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**COST OF EXILE: THE ROLE OF THE RETURNING EXILES
IN POST-2003 IRAQ**

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Introduction

On April 9, 2003 Baghdad fell to U.S. forces, bringing an end to Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party's decades long hold over Iraq. In place of the old regime, Americans and Iraqis alike sought to transform Iraq from an isolated, authoritarian state to an economically strong democratic republic. The relative success or failure of these endeavors garnered considerable attention in the subsequent decade, particularly following the withdrawal of U.S. troops at the end of 2011. These issues remain relevant in 2014 as Iraq, embroiled in a level of violence not seen in half a decade, participates in its first post-U.S. parliamentary election.

The challenges faced by Iraq today - from endemic corruption to sectarian conflict and terrorism - are severe and numerous, leaving many to consider their root causes and whether or not the situation today could have been mitigated or avoided. In this vein, numerous academics and policy makers have largely focused on the impact of the U.S. invasion and occupation or on outside actors' influence more generally. In this paper, we look at these issues from a different perspective by focusing on the sizable Iraqi exile population, many of whom returned to the country hoping to play a role in post-Saddam Iraq. In doing so, we focus on three different, yet interconnected questions. First, what determined the relative political success or failure of various groups within the returning exile population? This particularly concerns the major opposition parties in exile, such as the Islamic Dawa Party, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), the Iraqi National Congress (INC), and the Iraqi National Accord (INA), as well as more politically independent individuals. Second, did the Iraqis' experiences and perspectives from their lives in exile shape the way they viewed policies and governed the country? The nature of our research method led us to ask a third question: what was the relationship between perception and reality for the returning exile community and what determined this relationship?

To address these questions, we begin with a history of the Iraqi opposition under the Ba'ath Party and the origins of the opposition in exile. We then examine the interaction between these groups as they plotted against the regime and planned for their eventual return to a post-Saddam Iraq. Next, we consider the returning exiles' role in post-2003 Iraqi politics, highlighting their political representation, factors that contributed to the success or failure of individuals and parties, exiles' perceptions of Iraq prior to their return, and the local Iraqi's perception of the returning exiles. We then examine perceptions of the exiles' impact on issues including sectarianism, transitional justice, corruption and nepotism, and foreign influence in Iraq. Through this analysis, we draw a number of conclusions.

By looking at the historical trajectory of the political parties in power – principally Dawa – we argue that the success or failure of politicians and parties returning from exile was determined by four major factors: legacy as an indigenous movement, perceived independence from foreign influence, legitimacy as opposition to the previous regime, and a pre-existing organization and network. Without these elements, parties have tended to decline in influence, and individuals not attached to a party with these elements have tended to fail. This theory also highlights an apparent contradiction between accepting the resources of foreign benefactors and maintaining the appearance of independence.

Second, we can confirm that the Iraqi exiles held a number of perceptions about their homeland that turned out to be false once they returned. This was largely driven by the time spent in exile, but can also be linked to the location of exile and the ideas they formed in exile.

Finally, and perhaps the most difficult to definitively confirm, is the impact the returning exiles had on issues such as sectarianism, transitional justice, corruption and nepotism, and foreign influence. While exiles appear to have done little to alleviate these issues, the underlying

problems are not new to Iraq and there are often other factors that merit consideration.

Methodology

Our analysis relies heavily on historical analysis and existing literature, but we supplement this with more than a dozen interviews with a variety of Iraqi exiles now residing in the United Kingdom or the United States. Most of them were active members of the opposition during the Saddam era, and some remain politically active today.

For security reasons, traveling to Iraq was not possible; as a result, we decided to conduct fieldwork in London and Washington, DC. Both cities have sizable Iraqi populations and served as epicenters of the Iraqi opposition prior to 2003. Both cities are also home to a number of key Iraqi cultural and religious centers. Prior to conducting interviews, we worked in consultation with our advisor, Dr. Judith Yaphe, to create a comprehensive set of questions on interviewees' personal backgrounds, perceptions about Iraq, involvement in the Iraqi exile communities, and their assessment of the returning exile population. While we had a number of standard questions, we tailored each interview to the individual subject's background and expertise in areas such as democratization and transitional justice.

Our interview subjects represented a wide variety of backgrounds and opinions, but most of them – with the exception of two clerics from Najaf – now reside in the West. We spoke to 14 Iraqis, predominantly Shia men, but also two women and two Sunnis. We decided to focus on the Shia exile population because they comprised the vast majority of the opposition in exile.¹

Several interviewees have worked closely with elements of the U.S. government – predominantly the State Department – both before and after the U.S. invasion. Many today have

¹ The Kurds were not displaced in the same way as the Shia experienced; for the most part, they were able to remain in the three predominantly Kurdish provinces in northern Iraq or flee to Kurdish communities across the border.

connections to the highest echelons of the Iraqi government, including to Prime Minister Maliki. Most of the interviewees have spent a significant amount of time in Iraq since 2003, whether through frequent visits or longer durations spent living in the country; a number of our interviewees had been in Iraq only days or weeks prior to our meetings. While many were critical of the Iraqi government and denied having any official political affiliation, we also spoke with two sources able to provide a perspective from the Dawa Party. Additionally, though not inherently political, we had the opportunity to speak with two Shia clerics from the city of Najaf, the epicenter of the Shia religious community.

We would be remiss not to mention some challenges posed by our fieldwork strategy. First, it is important to keep in mind some inherent discomfort on the part of our interviewees when talking about politically sensitive issues like corruption, nepotism, and party affiliation. A number of the people we interviewed chose to remain anonymous either due to their current ties in Iraq or to make it clear that they were not speaking on behalf of the organization they work for. Out of respect for this anonymity and in acknowledgement of the sensitive nature of some of our questions, we opted to refrain from identifying any of our interviewees by name. Instead, the following table includes some useful information about our interview subjects, such as the location of the interview, the year they left Iraq, a generic description of their occupation or affiliation, and their religious identification.

Table 1: Interviewee Descriptions				
Letter Designation	Description	Religious Identification (self-identified or perceived)	Location	Year Left Iraq
A	Iraqi-American businessman	Secular Shia	Washington, DC	1975
B	Iraqi political analyst	Secular Shia	Washington, DC	Early 2000s
C	Dawa sympathizer	Religious Shia	Washington, DC	Born outside Iraq; family left in 1970s

D	Dawa sympathizer	Religious Shia	London, UK	1970s
E	Former political activist	Secular Shia	London, UK	1979
F	Former politician and activist	Secular Shia	London, UK	1983
G	Shia scholar	Religious Shia	London, UK	1991
H	Cleric from Najaf	Religious Shia	London, UK	1982
I	Former-MG in the Iraqi armed forces	Secular Sunni	Washington, DC	2008
J	Pro-democracy civil society activist	Secular Shia	Washington, DC	1991
K	Cleric from Najaf	Religious Shia	London, UK	Never Left
L	Shia activist and former opposition member	Religious Shia	London, UK	1991
M	Female activist	Religious Shia	Washington, DC	1991
N	Female researcher from non-profit and NGO field	Prefers not to identify by sect; Secular Sunni	Washington, DC	1990

Additionally, our inability to travel to Iraq precluded us from speaking directly to any former exiles who currently hold positions of power in the Iraqi government. While many of the exiles we interviewed discussed the relationship between returning exiles and those who remained in Iraq, none could speak directly from the point of view of someone who had returned to Iraq permanently. Iraqi parliamentary elections, scheduled for April 30, also proved a challenge to our fieldwork; a number of experts based in London or Washington had returned to Iraq to work on the elections and thus were unable to meet with us. Finally, with the exception of the two clerics, our interviewees have all lived in the West for a number of years and continue to be based outside of Iraq, which tends to color their perspective. Because of the nature and limits of our study, the focus here is on the perceptions, attitudes, and assumptions held by the exiled Iraqis during three general time periods: during exile prior to 2003; returning to Iraq for the first time; and the present-day, 11 years after the fall of Saddam.

Even with these limitations, we compiled a reasonably diverse and well-rounded set of

interviews to supplement some of the arguments and theories we present. While the nature of our research - and perhaps Iraqi politics itself - makes it difficult to form definitive, quantitative conclusions, our interview findings corroborate some existing ideas and theories and suggest areas for further study.

Existing Theories on Returning Exiles

There is little available research on the number of Iraqis who sought refuge from the regime of Saddam Hussein over the three decades of his rule. Geraldine Chateland, a scholar on Iraqi refugees, estimates that between 500,000 and 700,000 Iraqi refugees lived outside the country before the invasion of Kuwait. She estimates that up to 1.5 million Iraqis left Iraq between 1990 and the end of 2002.² Some scholars have focused on post-Saddam Iraq and the role of the returned exiles in politics. Others have written more generally about the experiences of exiles while living abroad and their role when they return to their homeland. From the existing literature, a number of theories emerge regarding: why certain parties and politicians succeed or fail when returning from exile; how perceptions and experiences of exiles while abroad create dissonance when they return; and the decision-making process of returned exiles in government.

Political Success or Failure of Returning Exiles

A number of scholars focus on the strength of the Dawa Party and why it has remained in power. Two general narratives emerge from the literature. One states that the Dawa Party rose to power and stayed there ultimately because of its legitimacy as an Iraqi-Shia organization and its pre-existing infrastructure. The counter narrative asserts that Dawa came to power because of foreign influence chiefly from the United States and Iran, both of which had strong ties to the returning exile community.

² Chateland, 2009, *Centre on Migration, Policy and Society*: 13 (unnumbered pdf file)

Speaking on the returning exiles to Eastern Europe in the 1990s and applying it to Iraq, Yossi Shaim and Ariel Ahram note that, “whether the returnees ascend to positions of power inside their homelands with the blessing of their people often depends on the circumstances leading to their departure and the symbolic and real status they maintained while abroad.”³ In seeking to explain the success of the Dawa movement, Joyce Wiley, an Iraq specialist who lived in southern Iraq in the 1980s, wrote in 1992 that the success of the Islamist movement in Iraq was not due to sectarianism, Iranian influence, or even the ideological appeal of Islam. Rather, she observed, it was due to its opposition to the injustices perpetrated by the regime.⁴ American historian Phebe Marr argues that a modern Shia identity formed around opposition to regime reforms, which she traces back to the 1958 revolution and General Qasim, and changes he initiated from 1958 through 1963 that especially alienated the Shia ‘ulama.⁵

Rodger Shanahan argues that, “The sacrifices the party made in resisting the Ba’ath regime over the years are respected within Iraq, and a source of strength within the party itself.”⁶ Moreover, its continued presence in Iraq, even when driven underground, gave it “a pre-existing support base and organizational infrastructure” to build upon.⁷ Shanahan also argues that Dawa presented itself as independent from the United States and committed to technocratic governance within an Islamic state.⁸

Yet Dawa had weaknesses as well. Faleh Jabar, an Iraqi sociologist who is still in exile, argues in 2003 that the dispersed and decentralized nature of the Dawa Party across different countries in the region created a sense of disunity. He presents this as one of the reasons for

³ Shaim and Ahram, 2003: 668

⁴ Wiley, 1992

⁵ Marr, 2012: 104

⁶ Shanahan, 2004, *Third World Quarterly*: 949-950

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.: 950

Iran's creation of Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI),⁹ which, re-branded as ISCI, remains prominent today.

Once the exiles gained power, their continued success or eventual failure was based on their adaptability and ability to amass local support. In light of the 2010 election results in which Maliki's State of Law Coalition stayed in power despite winning 89 seats to Ayad Allawi's 91, Marr argues that,

*The opposition exiles who had succeeded in the domestic power struggles – Maliki is the prime example – had now gained considerable experience inside Iraq, learning how to navigate the political landscape. The weaker elements among them, especially those like Chalabi, who could not generate local support, and more recently Allawi, had been marginalized. Moreover, many well-known exile figures who had played a role in opposition politics for years failed to win seats in the new CoR [Council of Representatives].*¹⁰

The counter argument presented in the current literature is that Dawa, ISCI, and other Shia groups are in power because of the way that the United States appointed members of the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), and because of Iranian influence. In 2003, Shain and Ahram note that the political Iraqi exiles that worked with the United States had an advantage when first returning to Iraq because of “the difficulty [for the United States] of identifying indigenous Iraqi leaders who have not been tainted by the Ba’athist regime.”¹¹ Shain and Ahram also point out that, “by organizing opposition bodies abroad, they also signaled to the world that Iraq had a functional alternative once Saddam was deposed,”¹² The exiles’ influence on the decision to topple the regime and how to go about doing so gave them another advantage, since “the exile’s role upon returning directly relates to how the outgoing regime collapsed and what remnants of incumbent power remained available.”¹³ Such arguments help explain how exiles came to

⁹ Jabar, 2003: 235

¹⁰ Marr, 2012: 351

¹¹ Shain and Ahram, 2003: 665

¹² Ibid.: 666

¹³ Ibid.

dominate the IGC, but do not explain the continuing role of the exiles in government. Shain and Ahram also argue “The longer the occupation continues, however, the greater the chance that the United States will circumvent the exiles and cede power to a newly recruited indigenous leadership.”¹⁴ Shain and Ahram do not elaborate on how long they anticipated the occupation to last, but their theory suggests that an absence of U.S. influence would explain the endurance of exiles in positions of political leadership.

Michael Knights observes, however, that, “In 2006, U.S. ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad played the pivotal role in selecting and boosting Maliki as the Shiite bloc's candidate for premier.” He also notes that Iran blocked efforts to hold a no confidence vote against Maliki in 2012 and has been an active player in Iraqi politics.¹⁵ Yet the view that the United States and Iran have propped up the current regime does not take into account that Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf countries have also backed preferred candidates, such as Ayad Allawi. If all major candidates and parties are receiving foreign aid, is the playing field even? If not, who gets left out?

To help answer these questions, and better understand which of the two theories above is correct, we also need to look at the unique aspects of the returning exile community to see what ideas and perceptions they brought to Iraq.

Perceptions of Returning Exiles

Numerous studies examine the psychological impact of exile. They describe changes in perception, sense of connection or pride in one’s homeland, as well as the suspicions cast upon the exiles by those who never left. Current scholarship finds that time spent in exile increases the difficulty of reintegration upon return. Exiles often maintain or strengthen their sense of identity in connection to their homeland, but base this on a nostalgic and idealistic conception of

¹⁴ Ibid.: 670

¹⁵ Knights, 2014 April 24

home, which can lose its grounding in reality over time. The community they join in exile also shapes exiles' perceptions of their homeland and their identity.

Roger Porter examines modern literature written by exiles that fled the Holocaust and later returned home. He shows that a return from exile evokes a mix of emotions, including nostalgia for the homeland that creates a fantasy in one's mind and draws exiles to return. Yet exiles are also torn by the worry that they may not be accepted or that their fantasy might turn out to be false.¹⁶ In the context of Iraq, Shain and Ahram note that "the destination of exiles, far or close to the homeland, and the nature of their host society—its culture and politics—are critical factors in mitigating or exacerbating the separation anxiety."¹⁷

For many Iraqis, such worries came to fruition when they returned. In fieldwork conducted in 2004-2005, Marianne Holm Pedersen studied Shia Arab Iraqi women and their families living in exile in Copenhagen. Many of the women told her they found it easier to form a social network within the religious community while in exile, and attempted to maintain their Iraqi heritage within the collective memory so that "the imagined Iraq was a part of their everyday lives."¹⁸ Many tried to return to Iraq after the fall of Saddam's regime. They were overjoyed to see their former houses again, but soon "realized the changes that had occurred while they were living abroad. This led them to consider seriously where they felt they belonged and where they wanted to spend their futures."¹⁹

Yossi Shain and Ariel Ahram argue that exiles often develop ties and loyalties to their new homes abroad while also maintaining a sense of identity and loyalty to their homeland. They caveat this by noting that, "What distinguishes political exiles from other diaspora

¹⁶ Porter, 2011: 289-299

¹⁷ Shain and Ahram, 2003: 663

¹⁸ Pedersen, 2011: 22

¹⁹ Ibid.: 15

members is not only the exiles' continuous struggle to facilitate the conditions for their return, but also their determination not to establish life abroad as a comfortable option, even temporarily."²⁰ However, Shain and Ahram identify a number of challenges that political exiles face when they return. For instance, "many of the political exiles may have difficulty earning the 'credential' of victimhood required by those who stayed behind."²¹ This is because they "may be perceived as lacking the valor of endurance under suffering."²² They also point out that the exiles "are burdened with the legacy of tainted loyalties that the Ba'athist regime constantly attributed to its opponents, especially those abroad, who were charged with treason and desertion."²³ Such accusations would be especially difficult to overcome for the Badr Brigade, a group formed by Iran from among Iraqi army deserters. The brigade fought against the Iraqis on behalf of Iran in the 1980s war.

Another challenge for the exiles according to Shain and Ahram is how to distinguish between remnants of the former regime and the native Iraqi people. This is a challenge because, "Saddam's cult of personality and his recruitment of direct loyalties within all ethno-sectarian groups inside Iraq successfully split and undermined indigenous Iraqi affinity for exile leaders."²⁴ Such divisions can have serious consequences. "When the issue of who constitutes the people is itself at stake, and when state boundaries are challenged by secessionist claims, divisions among exiles may become even more explosive."²⁵

Shain and Ahram also observe that the returning exiles must find ways to reconcile the foreign ideas that they adopted while in exile with what their own communities will accept,

²⁰ Shain and Ahram, 2003: 663

²¹ Ibid.: 665

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.: 666-667

²⁵ Ibid.: 667

including ideas “ranging from liberal democracy to constitutional monarchy to a workers’ state to Islamic republicanism.”²⁶ On the other hand, exiles returning from Iran might be “less susceptible to charges of national disloyalty because they draw largely upon religious (and not national) affinity.”²⁷ Nonetheless, suspicion of the exiles increases the stronger their ties are with the elite in their host country and the longer they are abroad.²⁸ Overcoming this barrier can be a major boon for Iraqis, especially if those who resided in the West can mobilize the educated and wealthy within the diaspora community to get them to invest in their country.²⁹

In his 2007 history of the occupation, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, Ali Allawi offers an insider account of the Iraqi opposition in exile. His narrative confirms many of the challenges confronted by the returning exiles. A cousin of Ayad Allawi and Ahmad Chalabi, he left Iraq in November 1958 for boarding school in England and returned in 2003, serving as Ministers of Trade and Defense in the IGC. He later served as Minister of Finance in the Iraqi Transitional Government of 2005-2006. He attended university in the United States and hoped to return to Iraq when he had completed his studies but was unable to do so after the 1968 Ba’athist coup. He remained in exile for 30 years. Of this “second period of exile,” he writes:

I hardly ever stopped thinking about Iraq [...] The main feature of exile, however, at least for me, was not a sense of loss or a violent dislocation in the pattern of my life. It had more to do with the limitation of possibilities [...] There was the feeling that Iraq would have been a far better place if its destiny had not been hijacked by one miserable set of dictators or another; if it had somehow evaded the disastrous experiments on re-engineering societies and economies that characterised the ‘revolutionary’ states of the Arab world.³⁰

Allawi explains that while he was working at the World Bank and later as an investment

²⁶ Ibid.: 668

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.: 668-669

³⁰ Allawi, 2007: ix - x

banker, he continued to oppose the Saddam regime but “keeping the two worlds separate was a difficult, even hazardous, task.”³¹ He spent much of the 1980s, during the Iraq-Iran War, in the Gulf countries; they were strategically allied with Saddam during this time. Echoing the sense of hope to return to Iraq and the sense of betrayal felt by many exiles after the United States did not support the Shia uprising in 1991, he notes that, “Iraqi exiles’ hopes rose that the end of Saddam was close at hand, but he, unforgivably, was let off the hook.”

Ali Allawi returned to Iraq on September 11, 2003 and served as a member of parliament and a cabinet minister in the government formed in 2005 by Ayad Allawi. He notes that the returning exiles were shocked to discover how much Iraq had changed since they left. The 1970s was a decade of prosperity for Iraq and its middle class, largely due to rising oil revenues as a result of the nationalization of its oil production and the rise in oil prices. The middle class that these returning exiles had been a part of in the 1970s no longer existed, mostly as a result of decades of war, sanctions, and regime neglect.³²

From Exile to Governance

What was the impact on governance of the perceptions and disconnects that were developed in exile and brought back to post-2003 Iraq? One hypothesis is that the returning exiles exacerbated sectarian identities. As Shain and Ahram note, “the task for all returned Iraqi exiles is not to invent the Iraqi state, but to alter the definition of Iraqi identity from its previous meaning of loyalty to Saddam.”³³ What form that identity should take often varied depending on background. As Geraldine Chateland observes, “most of the social fragmentations existing in Iraq have also been maintained among those who have settled in liberal countries in the West.”³⁴

³¹ Ibid.: x

³² Ibid.: 127

³³ Shain and Ahram, 2003: 671

³⁴ Chateland, 2009, *Dispossession and Displacement: Forced Migration in the Middle East and North Africa*: 20

The question then becomes whether this fragmentation became even stronger with time as the exiles stayed within their particular communities.

Dr. Dina Khoury argues that sectarianism as a frame of reference “conceals as much as it reveals.”³⁵ In order to understand sectarianism in Iraq, one must look at the specific kinds of violence used since the Iran-Iraq War. She uses archival data from the Iraq Memory Foundation to show that the regime targeted individuals for oppression based on factors other than sect, primarily to ensure its own security. However, because these factors often coincided with the Shia south, a collective identity emerged amongst the Iraqi Shia. When Iraqi exiles and the United States came to power in 2003, they built on this history of oppression and victimization by writing a constitution that assured a Shia majority and would prevent the emergence of another autocrat like Saddam who was overtly sectarian. The preamble to the 2005 Iraqi Constitution describes the Ba’athist regime as sectarian, although ironically, the Ba’ath regime was accusing the Dawa Party of being sectarian during the 80s and 90s.³⁶

Sherko Kirmanj identifies three competing nationalisms in Iraq and argues that “the failure of national integration in Iraq is a direct result of the clash of identities and competing nationalisms, be they ethnic, secular, or religious.”³⁷ His conclusions suggest that an emphasis on sectarian identities by the returning opposition alienated those not belonging to their sect while they focused on solidifying their base of support.

From this review of the literature, other questions emerge as well, such as whether variations among the exiles regarding the time spent outside Iraq and the year in which they left might have caused variations in their viewpoints. What were these variations and did it result in a stronger sense of Shia identity, anti-Ba’athist sentiment, or victimization? Could this be linked

³⁵ Khoury, 2010: 325

³⁶ Ibid.: 329

³⁷ Kirmanj, 2013: 16

to the push for de-Ba'athification when they returned?

In our interviews, we found some evidence confirming this hypothesis, but nothing definitive. Some of the Iraqis we spoke to told us that a number of their colleagues in exile had illusions about Iraq. For example, one of our interviewees told us of an exile who had left in the 1970s and refused to accept that the toll sanctions and war had taken on the people and the economy was as described by someone who left in the early 1990s. Such denial could either point to ignorance, wishful thinking, or perhaps an attempt to please foreign clients (such as the United States) by telling them what they wanted to hear. Our interviewees suggested all of the above as possible explanations.

Another question is whether the Iraqi people in turn were less connected with the exiles as a result of their physical separation and lack of interaction. The nature of the regime played a big part as well; it ruthlessly suppressed dissent and made it exceedingly difficult - if not dangerous - for exiles to stay in touch with their friends and family inside Iraq or for those in Iraq to remain in touch with dissidents abroad. The only people they could stay in contact with would have been those most trustworthy, inevitably those within their own family and tribe – both of which tended to be within their own sect. Did stronger loyalties to sect, tribe, and family result?

The Opposition in Exile – A Historical Overview

In 2003, the Iraqi political exile community largely consisted of two groups: those who had left between 1969-1982 in response to a Ba'athist crackdown on the Islamist opposition, anyone suspected of having ties or sympathies with Iran, and anyone questioning the regime; and those who left in 1991 after the failed Shia and Kurdish uprisings against the regime and the brutal crackdown that followed. In both time periods, those forced into exile were primarily

Shia, though Sunnis fled in lesser numbers as well. Even if the regime was not openly pursuing a sectarian agenda, the Islamist opposition that had begun to form in the 1950s assumed a Shia identity while Sunni Arabs continued to dominate the top leadership of the Iraqi government. As a result of Saddam's crackdown, many Shia fled to Iran, Syria, Lebanon, the Gulf, or the United States, United Kingdom and other parts of Europe to begin their decades-long exile.

A third group of Iraqi exiles were mostly secular Iraqis, Sunni and Shia Arab, who willingly left the country, often to pursue an education or employment in the West and were eventually unable or unwilling to return. There are some crucial differences between these groups of exiles, and in order to fully understand them and how they came to form the Iraqi opposition, it is necessary to review the historical origins of the individuals and parties that formed the Iraqi opposition in exile.

The Islamic Dawa Party and Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki

The oldest organization to oppose Saddam and one of the most prominent groups within the Iraqi exile community is the Islamic Dawa Party (Hizb al-Dawa al-Islamiyyah). Accounts vary on the year of Dawa's founding (1957-1959) but it was a cohesive organization in Iraq by 1959.³⁸ Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr, a prominent Shia cleric, was one of the founders as well as the intellectual guide of the Party.³⁹ The organization was intended as an Islamic alternative to secular political movements, such as the Iraqi Communist Party and the Ba'ath Party; his writings defined the meaning of an Islamic state and served as the primary source of Dawa ideology.⁴⁰ Two other clerics, Mahdi al-Hakim and Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim, sons of Grand Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim, also played a prominent role in the party's formation and

³⁸ Jabar, 2003: 96-100

³⁹ Marr, 2012: 103

⁴⁰ Rizvi, 2010: 1302-1303

development.⁴¹

As the Islamist movement in Iraq grew during the 1960s and 1970s, the communists lost influence - especially after the Ba'athist coup of 1963. The Ba'athists were overthrown later that year only to return in two 1968 coups.⁴² During the intervening years, the Dawa Party developed close relations with the clerical establishment in Najaf and established libraries in husayniyas (Shia prayer houses). Noting the significance of the Grand Ayatollah's apparent approval of such a proposal, Faleh Jabar writes:

The libraries broke off the narrow limits in which the husayniyas were formerly caged. As leading Dawa Party activists in Baghdad admit in retrospect, they brought a rich catch of new, young, energetic supporters and sympathizers. This success brought leading Dawa figures the blessings of the grand marja' in their capacity as supportive, lay-emulators on one hand, and gave them on the other hand the opportunity to build informal networks to circulate ideas, forge personal bonds, distribute party literature and mobilize the young who responded. Through these libraries, it seems, some university students were recruited, and a new inroad into the universities was opened.⁴³

The Dawa movement grew rapidly in the 1960s, but so too did Shia membership in the Ba'ath Party.⁴⁴ Young Shia were drawn to it by its secularism and promise of a new Iraqi identity which would level the playing field between the diverse ethnic and sectarian populations and provide better access to employment and education.

After the Ba'athists seized power in 1968, the new leaders – Prime Minister Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr and his kinsman Saddam Hussein – began to target the Shia movements as they focused on consolidating power and eliminating suspected and real rivals.

The regime especially suspected Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim because of his refusal to

⁴¹ Jabar, 2003: 78-97

⁴² Marr, 2012: 134-138. The first coup on July 17, 1968 brought a cadre of military officers to power, including Ba'athist General Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr. By July 30, the Ba'ath had consolidated power by marginalizing the non-Ba'athists and installing Bakr as Prime Minister and Commander in Chief. He appointed his kinsman, Saddam Hussein, his deputy on the Revolutionary Command Council and in the Party.

⁴³ Jabar, 2003: 139

⁴⁴ Marr, 2012: 127 [citing T. A. Aziz, "Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr: Shia Activism in Iraq," IJMES 25:2 (1993): 211; Ali al-Mu'min, *Sanawat al-Jamr: Musira-l-Harakat al-Islamiyya fi-l-Iraq, 1957–1986 (Years of Embers: The Journey of the Islamic Movement in Iraq, 1957–1986)* (London: Dar al-Musira, 1993), p. 68.]

condemn Iran for its challenges to Iraqi sovereignty over the Shatt al-Arab waterway and his opposition to the Ba'ath Party. He organized protests after the regime expelled Iranian students studying in Najaf and Karbala, and he issued a fatwa against Ba'ath Party membership in 1969.⁴⁵ The result was a series of escalations in which the government responded to Shia dissent by banning Shia religious processions, confiscating religious endowments, closing Islamic schools, prohibiting the reading of the Qur'an over broadcast, and arresting 'ulama, including Mahdi al-Hakim. He was released later that year and fled to Iran. Murtada al-Askari, another influential cleric and founding member of Dawa, fled to Lebanon.⁴⁶ The regime, which feared a united Islamist movement, targeted both Shia and Sunni movements; a Sunni shaykh was executed after preaching in solidarity with Ayatollah Hakim in Baghdad and Sunni Islamist organizations were among those targeted.⁴⁷

Ayatollah Hakim died in 1970, and Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei, an Iranian by birth, succeeded him as chief marja.⁴⁸ Ayatollah Khoei, a quietist in the Iraqi tradition, did not believe clerics should be involved in politics and abstained from political activity. Many of Hakim's followers chose to follow Baqr al-Sadr instead of Khoei as marja.⁴⁹ Sadr apparently had some influence with Khoei, who was also his mentor; he reportedly convinced Khoei to stand up to the regime by ordering his students to stay in Najaf despite orders from the regime for non-Iraqi students to leave the country.⁵⁰

As Sadr's activism gained a greater following throughout the 70s, the regime continued to harass, arrest, and sometimes execute Dawa activists and sympathetic ulama. In 1970 an Iran-

⁴⁵ Tripp, 2007: 195

⁴⁶ Aziz, 1993: 212

⁴⁷ Tripp, 2007: 195-196

⁴⁸ Marr, 2012: 170

⁴⁹ Aziz, 1993: 213

⁵⁰ Tripp, 2007: 196; Aziz, 1993: 212

backed plot to overthrow the Ba'athist regime was discovered; the regime response was to execute the plotters, including a number of Dawa sympathizers, and expel a number of Iranians, as well as the Iranian diplomatic corps.⁵¹ Conflict between the Shia Islamists and the regime reached a new level in 1977, when large Shia demonstrations and riots erupted during the observance of Ashura in Karbala and Najaf, which was celebrated in defiance of a government ban on the ritual marches and observances. The regime sentenced Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim to life in prison before he was released and later fled into exile. A large number of Shia scholars and activists were also forced into exile as a result of the crackdown.⁵²

In describing Dawa's growth in Iraq, Interviewee D emphasized Dawa's presence on university campuses and among the professional intellectual class. He described marches in the streets during the 1960s and 1970s in which the Dawa activists were wearing suits and holding books, and he emphasized that Dawa's intellectual appeal was a major reason for its continued influence in Iraq, particularly on university campuses.

Other interviewees also highlighted certain aspects of Dawa's appeal. Interviewee A, a self-identified secular, non-practicing Shia, expressed his admiration for Baqr al-Sadr's intellectual writings. Interviewee J professed to being a former member of Dawa, which he had joined because of its opposition to the regime; prior to that, he was a member of the Communist Party. From the non-Shia perspective, however, Dawa's presence and influence was less apparent. Interviewee N said she was unaware of Dawa's existence until she went to university in the 1980s and some of her colleagues were harassed by the regime for their affiliations with Dawa.

In the 1970's Dawa loyalists in exile established cells in universities in Lebanon and the

⁵¹ Marr, 2012: 139; Jabar, 2003: 204

⁵² Tripp, 2007: 208; Aziz, 1993: 214

Gulf.⁵³ A rival Islamist party of militants emerged in Iraq and the Gulf in this period -- the *Munazimat al-Amal al-Islamiyya* (the Islamic Action Organization, or IAO) founded in Karbala by Ayatollah Shirazi, an Iranian cleric. It, too, came to the attention of the regime, its members arrested and exiled.⁵⁴ As the threat of militant Islamists grew in 1978, Saddam Hussein reportedly called the Shah to ask what he should do about another Iranian cleric living in exile in Najaf; he complied with the Shah's suggestion that Ayatollah Ruhallah Khomeini be deported from Najaf rather than arrested.⁵⁵

With the Islamic revolution and Khomeini's triumphant return to Iran in 1979, Iraq's Shia movement gained new momentum. Ayatollah Sadr congratulated Khomeini for his victory and issued a fatwa banning membership in the Ba'ath Party. News spread that Sadr was planning to travel to Iran to celebrate the revolution, and Dawa organized demonstrations in support of Sadr. The regime allowed the demonstrations to continue for nine days, then arrested hundreds of Dawa members, including Sadr.⁵⁶

In what Phebe Marr describes as "the first popular mass movement of its kind in decades,"⁵⁷ protests and riots occurred throughout Iraq in response to Sadr's detention. Protests also erupted among the exiled Dawa and Sadr supporters in the UAE, Britain, Lebanon, and France. The regime released Sadr once again, but its response to the Dawa-led protests in Iraq was swift and merciless; by March 1980 the regime declared membership in Dawa punishable by death and had killed hundreds of Dawa members, shattering the organization's ability to function.⁵⁸ One month later, Shia militants, possibly members of IAO, attempted to assassinate

⁵³ Marr, 2012: 170

⁵⁴ Ibid. (for more on IAO, see Jabar, 2003: 216-234; for more on the Shirazi family, see Nakash, 2003: 66)

⁵⁵ Ibid.: 171. The anecdote was told to Dr. Yaphe by a senior cleric from Najaf during her trip to Baghdad in March 2014.

⁵⁶ Ibid.: 172

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.; Jabar, 2003: 233

Tariq Aziz, Deputy Prime Minister and a close associate of Saddam's. The regime arrested Sadr and his sister, who headed the women's branch of Dawa, and tortured and executed them, creating martyrs for the Dawa movement as it transitioned to an underground and exiled existence.⁵⁹

In addition to Iran, some members of Dawa fled to Lebanon and joined the Amal movement. Three Dawa members were among the 9 delegates that formed Hizballah in Lebanon in 1982.⁶⁰ Some members participated in Hizballah terrorist activities in the 1980s against Kuwait and the United States. According to Rodger Shanahan, "Support for Dawa was also strong in Kuwait, and much of the party's financial resources were located there." Bombings of the French and American Embassies in Kuwait in 1983 were blamed on Dawa; those captured and convicted of terrorism were called the "Dawa 17." Dawa, which by then had many members in exile in Iran, claimed its Kuwait branch had fallen under Tehran's control.⁶¹

Many of Iraq's future leaders fled Iraq around this time. Among them was Ibrahim al-Jaafari who fled to Iran in 1980 and then to London in 1989.⁶² He would become Prime Minister briefly in 2005. Other members worked in Damascus, such as Abd al-Anizi, who would become the head of the Baghdad Office of al-Dawa after the fall of the regime, and current prime minister Nuri al-Maliki, who headed the Damascus office.⁶³

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is the quintessential Shia exile; expelled for his active opposition to the regime, he continued participating in the opposition in exile, only to return home when the regime fell and succeed in politics. His recent biographers⁶⁴ suggest that Maliki's

⁵⁹ Marr, 2012: 173

⁶⁰ Shanahan, 2004 *Third World Quarterly*: 947

⁶¹ Shanahan, 2004 *Middle East Review of International Affairs*: 21

⁶² Shanahan, 2004 *Third World Quarterly*: 947

⁶³ Parker and Salman, 2013: 67

⁶⁴ Few English language biographies on Prime Minister Maliki appear to exist, however, Ned Parker and Raheem Salman, veteran journalists with experience reporting on Iraq, were able to chronicle his early life and rise to power

story demonstrates “the dangerous ways secular and Islamist parties, shaped and defined by an authoritarian and conspiratorial political culture, are poised to mirror the very oppressor they cast off.”⁶⁵ If true, this has clear implications for contemporary Iraq.

Maliki came from a politically oriented family; his grandfather participated in the 1920 uprising against the British while his father was a staunch Arab Nationalist. Seeing the failure of Arab nationalism under Ba’athist rule in the late 1960s, Maliki returned to his grandfather’s more Islamic values and joined the then-clandestine Dawa Party, looking for a “religious answer” to the western influence and secular nationalism emerging in the Middle East. Rather than attending the more liberal Baghdad University, Maliki attended a religious college and eventually got a job in the education department in Hilla, a city in central Iraq where he quietly preached Sadr’s teachings to family members. Following the Iranian revolution in 1979, the Iraqi regime began to crack down on Islamists, especially members of Dawa. Under suspicion, Maliki fled the country to avoid being arrested and made his way to Damascus. Back in Iraq, the government seized his family’s land and over the course of the next decade, killed at least 67 members of his family. Parker and Salman describe Sadr’s execution a year later as a turning point for the young Maliki; the regime had never killed a cleric of Sadr’s stature and the act served to harden sectarian divisions in Iraq. According to the authors, this event “implanted vengeance as a guiding principle” for Maliki and his fellow Islamists.⁶⁶

In Damascus, Maliki helped recruit and train fighters for guerilla cells in Iraq. Seeing his leadership abilities, Dawa sent him to Iran in 1981 to help run its military training camp.

Though originally “infatuated” with Khomeini's revolution, Maliki and Dawa’s relations with the

through trips to his native village - Janaga - as well as interviews with the prime minister, his family, members of the Dawa Party, and U.S. officials.

⁶⁵ Parker and Salman, 2013: 65

⁶⁶ Ibid.: 66-67

Islamic Republic deteriorated. Dawa saw itself as an Iraqi Arab Islamist movement. It would not be co-opted by Iran nor would it recognize Khomeini as its spiritual leader, causing the group to lose favor with the Iranian regime. Instead, the government in Tehran tried to recruit Dawa members into a competing organization and gave this new organization much of what it had given Dawa, including the training camp Maliki had helped run. When asked later about this period, Maliki stated that he did not “trust the Iranians for a minute.” He left Iran for Syria in the late 1980s after the regime began to crack down on Dawa members and remained there until his unceremonious return - he traveled by taxi with only two companions - to Baghdad after the fall of the Ba’athist regime in 2003. In describing these difficult years, Maliki later explained that, “I never stopped working in Iraq. I lived the suffering of the Iraqis . . . I refused any other nationality.”⁶⁷

The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq

As Faleh Jabar writes, “all Iraqi Shiite [sic] groups transferred their headquarters and the bulk of their human resources to Tehran, where they sustained a radical change in organization and ideology.”⁶⁸ The groups were also divided on the issue of *vilayet e-faqih*,⁶⁹ on who would assume leadership, and how to conduct the struggle against Saddam.⁷⁰

Unsatisfied with Dawa, Iran created *Al-Majlis al-A’la lil Thawra al-Islamiya fil Iraq* (The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, or SCIRI) under Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim in November, 1982. Hakim fled to Syria and then Iran in 1980.⁷¹ Between the attack on Tariq Aziz in 1980 and the end of the 8-year war with Iran, Baghdad had deported

⁶⁷ Ibid.: 68-69

⁶⁸ Jabar, 2003: 235

⁶⁹ The doctrine of clerical rule, especially the Supreme Guide, espoused by Ayatollah Khomeini.

⁷⁰ Jabar, 2003: 236

⁷¹ Ibid.: 238

approximately 235,000 Shia Iraqis, ostensibly for their Persian descent.⁷² Iraq entered into a full scale war with Iran later that year. Phebe Marr notes that, “this growing number of alienated, bitter, and frustrated Iraqis provided an ideal resource to be organized by the Iranians and the exiled leadership of the Iraqi Shia opposition.”⁷³

Viewed by other exiles as a “latecomer and an alien,” Hakim’s family name, network, and support from Iran helped him gain his position of leadership.⁷⁴ Hakim had created a group before SCIRI; called *Maktab al-Thawra al-Islamiya fil Iraq* (The Bureau of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq), its primary function was to provide services to Iraqi militants and exiles living in Iran. Iran transformed it into an umbrella group that would encompass Kurdish, Turkish, and Sunni Islamists in addition to the Arab Shia. The group sought direction from the Iranian leadership and found support in Ali Khamenei who, as Ayatollah Khomeini’s representative to the Higher Defense Council at the time, was also the Iranian liaison to the Iraqi opposition. He helped transform the organization into SCIRI, with Hakim as the speaker and Mahmud al-Hashimi as chairman.⁷⁵

Hakim had announced a government in exile in 1983. In response, the Iraqi regime arrested about eighty members of the Hakim family, 16 of whom eventually were executed. Three years later Hakim became chairman of SCIRI, replacing Hashimi.⁷⁶ In 1988, Saddam had his brother, Mahdi al-Hakim, assassinated in Khartoum due to his involvement with SCIRI in London.⁷⁷

By 1986, SCIRI’s military wing, the Badr Brigade, had several thousand members and

⁷² Marr, 2012: 180, 195

⁷³ Ibid.: 195

⁷⁴ Jabar, 2003: 238

⁷⁵ Ibid.: 237-238

⁷⁶ Ibid.: 238

⁷⁷ Marr, 2012: 195; Hijazi, 1988 January 24

was led by Abd al-Aziz, Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim's son. Iran used this militia to fight Iraq during the war, which ended in 1988. SCIRI also engaged in bombings, sabotage, and assassinations within Iraq against the regime.⁷⁸ The exile opposition groups did not directly take part in the 1991 uprising, but SCIRI did help Iran infiltrate some agents into southern Iraq. These agents handed out posters and signs implying that the uprising was Islamist and backed by Iran. This, according to Dr. Ali Allawi, caused the Arab regimes and the United States to withhold support for the uprising,⁷⁹ although there were a number of other reasons cited by U.S. officials for not backing the uprising. SCIRI's ties to Iran have also impeded its efforts inside of Iraq, an idea that will be revisited in later sections.

The Secularists

In the mid-1970s, the Ba'ath Party began increasing its control over the education system by placing Ba'athists among the faculty and requiring Ba'ath ideology courses as part of the university curriculum. As a result, many Iraqi intellectuals left Iraq to pursue education and work opportunities abroad.⁸⁰ Though not initially forced to leave, they felt compelled to stay in exile as the Ba'ath consolidated power. This included those like Ayad Allawi, who fell out with the regime, and Ahmed Chalabi, whose family left before the Ba'ath came to power. Both individuals will be discussed in the following sections.

Ayad Allawi and the Iraqi National Accord

Ayad Allawi is a well-known example of a secular Shia Ba'athist who left Iraq in order to pursue his education and because he felt increasingly estranged from and threatened by the regime. Born in 1945 to a prestigious Shia family that had historically been politically active in Iraq, he grew up in the wealthy, mostly Sunni Adhamiyah neighborhood of Baghdad and studied

⁷⁸ Marr, 2012: 196

⁷⁹ Allawi, 2007: 47

⁸⁰ Marr, 2012: 168

medicine at the Jesuit-run Baghdad College.⁸¹ He was an active member of the Party and was frequently arrested for his activities before it came to power in 1968.⁸² Soon after, he became disillusioned with the Party and fled to London in 1971 to avoid one of Saddam Hussein's purges within the party.⁸³ He continued his studies in London, where some exiles claim he was also keeping tabs on Iraqi students for the Ba'ath Party's intelligence apparatus. Allawi says he was working for the global Ba'athist movement rather than the Iraqi branch.⁸⁴ In 1975, he formally resigned from the Party; three years later Saddam Hussein sent an ax-wielding assassin to his house in the London suburbs. Allawi survived the attack and from that point on, began building an opposition network among Iraqis both within the Iraqi government and those living abroad. In 1990, he announced the creation of the INA, which was set up by Saudi and Western intelligence and supported by the CIA.⁸⁵ The INA soon became a rival of Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress (INC) for opposition leadership and American support.⁸⁶ In 1996, the CIA supported an INA effort to engineer a coup from within the Ba'ath Party and the officer corps, but it was penetrated by the regime and the conspirators in Baghdad were executed.⁸⁷

Ahmed Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress

Ahmed Chalabi was born in Kadhimiya, a predominantly Shia suburb of Baghdad, in 1944. He is a cousin of Ayad Allawi and uncle to Ali Allawi.⁸⁸ Before the 1958 coup that brought down the monarchy and brought Abd al-Karim Qasim to power, the Chalabis were wealthy, powerful, and well connected to the regime. This all changed after 1958, and the

⁸¹ Anderson, 2005: 5

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Allawi, 2007: 51-52

⁸⁶ Anderson, 2005: 6

⁸⁷ Marr, 2012: 253. One conspirator, retired general Muhammad Shahwani, was evacuated to the United States where he worked for the CIA. He later returned to Iraq after the fall of the regime.

⁸⁸ Anderson, 2005: 4

Chalabis fled Iraq for Jordan.⁸⁹ Ahmed went to boarding school in England and then to the United States to continue his education.⁹⁰ He received a bachelor's degree in mathematics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and earned a PhD in mathematics from the University of Chicago before becoming a faculty member at the American University in Beirut in the early 1970s.⁹¹ Following the 1958 revolution in Iraq, his family relocated its business assets to Lebanon, the UAE, and Switzerland. His family founded Petra Bank in Jordan in 1977, entrusting him with its management. Chalabi lived comfortably in Jordan and established a strong relationship with Jordan's then Crown Prince Hassan. However, the bank later collapsed and became wracked with scandal in 1989.⁹² Chalabi fled to London and was charged and convicted of bank fraud in absentia by the Jordanian government.⁹³

According to Ali Allawi, Ahmed Chalabi was active in the Iraqi opposition, working closely with Kurdish leader Mullah Mustafa Barzani and meeting with Iraqi political and religious figures in Lebanon.⁹⁴ Chalabi became prominent, however, for his leadership of the Iraqi National Congress (INC), formed in 1992. He used the INC and his University of Chicago friendships with prominent politicians and consultants in the Republican Party to forge a close relationship with the United States, which in turn elevated him to a prominent role within the Iraqi opposition. As Yossi Shain and Ariel Ahram describe, Chalabi

*. . . found a sympathetic ear in the corridors of power in Washington and ultimately in the White House as he sold his vision of an Iraq in concert with American principles, presenting himself and his movement as secular, democratic, and Western-oriented. He stressed his own Shiite roots, Western education, and liberal ideology as proof that Iraq's Shiites were secularly oriented, not fundamentalists like the Shiites of Iran.*⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Mayer, 2004

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Allawi, 2007: 41

⁹³ Ibid.: 42; Mayer, 2004

⁹⁴ Allawi, 2007: 41-42

⁹⁵ Shain and Ahram, 2003: 671

Between 1992 and the 2003 war, Chalabi received approximately \$100 million from the United States government for his political activities and intelligence gathering operations.⁹⁶ He portrayed himself as the leader of the Iraqi opposition in exile, despite his lack of any support base within Iraq itself. Jane Mayer wrote in *The New Yorker* in 2004 that, “According to a former I.N.C. member, in June, 1992, the Iraqi National Congress held one of its first organizational meetings, in Vienna; Chalabi didn’t win enough backing to qualify for a seat on the fifteen-member board. By the time attendees returned from the meeting, however, Chalabi’s name had somehow been added to the list of members.”⁹⁷

Chalabi’s relationship with the United States was enhanced by his frequent trips to the Iraqi Kurdistan region and his reports back to Washington, DC. However, he never appeared to be a serious threat to the Saddam Hussein regime. According to Robert Baer, a former CIA case officer who operated in the Kurdish region in the 1990s and met with Chalabi on several occasions, “If he was dangerous, [Saddam Hussein] could have killed him at any time. He was the perfect opposition leader.”⁹⁸ Yet he was also working very hard to undermine the regime in a very nefarious way; by forging documents. Baer described one forgery that portrayed a letter from the National Security Council requesting help from Chalabi to overthrow the regime. Baer surmised that this was meant to be a ploy to convince the Iranians to back a plot against the Saddam. Chalabi was later accused of forging evidence that Saddam had been developing weapons of mass destruction.⁹⁹

In 1995, the INC lobbied the CIA to support an INC “offensive” against Saddam’s regime. The CIA decided not to back it in favor of the INA’s coup plot. A few months after this

⁹⁶ Mayer, 2004

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

plot failed, the INC took a significant blow in 1996 when Masud Barzani, head of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) invited Saddam to send troops to Kurdistan to deal with his rival, Jalal Talabani and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).¹⁰⁰ Saddam used the opportunity to round up, torture, and kill INC supporters and other oppositionists safe havened in the north. The INC was forced to flee, and the U.S. government helped evacuate several thousand of its supporters. The INC's presence in Northern Iraq was effectively dismantled.¹⁰¹

Planning for a Post-Saddam Iraq

After the 1990-1991 Gulf War, the exiled opposition groups sought to more actively coordinate with one another through a number of conferences and forums in the decade prior to the U.S. invasion in 2003. In meetings in Europe, their leaders laid out group expectations and preliminary plans for governing a post-Saddam Iraq. Once again, however, cleavages between opposition groups and leadership rivalries impeded effective cooperation. This lack of unity between dissident factions would continue through the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and after the exiles returned to Baghdad.

The Joint Action Committee

In 1990, Syria pushed for the organization of the Joint Action Committee, which included SCIRI and the Dawa party. By December 1990, it had expanded to include Ayad Allawi's Iraqi INA, former Ba'athist Saleh Omar al-Ali, and Saad Salih Jabr's London based Free Iraq Council.¹⁰² In March 1991, around 300 delegates from 20 opposition groups, including secular and Islamist as well as Arabs and Kurds, met in Beirut. Euphoric over Saddam Hussein's defeat in the first Gulf War, the groups began to plan for a post-Saddam provisional government.

¹⁰⁰ Both the KDP and the PUK would join the INC and fight to defeat Saddam in 2003.

¹⁰¹ Allawi, 2007: 53

¹⁰² Allawi, 2007: 42-43

However, disunity and competition plagued the group as factions disagreed over representation and voting rights within the organization. According to Michael Gunter, the opposition collectively lacked “a leadership capable of exploiting opportunities, of controlling the means and methods leading to recognizing the rights of the uprising and the opposition, and of representing the opposition before the UN organizations and decision makers.” In his memoir *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, Hamid Bayati, the SCIRI representative and later UN ambassador, described the conference as “disorganized and done in haste.”¹⁰³ According to him, every major group at the conference believed it would lead Iraq once Saddam fell.¹⁰⁴

Vienna and Salahuddin Conferences, 1992

In June 1992, the opposition regrouped in Vienna for a second conference. Unlike the meeting in Beirut a year earlier, Dawa and SCIRI did not fully take part in the proceedings. Apparently suspicious of Western influence over the conference, both groups sent only observers to Austria. The Vienna conference is significant for laying the framework for the INC. However, the parties present recognized the importance of including groups like Dawa and ISCI and plans were made to meet again to expand the organization so as to encompass more of the opposition.

The follow-up to Vienna took place in October in Salahuddin, a city in the Kurdish region of Iraq. The Salahuddin conference was notable for its inclusion of the Islamist parties - SCIRI and Dawa.¹⁰⁵ The conference included 234 delegates who reportedly represented as many as 90 percent of Iraqi opposition groups. Under the protection of the Kurds and the post-Gulf War no-fly zone, the opposition was able to meet on Iraqi soil for the first time to create the basic institutions that would constitute the INC. A three-man presidential council was created with

¹⁰³ Bayati, 2011: Loc. 547 of 7372 (Ch. 1)

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Allawi, 2007: 53

representatives from Iraq's three main groups: Muhammad Bahr al-Ulum represented Shia Arab factions, Major General Hassan Mustafa Naqib the Sunni Arabs, and Masud Barzani the Kurds. A 26 member cabinet-like executive council was also formed and Ahmed Chalabi was chosen to lead. According to Michael Gunter, this in effect made Chalabi "the prime minister of the opposition's projected government in exile."¹⁰⁶ It also allocated seats formulaically, based on sect, ethnicity, and ideology. In 1995, Dawa and other groups pulled out of the INC.¹⁰⁷

1998 Iraq Liberation Act

Throughout the 1990s, the United States government provided both covert and overt support to the Iraqi opposition - principally the INC and INA - although the level of support and American confidence in the opposition ebbed and flowed in the decade. In October 1998, a Republican Congress, frustrated by the Clinton Administration's unwillingness to take stronger action against Saddam, passed the Iraq Liberation Act. The legislation authorized the Administration to provide an additional \$97 million in equipment and arms to opposition groups that could demonstrate broad-based support as well as support for democratic principles. The Iraqi Liberation Act also stipulated that U.S. airpower would support any opposition force that could capture area of southern and western Iraqi and encourage mass defections from the Iraqi military.¹⁰⁸ The two major Kurdish parties, the INC, INA, and SCIRI were designated to receive funding. SCIRI, however, refused to take the money.¹⁰⁹

Declaration of the Shia of Iraq, 2002

Between 2001 and 2002, Iraqi Shia of various backgrounds convened a series of conferences in London. The goal of these meetings was to discuss the issue of sectarianism in

¹⁰⁶ Gunter, 1999: 139-140

¹⁰⁷ Allawi, 2007: 53

¹⁰⁸ Gunter, 1999: 160

¹⁰⁹ Marr, 2012: 254

Iraq and how to achieve justice in Iraq, “now and in the future.” It particularly focused on the systemic problem of anti-Shia bias in Iraqi governance going as far back as the 1920s. The result of these meetings was the “Declaration of the Shia of Iraq,” which recommended a number of measures to address the problem of anti-Shiism in Iraq. It was signed by nearly 200 participants, including Mowaffaq al-Rubaie (Dawa Party member and former Iraqi National Security Advisor in post-Saddam Iraq) and Ali Allawi.¹¹⁰ A number of the Iraqis interviewed for this research mentioned the Declaration as a significant document that, in many ways, demonstrated the nature of sectarian thinking held by many Shia Iraqis among the exile community prior to the U.S. invasion. Although it recognized the injustice as coming from the government rather than the Sunni community at large, the document sought to address an injustice against the Shia of Iraq.

The declaration is notable for its unity in voice and pan-Iraqi Shia character; as the introduction on the website states, “The ideas expressed at these meetings were strictly those of the participants in their individual capacities, even though a number of them were attached to specific political groups or ideational currents.”¹¹¹ Rejecting the Lebanese model of institutionalized sectarianism in government, the Declaration called for “the complete banishment of official sectarianism from any future political construct, and its replacement by a contract premised on a broad and patriotic definition of citizenship that is far removed from sectarian calculations and divisions... not some bogus solution based on the division of the spoils according to demographic formulae.”¹¹² It elaborated on three primary goals: “the abolition of dictatorship and its replacement with democracy; the abolition of ethnic discrimination and its replacement with a federal structure for Kurdistan; and the abolition of the policy of

¹¹⁰ “Declaration of the Shia of Iraq.” July, 2002. “Annex 2.” The list is only partial, but includes 195 names.

¹¹¹ “Declaration of the Shia of Iraq.” July, 2002. “Introduction.”

¹¹² “Declaration of the Shia of Iraq.” July, 2002. Section 6: “The Politics of Sectarianism.”

discrimination against the Shia.”¹¹³ The Declaration then outlined in detail the steps that should be followed to carry out these three basic goals.

The Declaration of the Shia of Iraq demonstrates that many Shia exiles saw institutional discrimination from the Iraqi state against the Shia as a significant problem. However, they also recognized the need to eliminate all sectarianism, whether against the Shia or the Sunnis, and they recognized the need for a solution that did not alienate the Sunni community at large.

In practice, however, the declaration was used as another sectarian device. Interviewee N – an Iraqi female researcher now with a non-profit NGO who is a secular non-Shia – recalls a meeting at the White House in which non-Shia Iraqis were asked to wait outside the room while the Shia parties presented the declaration to White House officials. Interviewee G also noted that the document is now seen as a pre-2003 example of the polarization of sectarian identity, which has had a clear role in shaping post 2003 politics.

Future of Iraq Project

Shortly after the September 11th attacks, the State Department began planning for a post-Saddam Iraq and the inevitable period of transition that would follow regime change. Directed by State Department official Thomas Warrick, the Future of Iraq Project brought together 200 Iraqi exiles - engineers, lawyers, businessmen, doctors, and other experts - in 17 working groups on nation-building topics, including transparency and anti-corruption, oil and energy, defense, transitional justice, democratic principles and procedures, and civil society capacity building.¹¹⁴ Through 33 meetings between July 2002 and April 2003, the Future of Iraq Project produced a 1,200 page, 13-volume report containing facts, predictions, strategies, and recommendations on a

¹¹³ “Declaration of the Shia of Iraq.” July, 2002. Section 9: “What do the Iraqi Shia Want?”

¹¹⁴ The full list of workings groups is: public health and humanitarian needs, transparency and anti-corruption, oil and energy, defense policy and institutions, transitional justice, democratic principles and procedures, local government, civil society capacity building, education, free media, water, agriculture and environment and economy and infrastructure.

number of complex, critical issues. However, due in large part to disagreements between the State Department and the Department of Defense as to the nature of post-war reconstruction and transition in Iraq, the report and its findings were largely ignored.¹¹⁵ Regardless, the Future of Iraq Project provides useful insight into the expectations of the Iraqi exiles that participated.

Two Iraqis interviewed for this research served on working groups for the project. One in particular, Interviewee E, shared his experiences serving on the Working Group on Transitional Justice. He described meetings in Washington, DC and Europe where the group spoke with experts from the United Nations and countries like South Africa that had gone through transitional justice periods. Topics discussed included human rights, accountability, governance, judicial independence, and reconciliation – all based around the concept of equality under the rule of law. They also considered how members of the Ba’ath Party would be reintegrated into the “new” Iraqi society. He acknowledged, however, that the group’s recommendations, even though they were adopted by the State Department, were for the most part ignored by both the US Department of Defense during reconstruction and the early, Iraq-led governments. Interviewee E also pointed to a key challenge faced by the exiles who worked on the Future of Iraq Project: their inability, given the nature of their existence in exile, to fully comprehend the changes that had taken place in Iraq since they left, and the impact this could have on the applicability of their recommendations. This concept will be elaborated on in a later section.

The Indigenous Opposition: The Sadrist Movement

Thus far, the evolution of Shia opposition groups in exile has been the predominant

¹¹⁵ "New State Department Releases on the "Future of Iraq" Project." The National Security Archive, 1 Sept. 2006. Web.

focus. However, it is important to note that while opposition activity in Iraq was severely restricted and highly dangerous for those involved, there were actors who remained inside Iraq who would seek to challenge the exile opposition's aspirations to political power in a post-Saddam Iraq. One figure who rose to prominence in the last decade is Muqtada al-Sadr.

The emergence of Muqtada al-Sadr soon after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime surprised many observers, exiles, and even some Iraqis. As the International Crisis Group noted in 2006:

*The most puzzling aspect of Muqtada's ascent is that he possesses none of the more obvious criteria of political success and little that can account for the existence and resilience of his social base. Although coming from a prominent family, he is neither particularly charismatic nor a particularly adept speaker. He does not enjoy the backing of a party apparatus. He has few religious credentials. By most accounts, even his material assets are scanty: by and large, he is excluded from the financial networks controlled by the Shi'ite clerical class and is not truly aligned with any foreign sponsor, receiving at best limited material support from Iran.*¹¹⁶

One of the central arguments of this paper is that the indigenous origin of a movement or party has a significant role in its success. The rise of Muqtada al-Sadr demonstrates this point.

Saddam Hussein's ruthless pursuit of those who opposed him was highly successful in disrupting any meaningful indigenous opposition; any leaders who defied Saddam and showed the potential to lead a movement against him were arrested or killed. One prominent example was Mohammad Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr who was a cleric in Saddam City, a southern suburb of Baghdad home to nearly 2 million mostly poor Shia. He was a cousin of Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr and the father of Muqtada al-Sadr. Following Grand Ayatollah al-Khoei's death in 1992, Saddam supported the rise of Sadiq al-Sadr as a marja' in hope of countering the influence of Persian clerics, especially Khoei's successor, Ayatollah Ali Sistani, who was born in Iran.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ International Crisis Group, 2006: i

¹¹⁷ Allawi, 2007: 54, 207

Assuming it could control him, the regime released Sadiq al-Sadr from house arrest in 1993.¹¹⁸

In contrast to Ayatollahs Khomeini and Khatami, Sadiq al-Sadr promoted an activist Islamist agenda, although he stopped short of endorsing Khomeini's principle of the rule of the supreme jurist over all Muslims. Through charitable works, political activism, and reconstitution of Friday prayers and other banned Shia rituals, Sadiq al-Sadr built a large following, especially among poor Shia.¹¹⁹ By 1999, he had become an outspoken opponent of the regime. Sadr's assassination in 1999, along with two of his sons, galvanized the movement. Muqtada al-Sadr, his only surviving son, remained under house arrest until the regime fell four years later.¹²⁰

According to Ali Allawi, the exile opposition did not fully comprehend the importance of the Sadrist movement. When riots and protests erupted following Sadiq al-Sadr's assassination, the exile community only belatedly realized the extent of support that he attracted.¹²¹ With the fall of the regime, Muqtada al-Sadr immediately drew on the popularity of his father and the legacy of his family to build his own base of support. Picking up where his father left off, he immediately took over schools, hospitals and other facilities in the southern suburb of Baghdad, filling the void left by the regime's collapse and the more quietist or passive clerics like Ayatollah Khatami. For poor Shia who believed the exile community had abandoned them to the struggle against Saddam, this was a void only Muqtada could fill.

Perspectives among the interviewees varied on the reasons for the Sadrist movement's immediate success, but tended to portray it in a negative light. Interviewee J saw the movement as one that does not appeal to the higher educated (they went to the Fadliah, or Virtue, Party instead), but he acknowledged its mass appeal across the lower class. Interviewee C attributed

¹¹⁸ Marr, 2012: 249

¹¹⁹ Allawi, 2007: 58

¹²⁰ Jabar, 2003: 24

¹²¹ Allawi, 2007: 60

the Sadrists initially poor showing in the ICG and the Transitional Government to the fact that it was not organized at first. Interviewee D agreed wholeheartedly when asked if the Sadrist movement was a direct result of a “prison mentality” he described having developed under Saddam’s regime. He described the Sadrists as a “thuggish and brutish” movement that reflected the impact of sanctions and the police state on the Iraqi psyche. Interviewee B, however, saw it as simply an indigenous group competing for power and resources in the same way as ISCI or Dawa. But he also noted that the Sadrists sought revenge against the former regime just as much, if not more, than the returning exile parties. Interviewee G also noted the “negative” impact of the Sadrist movement, but acknowledged that they were frozen out of the political process by the returning exiles. He claimed there is still an unwritten agreement among the exiles to deny the Sadrists any positions in the security ministries. In summary, the interviewees understood the appeal of the Sadrist movement as a grassroots but violent group that competes with the returning exiles, yet shares the goal of revenge against the former regime.

Exiles in Post-2003 Iraqi Politics

Following the U.S. invasion and overthrow of Saddam Hussein, Iraqi exiles flooded back into the country. They arrived both in organized political parties and as independent actors looking to carve out some political space. Some arrived with clear political agendas and aspirations, while others wanted to find ways to use their expertise to help their country in any way they could. While some exiles went on to hold positions in the highest echelons of the new Iraqi government, others, either by choice or necessity, failed to reestablish themselves permanently in post-2003 Iraq. The following section will look at the exiles’ involvement in Iraqi politics, some of the challenges they had to confront, and some of the factors that

contributed to their relative success or failure in Iraqi politics.

Early Representation in Politics

The returning exiles' influence over Iraqi politics began in the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) and in the first elected government in 2005. In a 2006 report for the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Phebe Marr states that the most significant feature of Iraq's new political leadership was the prevalence of exiles (whom she refers to as "outsiders"). Of the "insiders" who played a role, this group was split between Kurds from northern Iraq and the Sunni Arabs.¹²²

The CPA appointed 25 members to the IGC. Members were selected largely on the basis of a sectarian quota system designed to take into consideration Iraq's ethno-sectarian make up. In terms of political party affiliation, the CPA looked to include a wide spectrum of parties but gave an advantage to more secular-leaning parties.¹²³ The council included thirteen Shia Arabs (predominantly former exiles), five Sunni Arabs, five Kurds, one Turkoman, and one Assyrian Christian. In June 2004, Ayad Allawi was named Prime Minister of the last appointed Iraqi government. As with the IGC, advantage was given to secular rather than Islamist leaders; Shia Islamists were only given two top cabinet posts, including Dawa's Ibrahim Jaafari, who served as one of the two vice presidents.¹²⁴

In December 2005, Iraq held its first election for a permanent parliament. According to Marr, the results were marked by a high degree of turnover relative to the previous transitional government, with only 40 percent of ministry leaders elected having served in a previous government. Again, the government was dominated by former exiles while the "insiders"

¹²² Marr, 2006: 8

¹²³ Marr, 2012: 272

¹²⁴ Marr, 2012: 283

elected were predominantly Kurds from the north.¹²⁵ In terms of the most important cabinet positions, former exiles secured eleven out of the thirteen top positions. Specifically for the Shia exiles, this included, the prime minister (Ibrahim al-Ja'fari/Dawa), vice president (Adil Abd al-Mahdi/SCIRI), deputy prime minister (Ahmad Chalabi/INC), and minister of interior (Bayan Jabr/SCIRI). In terms of other key positions, Jalal Talabani – a Kurd – became president while the Sunnis were given the second of two vice president posts and the Ministry of Defense and a Sunni Arab was elected speaker of parliament. Some insiders, such as the Sadrists, managed to gain seats in the cabinet, but they were not selected to lead any of the important ministries.¹²⁶

The following table demonstrates the breakdown of insiders versus outsiders and political party affiliation in the IGC and the 2005 elected government.¹²⁷

Insiders versus Outsiders	IGC (2003)	Elected Government (January 2005)
Insiders	28% (14)	32% (12)
Insiders in Northern Free Zone	18% (9)	29% (11)
Outsiders (Exiles)	38% (19)	37% (14)
Unknown	16% (8)	3% (1)
Political Parties	IGC (2003)	Elected Government (January 2005)
Membership in Parties	66% (33)	67% (24)
Centrist Parties	30% (15)	3% (1)
Religio-political Parties	22% (11)	36% (13)
Kurdish Parties	14% (7)	28% (10)
Independents	12% (6)	19% (7)
Unknown	22% (11)	14% (5)

¹²⁵ Marr, 2006: 10-11

¹²⁶ Marr, 2012: 291

¹²⁷ Table is originally from Marr, Phebe. *Who Are Iraq's New Leaders? What Do They Want?* Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2006: 8, with minor modification in formatting.

There are two additional points to be taken from this table. First is the electoral success of Kurdish parties, who successfully obtain a larger share of positions relative to their demographic size. The second important point is the steep drop off of centrist, secular parties like Allawi's INA, which were virtually non-existent in the new government. Instead, Shia religious parties, led by former exiles, came to dominate the political landscape.¹²⁸ This culminated with the rise of Iraq's current Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki, who replaced Jaafari as prime minister in 2006. Many of these same actors and parties continue to exert the most influence over Iraqi politics.

Divisions Among the Exile Community

Interviewees were fairly consistent in describing the divisions among the exile community, but there were some interesting variations as well. While the divisions they described roughly lined up with "Islamist versus secularist," many of them felt it was even more complicated than that. Four of the eleven interviewees in exile before the war mentioned a generation gap and the difference between the Iraqis who left in the 1970s to early 1980s, and those who left in the aftermath of the failed 1991 uprising. Interviewee A, who left Iraq in the mid 1970s to pursue an education, argued that there were three groups of exiles: 1) those who left prior to the late 1970s for education or business purposes and tended to be secular and technocratic; 2) those who left in the 1970s and early 1980s to escape a crackdown on those belonging to or sympathetic with Islamist opposition groups; and 3) those who left in 1991, mostly poor refugees with a variety of ideological backgrounds.

This exile argued that the different backgrounds of these individuals had an impact on what they did while living outside Iraq. Those who left of their own will and studied or worked in the West had become well off by the time Saddam was removed from power. They were reluctant to leave their comfortable lives and return to Iraq. Interviewee C offered a similar

¹²⁸ Marr, 2006: 12

sentiment; he had grown up in the UK, returned to Iraq between 2008-2010, but left again. He wanted to return to Iraq but also felt he could not cut his ties from where he grew up. Most interviewees agreed that the length of time away from Iraq and when they left were important factors that shaped the exiles' views.

The Role of Political Parties

Most interviewees agreed that membership in a political party is an important component of whether or not an exile is able to gain influence and political power in post-Saddam Iraq. This was in distinct contrast to the difficulty that secular and independent individuals face when trying to secure a place in government or politics. Interviewee F explained that without the political and financial backing party membership can provide, there is little seculars and liberals can achieve. Interviewee M pointed out that many independents who cannot find space to run are forced to run as an independent within a political party. While this may be described as an attempt to change the system from within, given the restricted leadership structures of political parties, this idea appears counterintuitive to independent Iraqi political-hopefuls' goals.

Interviewee J also noted that there is little space for non-party members who must look for small windows in which to work. He pointed out that many jobs are blocked-off for political parties; one can only get these jobs based on party membership, not based on experience, a clear overlap with the theme of corruption and nepotism that will be addressed in the next section.

On the issue of secular versus Islamist political parties, Interviewee B noted that secularism tends to have a negative connotation in Iraqi society and does not appeal to many voters. Thus, secular parties have been unable to establish a strong support base. He also noted that while Islamist parties are not generally conciliatory, they are likely to unify to prevent non-Islamist parties from succeeding politically. Referring to Iraqi history, he explained that during

the various secular governments of the 1950s and 1960s, Islamists were not allowed to compete politically, which allowed them to garner popular support from a dissatisfied populous, a support they were able to maintain. However, he stated that some Islamist parties are now losing support as they still have not delivered services after being in power for eight years, yet he added that Iraqis are still more likely to switch their vote from one Islamist party to another rather than support a secular party. He identified some technocratic members of the Iraqi government, chiefly Deputy Prime Minister for Energy Hussain al-Shahristani, but stated that political conditions on the ground are not conducive for a secular, technocratic government.

The story of Interviewee F in particular, a secular Shia who is a former activist and politician now living in London, reflects these conclusions. He returned to Iraq in 2003 after spending two decades in exile. Though he received offers to join the government on more than one occasion, he turned them down. Instead, he tried to remain an independent intellectual and established a pro-democracy NGO that did not have ties to any political party. He now admits this decision to remain independent may have been a mistake. Unable to build a base of support in Iraq and feeling threatened by the Iraqi government, this individual, clearly an example of an unsuccessful political exile, now lives in exile again.

Interviewees B and J also noted the difficulty in cultivating non-exile political leaders. Interviewee B explained that while there are some non-exiles gaining political influence on the local level, the decision makers in Iraq's political parties are still the exiles. Interviewee G also noted that the United States originally wanted a longer occupation period to provide the internal opposition – both Shia and Sunni – with time to grow like the external opposition had done while in exile. However, given the nature of the former regime, any elements of the internal opposition had too much ground to pick up. This allowed the exiles to gain comparatively more political

power.

Some interviewees questioned the strength of Iraq's political parties and whether the success of parties may have more to do with the personality of the leader rather than the party as a whole. Interviewee J stated that he did not see Dawa as a political party. Instead, he saw a private organization and asked: if you remove the head of the party, would the organization still exist as a political party? He noted that even if MPs change, the party will remain the same unless its leadership changes. Interviewee A pointed out that Arab and Muslim culture is very much people and leader oriented, which supports the idea that a political party is only as strong as its leader. Interviewee F opined that this emphasis on what he called "one man shows" in political parties does not bode well for Iraq's democratic prospects.

Factors in Political Success and Failure of Political Parties

Interviewees identified a number of factors that point to the success or failure of political parties. While some described these traits more broadly, others pointed specifically to success of the Dawa Party and its ability to gain political power, especially early on in Iraq's new political development. These factors included having: a pre-existing organization or network, Iraqi roots, the perceived independence from foreign influence, and legitimacy as opposition to the former regime.

Just as it was difficult for independent actors to carve out political space, numerous interviewees explained that political parties tended to fare better if they had a robust pre-existing organization and network. For instance, Interviewee C noted that since Dawa was an older party, it had more organizational structures compared to a Sadrist movement, which had grassroots support, but was less organized.

The perception that an opposition group had Iraqi roots was also important. Of the major

exile opposition parties highlighted above – Dawa, SCIRI/ISCI, INC, INA – Dawa had the distinct advantage of being the only group founded indigenously on Iraqi soil. Interviewee C noted that while it was a challenge to show that Dawa was still part of the fabric of Iraq after decades in exile, the essence of Dawa remained in Iraq even if the vast majority of the party lived in exile. Interviewee D elaborated that even while in exile, Dawa’s influence existed “informally” in Iraqi society, especially on university campuses where Dawa built a lot of its support prior to Saddam’s crackdown.

Having spent decades living outside Iraq, all exile opposition groups had ties to foreign countries. However, a group’s ability to portray themselves as independent once back in Iraq appears to be a contrasting factor to some group’s relative success. Interviewee C attributed Dawa’s ability to secure top positions, including the premiership, to the perception that the party had less obvious ties to Iran. Additionally, he noted that while Dawa had ties to the west, it helped that they did not support the 2003 invasion of Iraq and, as he perceived, built a relationship with the United States only out of circumstance. In contrast, Interviewees A and G noted that while ISCI had a strong presence in the appointed governments and even though it had the necessary legacy, legitimacy, organizational network and financial resources, its candidates fared less well in the 2005 elections, in part due to their especially close relationship to Iran. In regards to opposition groups with strong ties to the United States, such as the INC, Interviewee N noted that many local Iraqis associated these ties to a close relationship with the U.S. military, and this hurt their credibility.

Though far from unanimous, a number of interviewees also placed a high premium on an opposition group’s ability to portray itself as the legitimate opposition to Saddam Hussein. Here again, interviewees pointed primarily to the Dawa Party. As previously mentioned, Interviewee

J joined the party because of its stance against the regime. Interviewee D noted that opposition to the regime was a part of the Dawa mindset; people were proud to be a part of it because of its opposition to the regime. Interviewee C also noted that Dawa continued its struggle against Saddam, even in exile.

How Exiles Perceived Iraq

When discussing their perceptions of Iraq before 2003, their expectations upon return, and the reality they faced when they returned, interviewees almost always spoke of their perceptions of Iraq from a collective “we” point of view. In doing so, they lamented the false expectations they and their compatriots held. Nearly all noted their surprise at discovering the true toll that war and sanctions had taken on Iraqis in terms of income, education, and collective psyche. In explaining why exiles largely failed to take into account these dramatic changes, Interviewee E noted that under Saddam, it was nearly impossible for exiles to contact their family in Iraq for fear they would be punished by the regime if caught. He spoke from experience; after he fled the country due to an arrest warrant, his family was interrogated.

Some interviewees described an Iraqi society that had been traumatized by decades of existence under the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein. They always placed an emphasis on the sanctions during the 1990s, although none of them mentioned who was most to blame - Saddam or the United States.¹²⁹

The secular Shia exiles often mentioned that they or their colleagues held high expectations regarding their ability to implement the practices of governance and administration that they had observed in the West. They were unprepared for the “mentality” of the Iraqi people. The Dawa sympathizers, Interviewees C and D, also mentioned their surprise and

¹²⁹ We did not ask who they blamed. Only later did we realize the consistent omission of who they thought was most responsible for the devastating impact of sanctions on Iraqis. A few faulted the United States for its failure to back the 1991 uprising against Saddam Hussein as President George H.W. Bush had promised.

dismay at the conditions of Iraq as a result of the sanctions. However, they dismissed the idea that Dawa was unprepared to govern, arguing that Dawa's roots in Iraq and familiarity among Iraqis allowed the party a seamless return. On the other hand, many of the secularists found they did not have a viable support base for their secular platforms.

How Iraqis Perceived Returning Exiles

Most of the interviewees said that the Iraqis were suspicious of those returning from exile. Interviewee B, who returned from Iran in 2003 without political affiliation, said this suspicion was immediate. He felt that the Iraqis did not see the exiles as representative of their interests. A secular Shia Iraqi mentioned that the Iraqis tended to see the returning exiles as one group.

Resentment toward returning exiles was another recurring idea expressed by interviewees. Interviewees C and J noted that both inside government and the private sector, local Iraqis felt the returning exiles were coming to take their job. They both also explained that because many of the wealthier exiles retained foreign passports from their host countries, local Iraqis resented their ability to leave the country whenever they wanted, especially when the conditions in Iraq became more dangerous. Interviewee J also noted disappointment on the part of local Iraqis and their perception that returning exiles – especially those from the West – did not use their experiences outside of Iraq to improve the country's services once they returned.

Perception of the Exile's Impact

This section considers a number of chronic challenges present in post-2003 Iraq. While it may not be possible to wholly blame the returning exiles for these issues, existing literature and the interviews compiled for this paper seem to signal that the returning exiles were unable to

mitigate preexisting problems and, in some cases, may have made the situation worse.

Interviewees' views on the returning Iraqi exile community's impact varied most regarding which groups sought power and which groups sought to help the country. Not surprisingly, this corresponded with their political views or the circumstances of their current state of exile. For example, the two Shia that were sympathetic to Dawa (Interviewees C and D) pointed to the Party's clean record in terms of corruption, and its independence from foreign influence. Those that expressed estrangement from the current Government of Iraq – particularly Interviewees F and I, who are currently unable to return to Iraq for political reasons told us that the Dawa Party was nepotistic, corrupt, and did not bring in the right people to govern. They pointed to Prime Minister Maliki in particular and argued he was only interested in staying in power. They also felt that the country was falling under the influence of Iran.

Sectarianism

The amplification of sectarian tensions, according to numerous interviewees, began fairly early, although it is important to note that the sectarianism in Iraq's political process existed long before the events of 2003. The increase of "sectarian self-identification" began during the sanctions era for a variety of social, economic, and political reasons, including economic hardship, the retreat of the state, and the further marginalization of the Shia community. As a result, by 2003, "the grounds for sectarian politics were already in place." The situation, however, was exacerbated by the returning exiles who sought to fill the political vacuum caused by the removal of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party¹³⁰

The returning Shia opposition, for a number of reasons, appeared most inclined towards

¹³⁰ Haddad, 2011: 115, 145

sectarian politics. According to Fanar Haddad,¹³¹

*The Iraqi Shia opposition in exile was so traumatized by what it regarded as sectarian discrimination and so focused on the sorrows of their group that their overriding ambitions were a mixture of righting sectarian wrongs, asserting the Shias' majority status and ensuring that Iraqis would never again be victim to sectarian discrimination.*¹³²

However, placing such a strong emphasis on “sectarian victimhood” and correcting “sectarian wrongs” only galvanized sectarian rhetoric in politics. This gave Shia parties an advantage over Sunni groups who had never had to organize along sectarian lines; under Saddam, their group identity was largely tied to the state. Further, even if the Shia opposition groups may not have been inherently anti-Sunni, by their very nature their goals and ambitions are based around Shia interests. This in turn served to amplify Sunni perceptions of their exclusion from the new Iraqi state.¹³³

Politically, many interviewees – in agreement with much of the literature – cited the establishment of the IGC as strengthening divisions since its membership was partially determined based on a sectarian and ethnic quota. Interviewee A accused political parties of “selling” sectarianism; for example, Shia parties warned their members that if they don’t vote for a Shia, Sunnis would regain power. Similarly, Interviewee M noted that divisions among political parties play a role in exploiting sectarianism, as there is an emphasis on sticking with one’s group for money, power, and protection.

In describing a recent trip back to Iraq, Interviewee G described the country’s sectarian identity as increasingly “in your face.” He noted that Shia flags and symbols can now be found on military vehicles and displayed by soldiers. This used to be common only around Shia areas, but now the sectarian symbols are hard to avoid. Politically, he also discussed the increase in

¹³¹ Fanar Haddad is a Research Fellow at the Middle East Institute at the National University of Singapore.

¹³² Haddad, 2011: 115, 148

¹³³ Ibid.: 115, 148-149

intra-sectarian disagreement. He noted that while in previous elections many Shia parties ran on a single ticket or as part of a coalition, in 2014 all are running separately. While previously, a voter's choice could largely be along sectarian lines, this year it is much harder since they have multiple candidates and coalitions representing the same sect. He considered this a healthy dynamic, as voters' choices may be more political than sectarian.

A number of interviewees, particularly Interviewee I, lamented that Iraqi nationalism has suffered, noting as an example that many Iraqis now primarily identify themselves as Shia, Sunni, or Kurd, whereas before they would identify themselves as Iraqi. This decreasing sense of nationalism, like increased sectarianism, was also a byproduct of the sanctions era as the state began to lose its ability to support a “unifying national identity.”¹³⁴ As Interviewee F phrased it more generally, “religion in a divided country is an element of division.” Interviewee L called religion in party politics “self-destructive,” explaining that when a leader rules in the name of religion, he makes anyone who does not practice that same religion second-class citizens. He also attributed the weakening sense of Iraqi citizenship to the fact that many people work for their political party and not for the state.

While some interviewees went as far as to insinuate that Iraqi nationalism has become non-existent, Interviewee G was more optimistic. While he acknowledged that a broader national identity has suffered in recent years, he asserted that it is a “testament itself to Iraqi nationalism” that in 2014, Iraq remains one state, despite its tumultuous past. He also provided examples of a number of cross-sectarian interactions that provide some optimism. One example, which he called “football diplomacy”, involved the Iraqi national soccer team all praying together – Shia, Sunni, and Christian – following a victory. He also described Sunni protesters from Ramadi donating blood to help the bombing victims after a series of bombings in Shia areas of Baghdad

¹³⁴ Ibid.: 145

during March 2014.

Transitional Justice

Transitional justice is defined as, “a set of policy interventions designed to bring justice, disclose truth, and promote reconciliation in order to foster peace and establish democracy in the aftermath of political conflicts and authoritarian regimes.”¹³⁵ When there is a regime change, particularly in cases like Iraq where the regime change involves the overthrow of an authoritarian regime, some form of transitional justice is necessary for a complete and healthy transition. Transitional justice measures often fall into three categories: reparation, retribution, and reconciliation. Reparation can involve financial compensation and truth telling, which can provide victims with an avenue to articulate their experiences while retribution aims to punish transgressors by removing them from social and political positions or through criminal trials. Reconciliation aims to restore the civil relationship between the disparate individuals and groups and repair a society's social fabric.¹³⁶ If these measures are implemented successfully they can mitigate previous inequalities and reduce retributive desires rather than leading to further retaliation on the part of the victims against their transgressors. In addition to these measures, effective transitional justice relies on reestablishing rule of law during the transitional period.¹³⁷ Over the last decade, Iraq has struggled on all of these fronts.

Col. Richard Hatch¹³⁸ argues that, “restoring the concept of justice based on the rule of law is a precondition for a stable, secure, economically sound, and democratic post-Saddam Iraq.”¹³⁹ However, as Parker and Salman explain, it is “difficult to lead the transition to

¹³⁵ David and Choi, 2009: 161-162

¹³⁶ Ibid.: 165-168

¹³⁷ Bell, Campbell, and Ni Aolain, 2004: 305

¹³⁸ Col. Richard Hatch served two tours in Iraq. During his second tour from 2004-2005, he served as staff judge advocate for Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I), which was in charge of developing and training Iraq's security ministries.

¹³⁹ Hatch, 2005: 103

democracy while still attempting to end a period of vendettas.”¹⁴⁰ This points to one of the largest criticisms of transitional justice in Iraq: the emphasis on retribution rather than reconciliation. The hallmark of Iraq’s attempts at transitional justice largely focuses on the decision to purge the public sector and the army of members of the Ba’ath Party and Saddam loyalists, an exercise that came to be known as de-Ba’athification.

In one of his first acts as Administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), L. Paul Bremer ordered the dissolution of the Ba’ath Party through CPA Order Number 1. Under this edict, Iraqis in the top four levels of the Party - approximately 30,000-50,000 individuals - were removed from public sector jobs. A week later, Bremer issued CPA Order Number 2, which disbanded the Iraqi army, intelligence and security services, leaving approximately 450,000 armed and trained Iraqis unemployed.¹⁴¹

Given the violence and human rights abuses perpetrated against Iraqis by the former regime, removing high-ranking members of the Ba’ath Party as well elements of the Iraqi security services involved in these crimes was a necessary retributive measure. However, such sweeping edicts failed to consider the fact that the majority of party members did not commit grave human rights nor were they necessarily wedded to Ba’athist ideology.¹⁴² For many – including 10,000-15,000 schoolteachers who lost their jobs under de-Ba’athification – party membership was necessary to obtain certain educational and professional opportunities and higher salaries.¹⁴³ Removing such a wide swath of the public sector also meant lost professionals with skills that the CPA and the provisional government would have to replace. Approaching de-Ba’athification from a rank rather than conduct approach and removing virtually all trained

¹⁴⁰ Parker and Salman, 2013: 65

¹⁴¹ Munson, 2009: 118-120

¹⁴² Hatch, 2005: 103-104

¹⁴³ Munson, 2009: 29-30

legal, military and police personnel was inarguably one of the first and most serious setbacks for sound transitional justice measures in Iraq.

A great deal has been written about the impact of de-Ba'athification on Iraqi security; chiefly its role in marginalizing the Sunni Arabs and fueling the insurgency. For the purpose of this research it is important to consider these measures from the perspective of the returning exiles. Shortly after the de-Ba'athification orders were issued, the IGC created the Higher National De-Ba'athification Commission (HNDC), which the CPA tasked with implementing the policy.¹⁴⁴ Ahmed Chalabi, already described as a prominent opponent of the Ba'athist regime and head of the INC, urged widespread purges of party members. He was named Chairman of the HNDC. Since he also served on the IGC, Chalabi had the power to legislate de-Ba'athification and simultaneously execute its policies.¹⁴⁵

Many scholars and analysts have come to see de-Ba'athification largely through a sectarian lens; most of those affected were Sunni, just as most members of the Ba'ath Party were Sunni. However, for the returning exiles, particularly those like Chalabi who had ambitions to lead the new Iraqi government, de-Ba'athification also removed their principle competition for political power.¹⁴⁶ Interviewees B and J supported this assessment. While Interviewee J acknowledged the importance of removing high-level Ba'athists, he criticized the program for being too harsh at first and stated that if a former Ba'athist is a criminal, Iraq should use the court system, but if not, he should be allowed to return to his job. In addition, Interviewee N criticized de-Ba'athification for removing technocrats from the government who could have still served Iraq effectively. A number of interviewees also criticized the dissolution of the entire army; Interviewee M noted that Iraq needed individuals who were trained to defend people and had

¹⁴⁴ Hatch, 2005: 105

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.: 106

¹⁴⁶ Marr, 2012: 267

removed many such people.

When the CPA and IGC began implementing de-Ba'athification, little thought or effort was put toward a reconciliation process. Writing in 2005, Col. Hatch already saw the shortcomings in not simultaneously pursuing both policies. He wrote that, "while this hesitancy is understandable, it may be shortsighted. . . . the likelihood of achieving the overall objectives will be increased by having a comprehensive, integrated, and complementary strategy at the outset."¹⁴⁷ In the ensuing decade, this lack of progress on reconciliation does not seem to have significantly changed. Interviewee B thought de-Ba'athification has gone on for too long and criticized the government for the inability to forget its revenge mentality. He opined that reconciliation can only be achieved through increased economic ties between different provinces. Yet as interviewee L pointed out, people's emotional scars made them ill prepared for dialogue and still focused on revenge. Interviewee M noted that reconciliation can only begin with the implementation of rule of law, which she stated does not currently exist in Iraq. Ranking on a scale of one to ten, she would not even give Iraq a two.

Interviewee D, on the other hand, argued that De-Ba'athification has not had a dramatic impact on governance in Iraq and that only the top levels of the Party were purged. He reminded us that achieving justice for the victims of the Ba'ath Party was also necessary. "What about them?" he asked rhetorically.

By only addressing measures aimed at retribution rather than reconciliation, the post-2003 Iraqi leadership, led primarily by former exiles, failed to address some of the key tenets of effective transitional justice policy.

Corruption and Nepotism

Corruption, as described by interviewee A, is a "devastating virus" in Iraq today and one

¹⁴⁷ Hatch, 2005: 107

that must be overcome if Iraq is to become fully developed. An overarching theme from many interviews is the idea of loyalty and trust versus capability and experience. Even the Dawa sympathizers recognized this challenge. Many interviewees felt that, to Iraq's detriment, the exiles who returned to govern Iraq rely too heavily on the former rather than the latter. As Interviewee G explained, in an atmosphere of distrust one is more likely to turn to those close to him - his family, his friends, his political party, or his tribe - before necessarily taking experience into consideration. As an example, Interviewee I claimed that Adnan Al Asadi, the deputy interior minister, sold vegetables for a living while living in exile in Denmark and now oversees Iraq's police force. As the interviewee pointed out, he is a long time member of the Dawa Party.

Multiple interviewees discussed a sense of entitlement on the part of leading political parties, including Dawa. After years spent opposing Saddam and suffering under the old regime, they saw what many would consider corrupt and nepotistic practices taking what they had rightfully earned. Interviewee C, while not expressing any bitterness, acknowledged that most exiles assumed they would fill director general positions at the very least. As to why corruption is not exposed, the Interviewee G noted that since all political parties are involved, there is little incentive to alter the system. Interviewee L stated that due to the lack of transparency, people can get away with anything.

Interviewee A explained that he wanted to get more educated, capable Iraqi-American exiles involved, but that most leaders in Iraq that he spoke to opposed this idea. He opined that this was because Iraqi leaders fear more experienced, educated people will jeopardize their own positions. He also mentioned a conference he had attended in 2006 or 2007 for educated Iraqi exiles that was organized by the Iraqi government. He described the enthusiasm on the part of the exiles and the plans to establish committees with them, and the disappointment when the

government did not follow up on the steps proposed at the conference.

Some interviewees also discussed a management problem throughout the Iraqi government. Interviewee J stated that exiles look to build their own images, not the country, and thus did not bring good management to help run the country, while Interviewee A complained that cabinet members have failed to create and implement standard processes across ministries. Interviewee F likened Iraq to a company in need of an efficient administration and a good CEO, implying that Iraq currently has neither.

One specific example of nepotism mentioned by numerous interviewees was the March 2014 report that Iraqi Transportation Minister Hadi al-Amiri's son Mahdi, after missing a Middle East Airlines flight from Beirut, called Baghdad and had the plane turned around mid-flight. According to media reports, some Iraqis compared this event to the nepotism demonstrated by Saddam's son Uday Hussein.¹⁴⁸ Interviewee J, however, considered this issue from another angle; he argued this is not just about a nepotistic system that gave a son this privilege, but should be about the businessman who may have been on his way to do business in Iraq, but will not get back on that plane.

On the larger question of exiles' place in post-2003 Iraqi society, Interviewee J also noted that most exiles did not want to be part of the average citizenry; they preferred to be the leaders rather than use their experience to help behind the scenes, a sentiment echoed by other interviewees as well. He criticized Iraq's new leaders for their lack of humility and noted that as they took the senior jobs and best opportunities, they were taking opportunities away from those Iraqis who had stayed and had the resources and capability to lead. In contrast, he chose to remain behind the scenes in a more advisory role and had returned to the United States when he felt the Iraqi activists he worked with could do his job. He also noted that as a result of de-

¹⁴⁸ "Iraqi Minister's Son Misses Flight, Forces Plane Back: Airline." Reuters, 6 Mar. 2014.

Ba'athification, there was a vacuum in middle management jobs, which many exiles did not want to take. As he succinctly phrased it, everyone wanted to be the Minister of Education, but nobody wanted to be the school principal.

Foreign Influence

A number of interviewees discussed the perceived level of foreign influence the returning exiles brought back to Iraq, both immediately following the US invasion and in the years since. Early on, many emphasized the role the United States played in determining the trajectory of Iraqi politics through its selection of the IGC. When discussing the difference between Iraqis who lived in exile in the West versus the Middle East (particularly Iran and Syria), Interviewee F claimed that countries like Iran and Syria used Iraqi exiles to advance their own political agendas against Saddam's Ba'ath regime. Even if they wanted to, there was little the exiles could do to avoid this; the Iraqis had to rely on their host countries to protect their lives and provide assistance. Interviewee F went as far as to call these exiles "tools for the policy of their host country." He opined that some of the exiles' politics today – particularly for those who lived in Iran – still reflect the ties the exiles developed to their host countries. He acknowledged, however, that exiles in the West were also used as tools by the UK and the U.S.

Iraq's post-2003 relationship with Iran was a major point of contention among interviewees. Both Sunni Interviewees (I and N) and Interviewee F felt strongly that Iranian influence had increased significantly over the past decade. While the Dawa sympathizers stressed the party's independence from foreign influence, Interviewee N countered this point. She stressed that Dawa does have strong ties to Iran dating back to the party's pro-Iranian agenda during the Iran-Iraq War. However it is important to note that these statements, given these interviewees background, likely reflect strong ideological, religious, or historical biases against

both the current Iraqi government and Iran.

Looking beyond the Shia exile community, Interviewee N noted that while Iran certainly has influence over some Iraqi Shia, Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia also have ties to and influence over some Iraqi Sunni communities. Interestingly, interviewees did not bring up anything about continued U.S. influence over Iraqi exiles, although this is likely due to America's overall declining influence following the withdrawal of U.S. troops in 2011.

Conclusion

From the data and research presented, we draw the following conclusions. First, the success or failure of politicians and parties that returned from exile to Iraq has been determined by four major factors: legacy as an indigenous movement; perceived independence from foreign influence; legitimacy as opposition to the previous regime; and a pre-existing organization and network, gained largely for individuals through membership in political parties. Without these attributes, parties and individuals have tended to fail.

Yet, this presents several tensions. Parties and individuals need resources, and foreign actors tend to be the easiest way to raise funds and gain influence. The parties had also developed ties to foreign countries during their decades spent in exile. Foreign benefactors helped a number of exile opposition members and groups gain prominence and even survive, but this connection often led to the downfall of individual exiles.

Thus, individuals without the backing of a pre-existing indigenous organization, such as Ahmed Chalabi, Ayad Allawi, and Interviewee F relied on the backing of foreign support while they attempted to build indigenous organizations of their own. Thus far, they have failed to build a strong following or shed the stigma attached to their foreign connections. When Ayatollah

Sistani pushed for early elections and endorsed the formation of the Shia coalition, the United Iraqi Alliance, in 2005, organized parties had an advantage.

Another tension is the way the parties have sought to expand their support base and their conception of Iraqi identity. Although far from conclusive, the data suggests that Shia opposition groups in exile understood Iraqi identity to be primarily Shia-Arab. So have the Sadrists, for that matter. Available literature and some of our interviews suggest that this view may have been enforced by the exiles' experiences abroad, where they tended to remain in communities defined by the segment of Iraqi society from which they originated. With much of the Sadrists' support base coming from Shia bastions such as Sadr City and Southern Iraq, one has to wonder whether this mentality is the exclusive domain of the exiles.

Second, the Iraqi exiles held a number of perceptions about Iraq that turned out to be false or inaccurate once they returned. Confirming the existing literature, this was largely driven by the time spent in exile. Location of exile and the ideology held by the exiles seems to have also played a role in this disconnect, but we were unable to contribute much in the way of original research towards this conclusion. Whether Dawa had an advantage because its members tended to remain in the region and in Iraq, and therefore had perceptions of Iraq that were closer to reality, could be the subject of future research.

Third and perhaps the most difficult to confirm is the impact the returning exiles had on critical issues in Iraq today: sectarianism, transitional justice, corruption and nepotism, and the impact of foreign influence. Particularly in regards to sectarianism and corruption, both problems existed in Iraq long before the events of 2003. However, from both the existing literature and our interviewees it is clear that on both fronts, the former exiles that have come to control Iraqi politics have done little to mitigate or reverse these trends.

On sectarianism, we cannot say conclusively whether the mere fact of exile or the exiles' previous misconceptions exacerbated sectarianism. There is some logic to this argument, but the sectarian activities of the Sadrists demonstrate that a sense of revenge based on sectarian identity was not exclusively held by the returning exiles. Nonetheless, the exile groups' overtly sectarian appeal to their support base may have been driven by their experiences and perceptions as exiles and their ability to dominate the opposition in exile. No doubt, the United States also played a role in emphasizing sectarian identities by identifying some of the early figures in Iraq's transitional governments along ethno-sectarian lines.

In regards to the culture of corruption and nepotism, this is best exemplified by the perception of many interviewees that by and large, returning loyalty and trust are valued over experience and capability. However, this cannot only be attributed to the exiles; many of our interviewees suggested that the security situation drove this trend.

With respect to transitional justice, we found that once the exiles returned and assumed roles in government, they largely focused on retributive measures, such as de-Ba'athification, rather than efforts towards reconciliation. While resentment toward the Ba'ath and the desire for revenge was equally felt among exiles and the Iraqis that remained, it is difficult to argue with the fact that politically, de-Ba'athification benefited the returning exiles by removing their political competition.

On the impact of foreign influence, opinions tended to coincide with the interviewee's religious identity and degree of disaffection with the Iraqi government. By nature of having spent years or decades in exile, those who returned to Iraq most likely brought some of the influence from their host countries with them. However, it is likely that given the breakdown in

central authority caused by the fall of Saddam and the ensuing instability, actors such as Iran would have found footholds even without having such strong ties to returning exiles.

Finally, it is important to note that for Iraq and the role that the returning exiles have played since 2003, the play is still in the first act and the conclusion is yet to be played out. It will take additional time and analysis to validate these claims. This writing comes at a critical time for Iraq as it coincides with both the first elections since the U.S. withdrawal in 2011 and heightened levels of violence and sectarianism. The future of Iraq is far from certain.

We sought to capture a niche in the vast array of analysis written about conditions in Iraq since 2003. While much has been written about the impact of external actors and decisions on Iraq's recent and more distant past, we feel it is important to focus on the role Iraqis have played in reshaping their country. For in the end, it will be Iraqis who determine the trajectory of their country's history.

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Appendix

Table 1: Interviewee Descriptions

Table 1: Interviewee Descriptions				
Letter Designation	Description	Religious Identification (self-identified or perceived)	Location	Year Left Iraq
A	Iraqi-American businessman	Secular Shia	Washington, DC	1975
B	Iraqi political analyst	Secular Shia	Washington, DC	Early 2000s
C	Dawa sympathizer	Religious Shia	Washington, DC	Born outside Iraq; family left in 1970s
D	Dawa sympathizer	Religious Shia	London, UK	1970s
E	Former political activist	Secular Shia	London, UK	1979
F	Former politician and activist	Secular Shia	London, UK	1983
G	Shia scholar	Religious Shia	London, UK	1991
H	Cleric from Najaf	Religious Shia	London, UK	1982
I	Former-MG in the Iraqi armed forces	Secular Sunni	Washington, DC	2008
J	Pro-democracy civil society activist	Secular Shia	Washington, DC	1991
K	Cleric from Najaf	Religious Shia	London, UK	Never Left
L	Shia activist and former opposition member	Religious Shia	London, UK	1991
M	Female activist	Religious Shia	Washington, DC	1991
N	Female researcher from non-profit and NGO field	Prefers not to identify by sect; Secular Sunni	Washington, DC	1990

Table 2: Comparison of 2003 vs. 2005 Political Participation

Insiders versus Outsiders	IGC (2003)	Elected Government (January 2005)
Insiders	28% (14)	32% (12)
Insiders in Northern Free Zone	18% (9)	29% (11)
Outsiders (Exiles)	38% (19)	37% (14)
Unknown	16% (8)	3% (1)
Political Parties	IGC (2003)	Elected Government (January 2005)
Membership in Parties	66% (33)	67% (24)
Centrist Parties	30% (15)	3% (1)
Religio-political Parties	22% (11)	36% (13)
Kurdish Parties	14% (7)	28% (10)
Independents	12% (6)	19% (7)
Unknown	22% (11)	14% (5)