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Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq: Obedience to Law Dilemma

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Abstract

In June 2014, Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani issued a fatwa mandating Iraqis to volunteer in the security forces to fight against ISIS. Consequently, the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), otherwise called Alhashd Alshabi, were formed primarily from these volunteers, most of whom were Shias. In December 2016, the Iraqi Parliament issued a law that granted full legal status to the PMF. However, the PMF continued to face accusations of disobedience to the laws of the Iraqi state and the orders of the Commander-in-Chief of the Iraqi Armed Forces, raising concerns about its impact on the state's stability. This article aims to examine the nature of some PMF violations of the rule of law, explore the root causes of this phenomenon, and assess the possibility of eliminating or mitigating it. It argues that this phenomenon has social, historical, and religious origins tied to the relationship between the Shia in Iraq and the state. In particular, the internal divisions within the PMF stem from differences in perspectives regarding the rule of law. Thus, the article suggests that addressing this problem requires a long-term strategy beyond mere legal transformations. The article adopts a qualitative approach, which relies on the collection and analysis of data from the literature.

Keywords: Popular Mobilization Forces, Shia, Iraqi State, Rule of Law.

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1. Introduction

The advent of the PMF marked an epochal phase in Iraq's modern military and political chronicle. The PMF was established in June 2014 from Iraqi volunteers, of mainly Shia background. This followed a divine command, called fatwa, issued by Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the Shia supreme leader in Iraq, to all Iraqis with military capability to repel the onslaught of ISIS forces on the Iraqi state, as their collective religious obligation. Iraqis responded swiftly to Ayatollah Sistani's fatwa, with teeming numbers of them enlisting as volunteers in the war against ISIS forces, which had rapidly advanced to the edge of the Iraqi capital city of Baghdad. Subsequently, the PMF was transformed from an impromptu militia into a formal entity incorporated within the legal structure of the regular Iraqi army.

Nevertheless, even after being formally incorporated into the hierarchy of the conventional Iraqi army, the PMF has continued to be a source of controversy, with questions being raised over its observance of the rule of law and general allegiance to the Iraqi state. Faced with incessant recriminations for acting outside the perimeters of Iraqi state laws, as well as the authority of the Commander-in-Chief of the Iraqi Armed Forces, the FMF poses a serious dilemma as a state and non-state actor. This article examines the diverse ramifications of the rule of law challenge within the PMF, with due regard to the socio-political and religious background of the Iraqi Shia. In particular, the article seeks to provide the historical, ideological and structural explanations for why the PMF has continued to defy efforts to merge it within the legal and military structure of the Iraqi state. It contends that adequate comprehension of this issue demands deep insights into the preexisting relationship between the Iraqi state and its Shia community, which has long been characterised by the resentment and marginalization of the latter.

Against the above background, it becomes clear that arguments over the PMF's adherence to the rule of law and the like cannot simply be viewed as political and organizational problems, but rather as offshoots of longstanding socio-religious tensions. The article argues that mere legal transformations would be ineffective in resolving such tensions. Rather, it proposes a comprehensive and lasting approach that addresses the

foundational socio-religious factors that underlie the PMF's attitude and influence its interaction with the Iraqi state.

2. Methodology

This article uses a qualitative normative methodology, which is considered appropriate, given its focus on the investigation of social issues (Althabhawi and et al,2023; Adil Kashia Al-Ghetaa and et al,2023; Sukumaran and et al,2023). Qualitative studies are typically concerned with the collection of data that cannot be presented in numerical form, and mostly rely on library-based sources (Dazulhisham and et al,2023). This article draws on primary and secondary resources dwelling on the PMF. Collected data are processed through content analysis, which is an analytic approach widely recognized as ideal for the exploration of state policies (Bagheri et alnand,2021).

3. The Legal Structure, Administrative Frameworks and Ideological Directions of the Popular Mobilization Forces

3-1. Formation of the Popular Mobilization Forces

The PMF was created in Iraq in the middle of 2014 from a group of armed Shia fighter to repel ISIS forces, which had overrun the Iraqi army and allied forces, taking over four provinces in the north and northwest of the country, with Baghdad, the country's capital, in sight.

Pursuant to Decision No. 301 of June 11, 2014, the former Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, established an auxiliary force called the "Popular Mobilization Forces" in response to what he perceived as the "threat surrounding Iraq." The PMF, which was meant to reinforce the country's security and military establishments, was linked the Office of the Iraqi Prime Minister, as well as the Office of the National Security Advisor, then headed by Faleh al-Fayyad. However, it was the *fatwa* issued by Ayatollah Sistani ordering Iraqi citizens to volunteer their military services in the fight against ISIS that eventually prompted thousands of Iraqi Shia community members to enlist in the PMF. This signaled the beginning of the collective war against ISIS forces. According to the fatwa:

…the nature of the dangers facing Iraq and its people at present necessitates the defense of this nation and its people. This defense is an obligatory duty upon citizens under collective obligation, meaning that if those who are capable of fulfilling the duty step up and achieve the desired purpose, which

is the defense of Iraq, its people, and its sacred places, then the duty is lifted from others…

On April 7, 2015, the former Iraqi Prime Minister, Haider al-Ibadi, granted a formal status to the PMF as an entity directly under his leadership, organization and command.

After almost two years of their involvement in the war against ISIS, the Iraqi parliament also adopted the Popular Mobilization Forces Law No. 40 of November 26, 2016, granting a legal status to the PMF. Under this law, the PMF was recognized as an independent military entity within the Iraqi Armed Forces and under the control of the Commander-in-Chief of the Iraqi Armed Forces. Members of the PMF were also banned from participating in partisan politics or securing the membership of any political party or social groups.

Thus, the PMF was transformed into an independent military entity. When Adel Abdul-Mahdi became the Iraqi Prime Minister in 2018, several executive orders, particularly Order Nos. 237, 328 and 331, were released to delineate the organizational structure of the PMF. For example, Executive Order No. 237, which was released on July 1, 2019 (Hashimi,2020), provided for:

1. All PMF forces to function as part of the regular Iraqi armed forces, and in accordance with all the regulations applicable to the regular armed forces, unless otherwise provided. Moreover, all PMF operations are to be conducted under the command of the Commander-in-Chief of the Iraqi Armed Forces and in accordance with the laws enacted by the Iraqi parliament, as well as all regulations and directives made pursuant thereto. The PMF is to be supervised by the President of the Popular Mobilization Authority appointed by the Commander-in-Chief of the Iraqi Armed Forces, and this Authority shall cover all PMF formations.
2. The permanent replacement of all names by which the PMF factions, including tribal, local and national formations, were identified during the war against ISIS, with military designations, such as division, brigade, and regiment.
3. The prohibition of PMF factions, including individuals and formations, from all previous political or organizational associations.
4. The freedom of PMF factions that are not integrated into the regular Iraqi armed forces to form political associations, subject to compliance with the Law of Parties, as well as other existing laws regulating

political and societal activities. Such associations shall, however, have no right to bear arms, unless licensed to do so for the purposes of providing security for their headquarters and leadership, similar to other political associations.

5. Designation of the camps of the PMF forces in a way and manner similar to those of the regular Iraqi armed forces. Moreover, PMF locations should be in line with battle formations determined based on the procedures applicable to the armed forces.
6. The closure of all offices bearing the name of any PMF faction, both within and outside Iraqi cities.
7. The prohibition of the presence of any PMF faction, both within and outside Iraqi cities.
8. Any armed faction operating overtly or clandestinely in violation of the provisions of this Order to be treated as illegal and dealt with as appropriate.
9. Closure of all economic offices, checkpoints or other interests not established under this new framework for the formations and activities of the PMF as an integral part of the regular Iraqi armed forces.

The key purpose of Executive Order No. 328, which was released on September 14, 2019, was to incorporate the forces under the control of the Popular Mobilization Authority into the Joint Operations Command. On its part, Executive Order No. 331, released on September 17, 2019, provided for:

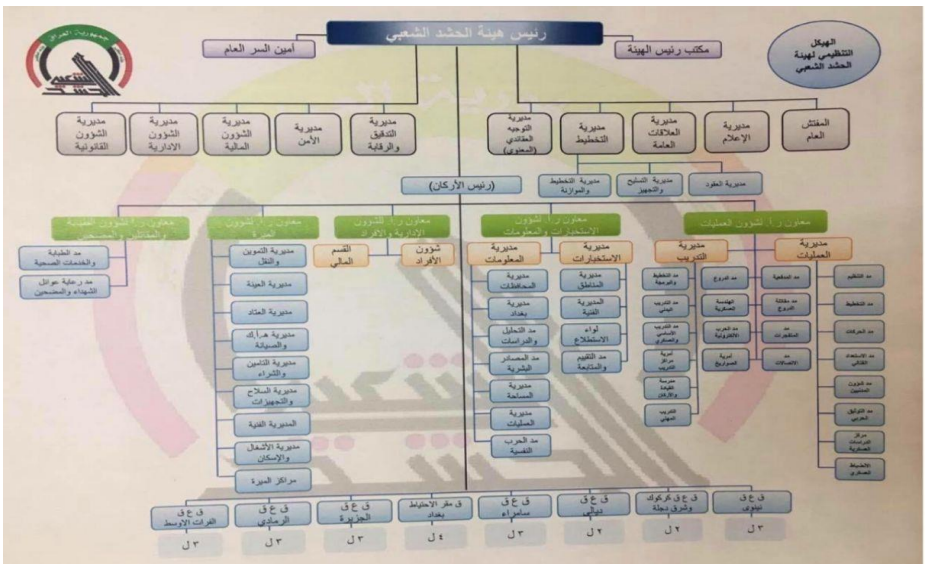
1. The approval of the organizational structure of the Popular Mobilization Authority, as shown in Figure 1 below.
2. Scrapping of all titles and positions outside those listed in the approved structure.
3. The authorization of the President of the Popular Mobilization Authority to make acting appointments to positions within the Authority, and to present same to the government for approval or rejection.

On May 14, 2024, the present Iraqi Prime Minister, Mohammed Shia' Al-Sudani, released a draft law to regulate the services and retirement of the personnel of the Popular Mobilization Authority, which is presently awaiting parliamentary approval. Moreover, the PMF set up the "Al-Muhandis General Company", which was funded to the tune of over USD76billion to undertake activities in diverse areas that include

agriculture, construction, engineering, industry and other mechanical operations. This company was approved by the Iraqi Cabinet on November 28, 2022, and formally registered with the Iraqi Ministry of Trade on February 26, 2023.

Below is the administrative structure of the Popular Mobilization Authority:

1. Top leadership positions*: Four positions, including the President of the Authority, the President's Office, the General Secretary, and the Chief of Staff.
2. Mid-level leadership positions*: Five deputy positions for the Chief of Staff.
3. Mid-level administrative and logistical positions: Ten directorates.
4. Field administrative positions: Fifty directorates reporting to the deputies of the PMF Chief of Staff, as illustrated in Figure (1).



4. Three Ideological Currents of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)

4-1. Al Atabat Mobilization

The "Atabat Mobilization," only came into limelight in the media and the wider Iraqi society on December 1, 2020, when the first conference of the Atabat Religious Mobilization was held in Al Najaf Governorate. Present at

that conference, which was tagged, "Atabat Mobilization: Guardians of the Fatwa and Builders of the State," were the Abbas Division (Brigade 26 PMF), linked to the Abbas Shrine; the Ali Al-Akbar Brigade (Brigade 11 PMF), affiliated to the Hussein Shrine; the Imam Ali Division (Brigade 2 PMF), an affiliate of the Alawi Shrine; and the Ansar Al-Marjaiya Brigade (Brigade 44 PMF), majority of which members hail from Rumaitha city in the Muthanna Governorate. Apart from the leaders of these formations, other top official, religious, and security figures were also in attendance at that conference. However, representatives of the PMF were absent. In ideological terms, the factions listed above subscribe to the religious authority of Ayatollah Sistani, and have their core social support in the central and southern governorates, particularly Basra.

4-2. Al Wilayah Mobilization

The Shia armed factions have apparently found a way to overcome the dilemma over their operation as an integral unit of the PMF, which is a formal state institution, on the one hand, and as insurgents linked to Iran. They devised a strategy under which their military forces were divided into two factions. The first is not part of the PMF, and retains the faction's original structure that existed prior to the formation of the PMF's in 2014, while the second is incorporated into the PMF. Thus, for example, there exist the Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada as a military (resistance) faction, as well as Brigade 14 PMF, which represents Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada. Similarly, Kata'ib Hezbollah functions with groups, such as Saraya al-Difa' al-Sha'bi, as well as Brigades 45 and 46 PMF, which are connected to Kata'ib Hezbollah. All of these factions existing within the PMF are ideologically devoted to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, with their key social base being the southern governorates, Baghdad and Diyala.

4-3. Saraya al-Salam

This faction was created by Muqtada al-Sadr on June 11, 2014, relying on the experience of the Sadrist movement in forming the Mahdi Army, which Muqtada al-Sadr later suspended in 2008. However, the Saraya al-Salam, as well as the Promised Day Brigade, which was earlier created, actually dates back to 2003. Many of its ranks not only retained their warfare experience, but also their social networks that boast organizational and funding capabilities. Thus, it was far easier to mobilize them, unlike other factions and militias that were established prior to June 10, 2014 or afterwards.

Saraya al-Salam was significantly involved in the war against ISIS, with part of its forces joining the PMF through three brigades namely, Brigades 313, 314 and 315, which were stationed in Samarra. At the end of the ISIS war, these factions paid their ideological allegiance to the leadership of Ayatollah Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, with his son, Muqtada al-Sadr, as their principal coordinator. The main social base of this faction spans Baghdad and the southern governorates.

5. Rule of Law and the Relationship between the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) and the State

At the onset of the ISIS war, many Iraqis had positive views of the PMF and commended their historic bravery in preserving the sovereign existence of the Iraqi state. These optimistic views were also shared at official levels, leading to wide acceptance of the PMF in the Iraqi society. Indeed, due to its key role in protecting the security and political stability of the country, which was on the verge of disintegration, the PMF came to be viewed as the bedrock of Iraq's national security system. An important contributor to the PMF's socio-political appeal lies in the passionate ideology that undergirds it, which ensured its victory over ISIS forces (Abdul Hussein,2015).

Indeed, throughout the ISIS war that lasted between June 2014 and December 2017, there were no notable controversies over the PMF, ostensibly due to the necessity for national unity to successfully withstand the enemy forces. All this was before the Iraqi parliamentary elections held in 2018. It was only after the end of the ISIS war on December 10, 2017 (Dodge,2020), with most parts of Iraq liberated from ISIS forces, that questions started to emerge over the PMF's respect for the rule of law.

With the end of the Iraqi liberation war, the legal framework for the PMF forces started to unravel, with serious issues being thrown up as to its adherence to the rule of law, allegiance to the Iraqi state as well as its laws, and submission to the authority of the General Command of the Iraqi Armed Forces, as represented by the Joint Operations Command.

As already explained, the new executive orders required all factions integrated into the PMF to withdraw from partisan politics and all political, as well as social affiliations, within a three-month deadline. The PMF failed to comply. The armed factions continued to maintain their core ideological and socio-cultural identities. There were no real changes in their structure or affiliations, other than the cosmetic rebranding of the factions as numbered brigades. Moreover, despite the series of decrees issued by former Prime

Ministers Haider al-Abadi and Adel Abdul Mahdi, there were no recognizable changes in the structure, affiliations, or designations of the PMF factions (Al-Kubaisi,2020). This was also true regarding the sovereignty of the Iraqi in relation to issues, such as external links with Iran and the Resistance Axis, crafty political scheming and scramble for power in Iraq, land acquisitions, as well as other commercial, economic and financial matters. Therefore, the question will be the impact of PMF on the states stability and state of law (Al-Jabour,2021).

The above developments prompted the question, "What is the utility and effectiveness or the impact of the PMF's existence on the stability of the Iraqi state and respect for the rule of law?" It is worth stressing that the PMF is essentially a Shia social construct, having emerged from the Shia sect and the Twelver doctrine in terms of its fundamental affiliation and the key factor underlying its formation. Thus, it is not exclusively to be attributed to the fatwa issued by Ayatollah Sistani, but also the novel attributes of the Shia social structure in Iraq that render it distinct from the Shia communities in Azerbaijan, Iran, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, among others. This article will explore the intricate nature of this relationship between the Iraqi Shia community and the Iraqi state, and how it interfaces with the understanding of the rule of law and the question of Iraqi sovereignty. This will enable appropriate rumination on how PMF fighters view their relationship with the Iraqi state, as well as their approach to law enforcement (Rudolf,2019).

6. The Shia in Iraq

The establishment and rise of the Shia sect, as well as the Twelver doctrine have a strong historic link with Iraq, which is home to most of the seminal events in Shia history. For example, in 661 AD, the fourth caliph and first Shia Imam, Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib, was assassinated in the Kufa mosque. Similarly, in 680 AD, Hussein ibn Ali, who claimed the caliphate, was killed in the Battle of Karbala, together with his associates. Indeed, several of the twelve Imams lived at one time or another in Iraq. Moreover, right from the beginning of the history of Islam, significant levels of Shia religious and academic activities occurred in urban centers of Iraq, such as Kufa, Hilla, Baghdad, Najaf, and Karbala. Also, Iraq was, at one time, under the dominion of Shia dynasties, especially the Buyids (1055-945**)** (Nakash, 2003a).

Further, social and historical accounts suggest that the Shia constituted the majority population in Iraq during the twilight of the 18th century, which marked the advent of Shia Islam among Iraqi tribes. This was prompted by political factors, such as the Wahhabi attacks on religious shrines and the Ottoman Empire's resentment of Shia. Other factors included religious propagation, intermarriages, as well as the roles played by Karbala and Najaf as strategic economic centers (Nakash,2003a).

6-1. The Shia and the Establishment of the New Iraqi State in 1920

The Iraqi state was formed in the early 20th century after the British occupation in 1914. That is not to say, however, that the country had been nonexistent. As a matter of fact, just as it is today, Baghdad had, since the reign of the Abbasid dynasty, and much prior to the advent of Islam, been the capital of a territory known as "Iraq." Ancient geographical records show that the territory had far more expansive spatial boundaries than those of the modern day Iraq. Its administrative structure lasted throughout the Ottoman era and laid the foundation for the present day Iraq (Al-Aidani, 2012; Abdul Mahdi,2023)[1].

The Shia made a significant contribution to the formation of the Iraqi state, spearheading the war against the British occupation, which started in 1914 when they invaded Basra. Eminent Shia religious scholars were prompted to issue fatwas calling for war against the British imperialists in Basra (Bell, 1971). Far beyond the issuance of fatwas, they got personally involved in the war, in which they led other Shia volunteers. Regrettably though, they lost the war to the British invaders (Alawn,1975).

Nevertheless, of far greater importance, at least, as far at the formation of the Iraqi state is concerned, was the uprising that occurred on June 30, 1920, when the people of the Dhawalim tribe in Rumaitha city in the Muthanna Governorate, vested with traditional weapons, invaded a site where their head, was being detained.

1. The Iraqi state went through several phases before its re-establishment in 1920. It had become an empire and ruled many countries, especially in the last centuries, such as the Abbasid state. This was followed by Iraq's subjugation to long-term occupation and foreign domination. Finally, it was founded according to the Sykes-Picot maps and the agreements that followed the fall of the Ottoman Empire. It was subjected to occupation and then mandate in the 20th century

This marked the formal beginning of the 1920 Revolution, Shalaan Abo Al Jun (Shbeeb,1977), the spiritual leader, Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi Al-Shirazi., having earlier issued a fatwa (Al-Khayoun,2011).[1] According to Ali al-Wardi, the Revolution unfolded in three stages:

1. The events that took place in Baghdad, Karbala, and Najaf.
2. The armed rebellion that occurred in Rumaitha on June 30, 1920, which extended to the central Euphrates region.
3. The subsequent escalation of the revolution to other parts of Iraq, including Diyala and Al-Gharaf.

Documentary records of the revolution indicate that it was motivated by several factors. Principal among them were the granting of full independence to Iraq, the preservation of its Arab identity, and the installation of a constitutional democracy, with a parliamentary system of government. It is believed that the British were responsible for the nationalist struggle and agitation for independence by the Iraqis by sarcastically pledging to liberate rather than conquer them. The number of bodies recovered and burial records obtained in Karbala and Najaf suggest that the revolution resulted in the death or injury of 8,450 Iraqis, as well as the death of 906 British forces, with 671 others injured. The Iraqi losses, most of which involved tribes in the central Euphrates region, may be seen as pretty high, considering that the country's population during the revolution was roughly 2.5 million. Although, as earlier mentioned, the revolution later engulfed other parts of Iraqi, the central Euphrates region was actually the melting point of the rebellion, which the British forces succeeded in quelling with relative ease and rapidity (Jamil,1987).

6-2. The Establishment of Sunni Rule and the Absence of Shia from Governance After the 1920 Revolution and the Formation of the New System

After 1921, a new political order was established in Iraq. Notably, however, the Shia did not feature in the government. This was because they took more

1.The 1920 Revolution, with its tribal nature, was based on a religious fatwa issued by Ayatollah Al-Shirazi, which stated: "Demanding rights is obligatory for Iraqis, and in their demands, they are entitled to maintain peace and security. They are permitted to resort to defensive force if the British refuse to accept their demands.

interest in trade and agriculture, with limited involvement in academia, which, to them, was “forbidden and heretical.” This gave the intellectual elites the power to exclude the Shia from the nation’s political system, thereby establishing Sunni dominance of state affairs to the chagrin of the Shia.

The new dispensation thrived in favoritism and nepotism in public appointments, as well as the propagation of Arab nationalism. Moreover, the Shia were associated with Iran, and charged with misplaced pride, self-centeredness and apostasy. The upper hand enjoyed by Sunni politicians left the Shia struggling to defend their Arab and national identity, while denouncing their association with Iran. In fact, many Shia intellectuals with Persian background were marginalized. The new Iraqi government, stirred by Arab nationalism, denied them participation in the national political administration and the wider Iraqi societal life. Several leading Shia clerics, such as Sheikh Muhammad Hussein al-Naini and Sayyid Abu al-Hasan al-Isfahani, were prevented from returning to the country, unless they gave undertaking to abstain from participation in political affairs (Al-Katib, 2007).

The Shia political elite reacted against their repression and called on the British authorities, then under Governor Henry Dobbs, to bring about a reform in the Iraqi government policy with a view to granting them better treatment and representation in the country’s affairs. Perhaps, in their bid to catch up, Shia initially focused their efforts on playing a prominent role in the educational system. Under the first Iraqi government, headed by Abdul Rahman al-Nakib, Ayatollah Muhammad Mahdi al-Bahr al-Uloom was appointed as the Minister of Education (Al-Katib,2007). The Shia retained the post of Minister of Education throughout the monarchy, but continued to be under the control of Sati al-Husri, who presided over education from 1923 to 1927. In his memoirs, Husri dismissed Shia ministers in contemptuous language, calling them "ignorant and backward," especially those who were appointed Minister of Education, such as Muhammad Rida al-Shabibi, Abdul Hussein al-Jalabi, and Hibah al-Din al-Shahrastani.

The main point of contention between Husri and the Shia ministers concerned the ideal model of educational system the country should adopt (Nakash,2003b). As far as Husri was concerned, a centralized system overseen directly from Baghdad was preferable. By contrast, the Shia advocated a decentralized system that was more capable of addressing the

needs of Iraq's mainly rural population and ensuring equal educational opportunities for all. There were deliberate efforts to deny the Shia the opportunity of directing_education, whether as teachers, public officials or ministers. Husri sought to rationalize this on the grounds that no Shia intellectuals were qualified for such positions, even at a time when Najaf alone had an estimated ten thousand students engaged in the study of the Arabic language and Arabic literature, which also undermined Husri's complaint about the dearth of Arabic teachers in Iraqi schools.at that time (Al-Alawi,2006; Al-Alawi,2009).[1]

Thus, as Batatu reflects, the new political system that emerged in Iraq after 1921 failed to accord meaningful representation to the Shia in government. Throughout the Iraqi monarchy that lasted until 1958, only four Shia individuals held the position of Prime Minister. Summarizing the fate of the Shia, King Faisal stated, "taxes on Shi'a, death to Shia, and positions for Sunnis—what is there for the Shi'a? Even their religious days are disregarded." Batatu, however, paints a more optimistic picture by arguing that Shia political marginalization actually helped them to achieve greater economic development than their Sunni and Kurdish counterparts. This was evident in their superior economic and social status. Their achievement was also facilitated by the British and the monarchy, who tried to empower them with a view to creating a balance of power. As of 1958, the Shia dominated land ownership in the country, constituting six out of every seven notable landowners in Iraq. During the same period, among 49 of the families that owned 270,000 square meters each, 23 were Shia, 14 were Sunnis, while 11 were Shia. Apart from land ownership, the Shia prospered significantly in trade, particularly following the migration of Jewish merchants. Notwithstanding all this though, the Sunnis continued to maintain overall control of the national economy, which was largely powered by industry; a sector that enjoyed substantial government backing (Batatu,2006).

6-3. The Incompatibility of the Shia Vision with State Authority

1. Hassan Al-Alawi assumes that after the establishment of the Iraqi state in 1921, although the Shia formed a political minority in power, they constituted an elite in social, cultural, economic, and religious fields. He says in this regard: "Before April 9, 2003, the Shia of Iraq lost power but gained everything else," including trade, poetry collections, literary forums, linguistic groups, grammar schools, and leadership of national movements.

Studies in social sciences and anthropology point to disruptive historical inconsistencies between Shia historical doctrine and political culture that result in virtual alienation. This contrasts with the Sunni vision that connects with the ruler. The disconnections witnessed among Iraqi Shia are, however absent in Iran, where historical accomplishment are progressively and collectively maintained right from the period of the Persian Sassanid to the present reign of the "Wilayat al-Faqih." This highlights a disconnection between the historical concept and the political culture in which the Shia society develops.

Returning to the formation of the Iraqi state, King Faisal I, remarked, in a secret memo in which he tried to portray the Iraqi society that, ‘in my opinion, there are no Iraqi people yet, but rather imaginary human clusters, devoid of any national idea, saturated with religious traditions and myths, with no common ground among them” (Batatu,2006). Matar advances additional reasons for the weak national identity observed during the founding of the modern Iraqi state, noting that, “just as individuals, the weaker and more fragmented their sense of the past, the weaker and more fragmented their attachment to the present This situation reflected on the political and cultural reality of Iraqi society, characterized by a weak sense of national identity” (Matar,2008). The author identifies the key factors challenging the Iraqi national identity as including issues relating to:

1. Sectarianism and the historical connection between the Iraqi Shia and their Iranian counterparts.
2. Kurdistan and whether they constitute part of the Iraqi state.
3. Arab nationals and their membership of the Iraqi state, including the status of the Turkmens, Syrians, Sabians, Yazidis, and Faili Kurds, who are non-Arabs.

Further, the Iraqi national identity is rendered fragile by the fragmented nature of its historical development. There was no continuity in its evolution across different historical eras, with each era having its distinct identity. In the absence of a common recognizable historical Iraqi identity, Iraqis have found it difficult to feel connected to any particular national identity in their past history. For example, they have no national attachment to the Arab-Islamic eras, in particular, the six centuries of the Umayyad and Abbasid states in Baghdad. That is why it is difficult to tell, by way of illustration, whether the likes of Harun al-Rashid, al-Jahiz, al-Tawhidi, and Ibn Hayyan had Iraqi identity. The Iraqis viewed them simply as Arabs, a tendency not

peculiar to the Iraqis, because it is typical of a sound majority of Arabs. An examination of the history of Arab-Islamic civilization, would show that emphasis is placed on tribal associations, rather than on national identity. As an example, Harun al-Rashid is considered to be an Abbasid Quraishi Arab from the Adnan tribe, while others are from the Tayy tribe, and still others from the Khuzāʻah tribe, with all of them claiming the Arabian Peninsula lineage (Matar,2008).

The lack of national identity can also be seen in relation to Iraq's pre-Islamic history. While Iraqis may pride themselves in that history, they, in no way, feel racially or ethnically connected to the vanguards of those civilizations, such as the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, or Arameans. From prolonged generational influences, Iraqis generally see themselves as the descendants of Qahtan and Adnan, and claim racial and ethnic connection to the history of their Arab ancestors in Hijaz and Yemen. As a result, any sense of attachment to Iraq’s ancient history is simply cosmetic (Matar, 2008).

In his study on the Iraqi society, Al-Wardi takes this challenge to greater heights by noting that the Iraqis are a "confused nation," stranded between two opposing social value systems. On the one hand, are the Bedouin values of the desert neighbors; its location on the Arabian Peninsula placed it on the frontier of a veritable source of Bedouin culture. From time immemorial until the modern era, Iraq has persistently been under Bedouin influence (Al-Wardi,2007). On the other hand, are the values of civilization, that were particularly pronounced right from the advent of the Abbasid era, when Iraq emerged as the epicenter of world civilization. During that time, the capital city of Baghdad rose to become an international social meeting point where the greatest achievements of human civilization of that era converged. This continuing tension, according to Al-Wardi, accounts for why the Iraqis have consistently grappled with social and psychological challenges across generations (Al-Wardi,2007).

With regard to sectarianism, Iraq witnessed sporadic clashes between the Shia and the Sunnis, which lasted even until the close of the 19th century. This hostility became more glaring and violent as both sects started to identify themselves with external powers, such as Turkey and Iran, which projected themselves as their source of security (Nazmi,2008).

What emerges from the above, is that religion, meaning Islam, has been a major cause of the polarization, rather than unification of the Iraqi people. In particular, it has served as a perennial source of disharmony between Arab Sunnis and the Shia. Social interactions, and worse still, intermarriages between them are uncommon. This segregation was also apparent in cosmopolitan cities, where they had their abodes in separate neighborhoods, and maintained their distinct lifestyles. From the perspective of Shia Muslims, the Ottoman empire ran an evil regime that alienated them so much so that they were even reluctant to serve in government or attend government-established academic institutions (Batatu,2006).

Batatu suggests that the religious acrimony was more evident in urban areas, where people were very much conscious of their Islamic identity. This religious sensitivity was, however, not common among the Arab tribes. For example, even though within the Arab tribes of the Middle Euphrates, religious leaders were highly revered, they were not so influential among the Shia Muslims in cities, such as Najaf, Karbala, and Hillah. Generally, the rural, as well as the urban tribes were conscious of their Arab identity, particularly in their conflict with the Turks or the Persians. That Arab identity is, however, not coextensive with the Arab nationalist feelings that subsequently developed. Although they acknowledged their Arab identity as a practical matter and ostensibly as a thing of pride, it never shaped their actions. In effect, as Batatu surmises, the Arab identity exhibited by the Shia was less potent; the Arab nation did not command their emotional devotion and allegiance (Batatu,2006).

The foregoing analysis highlights the diverse quandaries facing the Iraqi society, particularly sectarianism, fragile societal cohesion, and the intrinsic nature of society. Even the different sections of the Iraqi society, including the Sunnis, Shia and Kurds, each grapple with specific internal challenges. With regard to the Shia, for example, even though they had some intellectual, social, religious, and political commonalities, they lacked a cohesive social union. Impliedly, their shared characteristics did not translate into a common, united front. Traces of intellectual, political, and class disparities are also observable among them (Nazmi,2008). Nonetheless, the Shia generally tend to demonstrate allegiance to spiritual authority; they consider submission to supreme religious scholars as an obligation (Al-Nafisi,2012). Further, historically, in their interactions with the state across different periods, the Shia have typically been perceived as

the opposition, in political as well as religious parlance. Questions relating to the Imamate have also proven to be a serious source of tension between the Shia and state authorities. Despite that, the Shia have occupied high offices as ministers and advisors in Sunni-led governments, and even served under rulers that are tolerant towards them. Despite that, the state's sectarian identity did not converge with Shia Islam (Al-Khayoun,2011).

Turning to the issue of Iranian Shia's influence on their Iraqi counterparts, Al-Wardi associates this with Iran's adoption of Twelver Shia Islam. It was from then on that it started to extend its influence to the Iraqi society. With time, this influence intensified as the Iranian Shia embarked on regular pilgrimages to holy sites in Iraq, or visited the country in the quest for religious knowledge, or the interment of the deceased. This resulted in a novel social environment in Iraq, in which a sound majority of the people were Arab Shia, while most of the spiritual scholars were Iranians. Even those Iranian scholars, who trained in religious schools in Iraq called hawzat, and chose to settle in the country, continually retained their association with their homeland. As a result, religious or political crises, such as the Tobacco Protest of 1890 and the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 in Iran easily produced effects in Iraq. Further, scholars, who studied and lived in Najaf, reinvigorated the theory of the absolute guardianship of the jurist, Wilayat al-Faqih, which had held sway in Iran since 1979 (Al-Wardi,1992).

6-4. The Religious Authority and the Shia Community

Within the Shia community, there are different forms of religious, social, and tribal associations, but by far the most influential institution that galvanizes the community is the religious authority, that is, Marja'iyya. For the Shia, allegiance to religious authority in Iraq is viewed as obligatory in the jurisprudential context, which demands that every Shia follow and rely on a religious authority. However, in the social milieu, the symbolism of religious scholars, who represent this authority, rest on the intellectual and foundational legacies of the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt, according to the Twelver Shia sect. For the Sunnis, their Imams are considered as distinguished scholars, but the Shia hold their Twelve Imams in greater esteem, considering them as "infallible", that is, Ma'soom. This implies that for the Shia, their Imams are not just scholars, but the embodiment of the very nature of Sharia, which means Islamic law. Next to the Imams, are Shia

scholars, who indulge in an endless process of independent reasoning called ijtihad. Within the Shia community, the fuqaha, which refers to jurists, also occupy a vital historical place, which in contemporary times, is formally known as the Marja'iyya, reflected in the religious authority, Marja'.

Several centuries of juristic studies have engaged with the essence of jurists and the authority they wield during the occultation period known as ghaybah, with a consensus that such authority has three ramifications, which are the authority:

1. To release fatwas.
2. To judge.
3. To handle religious financial matters.
4. To govern, that is, political authority, although some controversy surrounds this (Al-Mu’men,2017).

In effect, the religious authority signifies the spiritual leadership of the Shia sect, to which the Shia community is connected by seeking the guidance and instructions of jurists on religious and secular matters. In other words, this authority covers not only religious issues, but also those of a social or political nature (Al-Mu’men,2021). A key distinguishing attribute of the Shia religious authority is the financial autonomy it enjoys vis-à-vis other state and societal powers. The financial autonomy of the Marja'iyya, its religious and academic institutions, as well as practices, are supported by khums, which are religious dues paid by Shia adherents to the Marja. It means that the financial survival of the religious authority has always depended on its adherents and never on state authorities (Al-Mu’men, 2021).

According to Al-Mo'min, the Shia community has several hierarchies, foremost of which is the religious authority, which acts as the community’s supreme power and head of its social and religious system. The next hierarchy is the religious seminary called hawza, the representatives called wukala, and the emissaries of the Marja' called sufara. Others are the mosques, that is, Husayniyyas, which are Shia religious centers; educational processions; governments; political groups according to the principle of the "absolute guardianship of the jurist", Wilayat al-Faqih; economic and financial institutions; and the devotees of the Marja', who constitute the main fabric of the Shia social system. Last among them are the general Shia populace, including non-adherents and even outsiders to the religion. As Al-

Mo'min maintains, it is the majority of this general group that are usually more enthusiastic about upholding the Shia system (Al-Mu'men,2021).

For over a millennium, Najaf city has served as the key centre of the supreme religious authority. On a few exceptional occasions, the residence of the supreme authority was based in other cities, such as Karbala, Kadhimiyya, and Qom in Iran. For example, leading jurists, who opposed the British occupation of Iraq in 1914, such as Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi al-Shirazi and Ayatollah Muhammad al-Khalisi, respectively had their residence in Karbala, and Kadhimiyya. Otherwise, Najaf city was the beehive of activities and principal organizational center of the rebellions against the British in 1914, 1918, and 1920.

6-5. The Religious Authority and the Formation of Shia Political Elites

The Shia elite has been significantly influenced by the religious authority since the formation of the Iraqi state in 1921. Several members of the political elite have emerged from the Marja'iyya directly, with religious scholars and leaders engaging in political affairs, or indirectly. Although some Shia political and intellectual parties and movements have been formed, they have not managed to crystallize into a solid political and social elite able to serve as counterweight to the religious authority. This also applies to movements that were closely associated with the religious authority, such as the Islamic political parties, or others that were antagonistic, such as the communists and the Ba'athists.

7. The Three Religious Authorities Followed by the Popular Mobilization Forces

7-1. The Authority of Sayyid al-Sistani (1930 – Present), The Shrine Troops

Ayatollah Sistani is a product of the main strand of religious authority called the Najaf School. This School arose from the time-honored religious authority that traces its origins to Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei, Ayatollah Mohsen al-Hakim, and Ayatollah Abu al-Hasan al-Isfahani, right through to contemporary leaders, that include the authority of Sheikh al-Tusi. It is this religious authority, which, throughout the course of history, has provided leadership for the Shia community, jurisprudentially and socio-politically, both inside and outside Iraq. Sayyid al-Sistani is acknowledged as a leading religious authority, compared to secondary authorities who, though also recognized for notable intellectual and scholarly achievements,

are yet to attain the position of the highest authority. One exception is Ayatollah al-Sadr II, who practically established himself as a de facto higher authority in Najaf based on his personal influence, rather than the conventional customs and norms for assuming such as position.

Sayyid al-Sistani's approach to religious authority is marked by his desire to preserve it in its traditional form, rather than institutionalizing or restructuring it as suggested by the al-Sadrs. As already noted, Ayatollah Sistani is associated with the Najaf School that vests the religious authority with limited political powers and focuses state affairs purely on necessities. Yet, he has equally been impacted by a scholar, such as Ayatollah Muhammad Hussein al-Naini, who is considered as the "Father of ShiaPolitical Jurisprudence" in the Najaf School, and also the author of the book entitled, Tanbeeh al-Ummah wa Tanzih al-Millah, which is among the primary political documents of the constitutional movement (Al-Abadi, 2024).

In the above regard, Ayatollah Sistani argues for the creation of a constitutional state where the citizens are free to decide their destiny without ideological or political influence. This notion of statehood is a modern constitutional one replete with suitable institutions necessary for democracy to flourish. According to Ayatollah Sistani, the people should be the source of legitimacy for this state, which should be founded on viable institutions that sustain its legitimacy, with the highest state authority providing direction, advice, and, at critical times, necessary intervention. Moreover, where any such "coercive intervention" is contemplated, an appropriate mechanism must be in place for its actualization. This means that the religious authority will only intervene or release statements and fatwas, if measures exist for their enforcement (Al-Khafaf,2012).

Ayatollah Sistani has also reflected on the key features of the modern constitutional state, which include people, political system, region, sovereignty, and international recognition. In this connection, the Ayatollah, when asked by the Associated Press whether the Iranians had attempted to exercise political influence over Iraq and whether they had contacted him, replied that, "all governments are supposed to respect Iraq's sovereignty and the will of its people and not interfere in their affairs. We do not have contact with any foreign party regarding Iraqi affairs" (Al-Khafaf,2012).

Moreover, Ayatollah Sistani has debunked claims that the Shias in Iraq pay allegiance to Iran. In his letter of April 10, 2006 to the late Egyptian

President, Hosni Mubarak, who had observed that, "Iraq is experiencing a civil war and the allegiance of most Shias in the region is to Iran, not their own countries," Ayatollah Sistani clarified that:

we have heard with great astonishment your statement to Al-Arabiya Channel claiming that the allegiance of most Shias in Iraq and the region is not to their countries, which means undermining the patriotism of tens of millions of people in this region and tarnishing their honorable positions in serving their countries. This view ignores recent and contemporary historical facts in most of these countries, such as Iraq, Lebanon, Kuwait, and Bahrain. How can one forget the jihad of millions of Iraqis in the 1920 Revolution and their resistance to British occupation and defense of their homeland whenever it was attacked? This view also undermines the patriotism of prominent religious, political, intellectual, and cultural leaders who have played significant roles in their countries, contributed effectively to their liberation, independence, progress, and advancement, and spared no effort in this regard.

In observance of the rule of law in Iraq, Ayatollah Sistani placed a ban on Iranians from coming to Iraq to visit sacred shrines through unofficial means. Importantly, even though he has lived in Iraq for more than four decades, the Ayatollah has neither given up his Iranian citizenship nor obtained an Iraqi one. During his medical trips to both Beirut and London in October 2004, he traveled on his Iranian passport (Jafarian,2008).

In respect of the Iraqi security forces, Ayatollah Sistani stressed the need for national security institutions that safeguard the country's security and stability with emphasis on the following:

- That the Iraqi government should undertake the primary task of tackling the country's security challenges, using official and legal institution, to the exclusion of unofficial armed groups or factions operating outside state institutions. Against this background, the right to bear arms should vest only in government forces, which should be established on sound national principles that guarantee their loyalty exclusively to the Iraqi state, rather than any political or other group.[1]
- Clerics should not be allowed to create religious groups to safeguard the seminary or sacred shrines or to keep oversight over and preserve public

1.Statement from the Office of His Eminence (may his shadow be extended) regarding the visit of the Iraqi Prime Minister-designate, Mr. Nouri al-Maliki, to His Eminence.

morals, neither should the action of the Sadrist movement in creating Sharia courts with incompetent people be permitted (Al-Khafaf,2015).

- Individuals or local groups should not be allowed to resort to the use of force in handling any manner of criminal activities, no matter the seriousness of the security disruption in Iraq. No individuals or groups can lawfully take such actions, without the permission of a qualified jurisprudent. The legal system and regulations should be upheld (Al-Khafaf, 2015).
- The Iraqi army is the nation's armed force constituted by Iraqis and with the responsibility of protecting the land, people, and sacred sites of Iraq. No other armed force is authorized to function in addition to the Iraqi army (Al-Khafaf,2015).

With regard to the military factions established by the religious authority after June 2014, those factions decided to withdraw from the PMF after about six years of its existence. The heads of those factions organized a conference under the slogan: "The Shrine Troops: The Patron of Fatwas and Builders of the State."

The Final Statement Highlights Several Points:

1. Loyalty to Religious Authority, with The Shrine Troops stressing their absolute obedience to the *fatwas* and directives issued by the highest religious authority, Ayatollah Sistani.
2. Obedience to the Law and Constitution. Here, The Shrine Troops also gave their assurance to respect the Iraqi constitution and laws, prevent their combatants from getting involved in political activities, associating with any party, or abusing their positions.
3. Call for Formal Integration: The "Shrine Troops," which are subject to the Commander-in-Chief of the Iraqi Armed Forces by virtue of a decree made by former Prime Minister, Haider Al-Abadi, wants the government to accelerate their formal incorporation in the Iraqi army to enable them to discharge their state obligations and carry on with their humanitarian activities. Without their speedy integration, the achievement of these goals would be hampered.[1]

1.This conference was preceded by the announcement of these brigades' military and administrative disengagement from the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) and their direct attachment to the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, dated April 19, 2020, in an official document signed by the then Prime Minister, Adel Abdul-Mahdi. The document, addressed to the head of the PMF, stated: "We have decided to administratively and

7-2. The Authority of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (1939 – Present), the Loyalist Forces

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader, known as Wali al-Faqih, is the topmost authority in Iran. He ascended this position, following the passing away of Ayatollah Khomeini on June 3, 1989. Ayatollah Khamenei is recognized as one of the leading vanguards of the revolution against Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and who facilitated Ayatollah Khomeini's rise to power. He is considered as a long-standing adherent of the theory of absolute guardianship of the jurist, that is, Wilayat al-Faqih. It is widely believed that, although Ayatollah Khomeini triggered the revolution, it was Ayatollah Khamenei, his protégé, who sustained and spread it abroad, having served as its poster child and shaped its direction.

Under the political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the position of Wali al-Faqih is the highest and most powerful institution, given its link to the religious-political theory of Wilayat al-Faqih (Al-Rawi,2005). The preamble to the 1979 Iranian constitution, as amended, highlighted the issue of Wilayat al-Faqih as the foremost authority in Iran. This notion is elaborated in text of the constitution, specifically Article 57, which gives it constitutional backing. The Supreme Leader is vested with political, as well as religious sovereignty. Consequently, the Wilayat al-Faqih came to be seen as one of the political cornerstones of the Islamic Republic of Iran. As provided in "the ruling authorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran — the legislative, executive, and judicial branches — exercise their powers under the supervision of the absolute leader (Wali al-Amr) and in front of the

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operationally attach Brigades (2, 11, 26, 44) to the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. The remaining details will be organized by a subsequent order." However, in practice, the situation remained unclear regarding the relationship between the Atabat Mobilization Forces (PMF) and both the Commander-in-Chief and the PMF Commission, as no subsequent orders or decisions were issued on this matter.

Researchers believe that the failure to attach the Atabat PMF to the Ministry of Defense or any other security ministry is due to administrative, legal, and doctrinal reasons. The Atabat PMF consists of approximately 20,000 fighters, who are ideologically driven. Their recruitment process into the PMF differs from that of citizens joining the security forces such as the army and police in terms of age, qualifications, and religious doctrine, which is a fundamental condition for joining the PMF. On the other hand, the security forces require only national ideology and patriotism, not religious doctrine. Furthermore, the Atabat PMF represents a specific religious doctrine exclusive to the Shia sect, a characteristic that does not exist in the official security forces, which include all religions, ethnicities, and sects.

nation according to the following articles of this constitution.[1]" Articles 107-112 outline the powers of the Wali al-Faqih.

In the post-2003 Iraq, prior to the U.S. war on Iraq, Iran took a neutral position on that war. As Ayatollah Khamenei stated at that time, "Both sides — Saddam's regime and the invaders — are unjust, and the Iranian people and government do not support either in this war." Iran, however, altered its position after the U.S. succeeded in occupying Iraq. Ayatollah Khamenei later indicated his pleasure at the collapse of the Saddam government (Al-Nahawi,2011), while at the same time calling for opposition against the U.S. occupation of Iraq (Khamenei,2020).

Ever since 2003, Iran has been in rivalry with the U.S.in Iraq, in an effort to safeguard its national security and interests in the nascent government, with Iraq becoming a battlefield for this Iran-U.S. conflict (Sadjadpour,2008).

In one of the latest updates on the Iran-U.S. conflict, the “Annual Risk Estimates” provided by U.S. intelligence agencies to the White House in February 2023, suggested that "the Iranian regime views itself as being in a sustained struggle with the United States and is keen to promote this idea while continuing its long-term pursuit of regional leadership." The report went on to suggest that:

1. Iran will continue to be a source of threat to the presence of the U.S in the Middle East, directly or through its proxies.
2. Iran will not relent on targeting U.S. presence in Iraq and Syria.
3. Iran will continue to threaten the security of Israel through missiles, drones, and other proxies.

Iran has created structures that are similar to those of the Iraqi security and military forces, forming armed factions and integrating them into the Iraqi security strategy, while embedding legal and financial aspects within the Iraqi state framework. Since 2003, Iran has helped in the incorporation of some factions of the Badr Organization into the Iraqi security and military agencies. New factions that have emerged after 2003 and identified with the Iranian ideology of absolute guardianship, include groups, such as Asaib Ahl al-Haq and Kata'ib Hezbollah. These factions are an integral part of the Iranian "Axis of Resistance." They coordinate with related regional organizations and also interact with quasi independent groups, such as the

1.See Article 57 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mahdi Army and the Promised Day Brigade linked with Sadrist movement(Elias,2021).

The operations and legitimacy of the above factions depend on major factors namely: association with Iran; support for Iranian roles in Iraq and beyond, including against U.S. and extremist Sunni groups; backing the post-2003 political system in Iraq controlled by parties that are connected to Iran; ensuring that the previous regime never returns to power, and providing assistance to Iranian regional adventures in Syria, Yemen, and other places (Ali,2019). These factions function on the basis of an extensive and lasting strategy, which has political, sectarian, regional, and economic ramifications.

7-3.The Reference of the Sadrist Movement (Saraya al-Salam), Ayatollah Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr (1999-1943)

Ayatollah Mohammad Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr (Al-Sadr II) is a populist religious leader, who arose from among his poor folks in Shia communities in the 1990s. His vigorous campaigns for change subsequently metamorphosed into the Sadrist Movement, noted today as a formidable socio-political and military force in Iraq. Al-Sadr II was influenced by the theory of Wilayat al-Faqih, akin to Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr. Not surprisingly, he emerged as one of those jurists who sought to challenge political authorities for the extension of the remit of their powers to the political realm.

Al-Sadr II did not only imbibe the theory of Wilayat al-Faqih, he brought some transformation to the theory, which was applied in Iran after 1979, although he did not jettison it altogether. He simply tried to give it a new interpretation and expand its application. Normally, the key requirement for guardianship and emulation, revolves around who qualifies as the most knowledgeable among the jurists. However, al-Sadr II conceived and added the additional principle of the multiplicity of jurists, that is, the concept of national Wilayat al-Faqih. On this basis, Al-Sadr II projected himself as the Wali al-Faqih for the Iraqi state.

In attempting to combine Islamic ideological thought and propagate it as an extensive ideology and a substitute for secular ideologies, with the traditional jurisprudential role, Al-Sadr II clashed with the jurists and religious authorities in Najaf. He employed, to his advantage, and in an incredible way, his charisma and power of mobilizing the masses, especially

young Shia from poor cities. Moreover, he capitalized on the fragile political situation in Iraq after the powers of the Ba'athist regime dwindled, following the economic sanctions imposed in 1990. In the aftermath of the demise of Ayatollah al-Khoei in 1992, the regime attempted to promote a Shia Arab religious authority, as well as transfer, among others, the administrative and legal functions customarily traditionally assigned to the highest religious authority, including the granting of exemption from military service to religious students and approval of residence permits for foreigners. This was possibly to foster engagement with an Iraqi national religious authority, instead of a non-Iraqi, and for political and social competition with the religious seminary in Iran.

Ultimately, the former political regime was compelled to recognize Ayatollah Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr as the highest religious authority. However, friction arose when Al-Sadr exceeded the limit of his permitted powers by demanding the release of religious clerics and calling for Friday prayers in mosques, in addition to opposing government prohibition of public gatherings. On October 6, 1997, he instructed his subordinates in Iraq to hold Friday prayers, the first of which took place at the Kufa Mosque on April 17, 1998. Prayers were organized continuously for 45 Fridays ending in his assassination on the last Friday, being February 19, 1999. Friday prayers became a rallying call for the Shia (Bishara,2018).

Al-Sadr II’s signature rhetoric, the simplicity of his language, and public appeal combined to galvanize his admirers from the lower echelon of society. Some of the phrases with which he was popularly associated include "Habibi” (my beloved), "Iskut” (be silent), and "Allah knows or doesn’t know." He also employed slogans, such as "no, no to falsehood;" "no, no to America;" and "no, no to Israel;" as well as "no, no to colonialism;" "no, no to arrogance," and "no, no to the devil," to depict his opposition to adversaries. Video recordings of those prayers, as well as other simple ones from his office, the barani, still trend on social media and in Sadrist media outlets, as well as related mosques.

Apart from the inspiring language and themes of Al-Sadr’s sermons delivered during those prayers, he also had a charismatic appeal that endeared him to his followers. He is remembered as a white-bearded elderly man, donned in a white shroud (kafan) and large black glasses, with a crooked cane (al-‘awjiyah). He drove to prayers in his private car, and

always arrived flanked by his two sons, Mu'ammal and Mustafa al-Sadr, both of them also clerics, who were murdered along with him.

7-3.1 Muqtada al-Sadr and the Sadrist Movement After 2003

The historical account of the Sadrist movement suggests that the term, "Sadrist movement," associated with Sadr II, came to light after 2003. Prior to that time, it did not feature in any materials, both print and electronic. The closest to that term was the name, "Imam Sadr Movement," borne by a group attending a conference in London in 2002, after his assassination. That group made no notable reference to Muqtada al-Sadr. Further, while the movement is clearly linked to Sadr II, the name and images of Sadr I also appeared regularly in the movement's media (Al-Khayoun,2011).

The assassination of Abdul-Majid al-Khoei on April 10, 2003[1] triggered the emergence of what is presently called the Sadrist movement. On August 2, 2003, the Iraqi judiciary issued a warrant for the arrest of Muqtada al-Sadr. Also arrested was his close ally, Mustafa al-Yacoubi, in addition to the shutting down of the Al-Hawza newspaper, which established the foundation for the subsequent creation of the Mahdi Army (Al-Khayoun, 2009).

Since 1998, the Sadrist movement has operated from the southern provinces of Iraq as its main support base, with the followers of Sadr II converging around Muqtada, who popularly projected himself as their protector (Bishara, 2018). The security breakdown and absence of state institutions in Najaf proved more serious than in other cities, which were so impregnable to U.S. forces that they found it impossible to access the holy shrines, talk less of invading them. The assassination of Abdul-Majid al-Khoei later provoked public outcry against Muqtada in that city (Abdul-Jabbar, 2010).

Sadr II admonished his sons not to involve themselves in the exercise of religious authority after his death. According to him, "the religious authority

1.The assassination of Abdul Majid al-Khoei (April 10,2003) marked the first time the name of Muqtada al-Sadr appeared in Arab and international media, as he was considered the instigator of the killing. Before that, he was entirely unknown, except for mentions related to his father's life, stating that he had four sons. One of them was Muqtada, in addition to Mu'ammal, Mustafa, and Murtada. Mucqtada and Murtada were the only ones who survived out of the four brothers. Murtada, however, does not prefer to make public appearances and has remained reclusive, reportedly living far from the events in Qom, Iran.

is not hereditary, and they should not speak on my behalf after my death or handle the religious authority and seminaries as the sons of previous religious leaders." Despite that, his supporters still transferred their allegiance to his son Muqtada al-Sadr. Nonetheless, some studies suggest that this transition to the Sadrist movement was orchestrated by certain individuals, which means that, perhaps, Muqtada al-Sadr does not quite possess the political and leadership capabilities commonly ascribed to him (Al-Khayoun,2011).

Abdul-Jabar contends that several factors were responsible for the emergence of the Sadrist movement. First, is the fact that the religious base was largely made up of religious scholars and seminarians, who were committed to Muqtada's father, Sadr I. Second, are the networks of charitable initiatives run by his father to meet the needs of the people. Third, are the armed militias that sprang up spontaneously in poor neighborhoods following the collapse of the Ba'athist regime caused by the unravelling of the security and services infrastructure, as well as the absence of rivals religious groups (Abdul-Jabbar,2010).

Though not dominant, the Sadrist movement steadily developed into a significant force. It arose at a time of growing religious consciousness, which was neither fundamentalist nor political, but instead a cultural and psychological environment that was favorable to fundamentalist tendencies (Mansour,2022). Since 2003, Muqtada al-Sadr has persistently fought to achieve political and religious importance in Iraq. In April 2003, he organized some demonstrations, which provided a litmus test for his ability to mobilize supporters in Najaf, Nasiriyah, and Baghdad. Implicit in those demonstrations was an indication that Muqtada al-Sadr was trying to project himself as a new Khomeini with political authority. For some analysts, this was akin to the mass mobilization politics witnessed in Tehran in 1979, a key difference being that Muqtada al-Sadr does not have any particular ideological vision needed for the formation of an Islamic state. Among religious scholars, he had a limited number of devoted supporters, numbering only a few hundreds, coupled with the fact that his movement was so frail that it could not even stand up to the Ba'ath regime that had become significantly weakened. Moreover, in political terms, Muqtada al-Sadr is not a well-established figure. Rather, his struggles are primarily focused on realizing his leadership aspiration; the desire to attain the

topmost religious and secular authority, using the medium of street mobilization.

From the perspective of the people in the southern part of Iraq and the tribal areas of Baghdad, Sadr II and his son Muqtada al-Sadr, are symbolic figures, who are not to be defined merely in terms of religious or jurisprudential functions. They are viewed as possessing supernatural attributes, thus qualifying them as sacrosanct. For example, Sadr II was described as "the Sacred Lord." In fact, they were often accorded a spiritual and sacred status, which surpassed that enjoyed by most of the preeminent figures in Shiism, particularly Imam Ali. As acknowledged, for example, by Hafiz Ismail al-Lami, otherwise called Abu Dir, a notable Sadrist personality, who spearheaded the Mahdi Army during the civil war that lasted between 2003 and 2008, "the Almighty, who granted us the blessing of loving the Sadr family, has given us a great blessing. The followers of Ali ibn Abi Talib were only five, but the followers of Muhammad Sadr number in the millions." In response to a question asked by one of his supporters in Sadr City as to who was more important between Imam Ali and Muqtada al-Sadr, Al-Lami said that, "Muqtada al-Sadr; he is alive and I see him, while Imam Ali is dead," implying that the former is more important to him. In another apparent attempt to project the perceived supernatural status of the al-Sadrs, a preacher recalled a story in which Sadr II claimed that he could recollect events that transpired prior to his birth when answering a question concerning whether a scholar could remember being in his mother's womb.

In terms of the formation of armed factions, Muqtada al-Sadr's establishment of Saraya al-Salam symbolizes an evolution in his unfettered leadership of those factions. The formation of Saraya al-Salam was made known through a statement posted on his website, and not by way of any speech delivered at the Kufa Mosque. Indeed, he made very effective use of electronic statements in mobilizing and controlling his followers, greatly dispensing with the need for physical appearances.

Even during the security and military breakdowns in June 2014, Muqtada al-Sadr sharply rebuked his key Shiarivals, especially former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, as well as factional leaders, who had separated from him since 2006 to create armed groups that fought in Syria. Muqtada al-Sadr staged the first major military parade of his new factions in Baghdad, Najaf, and Basra, which are cities that are intimately linked to the military function

of the Sadrist movement. Between 2004 and 2008, the movement fought U.S. forces, as well as Iraqi security and military forces, Muqtada al-Sadr focused particularly on these provinces because they are key Sadrist bases in Iraq, which are also of political and economic importance. He stationed a substantial reserve of his forces in those strongholds, which was not required to fight against ISIS. Saraya al-Salam was better organized in terms of uniforms, official logo, weapons, and vehicles, which took between two and three weeks to put together. These brigades were created principally to safeguard the sacred sites in the interim, and in collaboration with selected government entities, given that Muqtada al-Sadr did not have confidence in all the security institutions, particularly the Ministry of the Interior, which, as far as he was concerned, was controlled by the Badr Organization.

A final observation by analysts, is the lack of ideology and intellectual contradictions that characterize Muqtada al-Sadr, particularly in terms of his military and political organizations. He has a persona that has continued to be the source of controversy. Although he has maintained some consistency in his public opposition of U.S. occupation of Iraq, he is generally perceived as an unpredictable factional leader. In scientific and practical terms though, he has proven to be an astute and tactical politician, with the capacity to determine the most appropriate time to advance or withdraw. In terms of importance, some are not so upbeat about him. Nonetheless, for others, Muqtada al-Sadr is an accomplished religious leader and head of a militia, with a demonstrated ability to mobilize what has proven to be the sole mass movement in Iraqi politics (Cockburn,2008), replicating his father's symbolism and artefacts, from his Mitsubishi car to his shrouds and crooked cane. Yet, strictly speaking, Muqtada al-Sadr lacks the scholarly credentials and depth of religious knowledge required to perform the function of a religious authority.

8. Shia Tribalism between Southern Iraq and the Euphrates Region

To better appreciate the interaction between the Shias and the state, as well as its institutions, it is apposite to explore the nature of the mentality of the rural Shia vis-à-vis the mentality of their urban counterparts. There has been a gap in this regard. Yet, the difference is crucial because of the role it plays in influencing the PMF fighters' perceptions of the state and its institutions. Despite this gap in the academic domain, some social and anthropological studies exist, including those by Hanna Batatu, Shaker Mustafa Saleem, and Muhammad Ghazi Al-Akhras. These studies attempt to draw clear lines of

distinction between those Shias, who reside in rural parts of southern Iraq or even the capital city of Baghdad.

It was explained earlier in this study that, although Iraqi Shias have some commonalities, this has not transformed them into a closely knit, cohesive social group. Similar to other Iraqi residents, they divide into different unique groups. Essentially, they nurse no self-identity as Shias. Instead, they maintain stronger loyalty and attachment to their tribes and clans. This is glaring in religious cities that are based on the system of neighborhoods or districts, such as Karbala, Kadhimayn, Najaf and Baghdad, as well as in neighboring tribal areas within the Euphrates region, or in tribal cities mostly in southern Iraq.

Diverse explanations can be given for those disparities. One is the personality of the individual Iraqi, which according to Ali al-Wardi, is typified by social anomaly, duality, and tension between nomadism and civilization. Another factor relates to the nature of the ruling systems and regimes that Iraq has passed through, right from the Ottomans and the British to the establishment of the state in 1921, as well as the monarchy that followed. These factors reinforced the authority wielded by tribal leaders and entrenched the existing tribal system in Iraq, including the role of tribal leaders themselves in strengthening their powers and limiting the ability of tribal members to progress in civil life in terms, for example, of education and employment.

Urban Shias differ from their tribal counterparts. The former subscribe to criminal and civil laws that have no connection to tribal disputes, while the latter adhere to tribal customs.[1] Even in terms of social values, tribes around holy cities exhibit considerable differences from their counterparts in southern Iraq. Al-Izzawi draws attention to two types of personalities in Iraqi society, namely the Bedouin and the urbanite. The urbanite tries to relate with and understand their lineage, but without concerning themselves with the Bedouin's attempts to reinforce these connections. On the other

1. The **sawani** are rules that govern relationships and resolve disputes within tribal communities in southern Iraq. The term **sawani**—a colloquial word derived from the term **sunnah** (tradition)—rises to the level of laws with a touch of sanctity. When the British occupied Iraq in 1914, they documented these rules and made them a written code for the tribes. The provisional Iraqi government, formed in 1921, recognized the **sawani** as valid laws for organizing tribal society in Iraq.

hand, the Bedouin focus on determining their status among other tribes; ascertaining kinship, enmity, and degree of closeness, in addition to interacting with those related to them based on invasion requirements and similar factors, or with those who are equal or superior in lineage, or the quest for vengeance or conflict resolution (Al-Azzawi,2005).

On the other hand, Al-Akhras makes a distinction between rural and urban cultural patterns, each of which speaks to different social and economic situations. Rural individuals hail from villages populated by kinship groups that share everything, including land, means of production, as well as the ups and downs of life. Urban areas are, however, different. They have no kinship ties or sense of collective ownership; instead, they exhibit a kind of individualism and adhere to notions that may be alien to rural people (Al-Akhras,n.d.). Al-Akhras highlights the cultural and value conflict that exists between both patterns. The urbanites look down on rural people (Al-Akhras, n.d.), while the southerners are usually resentful of the political and economic elite when they migrate from southern Iraq to Baghdad and live in the eastern parts of the city, known as "Sharouqiyeen." The political, social, and religious elite in Baghdad did not forge any ties with them, and the Shia identity was not shared by both urban and rural individuals. Some ascribe the term, "Sharouki", to a group considered to be inferior in terms of culture and civilization. Southerners, have, however, sought to give a euphemistic meaning to this term. Tracing it to the Sumerian language, they maintain that "Sharouki" is a Sumerian phrase that means "native citizen." Nonetheless, this contention has no scientific backing, and seems merely to be an attempt by southerners to pride themselves in their own identity[1] and neutralize attempts to denigrate them.

9. Shia Tribalism between Southern Iraq and the Euphrates Region

The tribal condition in southern Iraq contrasts with the one in the Euphrates region. In the south, the tribal leader functions as the singular superpower, combining political, economic and every other aspect of power. In fact, in those places, the tribal leaders are practically feudal lords. As tribes formed

1.The southern poet Naeem Al-Furati wrote a long popular poem titled **Ana Shroki** (I am Shroki), proudly expressing his rural origins and attributing to himself qualities such as nobility, courage, honor, loyalty, etc. The poem begins with the lines: **"I am Shroki, I am Shroki, I never changed my nature, I never became deceitful."** When the famous popular poet Aryan Al-Sayed Khalaf is asked by a TV host about his origin and whether he is from the **Shrokiya**, he proudly responds, **"Yes, I am Shroki."**

settlements, this feudal system integrated tribal loyalty and dependence with land ownership. This system ultimately exacerbates poverty and ignorance, such that the tribal leader becomes virtually the owner of both the people and the land. This feudalism was ingrained during the monarchy, but at the same strained by the collaboration between the regime and the British, as well as the political feudal policies they practiced (Bishara,2018).

Tribal leaders in the Euphrates region usually see themselves as different from their counterparts in the south by claiming to be champions of the 1920 Revolution, placing emphasis on their proximity to religious cities, and considering themselves as more religiously devoted than tribal leaders in the south. In this regard, Sheikh Fareeq Mazhar Al-Farao, who is one of the tribal leaders of the Euphrates region, makes a distinction between two types of tribes and states, noting that:

The first group consists of those who have preserved all the noble traits of their ancestors, both men and women, such as love of freedom and sacrifice for it, pride, dignity, selflessness, and zeal. These people reside in the Euphrates region and northern Baghdad. The second group are Arabs by origin but have deviated from some Arab virtues due to their interactions with successive Arab and non-Arab governments over the centuries. They have forgotten or neglected their noble customs and traits. These people live in some areas along the Tigris River south of Baghdad (Al-Faroun,1952).

With regard to religious dedication among the tribes, Saleem, in his anthropological study of the Al-Jabayish district, as a proxy for rural areas in southern Iraq, found that Shias in that area do not maintain strict religious observance. According to him, they have neglected many fundamental Islamic duties, and now only concern themselves with loyalty to the Twelve Imams. For them, this allegiance undergirds their beliefs and is the only obligation they have. Therefore, apart from fasting and prayer, which they rarely practice, they mostly focus on practices, such as mourning the martyrdom of Imam Hussein; paying visits to the shrines of the Imams in Kadhimayn, Karbala, Najaf and Mashhad in northern Iran; as well as interment of the deceased in Najaf. By far their most sacrosanct ritual are the visits to the Imams' shrines. The indigent from the villages and countryside in southern Iraq, usually save money until they have enough to embark on one of such visits that generally involve prayers and supplications read by a Mumin or Sayyid, who traces his ancestral roots to

the Prophet. This implicitly attributes a divine connection to those Imams who are the Prophet's descendants. Among Shia tribes in southern Iraq, these Mumin or Sayyid are highly revered and considered holy figures, who enjoy precedence over all others. Since they are viewed as the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, treating them with great reverence is considered a religious duty. Thus, among Shia tribes, it is preferable to have a Sayyid lead a delegation for purposes, such as negotiating a marriage, settling disputes, or comforting the distressed, since they are accorded respect and priority wherever they go, and are rarely turned down whenever they make a request (Al-Jabayesh,1970).

The status of the Sayyid or Mumin considerably shaped the relationship between the people of the south and the authority of al-Sadr II. The latter deployed a strategy, which saw him recruit students from his religious seminary located in the rural parts of southern Iraq, particularly the tribal areas of Baghdad, such as Al-Thawra City, that subsequently became Sadr City, as well as in Al-Shaula, otherwise called the Shaula of the Two Sadr's, in addition to other parts of Baghdad. Those students were taught and mentored under the paternity of al-Sadr II, quite unlike the traditional method used in Najaf and other traditional seminary circles, where there were fewer students from the southern and tribal areas. Abbas Al-Zaydi attempts to capture this situation by noting that, "the seminary circles viewed the people of the southern Sharoukiyeen as backward and ignorant, or as they were called, the 'Madan' or 'Arabanjiya.' Martyr al-Sadr gave special importance to these individuals, which is why the majority of Friday prayer leaders are from the south" (Al-Jabayesh,1970).

It means that al-Sadr II focused essentially on people from southern and tribal areas to serve as the pillars of his social movement, and less so on those from urban areas, particularly Najaf. He placed unquestionable reliance on the former with whom he maintained regular contact to instruct them on ethics and the importance of perseverance, in addition to addressing any observed lapses, with a view to enhancing his moral standing among other community groups. Al-Sadr II was unique in another sense. Other Shia religious leaders, including activist figures, such as Ayatollah al-Sadr I, as well as traditional figures, such as Al-Hakim and Al-Khoei, failed to reckon with the tribal system. Instead, they placed their attention on the tension among tribal customs, religious values and the seminary. However, al-Sadr II chose to validate these customs through written works that provided

religious cover for tribal system, while reforming others, the final outcome of which was his book on tribal jurisprudence (Hani,2007). All this helped al-Sadr II to emerge as the incontrovertible religious leader of the tribes in the rural areas of the south and Baghdad.

10. The Phenomenon of Rural Cities in Baghdad

Baghdad varies from the Euphrates region or the south of Iraq in terms of differences in tribal affiliations among the Sunnis and the Shias. Until the 1960s, Baghdad was demarcated into different residential areas, some for the Sunnis and others for Shias. Shias lived in areas, such as Kadhimayn, Karrada and Al-Thawra City, now called Sadr City, with a few Kurdish Shias in Bab al-Sheikh. Even among these sects, there were sectarian and ethnic differences. For the Sunnis, their rural and tribal migrants were motivated by Sunni politicians to enlist in the military and seek government employment. In fact, their politicians helped them to get employment after completion of their studies. On the contrary, indigent Shia migrants received no support or any form of engagement from their politicians. Instead, their politicians preferred to associate with the elite and ruling classes, with no concern for their rural and tribal social needs. Thus, Shia politicians in Iraqi cities turned out to be either tribal chiefs, who placed attention on tribal leadership and connections with the king, the British, or urban personalities, who avoided sectarianism and anything capable of hindering their immersion into city life (Bishara,2018).

Despite their virtual exclusion from the political system, the Shias enjoyed substantially improved economic conditions under the monarchy. Nevertheless, they remained among the poorest, particularly the ones called "Sharoukiyeen." These groups, who are migrants from tribal towns and villages in Amarah, resided in shacks in the northeastern areas of Baghdad, presently called Sadr City. It was their very deplorable condition that caused the widespread disaffection, which finally resulted in an outburst in Baghdad on July 14, 1958 (Bishara,2018).

Presently, Sadr City is the largest Iraqi city, based on population density, even though, due to political factors, official verification of its real size is still lacking. It continues to be a Shia city and a suburb of Baghdad, with which it is comparable in terms of size (Allawi,2009). To provide shelter for tens of thousands of Shia migrants residing in shanty dwellings around the deprived areas of Baghdad, Abdul Karim Qasim conceived and developed

Al-Thawra City towards the end of the 1950s in the eastern part of Baghdad. However, this city remained tribal in terms of identity and organization. The tribe is the cohesive mechanism that unites people, whose lives are governed by its values and customs. The creation of Al-Thawra City, notwithstanding, people continued to maintain links with their original provinces. For example, they regularly visited Baghdad to meet their loved ones or receive medical treatment. Others went back to tribal leaders in their original provinces for the purposes of dispute resolution. Indeed, some neighborhoods in Sadr City bear names that continue to resonate with the tribes that previously settled there, such as the Kyzan or Jabb tribes. For example, the Rabi'ah tribe are the sole inhabitants of Sector 55.

Needless to say, the cultural back drop of migrants from tribal societies is usually incompatible with the principles of democracy, such as political pluralism, elections, the rule of law, and freedom of expression. Politically speaking, rural migrants have a tendency to associate with influential movements or charismatic leaders. With a few words or gestures, charismatic leaders can effortlessly influence these groups and galvanize them into vibrant masses prepared to crush any obstacle that lies in front of them. During the October 2021 general elections, for example, the Sadrist bloc employed the symbol of a stick, that is, a’awjiya, as a reminder to followers of the stick that also accompanied al-Sadr II. This symbolic strategy, combined with the specific use of the name of the Sadrist bloc, which had never been in use, as for example, "Ahrar Movement," "Sairoon," or "Istiqlam Party," ensured victory for the Sadrist bloc, which has won most of the parliamentary seats since 2005, amounting to 73 seats. Moreover, they have demonstrated capacity in mobilizing women and the unlearned for religious, political, and military affairs (Elections and Democratic Transformations in the Arab World: A Step Forward or a Step Backward – use author’s name,2008)

Such groups are also more likely to join military organizations, such as militias, than participate in regular political parties. For this reason, they attach great importance to weapons that tend to be of supreme value to them and a symbol of personal pride. The general public environment remains tribal, with no regard for state values and the rule of law, as far as the settlement of personal disputes are concerned. Indeed, it is usual for disputing individuals to threaten themselves with guns; a practice described

as "tribal harassment," that may also involve firing shots at a home to compel compliance, often causing fatalities (Zamel,2013).
Additionally, involvement in religious activities directed by clerics is considered as a religious obligation, which must be discharged with dedication. Al-Sadr II employed this strategy so well by imposing Friday prayers as a religious, political, and social obligation. In this way, he cleverly gave symbolic importance to Friday prayers, which became as one of his potent social assets. Those prayers took place in the streets of Sadr City, and were attended by millions of worshipers from April 17, 1998, to February 19, 1999. In all, about 24 Friday prayers were held, apart from others organized by his subordinates in Baghdad and other provinces of Iraq. Those prayers provided al-Sadr II the opportunity to disseminate his intellectual, political, and social ideas, touching on such matters as the vocal seminary, dealing with adversaries, religious doctrines, and societal guidance.

11. Al Najaf City

A close examination of the situation in Najaf would reveal that affiliations were more to families and clans, quite unlike the structured system that characterizes the south. Some tribal groups exist on the outskirts of Najaf and in border areas lying between it and Samawah, as well as Diwaniyah. Nevertheless, their customs and traditions are considerably different from those of the southern tribes. Affiliation to the neighborhood, that is, local district, can also be seen, within each of the four main neighborhoods namely, Al-Buraq, Al-Huwaish, Al-Mishraaq, and Al-Amara. The constitution of one of these neighborhoods, Al-Buraq, still exists, and provides in its fundamental clause that, “we, the residents of Al-Buraq neighborhood, have gathered and united, from one blood, following each other if any emergency arises to our neighborhood from other neighborhoods". It can also be seen, from other clauses in the constitution, that the social organization of the Al-Buraq neighborhood is founded on the family system, which defining values are embedded in tribal loyalty, with the neighborhood chief consolidating all powers. No political role is given to the religious authority by the constitution, neither does it even make any reference to it.

It is worth noting that some organizational systems uniquely combine tribal affiliations rooted in families and neighborhoods with economic determinants and power play in the city. Armed groups, now commonly called militias, that is, Al-Shamrat and Al-Zakrat, controlled the four neighborhoods of Najaf city, safeguarding it against outsider threats. They collaborated with religious figures, as well as city artisans, merchants, and even people paying visit to the holy shrines. These interactions also entailed the provision of security services in return for payment (Abdul-Jabbar, 2010).

Nevertheless, the affiliations and organizations highlighted above in no way defined the identity of Najaf, long known as the focal point of Shia religious authority, right from the era of Sheikh Al-Tusi. It is also recognized as the site of the shrine of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib, who is highly revered by Shias. At the close of the 19th century, Najaf witnessed an upsurge of scientific and literary activities spurred by scholars and Najafi families, such as those of Al-Kashif Al-Ghita, Al-Sheikh Razi, Al-Jawahiri, Al-Qazwini, and Al-Jazairi. Many new libraries were opened, such as the Al-Alawiya Library, Sheikh Ali Library and Sheikh Hadi Kashif Al-Ghita Library. Others were the Sheikh Khensari Library, and Sheikh Muhammad Al-Samawi Library.

Also in 1910, the first ever Iraqi magazine, Al-Ilm, which was edited by Hibbat al-Din Al-Shahrastani, was published. Najaf was equally involved in the revolts against the British invaders, with a good number of modern political organizations also being formed there, including the Secret Najaf National Party (1918), the Scientific Society in Najaf (1918) and the Muslim Youth Organization (1940). Others were the Jaafari Party (1952), the Ideological Muslims Organization (1954), the Youth of Faith and Belief (1957), and the Islamic Dawa Party (1957). It quickly developed as a key center of international attraction. Moreover, Najaf received special treatment from the Ottoman regime, which appointed the city's Kaymakam directly from Istanbul. The Baghdad Province was also careful not to meddle into its affairs, save in rare nominal ways. The Russian government even went to the extent of opening a consulate in Najaf in 1907 to enable it stay abreast of developments in Iraq. Due to this combination of factors, Najaf became a global destination where social institutions interacted and flourished.

12. Conclusions

This study has shown that the legal framework for the regulation of the PMF has undergone vital transformation in recent years. Nevertheless, its submission to the sovereignty of the Iraqi state and its laws continues to be weak. As the findings from the study suggest, this weakness is tied to religious, doctrinal, social, and cultural factors that shape the three directions. Of the PMF in terms of guidance and control. Throughout much of Iraqi history, Shias have been perceived as the opposition, whether in political or religious terms. Nevertheless, the Shia have also tasted power in Iraq, albeit to a limited extent. The result has been a clash between historical Shia doctrine and political culture, which resonates in the nature of the PMF's perception both as Shia organizations and factions. Moreover, in the Shia community, the religious authority is responsible for oversight over religious, social, and political affairs. This authority has, from time immemorial, acted autonomously of state power. Its viewpoint on political matters and the state system still shapes the attitudes and activities of the formations and factions that are spiritually and doctrinally tied to it. There is a continuing absence of a cohesive identity that holds Iraqi Shias together. Their identity is shaped by communal attributes, with variations in political, legal, and military culture existing between rural and urban Shias. It is this disparity that is similarly manifested in the PMF's non-conformist attitude to state law, as dictated by their rural or urban origins. Hence, the three Shia authorities within the PMF vary on different levels, such as religious authority, social composition, and geographical distribution. These discrepancies are reechoed in the movements and positions of the three Shia authorities regarding state law.

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