Muhammad through the seventh Shi'a imam, Imam Musa al-Khazim.

12 The hawza is a seminary for traditional Shi'a Islamic studies. The authority, or marja', holds the title of Grand Ayatollah.
jurisprudence.\textsuperscript{13} His use of Arabic in these works is notable, as many Shi'a scholars reverted to Persian text during this time.

As Communism threatened to change the entire nature of the Iraqi state, deposing the existing Iraqi monarchy and establishing a republic in 1958, Shi'a clerics grew concerned.\textsuperscript{14} Communism's atheistic disposition, in addition to the fact that a number of Iraqi Shi'a followers began to subscribe to Communism, dramatically increased this apprehension. Because the egalitarian nature of Communism drew in a number of Shi'a, the traditional clerical hierarchy had substantiated ground to agonize, as they did not want to lose influence.\textsuperscript{15} Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr believed that the only way to stop the spread of potentially detrimental western ideologies and prevent them from taking hold of the Iraqi government was for the Iraqi Shi'a to take over and lead the government themselves.\textsuperscript{16}

Consequently, the Iraqi Shi'a asserted their power via political activism, led by Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr. They determined that the only way to immobilize the secularization of Iraq was to form a strong political party as a countermove. This

\textsuperscript{13} Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr, \textit{Lessons in Islamic Jurisprudence}, trans. Roy Parviz Mottahedeh (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003), 29. These key works include, but are not limited to titles translated as: \textit{Our Economy}, \textit{Our Philosophy}, \textit{The Interest-Free Bank}, and \textit{The Logical Bases of Induction}.


\textsuperscript{15} as-Sadr, \textit{Lessons in Islamic Jurisprudence}, 28.

noteworthy historical moment resulted in "the creation of Hezb al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya (the Party of the Islamic Call) in 1958 [,which] was the direct result of the awareness by the clerical class of Iraq that the hawza, as an institution, was in real jeopardy in the face of secular ideologies."¹⁷ The Iraqi Shi'a refused to sit back and watch Communism overcome the Iraqi state, nor would they let newfangled ideologies threaten the hawza's religious credibility and standing among the Shi'a community. Ensuring that the hawza remained intact was an essential step to maintaining authority over their own affairs.

Thus, the Da'wa party was a form of Islamic revival, one where young clerics and laypersons could "...check the spread of ideologies which they believe threatened both to weaken the Shi'i community and to turn people away from Islam itself."¹⁸ The twofold goals of the Da'wa party included: proliferating Islam by reviving the traditional Shi'a religious institutions, and overcoming secular political ideologies to ensure that the traditional religious establishment was not marginalized.¹⁹ If Da'wa could successfully lead the way for reform, the Iraqi Shi'a would have a forum to disseminate ideas that might replace secularized western thought. Da'wa was, therefore, a mechanism for change.

¹⁷ Louër, Transnational Shia Politics, 83.
¹⁹ Louër, Transnational Shia Politics, 84.
There is some dissension concerning whether or not Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr was the actual founder of Da'wa; though, regardless, most credit him as being the party's spiritual leader and moving force. The exact nature of the relationship between Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr and Da'wa remains unknown, "...but there is no question that the party was vastly emboldened by events in Iran [namely the Iranian Revolution] and looked to Sadr for leadership."^{20} Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr's role as an Iraqi Arab *mutjahid*, naturally postured him as a guardian for the Iraqi Shi'a, someone who was capable of addressing their needs and articulating those needs within society.\(^{21}\)

The Da'wa party initially operated clandestinely in order to draw support and establish a structured entity, which might later emerge as a mass movement. Its members understood that any attempt to form a political movement that blatantly countered the Iraqi state was a dangerous move. However, the Iraqi government eventually became aware of the party, and in turn "...[denied] it any legality, [and] used its members in the balancing act with which the regime would alternatively set the Communists, the Baathists, the religious Shi'is and other factions against each other."\(^{22}\) While the Iraqi government allowed the Da'wa party to continue to operate, it

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21 Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 86. A *mujahid* is someone qualified to interpret Shi'a law, in addition to giving guidance on social and political questions.

simultaneously interfered with its operations to ensure it remained subservient to the state.

Why was the Iraqi government preoccupied with the Da'wa party? Though the Iraqi Shi'a were not completely unified, they all recognized Da'wa as the "…most direct claimant for the right of religious Shi'is to organize politically." Therefore, it was clearly a threat to the existing nation-state. In due time, Da'wa would emerge as the oldest and most significant Shi'a political party in Iraq within the last century. Moreover, Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr would become an increasingly important figure in Iraq’s future, even after death, as his reputation and influence long outlived him.24

Transitioning Political Landscape

In 1970 Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr's mentor, Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Muhsin al-Tabataba'i al-Hakim, was near death. As a result, Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr became a contender for his position. However, Muhsin al-Hakim chose Abu al-Qasem al-Khu'i instead.25 Such a move was extremely significant in the history of Iraqi Shi'a politics, as Muhsin al-Hakim supported Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr's Da'wa party, but Abu al-Qasem al-Khu'i did not.

23 Ibid.


25 Abu al-Qasem al-Khui is another influential Shi'a scholar, who is well known for opposing the ideas of Sayyid Ruhollah Musavi al-Khomeini.
Around the same time, Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr "...issued a manual of guidance for the lay Shi'i believer that more or less put forward the claim that Sadr had the standing to succeed Khu'i. This claim was widely accepted." Consequently, a divide emerged within the hawza, and many clerics refrained from direct involvement with Da'wa to ensure that they did not alienate themselves and solidify the growing rift. As a result, Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr made the difficult decision to give up his role within the Da'wa party and devote his full attention to religious studies.

The Da'wa party continued under the leadership of Muhsin al-Hakim's son, Mahdi, and strategically shifted to become the authoritative political party for the Iraqi Shi'a as the Communists, backed by the Arab nationalist Ba'athists, continued to rein in Baghdad's political apparatus and solidify governmental control. Though Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr was not particularly active during this time, he inspired a devoted following and ultimately became known as the "progenitor of the politically activist Shia religious movement whose followers became known as the Sadrists." In fact, many of Muhsin al-Hakim's followers shifted their loyalties to Mohammad Baqir

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26 as-Sadr, Lessons in Islamic Jurisprudence, 30.

27 Louër, Transnational Shia Politics, 84-86. The Ba'athists eventually took control after overthrowing the Communist regime and ruled until the United States invasion in 2003.

28 Cockburn, Muqtada, 27.
al-Sadr upon his death.\textsuperscript{29} The Sadrist movement consolidated power quietly over the years, only later to emerge as a potent force.

Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr, a cousin and student of Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr, and the father of Muqtada al-Sadr, assumed the role of \textit{marja'\textsuperscript{3}} in 1992 when Abu al-Qasem al-Khui died. Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr was trained through the traditional religious establishment. In fact, Sayyid Ruhollah Musavi al-Khomeini and Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim served as his teachers and mentors; however, they would later become his "fierce opponents."\textsuperscript{30} Although Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr grew to be an outspoken figure in Iraq, he was comparatively quiet in his earlier years. Though Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr was also a \textit{mujtahid}, he purportedly refrained from drawing attention to himself.

Despite his desire to avoid attention, as \textit{marja'}, Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr ultimately received the backing of the Ba'athist regime. Interestingly, he was handpicked (out of prison) by Saddam Hussein and placed in power.\textsuperscript{31} Though this occurrence seems somewhat odd, the regime desired an acquiescent liaison within the Iraqi Shi'a clerical establishment. The Ba'athists did not care for Abu al-Qasem al-

\textsuperscript{29}Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq}, 203.
\textsuperscript{30}Cockburn, \textit{Muqtada}, 81.
\textsuperscript{31}George Packer, \textit{The Assassins Gate: America in Iraq} (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 264.
Khui, who was Persian and deeply linked to Iran, but much-preferred Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr, who was an Iraqi national of Arab descent.32

Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr won over the Ba'ath regime with his narratives focused on nationalism, as "he spoke for the dispossessed and blamed the troubles of Iraq's Shia on the fact that so many of their religions leaders, such as Khoei and Sistani, originally came from Iran"33—a message that Saddam’s regime could appreciate. Moreover, Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr held credentials of an experienced leader, as former prime minister of Iraq in 1948 during monarchy rule.34

Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr owed many of his ideas regarding the creation of an Islamic state to Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr; however, the two men were somewhat different in the sense that Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr "...gave priority to starting an Islamic cultural revolution that would precede seizing state power."35 He was not as anxious to instantly install an Islamic government. Instead, Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr sought to preserve his role under the Ba'ath regime to convince them that they maintained control over the Iraqi Shi'a population, while simultaneously assembling an underground Shi'a movement. The sense of secrecy was vital to acquire a following

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32 Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, 259. The Ba'ath Party, rooted in Arab nationalism, has a deep-seated fear of Iran, and therefore, greatly distrusts its neighbor and anyone linked to the Persian nation.

33 Packer, *Assassins Gate*, 264.

34 Chehab, *Inside the Resistance*, 159.

35 Cockburn, *Muqtada*, 82.
that avoided detection by Saddam Hussein's regime, as its discovery could be detrimental, and likely deadly.

However, over time Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr became increasingly confrontational, especially as the Iraqi population continued to suffer from lack of basic services. Such was the result of United Nations sanctions after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The Iraqi government's inability to take care of its people empowered Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr to take action. When the "sanctions-depleted government of Saddam Hussein cut back services to Shiites," Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr took it upon himself to dole out charity. However, conditions in Iraq were miserable and the charity was not enough.

Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr was further emboldened and decided to give the Iraqi Shi'a a voice. He began by initiating Friday prayer services within Shi'a mosques, but this act was short-lived. In lieu of pro-Iraqi government speeches, Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr focused on the promulgation of Islam. Saddam Hussein grew impatient, primarily because Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr refused to prop up the regime in his sermons, and thereby declared that Friday prayer services were canceled.

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37 "He would begin Friday prayers, which he had introduced in a radical break with Shia tradition, by leading thousands of worshippers in the mosque in Kufa in chanting: '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.'" Cockburn, Muqtada, 79.
Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr consciously chose to completely disregard Saddam Hussein's orders. He absolutely would not be threatened by the regime. Accordingly, Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr arrived at Kufa Mosque as normal to deliver the Friday sermon. However, he was immediately confronted by government officials, who warned him to refrain. Mohammad Sadiq-al Sadr failed to heed this warning, walked past them, and entered the mosque to discover a number of additional hostile officials. Still, he also ignored them and delivered his usual sermon as he desired.

Though he was not interrupted or disturbed in the process of doing so, Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr understood what the future held for him. He had disobeyed a direct order from Saddam Hussein, who was notorious for enforcing his rules and regulations to whatever extent required. Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr was unmoved and refused to let the thought of dying stand in the way of doing what he felt was right.

**Al-Sadr Family Persecution Under Saddam**

Threats emanating from Saddam Hussein, directed toward the Iraqi Shi'a community, were certainly not a new phenomenon. During the 1970s, Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party associated all Shi'a with Iran and expelled many citizens

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38 Ibid., 105.

39 Ibid.
with suspected Persian connections. Because the Iraqi Shi'a became increasingly radicalized and sought Shi'a leadership, they turned to Da'wa, a group where like-minded individuals came together to address Shi'a needs. In turn, Da'wa became an outlet, as a place where the excluded Iraqi Shi'a could organize.

The Ba'ath Party dictated the public sphere of life for all Iraqis, believing that by doing so, the regime could keep Iraqi citizens under its control. However, just the opposite occurred, as the regime's actions "...further polarized Iraqi society, leading a growing number of lay Shi'is to consider Islamic ideology as a vehicle for political change which might succeed where communism had failed." Consequently, Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr gained influence and rose in popularity among the Iraqi Shi'a during this period due to his outright refusal to submit to the regime’s authority.

On the contrary, he openly preached the importance of adhering to Islamic law over a secular governmental structure. Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr also issued a fatwa banning the Iraqi Shi'a from becoming members of the Ba'ath party. Such a move caused alarm to Saddam Hussein, who had grown increasingly suspicious of the Iraqi Shi'a, as a threat to his power. Therefore, Saddam Hussein "...tried to undermine that [Shi'a] solidarity, channeling resources towards the Shi'i community at large, whilst

40 Saddam Hussein was extremely paranoid of Iran's potential influence in Iraq, especially over Iraqi Shi'a.

41 Nakash, The Shi'is of Iraq, 137.

ensuring that certain groups, families and individuals were more favoured than others. In this way, Saddam Hussein could utilize patronage to ensure that certain factions of Iraqi Shi'a remained compliant.

Saddam Hussein's actions brought on the hastened demise of the Da'wa party. Though he had always been fearful of the Iraqi Shi'a and Iranian influence, Saddam Hussein's suspicions dramatically escalated. As his paranoia grew stronger, this legitimized his ploy to crack down on various Iraqi Shi'a organizations. He arrested Iraqi Shi'a leaders, including Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr, which subsequently initiated mass protests from the Iraqi Shi'a community. Such demonstrations only served to anger Saddam Hussein more, and he resolved to take increasingly drastic actions.

Saddam Hussein eventually determined that the only way to solve the Iraqi Shi'a dilemma was to either expel or execute its leaders. In fact, a retroactive government decree declared that membership in the Da'wa party was legitimate grounds for the death. This action solidified Saddam Hussein's determination to eliminate all resistance by any means necessary.

Saddam Hussein promptly arrested and executed Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr, along with his sister, Amina Sadr Bint al-Huda. Stories indicate that their deaths were excessively vicious, as Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr was forced to watch his sister's rape,  

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43 Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 204.

44 Ibid., 229.
just before nails were driven into his head, ending his life.\textsuperscript{45} After this occurrence, the Iraqi Shi'a were forced to lay low for the time being, so as not to face deportation or death. Consequently, the Da'wa Party temporarily fell apart.\textsuperscript{46}

After Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr's death, his cousin Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr promptly assumed the position of Saddam Hussein's "most dangerous opponent."\textsuperscript{47} Although Saddam Hussein first integrated him as his primary ally from the Iraqi Shi'a community, a move made purely to keep his enemies close, this act was not long lasting. Despite his multitude of political and religious accomplishments, Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr also met his tragic end after initiating Shi'a unrest.

He gained the reputation for being quite the instigator based on the fact that "he opposed the principle of Taqqiya (dissimulation and concealment) when dealing with Saddam Hussein, arguing that, on the contrary, this was the moment for Shia religious leaders to stand up openly for their faith."\textsuperscript{48} Saddam Hussein did not approve of activist behavior from the Iraqi Shi'a and became frustrated with Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr, just as he had with Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr. Certainly, Saddam Hussein again grew increasingly anxious, realizing that if the Iraqi Shi'a majority ever found an effective voice, the Ba'ath regime was doomed.


\textsuperscript{46} Louër, \textit{Transitional Shia Politics}, 137-38.

\textsuperscript{47} Cockburn, \textit{Muqtada}, 27.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 82. "In Shiite theology there is a concept called \textit{taqiyya}, dissimulation, the principle of hiding one's beliefs to avoid persecution or harm." See Shadid, \textit{Night Draws Near}, 189.
Understanding that Iraqi Shi'a were undoubtedly never going to acquiesce to his demands and remain unobtrusive throughout his rule, Saddam Hussein continued a policy of Shi'a repression and marginalization. Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr’s distaste for the Saddam regime, coupled with his declaration as "supreme leader of the Iraqi Shi'a," ultimately led to his assassination in 1999, allegedly by Ba’ath Party agents.\(^4^9\) Gunfire riddled a moving car containing Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr and two of his sons, Mustafa and Mouamil.\(^5^0\) Shortly after, all were declared dead. Violent protests erupted within Iraqi Shi'a strongholds, as loyal followers discovered the news of Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr's death.

Immediately following the death of Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr, Muqtada al-Sadr remained as the sole heir to the Sadrist movement. A young man, he continued his education, "...but had attracted through his passionate, if occasionally intemperate, pronouncements and his family links a larger following than one might expect, given his youth and status."\(^5^1\) However, Muqtada al-Sadr was unable to utilize this support until much further down the road, a result of his precarious personal situation.

Muqtada al-Sadr’s only remaining brother purportedly became a recluse, leaving Muqtada al-Sadr to take care of both his mother and his brother’s family. During this time, Muqtada al-Sadr kept a low profile, as not to arouse any unnecessary

\(^4^9\) Ibid., 109.

\(^5^0\) Shadid, Night Draws Near, 171.

suspicion from the Saddam regime. He did not wish to meet the same destiny as his predecessors. Consequently, Muqtada al-Sadr never confronted the Iraqi government for killing his father, and he steered clear of protests stemming from Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr's death.\textsuperscript{52}

Saddam Hussein monitored Muqtada al-Sadr from this point forward, claiming that it was for his own personally safety. Thus, the young Muqtada al-Sadr essentially remained under house arrest. Saddam's justification for supervision was primarily induced from fear that "...the young man inherited a wide network of mosques, schools and social centers built up by his father."\textsuperscript{53} Saddam Hussein wanted to prevent Muqtada al-Sadr from utilizing these resources. Though this fact was true, Muqtada al-Sadr was in no position to exploit these networks.

Due to the circumstances, Muqtada al-Sadr was unable to assume any duties related to revamping the Sadrist movement for approximately four years, as isolation was certainly not conducive to activism.\textsuperscript{54} He undoubtedly found himself in a problematical situation based on lack of mobility. Muqtada al-Sadr had no choices, or

\textsuperscript{52} Cockburn, \textit{Muqtada}, 111.


\textsuperscript{54} Cockburn, \textit{Muqtada}, 113.
alternative courses of action to pursue, besides that of continuing theological studies for the time being in order to preserve his own life.\(^{55}\)

**The Rise of Populist Muqtada**

Despite the fact that the United States military successfully overthrew Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath regime, it quickly became clear that there was no adequate strategic plan for subsequent governance of the country. The primary intent post-invasion was not to remain to restore a nation. However, conditions overcame the military, basically prohibiting force withdrawal. Troops remained in Iraq and the United States continuously faltered as it attempted to establish some semblance of peace in the nation.

The environment looked fruitful and Muqtada al-Sadr's "...political prowess and a penchant for drama—along with a steadfast opposition to the U.S. occupation and his family credentials—coalesced to reinvent the younger Sadr."\(^{56}\) The invasion freed Muqtada al-Sadr from the scrutiny of Saddam Hussein; it was finally time for a new start. Regardless of claims that Muqtada al-Sadr lacked the appropriate religious credentials at the time, and was therefore an illegitimate figure to rise up to any

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\(^{55}\) Though he was not active during this time, "Upon his father's death, Muqtada al-Sadr had to shift his religious loyalties to a living source of emulation. He turned to Ayatollah Haeri, who conformed to Khomeini's ideology more than to the quietest tradition espoused by Sistani." This point is made in Paul A. Marshall, Lela Gilbert, and Roberta Green, *Blind Spot: When Journalists Don't Get Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 59.

\(^{56}\) Bruno, "Muqtada al-Sadr."
leadership role, he understood the potential for this political opportunity and promptly took action.  

Upon the fall of Baghdad, "...Ayatollah Kazem al-Haeri, the Iranian-based Iraqi cleric who had been Sadeq al-Sadr's marjah, issued a fatwa urging the Iraqi Shi'a to seize power." Though Muqtada al-Sadr was only a low-ranking cleric during this time, holding the title of Hoijet al-Islam, he had recently been appointed as Kazem al-Haeri's deputy and representative in Iraq, a move that undoubtedly gave Muqtada al-Sadr legitimacy in the eyes of the Iraqi Shi'a. It seems that Muqtada al-Sadr was "...ideally placed to take advantage of the political vacuum in Iraq as the old regime collapsed on April 9." With Kazem al-Haeri's endorsement, Muqtada al-Sadr was armed with the necessary support to assert control in the country. He began to tap into the underground network of his father's followers in order to mobilize the Sadrist movement. 

Certainly, the al-Sadr family was determined to make a profound impact on Iraqi society, namely for the benefit of the Iraqi Shi'a, who consistently failed to earn the right to govern their own. Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr instigated a mass following,

\[57\] Apparently, some of the more educated Iraqi Shi'a living within the higher echelons of society called Muqtada al-Sadr "a zazut, or ignorant child." For more information, see Bartholet, "Sword of the Shia."


which would later form the foundation of his youngest son’s movement. In fact, though "depleted by death, flight, and mass arrests, his movement went deep underground but did not disappear. It was to reemerge after the fall of Saddam with Sadiq al-Sadr’s youngest son, Muqtada, at its head." Muqtada al-Sadr’s present-day movement is a revival of his father’s supporters and followers, coupled with a certain degree of new blood, primarily Iraqi men moved by the populist leader’s rhetoric.

By and large, Muqtada al-Sadr fully exploited the al-Sadr intifada following his father’s death by later provoking Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr's concealed movement into reemergence, as his personal show of force. Without the evocative accomplishments of his predecessors, one may propose that Muqtada al-Sadr would not have enjoyed almost instantaneous support. To the Iraqi Shi’a, the al-Sadr name represented the deaths of martyrs, and it was exactly this "...martyrdom, that promoted with astonishing speed Sadiq’s little-known son Muqtada al-Sadr into one of the most powerful men in Iraq, to the horror of the United States and its Iraqi allies." As Muqtada al-Sadr resurfaced, his ability to rapidly reconsolidate power and influence was astounding.

Both the United States and the Iraqi government failed to predict Muqtada al-Sadr's rise to power. Without realizing and acknowledging Muqtada al-Sadr's

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lineage, there is no way the United States could have truly understood the background, which greatly contributed to Muqtada al-Sadr's success. Although the United States initially failed to recognize Muqtada al-Sadr's growing role among the Iraqi Shi’a, those within Iraq who understood the history of al-Sadr family activism noted the inherent strength of the rapidly growing popular movement associated with the al-Sadr family. In retrospect, had the United States incorporated Muqtada al-Sadr into the political process from day one, Iraq might be a very different place today.

Still, no one possessed adequate foresight to calculate exactly how events might unfold. Just after the invasion, Muqtada al-Sadr was questioned as to whether or not he "viewed the Americans as occupiers or liberators. 'This is not a question to ask me,' he said, his delivery still unsure. 'It is a question to ask them. I don't know their intentions. Only God does.'"64 Though Muqtada al-Sadr's immediate goals did not include full-out war with the United States, he was obviously cautious and suspicious of United States' objectives in Iraq.

Yet, the United States' preoccupation with expatriates like Ahmad Chalabi diverted their focus, and Muqtada al-Sadr failed to obtain immediate attention.65 Though Ahmad Chalabi was also an Iraqi Shi’a from a prominent family, he did not

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64 Shadid, Night Draws Near, 168.

65 Ahmad Chalabi was an exiled Iraqi politician, who returned to Iraq after the United States invasion with the support and political backing of the United States government.
hold even an inkling of influence over any faction of the Iraqi people.\textsuperscript{66} In fact, he was hand-selected as one of Washington's favorites and strategically placed into the Iraqi National Congress, despite his dubious past.\textsuperscript{67} This move, coupled with the decision to disregard Muqtada al-Sadr's budding militia, would prove to be a grave mistake.

During this post-Saddam period, a volatile and extremely aggressive Sunni insurgency mounted, characterized by numerous opportunistic Al-Qaeda linked foreign fighters entering Iraq to fight the invading forces. These individuals posed an unmistakable threat to both United States troops stationed in Iraq and native Iraqi locals, both Sunni and Shi'a. Yet, despite the fact that "…Iraq has attracted thousands of Sunni jihadists eager to fight the Americans and their putative Shia allies, no Shia transnational jihad developed there, neither against the Americans, nor against the Sunnis."\textsuperscript{68} Because Coalition Forces were confronted with both Sunni and Shi'a insurgencies almost concurrently, they likely evaluated Jaysh al-Mahdi as the lesser evil, which could be dealt with at a later date.

Such a decision was a serious miscalculation, which would allow Muqtada al-Sadr and Jaysh al-Mahdi to strengthen their support base, especially in neighborhoods

\textsuperscript{66} Though, interestingly, Ahmad Chalabi received a note from Muqtada al-Sadr's father just before he was murdered, requesting Chalabi's help. For more information, see Cockburn,\textit{ Muqtada}, 105.

\textsuperscript{67} Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq}, 275. Interestingly, Ahmad Chalabi later allied himself with Muqtada al-Sadr. Specifically, he "…attached himself to the Shiite bloc, became a champion of Muqtada al-Sadr, and revived his fortunes after the U.S. government dumped him and raided his house in Baghdad. Even Chalabi's harshest critics had to admire the man's shrewd opportunism." See Packer,\textit{ Assassins Gate}, 408.

\textsuperscript{68} Louër, \textit{Transnational Shia Politics}, 299.
where the Iraqi Shi'a suffered immensely from dire poverty. Many Iraqi Shi'a found themselves jobless, hungry and in need of various forms of immediate assistance. With nowhere to go and no one to help them, the Iraqi Shi'a seemed hopeless.

The Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein had certainly never assisted the Iraqi Shi'a, and now they were left with no functioning government at all, so they had little room left for hope. And any semblance of hope that might be left would certainly not be placed in the hands of good-intentioned invading forces, a group of people unfamiliar with the history of Iraqi Shi'a suffering. Consequently, the Sadrists swiftly mobilized this section of the population. Soon after, they escalated to violent means, recognizing that only they could protect themselves.
CHAPTER II: CHARACTERIZING THE SADRIST MOVEMENT

Despite my high confidence in God Almighty and in our patient people, there is a need to reform the political, social, and economic conditions. I still have hope for a free, united, and independent Iraq enjoying judiciary independence and a constitutional court.

—Muqtada al-Sadr

Original Sadrist Movement

The Sadrist movement is fundamentally unique due to its origins and development over the years, the byproduct of the renowned al-Sadr family history.¹ Each time the Sadrist movement appeared to mature into an expansive entity, its core was eradicated and its followers left with no choice but to temporarily recoil—though, remarkably, this cluster of Sadrists never completely disintegrated.² In fact, they merely took cover for whatever amount of time necessary in order to regroup, and later, resurface.

In a way, this process allowed the Sadrist movement to become more resilient when threatened, as repression created a necessity for withdrawal into tightly knit units, within which one could build loyalties that would be important to the organization later. Thus, the Sadrist base never fully capitulated and devout followers remained interconnected as a broad network throughout Iraq, resulting in the easy transition of the movement from one al-Sadr to another.

¹ The Sadrist movement is also commonly referenced as Sadrism, or the Sadrist Trend. Followers of this movement have been referred to as the Sadrists, or al-Sadriyyun.

² The core of the original Sadrist movement was Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr, and afterward Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr, and their closest confidants.
Though Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr carries the title of progenitor of the Sadrist movement, Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr also made significant contributions that facilitated the movement's progression. Operating under an inequitable authoritarian state, which obviously gave preference to Iraqi Sunnis, "…Sadr's ministry had reshaped Shiite activism through a sprawling, grassroots movement that, over a decade, had redrawn notions of politics and religion and, most important, the clergy's place in both." He consolidated a mass following through the reinstitution of Friday prayers and the mobilization of the poor in slums such as Saddam City.

It is important to understand that Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr and Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr created the Sadrist movement to rouse a following that would help lead Iraq back to Islam, as "both wanted an Islamic society that would prepare the way for the return of the Imam Mehdi, the redeemer who would end the rule of tyrants and establish justice in the world." The current Iraqi state would clearly not help facilitate this process. Though creating an Islamic government would be advantageous, the ultimate aim was not necessarily to install one. Instead, the goal was to create an

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3 Shadid, Night Draws Near, 169.

4 Saddam City is the nickname given to al-Thawra district, a neighborhood in Baghdad known for its impoverished residents. It was later renamed Sadr City, which will be discussed in the Chapter 2 section Sadr City Support Base.

5 Cockburn, Muqtada, 114.

6 As mentioned in Chapter 1, Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr was more focused that Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr on the importance of installing an Islamic government. However, the ultimate purpose of doing so was to ensure that Islam guided the daily life of the Iraqi Shi'a.
Islamic society in Iraq that incorporated Islamic beliefs into everyday life.\(^7\) Accordingly, the intent of the Sadrist movement was to propagate a way of life that would allow Iraqi Shi'a to promote Islamic values.

The original Sadrist movement, inspired by both Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr and Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr, can be characterized with many words that describe its inherent nature: religious, political, nationalist, populist, etc. However, Muqtada al-Sadr himself gives the best and most simplistic characterization of the movement. He states that the Sadrist movement "…was simply made up of people who followed the teachings of Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr….He added that in a broader sense, the movement included anybody who honored the 'speaking Hawza' and followed the teachings of Ayatollah Baqir al-Sadr."\(^8\) Here, Muqtada al-Sadr references the divide that surfaced between the Shi'a clergy, which resulted in two factions.

The first faction was the speaking *hawza*, or activists, who considered it a duty to be vocal on issues that affect the Shi'a community. The opposing side consisted of the quietists, who thought that it is always best to avoid confrontation and let issues run their course.\(^9\) Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr and Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr aligned with the activists; thus, the Sadrist movement represented the speaking *hawza*, and its

\(^7\) Though, obviously, creating an Islamic government would make accomplishing this much easier, especially during the face-off with Communism.

\(^8\) Cockburn, *Muqtada*, 114.

\(^9\) The activist *hawza* includes the following figures: Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr, Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr, Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini, etc. The quietist *hawza* includes the following figures: Grand Ayatollah Abu al-Qasem al-Khui, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim, etc.
followers included individuals who chose activism as a mechanism to promote and defend Iraqi Shi’a rights.

After the death of Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr, followers of the Sadrist movement were left without a figure to follow and needed a source of direction. Consequently, those looking for a new source of emulation also divided into two camps based on which marjah al-taqlid they chose to look to in Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr's absence. Some decided to follow Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, but those closest to Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr chose "…Karbala-born Ayatollah Kazem al-Haeri, Sadeq al-Sadr's source of emulation, who resided in Qom…." Al-Sistani was a quietest, while al-Haeri was an activist.

Thus, when the opportunity arose for the Sadrists to reemerge, the network of individuals that made up the Sadrist movement still existed under the guidance of al-Haeri, who was close to Muqtada al-Sadr. Consequently, as Muqtada al-Sadr moved into the spotlight to consolidate power, al-Haeri supported him. In addition, al-Haeri

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10 However, some of Sadr's followers decided to continue following Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr's preachings despite his death. This is significant because it "…marked a major deviation from the Shiite tradition of following a living marja." See Michael Knight and Ed Williams, The Calm Before the Storm: The British Experience in Southern Iraq, Policy Focus/Washington Institute for Near East Policy, no. 66 (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2007), 3-4, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/pubPDFs/PolicyFocus66.pdf (accessed September 11, 2010).

11 Marjah al-taqlid is a source of emulation, or someone to look to for guidance.

12 Cochrane, Iraq Report 12, 11.

13 Al-Haeri's role is pivotal in the reemergence of the Sadrist movement because he endorsed Muqtada al-Sadr and ordered him to rise up against the occupation in Iraq, as noted under the section The Rise of Populist Muqtada in Chapter 1.
transferred the Sadrist movement back to its namesake, reconfirming Muqtada al-Sadr’s status as an authority and the Sadrist movement’s true leader.\(^\text{14}\)

Ironically, the Sadrist movement would prove to outlive Saddam Hussein. He was adamant in his quest to suppress the Sadrist movement into nonexistence, as evidenced by the execution of both Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr and Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr, in addition to trailing Muqtada al-Sadr’s every move. However, Saddam Hussein’s ventures failed, as the movement quickly revived itself under Muqtada al-Sadr years later. In fact, while Muqtada al-Sadr remained under house arrest, many of the Sadrists simply went underground and Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr’s confidants ensured it did not lose momentum.

During this time, five of Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr’s closest aides assumed control of the Sadrist movement: Riyad al-Nouri, Mohammad Tabatabai, Mustafa al-Yacoubi, Qais Khazali and Jayber al-Khafaji.\(^\text{15}\) Though there is not much information concerning precisely what these individuals did to keep the movement alive, they were obviously successful. They maintained a loyal following that existed for years, some waiting to reemerge with a vengeance for the loss of Sadr I and Sadr II. Most of these men would become well known figures within the Iraqi insurgency, as they later assisted Muqtada al-Sadr in his endeavors to assume control of Iraq by fighting the occupation.

\(^{14}\) Despite the fact that Muqtada al-Sadr took on the Sadrist movement, he still relied on al-Haeri for religious direction. For more information, see Shadid, *Night Draws Near*, 172.

\(^{15}\) Ibid.
Reemergence with the United States Invasion

The second Sadrist movement is clearly linked to the first movement, as Muqtada al-Sadr utilized his father's aides and network of followers to revive Sadrism upon the United States invasion of Iraq in 2003. Similar to the original Sadrist movement, the present-day movement can also be described as religious, political and nationalistic based on its apparent desire to reestablish Islamic power within Iraq on behalf of the Iraqi Shi'a. However, what makes the present-day Sadrist movement especially unique is the organizational apparatus linked to it, specifically the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS), once Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr's office that was said to be the nexus of his movement, and Jaysh al-Mahdi, the militia initiated by Muqtada al-Sadr in the face of war. These two organizations play a crucial role in defining the Sadrist movement today.

Comparable to Lebanon’s Hezbollah, the contemporary Sadrist movement may be characterized as a socially integrated multifunction structure, which is made up of a social services and political organization, Office of the Martyr Sadr, and has operated as a paramilitary organization, through its militia wing of Jaysh al-Mahdi. Office of the Martyr Sadr bears the honorific of its creator Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr, a foundation that propagates the religious and political ideology of the Sadrist movement. Jaysh al-Mahdi, a more recent phenomenon, exists as the creation of Muqtada al-Sadr. Its formation is the result of the United States invasion and
subsequent occupation, perceived as an extremely negative and detrimental occurrence by many of the Iraqi Shi'a.

Initially, the Iraqi Shi'a community appeared pleased that the United States entered Iraq to overthrow their oppressor, Saddam Hussein, along with the rest of the Ba'ath regime. In fact, most celebrated as statues of Saddam came down.\textsuperscript{16} The Iraqi Shi'a had high hopes for the future of Iraq and the opportunities it may present. They were finally in a position to assert power without instant retributive action. Moreover, the de-Ba'athification plan that the United States intended to pursue could only yield positive results for the Iraqi Shi'a. They looked forward to the freedom and democracy that Americans promised them.\textsuperscript{17}

However, favorable opinions of the United States and Coalition Forces soon evolved into negative perceptions, as the invading forces transformed in the eyes of many Iraqis from liberators into occupiers.\textsuperscript{18} Muqtada al-Sadr denounced the United States' occupation of Iraq and, like his predecessors, chose a path of activism in candidly declaring his disapproval. The Iraqi Shi'a did not want assistance in setting up an Iraqi government and wanted the United States to leave Iraq indefinitely.

Though upset by the fact that the United States was there to stay for the time being, the Sadrist movement did not immediately resort to violence. Instead, Muqtada

\textsuperscript{16} Shadid, \textit{Night Draws Near}, 124.

\textsuperscript{17} Chehab, \textit{Inside the Resistance}, 144.

al-Sadr pursued peaceful protests, awaiting some signal of acknowledgement from the United States government that he would be included as a viable player in the future of Iraq. However, he soon realized that the demonstrations were completely useless; he had already failed to get the attention of the transitional government, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). This missed opportunity to incorporate Muqtada al-Sadr into the political process was an injurious misstep on the part of all involved parties.

Thereafter, the Sadrist movement’s actions are best explained by its role as a revolutionary movement, whose members are engaged in Islamic resistance against the *infidel* armies of foreign occupation. The Sadrists needed an outlet and were determined to find one, peacefully or not. They were horribly frustrated and resorted to a path of violence as a primary means to gain the attention of Coalition Forces.¹⁹ These individuals were led to believe that they would have a meaningful role in Iraq's government after the fall of Saddam Hussein, only to be castigated, as wealthy expatriate figures like Ahmad Chalabi moved into position to represent the Iraqi Shi'a.²⁰

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²⁰ The majority of the Iraqi Shi'a did not take well to Ahmad Chalabi, someone who had fled the persecution of Saddam Hussein, and consequently, was out of touch with the true needs of the Iraqi Shi'a population. Chalabi was viewed as a traitor, an opportunist who abandoned his people when times were toughest only to reenter Iraq when a situation arose where he could capitalize on his connections with the west.
Additionally, the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS) played an imperative role in defining the contemporary Sadrist movement, as "OMS became a mouthpiece of the discontent felt by the Shiite community and quickly attained a high profile by publicly criticizing any hiatus in service provision and organizing local work-arounds, much as Sadrist clerics had done throughout the latter decade of Saddam's rule."\textsuperscript{21} The organization served in a charitable capacity, providing essential services to neglected Iraq Shi'a during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Though it is well recognized for these benevolent acts, the Office of the Martyr Sadr also received criticism on multiple occasions from the Iraqi government and United States troops for storing weapons and ammunitions for Jaysh al-Mahdi. Once discovered, various branches of Office of the Martyr Sadr were shut down for supporting and fueling the insurgency. As this occurred, the official role of the Office of the Martyr Sadr and the nature of its connections to Jaysh al-Mahdi became unclear. Thereafter, anything and everything associated with the Sadrist movement was soon branded and no portion of the movement was exempt from scrutiny. This was purely a consequence of the fact that no solid lines divided one element or branch of the movement from another.

\textit{Sadr City Support Base}

At only thirty-two years in age, Muqtada al-Sadr surrounded himself with other frustrated but determined clerics, disparaging the United States' occupation of Iraq and

\textsuperscript{21} Knight and Williams, \textit{The Calm Before the Storm}, 13.
mobilizing a mass following among the poor.\textsuperscript{22} In addition to making use of the original Sadrist movement to rally support, Muqtada al-Sadr looked to discouraged Iraqi Shi'a communities to strengthen and widen his following.\textsuperscript{23} Muqtada al-Sadr was sure to be "faithful to his father's populist vision," and in turn, "his organization had become a kind of street movement, from the Iraqi equivalent of the barrio, imbued with a profound antagonism to traditional Shiite authority and to the power those families represented."\textsuperscript{24} Muqtada al-Sadr represented the average Iraqi Shi’a, who did not leave Iraq during the reign of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'athists.

Sadr City, \textit{al-Thawra} district in Baghdad formerly known as Saddam City, quickly gained the reputation as an area of refuge for Muqtada al-Sadr sympathizers. Though initially intended to be a posh housing development named Revolution City, the area quickly grew into a densely populated slum, as Iraqi Shi’a immigrants fleeing southern Iraq made it their home during Saddam Hussein’s reign. Ironically, this very area was one that Saddam Hussein desired to reflect the greatness of his regime, but it quickly transformed into something that more likely represented Saddam's true treatment of his people.


\textsuperscript{23} However, some of his father's friends did not side with him because of his lowly religious credentials. Instead, they broke away to form their own movements. See Shadid, \textit{Night Draws Near}, 172.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 173.
No longer an urban development to be proud of, as the Iraqi Shi'a "crowd[ed] into apartment buildings, they transformed the place into a slum that its embittered residents believe was willfully neglected by Saddam, even as they were forced to call it by his name after he took power." When the regime fell, residents removed with great pleasure, pictures of Saddam Hussein. In their place appeared the faces of al-Sadr family figures, which were subsequently plastered everywhere.

This transition was almost natural, as Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr had previously gained popularity within the walls of these slums. During his lifetime, he directed his "missionary zeal" to the tribes living there. Muqtada al-Sadr continued to serve this destitute area, as he "...sought to capitalize on the anger and resentment of the Shi'a poor." He did so by providing aid and other services to this community. Indeed, the residents of Sadr City benefited from food, shelter, fuel and other charitable contributions made available by the Sadrist movement.

Not only did Sadr City benefit from services, but they also benefited from enhanced security. Muqtada al-Sadr was able to temporarily restore some semblance of order in the area. He cleaned up the neighborhood per se "...aim[ing] to put the fear of God into the local population by spreading the warning that women without head scarves, sellers of alcohol, and cinema operators would be severely punished by

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25 Shadid, Night Draws Near, 158.

26 Cockburn, Muqtada, 98.

27 Cochrane, Iraq Report 12, 12.
vigilantes."\(^{28}\) He organized a group of guards that kept order on the streets of Sadr City and protected key facilities, such as hospitals. Muqtada al-Sadr imposed Islamic law in strongholds that he maintained, and his militia enforced such order.\(^{29}\) Additionally, as the Sunni insurgency mounted and began to threaten Iraqi Shi'a livelihood, Muqtada al-Sadr made sure his people were safe. Sadr City gained quite the reputation as a no-go area for Coalition Forces, as venturing into the area would likely result in deadly conflict.

However, the support base in Sadr City proved to be somewhat counterproductive to Muqtada al-Sadr's movement in the beginning, as many al-Sadr followers took part in criminal activities as chaos broke out throughout Iraq. Muqtada al-Sadr sought to build up legitimate support, but many of the poor Shi'a he represented took part in looting. He temporarily fixed this potential dilemma by mandating that individuals pay *khoms* on stolen goods, thereby making their criminal activities somewhat acceptable.\(^{30}\) Later, these acts would prove to threaten the identity of Jaysh al-Mahdi, as criminal activities escalated and some began to view the militia as a mob-like organization wreaking havoc on Iraq, as opposed to a legitimate militia instilling law and order.

\(^{28}\) Feldman, *What We Owe Iraq*, 39.

\(^{29}\) Eli Berman, *Radical, Religious, and Violent*, 57.

\(^{30}\) *Khoms* is religious tithing for Muslims. For more information, see Shadid, *Night Draws Near*, 186.
Marginalizing Shi'a Competition

Muqtada al-Sadr not only moved quickly to build up additional support from within the Iraqi Shi'a underclass. He also had to ensure that any other Shi'a groups vying for power and influence within Iraq were marginalized immediately. Although of the same religious strain, Muqtada al-Sadr wholly disagreed with the policies of other non-Sadrist Shi'a political actors in Iraq, including two primary rivals: the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI, previously known as ISCI) and the Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki’s Da'wa Party.

The contention between these groups stemmed from the fact that their leaders were quietists, and therefore, not advocates of direct political involvement. Muqtada al-Sadr followed the example of his father, who had opposed the usual position of political taqqiya. In short, the Sadrist tradition was and would continue to be quite different from other Iraqi Shi'a political parties. Activism was necessary part and mandatory step to propagating the Sadrist views among society.

Unfortunately for him, the Americans were working against Muqtada al-Sadr. Lacking complete comprehension of the history of Iraqi Shi'a politics, "The main objective of the Americans was to corner Al Sadr and weaken him in order to strengthen other moderate Shia who were opposed to Saddam's regime while in exile."31 This move confirmed Sadrist suspicions that the Americans' goal was to

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"deprive Sadr and his men of power." The Sadrists feared an Iraqi government installed by a corrupt and materialistic United States, as it surely would not promote the Islamic way of life that the Sadrists desired. Additionally, Muqtada al-Sadr believed that the installation of democracy was un-Islamic, a step in the wrong direction.

The successive actions of the United States only fueled Muqtada al-Sadr’s plight. Instead of looking to Iraqis who remained in Iraq when times were bad, the United States handpicked Iraqi exiles, thereby excluding Muqtada al-Sadr from the political process. However, the twenty-five member Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) set up by the United States on July 13 "...had little real power, and its members were widely regarded as corrupt American stooges. Muqtada was to benefit from being excluded from this body, while SCIRI, Dawa, and secular Iraqi leaders were discredited by joining it." Consequently, "Muqtada secured strong legitimacy in the eyes of his constituency" because he was not viewed by common Iraqis as a pawn to be exploited by foreigners. Unintentionally, the swift actions of the United States,

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33 Feldman, What We Owe Iraq, 99.
35 Cockburn, Muqtada, 134.
perceptibly lacking both cultural awareness and foresight, set up a fiendish playground from which Muqtada al-Sadr drew incalculable influence.

Simultaneously, the Muqtada al-Sadr grew paranoid that the traditional Shi'a hierarchy would sideline the Sadrists to assure its position as the ultimate source of Shi'a power. Therefore, the Sadrists also challenged the authority of Najaf, specifically Abdul Majid al-Khui. According to numerous sources, "When Abdul Majid al-Khoei, the son of a legendary Shiite cleric, was flown into Najaf in a coalition-backed attempt to influence Shiite politics at the highest level, he was promptly murdered by Sadrist militiamen at the Imam Ali shrine on April 9." This particular moment clearly marked a turning point in how the United States military would deal with Muqtada al-Sadr.

Muqtada al-Sadr felt that only Iraqis who remained in Iraq under Saddam's rule should have the chance to participate in Iraq's unfolding government, which is exactly why he adamantly opposes figures such as al-Khui. However, al-Khui's execution put Muqtada al-Sadr on the Americans' radar (though not necessarily in the manner Muqtada al-Sadr desired), as an Iraqi judge issued a warrant for his arrest and officials in Washington, DC declared that he must be hunted down. Consequently, the United

38 There was a deep history of animosity between Muqtada al-Sadr's father and Abdul Majid al-Khoei's father. In fact, "al-Khoei's father had been Iraq's top ayatollah—and a bitter rival of Sadr's father—during Saddam's rule. Now the sons were competing for power and influence. Sadr castigated al-Khoei as a U.S. agent, and demanded that he turn over the keys to the tomb of Imam Ali, the Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law." See Bartholet, "Sword of the Shia."
States military was given authorization to kill or capture Muqtada al-Sadr when he was located. However, Muqtada al-Sadr was never arrested, captured or killed because the United States military feared the unrest that would occur within the Iraqi Shi'a community if they chose to follow through with any of these courses of actions.

Furthermore, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani played a large role in keeping this from happening. As Muqtada al-Sadr became more influential among the Iraqi Shi'a, the Coalition Provisional Authority grew increasingly unnerved. However, al-Sistani was not overly concerned and in turn "…adopt[ed] a strategy of ignoring the upstart while emphasizing to his own community that Shi'i clerical authority could be exercised only by permission of the hawza."

Accordingly, followers of al-Sistani countered Muqtada al-Sadr's moves by declaring anything he did as "unauthorized and illegitimate."

However, because the Iraqi government did not include the Sadrists, they were deeply offended and refused to look upon it as a legitimate entity. Moreover, Muqtada al-Sadr "…sought, unsuccessfully, to wrest control of the shrine of Imam Husayn from Sistani, which would have given him access to major revenue as well as a

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40 Feldman, *What We Owe Iraq*, 39.

41 Ibid.
powerful political base. Muqtada al-Sadr and the Sadrists continuously tried to sideline al-Sistani, undermining him based on the fact that he is not an ethnic Iraqi, while simultaneously "…present[ing] himself as the only true Arab Iraqi Shi'ite leader as a way to exclude him [al-Sistani] from Iraqi national politics." Thus, the rift between al-Sadr and al-Sistani intensified and eventually resulted in an attack on al-Sistani supporters by Sadrists at the same shrine.

Muqtada al-Sadr continued to publicly lash out against the Iraqi Governing Council, declaring the body illegitimate based on an unlawful occupation. He utilized his newspaper, Al Hawza, to "stir up anti-Israel and anti-U.S. sentiment." Muqtada al-Sadr even went as far as praising the September 11 attacks against the United States. In turn, the Iraqi Governing Council openly reprimanded Muqtada al-Sadr and the Coalition Provisional Authority used its authority to temporarily shut down Al Hawza, based on the presumption that it was being utilized to incite violence against Coalition Forces. This move changed the nature of the entire game, as Muqtada al-Sadr's frustrations reached their breaking point.

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42 Herring and Rangwala, *Iraq in Fragments*, 27.

43 Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr, *Shi'ite Lebanon: Transnational Religion and the Making of National Identities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 215. Muqtada al-Sadr knows how to exploit his Arab Iraqi origins through the framework of nationalism, while "…Sistani had to position himself as an Arab within an Iraqi national narrative, and capitalize on his Sayyid origins, according to which his genealogy can be traced back to the Arab family of the Prophet Muhammad, in order to carry out his activities as a Shi'ite marja' and to be influential in the politics of Iraq."


Between the closure of Muqtada al-Sadr's newspaper, the announcement of an arrest warrant for him in connection with al-Khui's murder, and additionally, the arrest of his chief advisor, Mustafa al-Yacoubi, Muqtada al-Sadr realized it was time to fight back. Such was the true beginning of Jaysh al-Mahdi, and as stated below:

Muqtada al-Sadr declared jihad and urged his supporters to 'terrorize the enemy.' Observing a sit-in at one of Najaf's holiest mosques, the cleric said that street demonstrations had become pointless. It was the first time he had urged his followers to opt for armed resistance.  

From this point forward, outsiders would look upon the Sadrist movement differently. For those lacking historical context of the situation, Jaysh al-Mahdi and the Sadrists became one and the same, a mass movement of radical violent Iraqi Shi'a instigating additional chaos at the expense of Coalition Forces and the Iraqi government.

CHAPTER III: THE RISE OF JAYSH AL-MAHDI

We have been keen and are still keen to avoid a clash with the occupation forces. But as I have said, we continue to face, almost on a daily basis, an intense campaign of escalation, harassment, and provocation.

—Muqtada al-Sadr

Application of Social Movement Theory

Though a characterization of the Sadrist movement provides critical background and context to the movement's formation, evolution and impact on present-day affairs in Iraq, it is also necessary to explore Jaysh al-Mahdi as a linked outgrowth of the movement. Jaysh al-Mahdi's relationship to the Sadrist movement is significant, as "...Shia violence is never disconnected from domestic political stakes and from a concrete political project. This is because the Shia Islamic movements are intrinsically political...[and] are at ease with this identity."\(^1\) Although it was not clear during the earlier years of war, it is now blatantly apparent that Jaysh al-Mahdi's violence is intrinsically linked to Muqtada al-Sadr's quest for Sadrist political influence.

In fact, some postulate that "JAM can be understood only as one component—albeit, a major one—of the broader Sadrist movement."\(^2\) If this fact is indeed true, and Jaysh al-Mahdi is only a piece of the larger movement, can one assume that the militia members are rational actors, merely utilizing violence to fulfill a greater objective?

\(^1\) Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, 300.

\(^2\) Williams, *Criminals Militias, and Insurgents*, 235.
Does this relationship between Muqtada al-Sadr's militia and the Sadrist movement mean that those involved in the violence have made the rational choice to do so?

Through investigating the rapid formation and subsequent rise of Jaysh al-Mahdi itself, one may acquire greater insight on the group's propensity for violent means of activism and how that connects to the Sadrist movement's overarching political objectives, in addition to ascertaining whether or not Jaysh al-Mahdi can be characterized as an organization composed of rational actors. Assessing whether or not Muqtada al-Sadr's militia consists of rational actors is a critical step in determining how to approach and deal with them in the long run.

In order to assess Jaysh al-Mahdi in a fashion that accounts for its ties to the Sadrist movement, it is imperative to utilize a structured approach. Social movement theory lends itself well to this type of assessment, as it offers a framework to address the formation of social movements and their related organizations, often called social movement organizations (SMOs). Though interdisciplinary in nature, social movement theory has only been utilized more recently to examine the phenomenon of Islamic activism.

Social movement theory is useful in that it examines the relationship between moments of madness and "… the historical development of the repertoire of contention." In other words, social movements and their linked organizations are

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certainly not devoid of historical connections; they do not simply emerge out of thin air during times of crises. In fact, movements as "repertoires are learned cultural creations, but they do not descend from abstract philosophy or take shape as a result of political propaganda; they emerge from struggle." A crisis may be the trigger that gives reason for a movement or organization to rise up and become more active, even though it is likely that the foundation of the movement or organization already existed.

The United States invasion of Iraq was the trigger that launched the Sadrist movement forward, out of hiding, and back into public space. However, it was not the initial invasion that resulted in the formation of Jaysh al-Mahdi. In reality, Jaysh al-Mahdi was the byproduct of Muqtada al-Sadr's ineffective attempts to gain the attention of the Coalition Provisional Authority for political reasons, coupled with the rise of sectarian violence that ensued in the midst of unfolding chaos.

Muqtada al-Sadr simply wanted some form of recognition that the Sadrists existed and would be included in the newly forming government after years of remaining ostracized. However, this moment never occurred. In turn, he grew increasingly despondent and finally called on his following to rise up and fight. Muqtada al-Sadr legitimized his actions by asserting that the current governing powers were nothing more than puppets of the United States, a materialist and corrupt nation that had no business meddling in the future of Iraq.

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Due to unfolding events, Muqtada al-Sadr announced the creation of his own shadow government, "...declared that he was forming a religious army [Jaysh al-Mahdi], and called for a 'general mobilization to fight the American and British occupiers." This was all done during a Friday sermon at the Kufa mosque, a place of particular significance, as it was the very mosque where his father delivered his final sermon. From this point forward, brutal armed conflict ensued.

Jaysh al-Mahdi initiated violent attacks to push the occupiers out of their homeland, thus accordingly, "the April-August 2004 armed confrontation pitting coalition forces against Sadrists arose out of a vicious circle of mutual actions and reactions." This cyclical process continuously reinforced itself to the dismay of Coalition Forces. Thereafter, the Sadrists could not turn back—Jaysh al-Mahdi became the focal point of the Sadrist movement. The Sadrists would not cease the usage of violent tactics, techniques and procedures until the occupation made the decision to stand down and get out. However, the growing sectarian nature of the conflict between Sunnis, Shi'a and Kurds left the United States military with no choice but to remain in Iraq for the time being.

The application of social movement theory to Jaysh al-Mahdi in this chapter will address the role of political opportunity, resource mobilization, framing, and

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6 International Crisis Group, Iraq's Muqtada Al-Sadr, 10.
finally, rational actor theory.\textsuperscript{7} The political opportunity section will speak to the turning point in Iraq with the United States invasion that allowed the Sadrists to reemerge. The resource mobilization section will touch on Muqtada al-Sadr's capacity to mobilize both former Sadrists and a new following of underprivileged Iraqi Shi'a to form Jaysh al-Mahdi. The framing section will focus on Muqtada al-Sadr's rhetoric, namely his ability to shape and propagate a powerful narrative that resonates with his followers. And finally, the rational actor section will present an argument for whether or not Jaysh al-Mahdi consists of rational actors.

\textit{Political Opportunity}

The basic premise of the political process approach is that power and influence are derived from political, economic, cultural and social institutions, where elites benefit from the status quo and discourage insurgents.\textsuperscript{8} Insurgents, in return, play off the situations created by these institutions. An explanation of this model is actually

\textsuperscript{7} Social scientists tend to synthesize these theories in different ways. The intent of this chapter is simply to explore each component on its own (with the realization that there is significant overlap between them) in order to understand Jaysh al-Mahdi's rise. The choice to focus on political opportunity, resource mobilization, framing, and rational actor theory was strategic in nature. The majority of social movement theorists focus on three variables in case studies utilizing social movement theory: political opportunity, mobilization and framing (which is why this thesis will address the same). However, it is also important to answer the difficult question of whether or not Jaysh al-Mahdi consists of rational actors to better understand why the Iraq Shi'a, who took part in this militia, are motivated to pursue violence. For more information on social movement theory, especially as applied to Islamic groups, see Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., \textit{Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

\textsuperscript{8} Political opportunity is commonly referenced in social science literature as political opportunity theory, political process approach or theory and political opportunity structure. A significant amount of theoretical information within the political opportunity section is derived from knowledge acquired from course material presented by Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Political Process Approach" (lecture for \textit{Islamic Activism} course, Rhodes College, Memphis, TN, March 18, 2004).
found in the name "political process" itself. According to this approach, "…a social movement is held to be above all else a political rather than a psychological phenomenon." Thus, under this model, insurgents use violence as a tool to achieve political objectives.

Political opportunity explanations can provide insight on why a particular movement or social movement organization emerges at a certain point in time. It provides a way to answer the question "why do movements take different forms in different political environments?" Thus, it can be used to determine why the Sadrist movement took the form of Jaysh al-Mahdi during the most recent Iraq war. Though the political and religious aspects of the Sadrist movement did not disappear during this time, Jaysh al-Mahdi indisputably emerged as a central node of the Sadrist movement. Clearly the United States invasion played a role; however, it cannot be blamed as the sole reason for the formation and rise of Jaysh al-Mahdi, as the group did not mobilize immediately.

According to traditional political opportunity structure explanations, Jaysh al-Mahdi's formation occurred due to the "…context of the balance of opportunities-

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11 Had the media focused on the overall Sadrist movement in reporting, as opposed to Jaysh al-Mahdi, this likely would have been different. However, due to the extreme violence occurring in Iraq during this time, initiated by multiple Sunni and Shi'a insurgent groups, it is understandable that Jaysh al-Mahdi received significant attention.
threats for challengers and facilitation-repression by authorities." After encountering years of intense repression under the reign of Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi Shi'a were, perhaps inadvertently, given an unprecedented degree of freedom to do as they pleased. With Saddam Hussein ousted from power, the opportunities for Iraqi Shi'a drastically outweighed any foreseeable threats, especially void of an authoritarian establishment monitoring their every move.

As the Sadrists asserted power to no avail, they became increasingly hostile. The influence that the Sadrist movement historically wielded should have been reason enough for inclusion in the new Iraqi government, especially if it were to be truly democratic. Yet, Muqtada al-Sadr and the Sadrists were purposely excluded from the political process. The reality of the situation is that the Sadrists perceived a unique political opportunity and were immediately blocked from pursuing it, for reasons that made absolutely no sense to them.

The fact that the United States actively supported Iraqi expatriates, as opposed to true Iraqis who had stayed in Iraq when times were bad, greatly angered individuals such as Muqtada al-Sadr. In turn, the Sadrists mobilized and prepared for armed conflict. Consequently, the formation of Jaysh al-Mahdi was the direct result of the United States failing to recognize and incorporate Muqtada al-Sadr and the Sadrists into the new Iraqi government.

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It is necessary to mention that aspects of the political process model and rational choice most definitely overlap, especially since the intent of this work is to determine whether or not Jaysh al-Mahdi consists of rational actors. Under the political process model, social movements are seen as "rational attempts by excluded groups to mobilize sufficient political leverage to advance collective interests through noninstitutionalized means."\(^{13}\) The political process model operates on the assumption that groups have acted rationally in accordance with the prevailing situation of institutions. Based on this theory, Muqtada al-Sadr made a rational choice to create a militia, a non-institutionalized means to assert the collective interests of the Sadrists. Therefore, Jaysh al-Mahdi as a whole has made the rational decision to employ violence to achieve Sadrist objectives.

**Resource Mobilization**

Resource mobilization is also an important concept, which goes hand-in-hand with political opportunity, as it describes the "coordination of collective action" and is used to explain how actors come together to pool resources for a common cause.\(^{14}\) Similar to the political process approach, resource mobilization theory also views individuals as rational actors. According to resource mobilization theory, grievances are a constant variable, which in turn shifts the ultimate explanation for the formation

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\(^{13}\) McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*, 37.

\(^{14}\) Tarrow, *Power in Movements*, 21. It is important to note that though resource mobilization addresses the concept of collective action, it does so quite differently from traditional collective behavior theory, which deems movements irrational. Resource mobilization theory views those involved in mobilization as rational actors, who utilize social movement organizations to achieve a political goal.
of social movements on alternative variables, namely resources. Hence, movements emerge when there are available resources. These resources may include both the tangible, such as organizations, and the intangible, such as networks, or social connections.

These resources serve as mobilizing structures that allow one to organize a movement. According to noted social movement theorists, Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, "Mobilizing structures can be preexisting or created in the course of contention but in any case need to be appropriated as vehicles of struggle."\(^{15}\) Thus, it seems that the Sadrist movement served as the initial mobilizing structure, which helped solidify a following that would soon after form Jaysh al-Mahdi, a group that chose violence as a means to assert political control.

It is also worth mentioned that social movements sometimes develop hand-in-hand with social movement organizations (SMOs), related organizations that are created for a specific cause, and social movement communities, which consist of networks of movement activists coming together to pursue a cause. Often the creation of formal organizations is important to achieve structure and hierarchy within a movement. In the case of the Sadrist movement, the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS) already existed as a linked social movement organization. This organization served as

\(^{15}\) Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), 45.
the more formal, bureaucratic side of the movement and was dedicated to propagating the ideology of the late Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr.

Though many individuals working for the Office of the Martyr Sadr supported Jaysh al-Mahdi's cause, a number of them did not become directly involved with the militia. Why? A downside to maintaining this sort of formal organization is that leaders become less willing to take on risks as they become more professionalized. As the United States began to battle Jaysh al-Mahdi, the individuals working with the Office of the Martyr Sadr were prime targets. One could assume that because the office operated under the umbrella of the Sadrist movement, and likewise, Jaysh al-Mahdi operated under the umbrella of the Sadrist movement, both were targets of opportunity for the United States military.

Individuals working with the Office of the Martyr Sadr understood that if they were caught openly or directly supporting Jaysh al-Mahdi, they would be considered members, despite whether or not they were actually picking up arms to fight. This assumption proved true, as many branches of the Office of the Martyr Sadr were shut down, as previously mentioned, because they were storing arms and ammunition for Jaysh al-Mahdi. Again, this is another example of how the bureaucratization of a movement can actually be a hindrance to a movement's activities, as everything is more easily tracked when a structure exists.

In cases where social movement organizations are not feasibly options for resource mobilization, social movement communities also exist. Such communities
consist of networks of activists, which are more fluid, informal, and less identifiable. This becomes obvious when one examines the organization of Islamic activist groups, which are primarily based on informal networks throughout society.\textsuperscript{16} Muqtada al-Sadr's most loyal support base came from a social movement community, the networked community of followers built up by his father that had remained underground since Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr's death.

Mobilizing resources and pursuing substantive action sometimes proves difficult; however, Muqtada al-Sadr efficiently utilized his father's existing support base and hastily built upon it to mold his contingency of followers. As the preexisting Iraqi government began to collapse, he "moved more quickly than anybody else in Iraq to organize his supporters…."\textsuperscript{17} Muqtada al-Sadr was unarguably in a prime position to pursue his personal agenda.

Nevertheless, Muqtada al-Sadr was driven to broaden the support base in order to forcefully confront his enemies, and in turn, became "more reliant than his father on the impoverished urban masses, whom his opponents denounced and feared a dangerous, criminalized mob."\textsuperscript{18} These masses were not necessarily criminal elements; however, they were the uneducated poor class that remained largely ignored and

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\textsuperscript{16} This particular paragraph on social movement organizations (SMOs) is primarily derived from knowledge acquired from course material presented by Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Resource Mobilization" (lecture for Islamic Activism course, Rhodes College, Memphis, TN, February 10, 2004).

\textsuperscript{17} Cockburn, \textit{Muqtada}, 117.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 118.
ostracized by society, even by other Iraqi Shi'a groups.\textsuperscript{19} Though most never posed a problem for Muqtada al-Sadr, the individuals that primarily pursued criminal activities, under the pretext of the Sadrist movement, grew unruly later as they felt no true allegiance to him.\textsuperscript{20}

In short, Muqtada al-Sadr tapped into preexisting networks created by his father years before—from there he identified gaps and expanded influence to increase his following. It seems that "Muqtada was highly active. His resources were limited but he deployed them with energy and skill."\textsuperscript{21} During the finals days of Saddam Hussein's reign, Muqtada al-Sadr established contact with twelve to fifteen religious sheikhs in Sadr City, men who eventually became his nucleus.

From there, he hurriedly appointed others as his representatives and the "Sadrists picked up where they had left off at the last high point in Shia political activism, before state repression intensified following the assassination of Sadr II four years earlier, in February 1999."\textsuperscript{22} Muqtada al-Sadr did everything in his power to restore the Sadrist movement to what it once was. The occupation's ignorance of the preexisting Sadrist movement would prove to be detrimental.

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\textsuperscript{19} Williams, \textit{Criminals Militias, and Insurgents}, 234.
\textsuperscript{20} As noted in Chapter 2, these criminals from Sadr City did not necessarily ideologically support Muqtada al-Sadr, but looked to him temporarily in order to sustain their livelihoods.
\textsuperscript{21} Cockburn, \textit{Muqtada}, 127.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 128.
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However, over the years, Muqtada al-Sadr lost complete control over the militia, and Jaysh al-Mahdi evolved into a more informal structure, where random young men joined the cause and pursued violence under Jaysh al-Mahdi's name. Whether or not every single one of these men was truly a member of the militia is nearly impossible to prove. Informal networks of men who believed in Jaysh al-Mahdi's cause, in addition to those who fought for material incentives, kept the militia alive.

**Framing**

The concept of framing also played an integral role in Muqtada al-Sadr's plot to initiate the creation of Jaysh al-Mahdi. Framing involves disseminating messages in a way that resonate with a particular set of people. Framing is significant in that "…movement actors are viewed as signifying agents actively engaged in production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers." Fittingly, Muqtada al-Sadr continuously shapes messages to elicit a compassionate audience, people who perceive his words as truth and act on behalf of the Sadrist cause.

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23 Framing is essentially a schema of interpretation, how a specified audience perceives a message. As associated with social movement theory, frames are important in ensuring that the message being disseminated resonates with the intended audience.

In the process of doing so, "Frames help to render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action."\textsuperscript{25}

Sometimes described as a charismatic orator, Muqtada al-Sadr emplaced his skills to embrace and exploit his preexisting and potential following. His use of motivational framing is highly successful, as he calls disgruntled Iraqi Shi'a to arms and rationalizes the fight against the occupation.

With this in mind, how is it that Muqtada al-Sadr has been successful in solidifying a base of support? Though Muqtada al-Sadr does not hold the rank of an Ayatollah, his followers credit his legitimacy to his family credentials, and in turn, focus on his symbolic significance. Apparently, this move worked because "by early 2004 Sadr's followers had elevated him to the rank of hujjat al-Islam (a 'Sign of Islam,' or a 'Proof of Islam,' the third rank from the top in the Shi'i clerical hierarchy)."\textsuperscript{26} Such promotion in rank was quite the feat for an up and coming popular figure.

Muqtada al-Sadr has learned to thrive in the chaotic environment by "…reflecting the aspirations and expectations of a good portion of his father’s constituency and by being in tune with young, poor, urbanized Shiites."\textsuperscript{27} Still, he utilizes rhetorical repertoire to produce highly convincing messages, primarily focused

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 614.
\textsuperscript{26} "Muqtada al-Sadr," Global Security.org.
\textsuperscript{27} International Crisis Group, \textit{Iraq’s Muqtada Al-Sadr}, 8.
on the *infidels*, messages that most definitely resonate with his audience of formerly repressed and abused Iraqi Shi'a.

In order to stir up support for Jaysh al-Mahdi, Muqtada al-Sadr and his preachers spread rumors that "…the Americans were aware of the impending reappearance [of the Mahdi], and that the Americans invaded Iraq to seize and kill the Mahdi." Here, Muqtada al-Sadr plays to Shi'a desires for the return of the Mahdi, thus he is sure to couch his framing in religious terms that cannot be challenged. This framing is ingenious because it leaves no room for questioning. What faithful Iraqi Shi'a citizen would allow an *infidel* to interfere in the coming of the Mahdi?

In fact, most of Muqtada al-Sadr's basic repertoire for framing his narratives is distinctly Shi'a, and he possesses enough formal religious education to ensure his words are not questioned. By framing issues in this way, no devout Iraqi Shi'a would realistically attempt to argue against mobilization to fend off the American superpower. Accordingly, Muqtada al-Sadr ensures that he presents the United States as the ultimate threat to the Iraqi Shi'a way of life. Thus, the Iraqi Shi'a must rid the nation of Americans in order to save themselves.

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29 Muqtada al-Sadr's narratives were framed accordingly to tap into Shi'a religious beliefs. Indeed, "The young cleric with a militia formed under the name of *The Mahdi Army* appealed to Shi'i subconscious, its latent yearning for the return of Imam al-Mahdi (d. 874) to fill the universe with justice as it was filled with oppression and cruelty. It is of significance that the great Sufi Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240) stressed that when Imam al-Mahdi returns, 'the people of Kufa will be happy.' That was the town where Muqtada al-Sadr made his appearance, practiced his prayers and aroused the resentment of well-established clerics." See Muhsin al-Musawi, *Reading Iraq: Culture and Power in Conflict* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 32-33.
Furthermore, Muqtada al-Sadr "…challenged the marja'iyya for being a sclerotic institution unable to answer the problem of its time. In the direct aftermath of Saddam Hussein's fall, Muqtada al-Sadr was particularly vocal about the political apathy of the marja'iyya during the Ba'th rule…." He purposely frames the issue in this way in order to publicly display the traditional Shi'a hierarchy's inability to appropriately deal with Iraqi Shi'a problems. Thus, Muqtada al-Sadr attempts to show, or prove, that the quietist Shi'a cannot help the Iraqi people, and in turn, champions himself and the Sadrists as the solution. He pits the quietists against the activists in order to convince the Iraqi Shi'a that activism is not only necessary, but also required.

Additionally, to appeal to those who may not be as concerned with their faith, "Moqtada Sadr mixes Iraqi nationalism and Shia radicalism, making him a figurehead for many of Iraq's poor Shia Muslims." Unfortunately, many underprivileged Iraqi Shi'a chose to join the insurgency during this time only to sustain their own livelihoods, along with those of their families. Therefore, Muqtada al-Sadr is sure to swoop in and present himself as their savior.

Thus, really, joining Jaysh al-Mahdi for this group of individuals was an economic decision, governed purely by dire circumstances. Statements issued by Muqtada al-Sadr had the ability to stir these individuals to action because they truly

30 Louër, Transnational Shia Politics, 260.

had no other choice. Muqtada al-Sadr's rhetorical repertoire was extremely convincing and gave many Iraqi Shi'a hope for the first time in their lives.

One may better understand the extent of his oratory's influence after reading one of Muqtada al-Sadr’s public statements issued during a temporary ceasefire agreement. He openly declares:

I call on those of the beloved Iraqi people who wish to demonstrate against the occupation to delay their protest, out of my fear for them and out of my determination to preserve their blood. By God, I fear that an Iraqi hand will be raised against you, and I expect that the Americans will raise their hands against you.  

Here, Muqtada al-Sadr firmly propagates his message in a forceful tone, and ensures it resonates by stating that he is asking for a ceasefire in order to "preserve blood." Through the use of such vocabulary, Muqtada al-Sadr ensures that he appears as a savior, someone not willing to risk the lives of his men.

Muqtada al-Sadr employs framing above in a way that is sure to portray him as the "sympathetic" leader, unwilling to sacrifice his beloved following. Hence, Muqtada al-Sadr’s supporters "...regard him not only as a religious leader, but as the only authority who can protect them in the wilderness in which they are living." In the current anarchic environment of Iraq the disadvantaged Shi’a need a fearless leader, who is willing to stand up for their needs and rights.

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Thus far, that someone has been Muqtada al-Sadr, as "Muqtada succeeded in asserting his authority over swathes of Shia Iraq in a few days because of his own abilities and the legacy of his father, in terms of both prestige and organization." Until an alternative source can provide security and stability in Iraq for the swathes of suffering Iraqi Shi’a, completely undermining Muqtada al-Sadr’s authority will prove challenging, if not impossible. Though it does not appear that anyone else is up for the challenge.

Notwithstanding claims that Muqtada al-Sadr is a consummate populist leader, many press that he is far from the orator others contend. Some even go as far to declare that Muqtada al-Sadr is mentally disabled, stating that "The sentences he utters are awkward and incomplete, and somehow lacking in conviction—hardly what one would expect of a man for whom the spoken word is his stock in trade." Though this critical look at Muqtada al-Sadr's speaking ability is interesting, the fact that he has succeeded in using his voice to acquire a loyal following proves that he is highly convincing to many. Furthermore, critics proclaim that "His turn of phrase is alien to his surroundings, prone to collapse into casual speech and slang. As a public speaker, he fails to rise even to the level of the average literate Iraqi." However, this point also, has yet to stop Muqtada al-Sadr from performing well.

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34 Cockburn, Muqtada, 118.
35 Al-Amin, "Moqtada al-Sadr: Leader of Orphans."
36 Ibid.
In fact, Muqtada al-Sadr's lack of eloquence may very well be the thing helping him broaden his support base from that of his father’s followers. Proper formal Arabic would not necessarily resonate with the poor Iraqi Shi’a underclass that he continuously addresses as his target audience; uneducated Iraqi Shi’a identify with Muqtada al-Sadr's more colloquial use of Arabic. In fact, one should note the following:

His subordinate status within his own family further resonated with his social base, which, like him, endured the suffocating authority of a strict, hierarchical Shiite structure that discriminated in favour of an educated elite. Uneducated Shiites thus identified with his lack of training. As a result, it seems that Muqtada al-Sadr’s seemingly grave flaws (in the eyes of secular critics) have not prohibited him from maintaining a devout support base and pursuing his overall goals.

**Rational Actors?**

Many may wonder "Why do Islamic radicals engage in high-cost/risk activism that exposes them to arrest, repression, and even death?" According to rational choice theory, Islamic activists weigh their preferences in order to achieve the highest attainable utility. Therefore, the chosen option of violence in order to reach the desired end result is employed, as it best accomplishes the objectives of most groups. It is important to note that one can assess rational actor theory at both the group and individual levels of aggregation. Here, we will use the group level of aggregation.

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because it would be nearly impossible to properly assess individual rationality considering the dynamic make-up of Jaysh al-Mahdi members.

Although acts of violence are usually viewed as extreme and irrational actions, these activists make intentional and conscious choices and calculate the consequences based on perceived threats and expected utility. According to Quintan Wiktorowicz, "At a group level, it appears perfectly rational: zealous contention places enormous pressures on adversaries and increases the likelihood that the group will achieve its objective." As long as the benefits outweigh the costs, violence will continue to be a rational course of action to gain desired objectives.

The collective rationality of a group is based on the preferences of the group as a whole, which then judges and makes decisions according to its own interests. Accordingly, Islamic activists base future decisions on the consequences of past and previous actions. To be more precise, the seven key assumptions of rational actor theory are as follows:

1. Actors pursue goals.
2. These goals reflect the actor's perceived self-interest.
3. Behavior results from conscious choice.
4. The individual is the basic actor in society.
5. Actors have preference orderings that are consistent and stable.
6. If given options, actors choose the alternative with the highest expected utility.

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39 Ibid.
7. Actors possess extensive information on both the available alternatives and the likely consequences of their choices.\textsuperscript{40}

By taking note of these assumptions, one has a basis from which he/she can analyze whether or not a group is acting irrationally or rationally.

At a glance, Jaysh al-Mahdi, a militia comprised of disgruntled young men performing violent actions with an unruly leader, appears as a group of completely irrational actors fighting to kill the occupation. Its designation as an insurgent group also does not help its case. However, it is important to look a bit deeper into the issue of rational choice in order to understand the motivations of Jaysh al-Mahdi members and determine if these men can truly be characterized as irrational individuals, especially considering this militia's linkage to the larger Sadrist movement.

Traditional rational choice theories focus on the individual's ability to make choices that hold the most economic utility; yet, it is sometimes difficult to assess rationality when it occurs in the form of collective action. Resource mobilization theory assumes that individuals are rational actors, as they have weighed the costs and benefits of participating in a particular movement, and are therefore, rational if they decide that the benefit of taking part in collective action outweighs the cost. So, in theory, the fact that individuals joining Jaysh al-Mahdi have deemed participating more beneficial than not, would mean that this militia consists of rational actors.

as previously mentioned, resource mobilization theory discounts its impact because grievances alone normally do not bring one to action. Yet, grievances, coupled with the economic utility of an action, do take form of collective action.

For the Iraqi Shi'a that chose the follow Muqtada al-Sadr and join Jaysh al-Mahdi, many clearly did so because the benefit of taking part in a militia that would provide funds to support one's family clearly outweighed the cost of remaining unemployed. What most people fail to understand is that in areas such as Sadr City, swarms of young men were wandering around the streets with nothing to do after they invasion—they were jobless, hungry and in need of guidance. Yet, it was not these grievances on their own that drove them to action.

Despite the fact that the intent of Jaysh al-Mahdi is to fight and kill Coalition Forces and any other group that threatened their well being, it would be fair to deem the individuals involved as rational actors. Though violence never seems rational, it might just be if used as a tool to accomplish something greater. In fact, it is important to note as follows:

In contrast [to Al Qaeda in Iraq], Jaysh al-Mahdi and the other Shia militias do not want to destroy Iraq; they want power in the new Iraq. They did not, for the most part, start out as criminal gangs, but as self-defense organizations protecting Shi'a neighborhoods from the chaos of post-invasion Iraq, including Al Qaeda.41

Most of the Iraqi Shi'a that chose to mobilize as part of the Sadrist militia, Jaysh al-Mahdi, did so to protect themselves and their families. They took up arms to defeat far

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more vicious terrorist organizations, such as Al-Qaeda in Iraq. Thus, they are not violent reactionaries seeking to defeat other insurgent and terrorist groups, along with Coalition Forces, for the sheer pleasure of doing so—at least not in most cases.

Instead, they are fighting to win control of Iraq to install a Sadrist strain of governance, which would ensure their safety and protection from other elements of Iraqi society, including the Sunnis and Kurds. The Iraqi Shi'a simply feel that they deserve their time to rule, and they certainly view themselves as rational actors. Though no foolproof methodology exists to prove that Jaysh al-Mahdi is a rational unit of actors, qualitative analysis of its actions demonstrates that it likely is, especially in light of later moves by Muqtada al-Sadr to recreate the militia.

Following intense fighting and a number of failed battles, Muqtada al-Sadr eventually came to the realization that only political pursuits would yield lucrative long-term results for the Sadrists. In summation, "This essentially meant that he did not intend to confront the U.S. military again if he could help it, though the Mehdi Army did not disappear or even contract in size." In fact, Muqtada al-Sadr would later try to give Jaysh al-Mahdi a new and less radical image in order to restore Sadrist prestige, especially as the militia began to fracture, and its more extreme wings pursued violence that was unacceptable.

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42 Cockburn, Muqtada, 174.
CHAPTER IV: DISBANDING JAYSH AL-MAHDI

Most Al-Mahdi Army elements will be directed toward ideological, awareness, and cultural resistance. The remaining part, which we call ‘resistance cells’ and which are authorized to carry arms, will pursue the duty of military resistance. Military resistance will remain as long as Iraq is occupied.

—Salah al-Ubaydi, Sadrist Trend Spokesperson

A Fractured Militia

The contemporary Sadrist movement, along with Jaysh al-Mahdi, lacks cohesion because Muqtada al-Sadr failed to entirely control his following and did not maintain the support of a number of Sadrists who supported his father. Despite the fact that Jaysh al-Mahdi and Hezbollah are very similar in some respects, one would be greatly mistaken to assume that Jaysh al-Mahdi is a carbon copy of Hezbollah, as Muqtada al-Sadr "…never wholly controlled his own movement, and never created as well-disciplined a force as Hezbollah in Lebanon."1 This difference is critical because many actions pursued in the name of Jaysh al-Mahdi were not necessarily sanctioned by Muqtada al-Sadr, a point he would use later to deny connections with very specific brutal acts of violence.

While Hezbollah can present itself as a solid traditional military component, Jaysh al-Mahdi is best described as a narrowly associated group of individuals committing urban guerilla warfare, which has resulted in countless rogue clusters of Jaysh al-Mahdi affiliated individuals. That is not to say that Jaysh al-Mahdi cannot operate in a more structured fashioned; the group simply had difficulty in its earlier

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1 Cockburn, Muqtada, 204.
years as a controllable entity. The organization grew too quickly for its own good, and factions emerged within. Many of its members did as they pleased when they disagreed with Muqtada al-Sadr.

However, over time the more radical factions eventually broke away and Jaysh al-Mahdi became somewhat more interconnected, unified under the guidance of Muqtada al-Sadr. Even so, the militia will likely never reach the organizational capability of a military unit. The fluidity of the movement not only "…mak[es] it hard to pin down but also hard to overcome."² Though a hindrance, the chaotic nature of the movement is also somewhat helpful—in fact, because there is not solidarity, there has never been a formal hierarchical structure for United States to destroy.

Not long after fighting between Jaysh al-Mahdi and Coalition Forces ensued in 2004, Jaysh al-Mahdi was defeated during a battle in Najaf, which appeared to be a huge blow to the Sadrist movement. Militia members held their positions in the area of Najaf's holiest shrines and cemeteries, but the United States military continued their assault nevertheless. Though Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani had temporarily left the country for medical treatment, the unfolding situation in Najaf greatly disturbed him and he immediately became involved in order to negotiate a ceasefire with Muqtada al-Sadr:

Sistani brokered a truce with Muqtada al-Sadr that contained several demands: the removal of JAM fighters from the sacred Imam Ali shrine and the city of Najaf; the withdrawal of Coalition Forces from the city; the creation of a demilitarized zone in Najaf and Kufa; the

appointment of Iraqi Security Forces to guard the cities and the shrines; and compensation for citizens whose property had been damaged in the fighting.\(^3\)

Muqtada al-Sadr's hands were tied with the Najaf situation, and he was left with no choice but to accept a stalemate.

Afterward, Ali al-Sistani’s authority dramatically increased, and Muqtada al-Sadr’s slightly wavered.\(^4\) Consequently, some of Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr’s confidants "… [broke] away, disillusioned with the son."\(^5\) Such was a huge loss for the Sadrist movement. Al-Sistani proved that he held the highly contested city of Najaf and that Muqtada al-Sadr would not take it from him.

The media questioned whether or not Jaysh al-Mahdi would dissolve or disband in the wake of defeat. During the negotiations, an Al-Jazeera broadcast revealed that "Al-Mahdi Army members, who are loyal to Al-Sadr, melted into the crowds that flocked to the Imam Ali Mausoleum after responding to their leader’s call to vacate Al-Najaf and Al-Kufah in implementation of his agreement with Al-Sistani. The future of Al-Mahdi Army, however, remains questionable."\(^6\) The fighters listened to orders as

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\(^4\) In fact, the Iraqi Defense Minister Hazim al-Sha'lan certainly undermined Muqtada al-Sadr's credibility when he announced, "We are not negotiating with Muqtada or the Al-Mahdi Army; we are talking with Al-Sistani who launched the peace initiative in Al-Najaf." See "Iraq: Defense Minister Discusses Efforts to End Al-Najaf Crisis," *London Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 31, 2004, in *World News Connection* (accessed October 24, 2010).

\(^5\) Bartholet, "Sword of the Shia."

requested; they understood that it was necessary to scale back operations temporarily after fighting the occupation head-to-head.

Though Jaysh al-Mahdi did not overcome the United States military at Najaf, Muqtada al-Sadr exploited the situation as proof that Jaysh al-Mahdi was a highly capable militia, one that could and would counter the occupation if required. Muqtada al-Sadr took a seemingly negative event and flipped the situation to reassert his authority. By doing so, Muqtada al-Sadr was able to maintain the majority of his support base.

Muqtada al-Sadr's spokesman, Shaykh Ahmad al-Shaybani promptly conducted interviews with various media outlets to assure the world that Jaysh al-Mahdi was not going anywhere. In an interview with Al-Arabiyyah, Shaybani stated that "The Al-Mahdi Army cannot be dissolved, because it represents popular resistance. Dissolving the Al-Mahdi Army means dissolving the people. This cannot happen." Though the militia would not dismantle, Jaysh al-Mahdi had some serious issues to work out.

Most importantly, Muqtada al-Sadr only maintained a limited amount of control over parts of his militia, and "although it has improved over time, Muqtada’s control over the Sadrist movement at best is mixed." Reeling in his supporters proved to be a difficult task for Muqtada al-Sadr. Even after issuing "recurring reprimands

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and punishments," Muqtada al-Sadr had issues regaining the control and authority he once wielded.  

Muqtada al-Sadr was in danger of losing complete grasp of the Sadrist movement.

As time passed, Jaysh al-Mahdi's actions continuously threatened Muqtada al-Sadr's supreme control, and rifts began to emerge within the ranks of the militia. In fact, "Although Muqtada al-Sadr had clearly been the symbolic leader of the Sadrist Movement throughout the revolts, he had difficulty controlling his movement during the fighting." However, a number of Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr's close associates began to challenge Muqtada al-Sadr's authority over the Sadrist movement. Most importantly, Muqtada al-Sadr's relationship with Ayatollah Kazem al-Haeri disintegrated, as al-Haeri distanced himself from Muqtada al-Sadr.

Thereafter, al-Haeri removed Muqtada al-Sadr as his deputy and issued a fatwa declaring that Iraqi Shi'a should not pay khoms to Muqtada al-Sadr and the Sadrists. This was a highly significant event as it "…was very likely done with Iranian approval and reflected a decision by the highest echelons of government to adopt a new policy toward the Sadrist movement." Such a move imposed a financial strain on the Sadrists, as khoms provided a significant source of funding to Jaysh al-Mahdi.

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9 Ibid.


11 Ibid., 15.
Now, Muqtada al-Sadr not only had to deal with keeping his militia as a cohesive unit, but he also had to determine exactly how they planned to stay afloat financially. Many Jaysh al-Mahdi members decided to take matters into their own hands and began to finance themselves through criminal activities. In short, the weakest aspect of the militia is that "the rapid growth in the movement from 2004 to 2006 and the subsequent emergence of a mafia-like system undermined Muqtada al-Sadr's control over his commanders."\(^{12}\) Though Muqtada al-Sadr attempted to rein in control by getting rid of commanders who failed to take his direction, he was largely unable to clean up his militia and keep its members in check.

**Jaysh al-Mahdi Splits**

As dissension increased among Jaysh al-Mahdi members, the militia began to split apart into multiple divisions, which eventually resulted in five separate Jaysh al-Mahdi linked militias, known as: the Golden Brigade, Noble JAM, al-Araj brothers militia, criminal gangs and the Khazali network.\(^{13}\) In the beginning, all of these groups not operating as part of mainstream Jaysh al-Mahdi were titled special cells, or special groups. Most of them were known for being rogue and committing atrocities without the permission of Muqtada al-Sadr.

The development of these militias did not occur in a single moment, but instead emerged over time as the various segments' allegiance to Muqtada al-Sadr shifted to

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 21.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 25-27.
varying degrees. Though initially all seemed to be overlapping groups, the more extreme members began to split off. Eventually, the schisms solidified and complete fragmentation occurred, allowing factions to take a step back and announce their future intentions.

Mainstream Jaysh al-Mahdi gained the label, Golden Brigade or Golden Mahdi Army, and was attributed to the individuals that chose to remain under the guidance of Muqtada al-Sadr. Based out of Najaf, Iraq, these militia members claimed to be acting on behalf of Muqtada al-Sadr, while he remained in Iran. The Golden Brigade's main objective was to rid Jaysh al-Mahdi of all rogue elements. These individuals were frustrated with the behavior of their fellow militiamen and did not want to be associated with the most brutal acts of violence committed by offshoot Sadrist-affiliated cells.

As the Golden Brigade emerged and attempted to clean up mainstream Jaysh al-Mahdi, a separate group of Jaysh al-Mahdi members in Baghdad formed their own unit, calling themselves Noble JAM. The main source of contention between the Golden Brigade and Noble JAM was terrain, as each group claimed authority over key Sadrist strongholds. Noble JAM was known as a "…pragmatic group…work[ing] to reduce violence and collaborat[ing] with U.S. troops." Though there was a slight

15 Ibid.
collision between the two groups, both the Golden Brigade and Noble JAM felt
responsible for reconstituting Jaysh al-Mahdi on Muqtada al-Sadr's behalf.

In the Khadhimiyah neighborhood of Baghdad, another small militia began to
take shape. Together, Sadrist cleric Hazem al-Araji and his brother, Sadrist
parliamentarian Bahaa al-Araji, vied for control of the Kadhimiyyah shrine. Never
devout supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr, the al-Araji brothers exploited their ties to the
Sadr movement only to "advance their personal and political interests."16 Their
disloyalty culminated "in the Spring of 2007, [when] Bahaa al-Araji created a 300-
member plainclothes militia in Kadhimiyyah ostensibly to protect the shrine—but more
likely to defend the brothers' control."17 From then on, the al-Araji brothers clashed
head on with other factions of Jaysh al-Mahdi.

Criminal elements of Jaysh al-Mahdi also posed a huge problem as the militia
began to splinter. There were a number of poor young Iraqi Shi'a men who never
placed their allegiance with Muqtada al-Sadr, but had pursued violence as a means to
make money. These criminals were involved in an array of organized criminal
activities, but "four criminal activities provided Mahdi Army members with important
revenue streams: extortion and protection, black market sales of petroleum, seizures of
cars and houses inextricably linked with, if not done completely under the guise of,


17 Ibid.
sectarian cleansing; and involvement in oil smuggling in Basra."\textsuperscript{18} Initially, Muqtada al-Sadr had allowed Jaysh al-Mahdi members to engage in criminal activities, as long as they paid \textit{khoms} on what they stole.\textsuperscript{19} However, such activity eventually spiraled out of control.

Muqtada al-Sadr's deputy, spokesperson, and close friend of Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr, Qais Khazali, made the decision to break away in 2004. Just after the falling-out, Muqtada al-Sadr was able to reconcile with Qais Khazali. In fact, to ensure their relationship was maintained, Muqtada al-Sadr "...appointed Qais Khazali, Akram al-Kabi (another prominent JAM commander), and two other to supervise OMS offices."\textsuperscript{20} However, Qais Khazali continued to consolidate support for his own network. Around the exact time that Muqtada al-Sadr and Qais Khazali had a falling out, Iranian influence in Iraq was on the rise, primarily activated through the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF). Though the Qods Force had assisted armed groups in Iraq since the start of the war, the Iranians were looking to expand their program.

The Qods Force set up training camps in Iran, where Jaysh al-Mahdi members and other extremists could acquire skills in "...the use of mortars, rockets, sniper tactics, intelligence gathering, kidnapping operations, and explosively-formed

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{18} Williams, \textit{Criminals Militias, and Insurgents}, xiv-xv.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 235.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{20} Cochrane, \textit{Iraq Report 12}, 17.}
penetrators (EFPs)."\textsuperscript{21} The relationship between the Qods Force and remnants of Jaysh al-Mahdi became formalized through Qais Khazali, when he accepted a leadership role over the elements that were being trained by Iran, which was deemed the Khazali network.

Members of mainstream Jaysh al-Mahdi perceived Khazali network members as "a better trained, funded, and armed faction of their movement."\textsuperscript{22} Initially, Jaysh al-Mahdi Special Groups was viewed as an elite segment of fighters within mainstream Jaysh al-Mahdi. However, naturally, the division between mainstream Jaysh al-Mahdi and Jaysh al-Mahdi Special Groups began to intensify.

As Jaysh al-Mahdi Special Groups evolved into a formal organization "…Al-Khaz'ali announced the establishment of the Leagues of the People of Right [Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq] with a number of Al-Mahdi Army leaders, such as Akram al-Ka'bi, Layth al-Khaz'ali, and Hasan Salim."\textsuperscript{23} During this time, the exact nature of the relationship between Qais Khazali and Muqtada al-Sadr is unknown. Likewise, it is difficult to determine how much overlap existed between Jaysh al-Mahdi and Jaysh al-Mahdi Special Groups, as the interwoven relationships between its members made it

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 19.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.

extremely difficult to determine to which organization members owed their ultimate allegiance.

**Iranian Influence**

Since its formation, Jaysh al-Mahdi has been broken down by a number of factors, the most noteworthy of which is Iranian influence, which significantly weakened Muqtada al-Sadr's control over his militia. Elements of Jaysh al-Mahdi, namely Jaysh al-Mahdi Special Groups, began to use extremely violent tactics, techniques and procedures, most of which were learned from the Iranian training camps. The dissension within Jaysh al-Mahdi increased so dramatically that "by late 2006, the Sadrist political and religious leadership had little control over the disparate groups operating under the JAM banner."²⁴ Muqtada al-Sadr had tough decisions to make.

Consequently, Muqtada al-Sadr sought to distance himself and began to dissociate from the more radical individuals in order to hold weight in the future political arena. Such action was especially important after Muqtada al-Sadr tried to bring Khazali back under his leadership, which failed. If Khazali would not reintegrate, Muqtada al-Sadr wanted nothing to do with him and his rogue men. In turn, Muqtada al-Sadr declared that Khazali's group, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq, was

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responsible for the sectarian war in Iraq and told his own followers that it would be a sin to work with the group.\textsuperscript{25}

Muqtada al-Sadr asserted that the Sadrists would not succumb to Iranian influence. In fact, Muqtada al-Sadr consistently brushes off any association with Iran, and "analysts believe that Iran has also provided support to Sadr, but not much."\textsuperscript{26} Muqtada al-Sadr has always championed his Arab origins and Iraqi heritage, promulgating a nationalist stance among his followers that vehemently denies submission to Iran.

Any implied connection between Muqtada al-Sadr and Iran is usually the result of the fact that "…Muqtada al-Sadr desires to establish an Islamic government in Iraq and because his anti-U.S. polemic echoes Iran's official line."\textsuperscript{27} In addition, Muqtada al-Sadr has spent significant time in Qom, Iran pursuing religious education. Some indicated that his presence in Iran served as proof that the Iranians provide support to Jaysh al-Mahdi. However, that may not necessarily be the case, as "part of Sadr's grand strategy to maintain his supporters' devotion includes a renewed focus on religious credentials."\textsuperscript{28} More than likely, Muqtada al-Sadr departed Iraqi immediately immediately

\textsuperscript{25} "Iraqi Sources Report Rising Tensions Between Al-Mahdi Army, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq," \textit{London Ilaf.com in Arabic}.

\textsuperscript{26} Bartholet, "Sword of the Shia."

\textsuperscript{27} Shaery-Eisenlohr, \textit{Shi'ite Lebanon}, 215.

\textsuperscript{28} Bruno, "Muqtada al-Sadr."
due to the arrest warrant issued in his name and considered the situation an opportunity to advance himself.

In 2007, during the peak of sectarian violence, Muqtada al-Sadr left Iraq to take the "…‘external research' course to obtain the Ijtihad in Shiite jurisprudence under Ayatollah Mahmud al-Hashimi, an Iraqi religious authority living in Iran." He remained in Iran for approximately three years, only later to return to Najaf, Iraq in 2010. Despite the fact that Muqtada al-Sadr remained out of the country for a number of years, he still managed to oversee Jaysh al-Mahdi, primarily through a group of advisors.

Muqtada al-Sadr still divorces himself and his militia from ties to Iran "…and has accused those making the allegations of wanting to label his movement as a terrorist organization similar to Hezbollah in Lebanon in order to provide an excuse to target his supporters." Eventually, Muqtada al-Sadr resolved that proving Iran was not supporting Jaysh al-Mahdi required remaking the militia. The militia's members were all over the place, like freelance fighters, many of whom willingly accepted Iranian support. In order to prove that he himself was not a pawn of the Iranians, Muqtada al-Sadr set out to disband Jaysh al-Mahdi and replace it with structured

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organizations, which evidently operated under his authority. Furthermore, in order for the Sadrist to eventually make headway in the political realm, Muqtada al-Sadr needed a new start.

A New Militia

As violence across Iraq reached its height, especially during the 2007 United States troop surge, Jaysh al-Mahdi became increasingly active in the midst of mass sectarian violence. The troop surge "...along with a planned security operation in Baghdad termed Fardh al-Qanoon (Enforcing the Law) aimed to decrease the level of violence in the capital and tackle the problem of Shi'a militias." This massive counterinsurgency operation began on February 13, 2007 and included intensive combat operations across Baghdad to counter both Al Qaeda in Iraq and Shi'a extremists, primarily Jaysh al-Mahdi.

The ground environment became increasingly chaotic, and various militia members took matters into their own hands. Though some Jaysh al-Mahdi members had previously loaned themselves out on demand as freelance fighters, the number appeared to increase. Internal dissension and disagreement within Jaysh al-Mahdi membership eventually caused extreme fracturing. Multiple sections of the group broke away to create their own militias, and were no longer subject to the rules and ceasefires emplaced intermittently by Muqtada al-Sadr. Muqtada al-Sadr grew

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31 Cochrane, Iraq Report 12, 22.
concerned about the group's negative image and decided that it needed a makeover of sorts.

Though a militia would still be a necessary component of the Sadrist movement as long as foreign troops remained on Iraqi soil, Muqtada al-Sadr had slowly lost credibility due to Jaysh al-Mahdi's lawlessness. He could not let their activities continue because it risked his future potential to become a viable political player in Iraq, the very thing he sought most from the beginning of hostilities. Muqtada al-Sadr probably never intended for Jaysh al-Mahdi to be looked upon as a group of disobedient criminals or thugs; things just got out of hand. He purely sought military-type force to back his ventures for political control.

Therefore, Muqtada al-Sadr determined that it was best to disband Jaysh al-Mahdi, as the militia's activities became completely uncontrollable. As a result, shortly thereafter "Al-Sadr announced in 2007 that the activities of the Al-Mahdi Army militia would be frozen…." This freeze was the direct result of Jaysh al-Mahdi's unauthorized use of excessive violence, assassinating two Iraqi Shi'a governors and desecrating a Shi'a religious festival. Jaysh al-Mahdi had already obtained quite the negative reputation for acts of brutality, and Muqtada al-Sadr wanted to restore his own authority, while simultaneously bestowing a new image upon his fighters.

Muqtada al-Sadr decided to transform Jaysh al-Mahdi into non-violent organizations, while still maintaining a small force of fighters separately. For the loyal

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followers who chose to remain under his control, Muqtada al-Sadr subsequently "…divided most of his men into two unarmed civic organizations called Mumahidoon, Arabic for 'those who pave the way,' and Munasiroon, 'the supporters.' The groups provide services to the poor Shiite communities that make up their base, protect mosques and study religion."³³ Muqtada al-Sadr viewed the creation of these organizations as the right step in a new direction for the Sadrist movement. Both al-Mumahidoon and al-Munasiroon are responsible for fulfilling their own set of civic duties.

The Mumahidoon's primary role is that of "leading an intellectual jihad."³⁴ This particular organization is characterized by a tightly knit group of Sadrist loyalists, who will undergo religious training in order to pave the way for the coming of the Mahdi.³⁵ Following the lead of his father, Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr, Muqtada al-Sadr appears to be revamping his following and leading them toward a cultural revolution. Why? Doing so is the primary way to ensure that devout Iraqi Shi’a are living proper Islamic lives so that the Hidden Imam may return to lead them. Similarly, the Munasiroon consists of supporters of the Sadrist cause, who likely assist the

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³⁵ Ibid.
Muhamidoon. The exact nature of their activities is difficult to determine since the organization is barely mentioned in media reporting.

Though Jaysh al-Mahdi was dismantled, Muqtada al-Sadr did not necessarily cease all violence. After announcing the creation of the Mumahidoon and the Munasiroon, Muqtada al-Sadr also presented the Promised Day Brigade, a group that has essentially replaced Jaysh al-Mahdi as his personal militia, and "whose purpose is to attack U.S. troops, [and] is permitted to fight." Under its new designation, Promised Day Brigade, Sadrists loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr continued to fight the occupation.

Conclusion

On August 19, 2010 the final brigade of United States combat troops withdrew from Iraq, marking an end to all combat operations. With the occupation departed, one would assume that the Promised Day Brigade would began gearing down fighting, shutting down its operations and prohibiting violence. After all, the main objective for the Sadrist movement in maintaining a militia was to defeat the foreign infidels and push them out of Iraq indefinitely.

However, Muqtada al-Sadr conveyed to the Sadrists that the occupation is not really gone. A Sadrist official publicly declared that "...despite the withdrawal of the

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36 Cockburn, Muqtada, 204.
last combat brigade from it, Iraq remains under occupation.\textsuperscript{37} He cited the presence of United States officials and their bases, and also emphasized the fact that Iraqi politicians still act upon dictates of the United States. Therefore, it seems that the Sadrists do not plan to dismantle their militia any time soon. In fact, the Sadrist spokesman "stressed the preparedness of the Al-Sadr Trend's military and security wings for any confrontation."\textsuperscript{38} Consequently, the Promised Day Brigade remains fully operational and continues to conduct intermittent attacks.

Interestingly, reports claim that "US planners had not even been aware of its [Sadr's movement] existence prior to the invasion."\textsuperscript{39} One cannot help but question how the Iraq war would have differed if key United States decision-makers had been briefed on the Sadrist movement beforehand. Understanding that it is truly difficult to foresee all possible immediate and long-term consequences of a military invasion, decision-makers should still be armed with at least some knowledge of potential threats.

Officials in Washington, in the least, owe American servicemen and servicewomen the benefit of obtaining all facts before allowing combat boots to hit ground—because ultimately, it is the soldiers, the officers and their families who suffer


\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{39} Herring and Rangwala, \textit{Iraq in Fragments}, 15.
the direst consequences of war. Do we, as Americans, not place value on historical information that might significantly aid our efforts abroad? Are we really so shortsighted that we do not comprehend the significance of history in politics, especially in the Middle East?

In retrospect, it is difficult to think that not a single academic or intelligence professional possessed background knowledge on the subject matter. Where were these individuals when they were needed most? Or, perhaps the better question, were they present and no one was listening? Unfortunately, these questions will likely never be placated with answers.

Without the necessary background knowledge on Iraqi Shi’a politics, the United States intentionally brushed off Muqtada al-Sadr, as if he were no one. Looking back, "One of the gravest errors in Iraq by the United States was to try to marginalize Muqtada and his movement." Had Muqtada al-Sadr been included in some capacity in the initial planning stages of Iraqi governance, the formation of Jaysh al-Mahdi may have been hindered, as there would be no real need for a militia.

After the invasion of Iraq, Muqtada al-Sadr "spoke words that would define his legacy and go far in shaping the record of the U.S. occupation. He uttered them less than a month after Saddam's fall: 'I advise the Americans to ally with the Shiites, not to

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40 Cockburn, Muqtada, 204
oppose them.’ By ‘Shiites,’ he meant himself.”

Only now can we truly understand what he meant when he uttered this statement.

For those who watched the media snippets of Saddam Hussein's final moments, as he approached the noose in preparation of his own death, most everyone focused on him and rejoiced—the event marked the end of a tragic authoritarian dictatorship. Yet, some likely found themselves hyper-focused elsewhere, namely wondering why men veiled in black masks chanted "Muqtada, Muqtada, Muqtada" in an almost synchronized manner. Who exactly are these men? And what do they mean by chanting "Muqtada?"

Looking back, this final moment for one man marked a new beginning for another group of men, the Iraqi Shi'a; and not just any Iraqi Shi'a—specifically, the Sadrists. One cannot begin to imagine the feelings of these men as they watched their aggressor walk the gallows, but one can suppose that they were hopeful for Iraq for the first time in a long time—hope that would soon be crushed. It is truly a shame that the political aspirations of this group of men were not taken seriously.

There is absolutely no excuse for the acts of violence the Sadrists have chosen to commit over the years. One cannot help but wonder what they would be doing today if the formation of Jaysh al-Mahdi never occurred. In conclusion, it is likely that Sadrist-associated violence will continue to ebb and flow with the ever-changing

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41 Shadid, Night Draws Near, 168.
current of Iraqi politics until the day comes when the Sadrist can restore power and control to Medinat al-Salaam.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


