

THE SADRIST MOVEMENT

Success in Mobilizing People in Iraq

This paper will review the rise of the Sadrist movement due to the use of informal social networks during the 1990s, and after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the movement's capability of employing framing to mobilize people, and to what degree the movement was successful in rebuilding its structure, and being capable of attractively appealing to the masses, despite the fact that the movement was severely oppressed by the regime of Saddam Hussein in the late 1990s, especially after the assassination of its leader, Ayatollah Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr. These are imperative questions that need to be addressed in order to explore the real pragmatic path in which the Sadrist movement used to bring people to believe in its causes and to be in a position that really threatening the whole political process in Iraq after 2003. Prior to my discussion of the aforementioned essential questions surrounding the Sadrist movement, it would be really significant to come across several indispensable factors that contributed very much to the evolution of the movement. These factors can be simply addressed as, political opportunities, resources, such as money and other financial means, leadership, and finally, the movement ability to utilize framing in the best way it can to get the critical support from the masses. I shall begin with imperative factor that eventually

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opened so many venues to the movement in years to come.

Political Opportunity:

During the 1990s, the Iraqi central government lost great deal of internal control on its population in the North and South. Two elements have contributed to this situation: first, the humiliating defeat of the Iraqi army in the operation of Desert Storm, second, the harsh economic sanctions imposed by the Security Council on Iraq, which ultimately weakened the political position of the central government before its population and the opposition forces as well. Consequently, the central government loosened its iron fist on the political life, and promoted religious sentiments to appeal to the masses for some support.

At this juncture, a critical religious figure of al-Sadr family the Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr (1943-1999), the father of the young Muqtada al-Sadr emerged as a key factor in the revival

of Shia movement in Iraq. With his blistering speeches especially in Friday sermons, Sadiq al-Sadr (also known as al-Sadr II) declared his movement, which was called later the Sadrist Movement. His targets in contrast to his cousin Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr (executed by the regime in 1980), were not the highly educated people, or the Middle class, instead, he appealed vigorously to the poor masses in Baghdad and in Southern cities of Iraq, where Millions of Shia youth poor are living in desperate conditions. Poverty and the lack of recognition from the regime have made those people a unique and easy target to the

Sadr movement. By addressing the essence of Islam to the youth, and how Islam can bring happiness and dignity to human beings, Sadiq al-Sadr achieved massive support from the poor and desperate people. But what made Sadiq al-Sadr so important within the Shia religious

institution was his sharp and critical opposition to the status quo. He became involved heavily in politics; he criticized the status quo, and the state incapability of managing the whole

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country with the same level of justice.

Furthermore, the Sadrist movement and its leadership in the 1990s emerged as a reaction to the wave of Wahabism (Salefi movement) in Iraq, which was capable of penetrating Iraqi society for economic reasons⁽¹⁾. Hence, internal and external factors contributed unequivocally to the rise of this movement.

Internally, the movement benefited significantly from the political tiny breathing space, which was provided by the central government

under some circumstances. Political and religious rhetoric massively disseminated to the young deprived Shia population in different places, in Baghdad, where the movement was applauded by a massive number of followers, especially on Friday's prayer. The message was very clear and simple, (a) reminding the followers of their sacred duties toward their country and toward them-selves as devoted Shia revolutionaries, and (b),

how to bring political and social changes, and how to sustain these aims. Externally, Shia prominent figures like Al-Sadr II has

sensed the urgent and critical position, which

the central government was trying to play in further weakening the Shia central institution the Hawza, by making possible for Wahabi and Salifi sentiments to penetrate in some major Shia areas, especially in Southern Iraq when economic factor, financial support for the poor Shia can do what religious sentiments have failed in changing people conviction. The

sense of urgency felt by the Shia prominent leadership during the 1990s from the dangerous appearance of Salifi religious ideas

cannot be considered as imperative as what the central government has offered the movement and its leadership to operate freely even for short period of time. The political opportunity was there for the movement to take advantage of, even though this opportunity was very minimal and surrounded by so many critical conditions.

The Sadrist movement was a special phenomenon; it was something that went beyond the classical Shia institution, which does not permit the direct or indirect involvement in daily political debate. According to Adel Raouf,

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the new revolutionary approach adopted by Ayatollah Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr was clear violation of the Quietest Approach in the Hawza institution in Iraq, specifically,

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for those who do not want to be part of the political debate.⁽²⁾ According to Raouf, the Quietest Approach has widened the gap between the Ulama (spiritual leaders), and the masses, which in return has helped in the Hawza isolation.⁽³⁾ The vocal Hawza and the Quietest Hawza are two essential concepts within the political and religious Shia institution. For centuries heated debate between these two approaches advocates resulted in overwhelming division among Shia Ulema, such division has serious impact on the behavior of the masses. Therefore, the materialization of Ayatollah Sadiq al-Sadr was the product of this struggle between these two approaches, as was the case with his cousin, Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr. In this regard, Greg Bruno believes that these

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two religious leaders have illuminated the contemporary Shia political and philosophical thoughts, and they were very active in opposing the regime

in Baghdad.⁽⁴⁾

The origin of the Sadrist movement lies in the formation and dynamic of a triangular relationship between the Iraqi regime, the urbanized Shia tribes, and the missionary activism of Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr.⁽⁵⁾ The Sadr's attachment to Shia tribes has helped him to gain so much support, and in return, he contributed back to them by his controversial Fiqh al-Asha'ir "Tribal Jurisprudence".⁽⁶⁾ Al-

Sadr attracted a wide following among Iraqi Shiites because of his call for the regime to release detainees and ease repression (UNHCR 2002). Such statement, no doubt

contradicts with the hypothesis that suggested that Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr was co-opted by the regime in Baghdad. His simplistic personality that helped him to achieve

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massive popularity was unexpected surprise to many people and to the regime in particular. The essence of al-Sadr phenomenon was that the Ayatollah Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr was able to break with the conservative clerical hierarchy, creating for himself a direct relationship with the poor and Shia tribes, and during the period of turmoil which lasted from 1992s to 1999s, Sadiq al-Sadr launched a new school of Shia proselytisation that went far beyond the doctrinal inculcation to focus on community organization, using the banner of legitimacy provided by its founder's heredity.⁽⁷⁾ Therefore, heredity has helped Sadiq al-Sadr at the beginning of his movement, so as other from the same family had benefited from, but in his case, charisma, religious knowledge, and political awareness rewarded him with unexceptional support from the tens of thousands who joined him in his Friday' sermons.

Timothy Haugh states that Sadiq al-Sadr clearly has resisted the regime of Iraq in organizing Friday prayers, which had been forbidden in Shia community and in places like

Mosques, and his defiance ultimately caused him his life.⁽⁸⁾ His life also was cut short, in 1999s, the regime in Baghdad saw enough of the man, and so, they decided to silence him forever. Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr was assassinated with two of his sons on Friday prayers in 1999, and with his assassination, Shia political revival deteriorated and those who succeeded him were neither charismatic nor having the capability of addressing the social, and political situations in the country. Thus, the Sadrist movement and its activists from the late 1999 to 2003 went into hiding to deviate the harsh and oppressive treatment

of the regime.⁽⁹⁾ By a simple observation to the history of the Sadrist movement during the chaotic and excruciating events in the 1990s, we deduce thus, that the movement has gone through many stages of ups and downs, from greatly involved in collective action, through informal social networks, especially, Friday prayers, and education institutions organized by the Hawza (religious school), which resulted in the profound mobilization of people, and encourage them to be active

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members in society, to being forced by the regime's compulsion into being secretive movement. Hence the following question arises: does informal social networks matter in changing the perceptions of individuals to join or participate in collective action? Positively, many researchers have answered that social networks do matter in influencing individual's participation in collective action. According to Mario Diani, finding the essential ties between collective action and social networks is not something new in social studies, and collective action as process, is "unambiguously shaped by the social ties between prospective participants".⁽¹⁰⁾ But what are precisely social networks do in the progress of collective action? They simply find the link between social and political actors in society, and in the process, these social networks are playing a key factor in organizing and managing all efforts in any collective action.⁽¹¹⁾

Thus, and from this imperative perspective, the success of al-Sadr II movement would not be materialized without the existence of some factors, and those factors are, informal social

networks such as religious schools, hospitals, charities committees, and leadership, etc. These informal social networks contributed massively to the poor people in many perspectives. Besides the distribution of money to the needy people, these networks also played an important role in connecting the base and the super-structure (leadership) of

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the movement socially and politically during the 1990s and after 2003. These informal social networks not only were a mediator between the base (mass), and the super-structure (leadership), but also

have made the connection and interaction between all political actors quite vital in the social and political progress of the movement. Such connection and interaction between all political actors that the Sadrist movement members have enjoyed provide how dynamic was the movement.

Things will appear brighter and promising when the regime was finally disappeared with the United States invasion of Iraq in 2003. New life came to the Shia political institution, new faces have emerged to lead the people in Iraq, and certainly, the images of Sadiq al-Sadr were

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a great deal of motivation to millions of Iraqis, who were so anxious to see the historical moment, a moment that reflected the agony and disparity, which Shia population has gone through for decades. According to Juan Cole, “the fall of Saddam’s regime in 2003, created a new political opportunity, which galvanized the Shia community and sparked an overwhelming and rapid wave of identity politics and political activism that was not anticipated by neither the US, nor by the Sunni Iraqi as well”.⁽¹²⁾ Besides what Cole and Fuller have indicated to in regard to the availability of the political opportunity that assisted the Sadrist movement and its new leadership to flourish again after the invasion in 2003, we may have to consider the external assistance to the movement by some other countries who share the same fundamental beliefs with the movement, and Iran comes as the first to be addressed in this regard, and financial support

was in the central relationship between Iran and the movement.⁽¹³⁾

It is quite clear that the movement has used these resources to mobilize people and to bring substantial support of people in adopting the movement’s causes, and this is may help us in answering the puzzling question, which we put to the task in the introduction of how is it possible for this movement to achieve success in such short period of time right after the invasion in 2003 despite being oppressed and structurally teared-down by the regime in the late 1990s. According to Marisa Cochrane, and Timothy Haugh, “the movement briefly after the fall down of Saddam Hussein’s regime, has operated wisely through all available informal social networks such as mosques, Friday’s prayer, and organizing young people as a militia, which one of its duty is to protect and provide security to people, and most

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importantly, to provide social services for their communities".⁽¹⁴⁾ Hence, the movement was capable of utilizing these informal networks to create a new set of communication between the leadership and its constituents. Ayatollah al-Sadr II, for the first time as a Shia spiritual leader, "notwithstanding the state ever eye-watched, has surprisingly assembled a social networks to connect a wide range of followers from poor marginalized people and urbanized educated middle classes, and at the end, he was wisely competent of creating an alliance between urban networks with the most influential tribal leaders".⁽¹⁵⁾ Creating the link between the poor but educated young Shia and the most influential tribes leaders was a new strategic innovation by the Sadr II. This strategic innovation was for long neglected by other influential and prominent Shia spiritual Imam, and for many reasons. Some of these reasons were, high recognition some Shia leaders felt of themselves, which in return made their seclusion of the mass inevitable. This was

clearly obvious during the 1970s, and 1980s, where the Ulmma never showed the tendency to be the leaders and the motivators of the mass. Such policy soon comes to an end with the emergence of Ayatollah al-Sadr II during the 1990s.

Framing and Mobilizing:

Many observers saw the Sadr II establishment of informal networks such as schools and charities as a major step toward mobilizing people, especially the young poor and desperate who were looking for a sense

of recognition and employment, and being part of the political life. These networks and charities supported millions of Iraqis during the catastrophic sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council after Iraq invaded

its neighbor Kuwait in August 1990. These informal networks will render Sadiq al-Sadr's son, the young Muqtada significant favor in Iraq 2003. Did the Sadrist movement constructively utilized framing in mobilizing people during

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the 1990s and in Iraq 2003? What type of framing did the movement have utilized to get the support from a wide range of people in many areas in the country after the invasion in 2003?

And finally, what has made the movement's usage of framing very successful? These are very critical questions, and certainly, any serious attempt to answer them, would shed some light on a very mysterious period of time in modern Iraq, a period, which endured for too long. This thesis is simply constructed to find some relevant answers to those critical questions, and it must be clear that these answers, simply, will be a diminutive portion of massive efforts conducted by great numbers of researchers, which have been interested in the study of this unique Islamic movement. According to some researches, "Shia leadership was

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always successful in mobilizing people, by using religious and national sentiments to oppose colonialism and to oppose postcolonial governments in Iraq or in Iran".⁽¹⁶⁾

As usual, cultural framing is in the center of any mass mobilization to tackle essential political, social, and economic issues. When we speak of cultural framing, especially in Middle Eastern Islamic social movement, the majority of writers and researchers refer to the use of religious framing. For instance, the most important protest in modern Iran before the revolution in 1979 was the "Tobacco Protest Movement" of 1890-1892, in this protest; "religious sentiments have played a significant role in mobilizing people against a concession granted by the Qajar Shah to a British company".⁽¹⁷⁾

According to Moaddel, "religion was so crucial to the success of the movement and the religious tactic used by the opposition was so effective, and the event provided a historical guide and justification for subsequent intervention of the Shia establishment in politics".⁽¹⁸⁾

Interestingly, this movement would not be successful without the participation of Shia Ulema in Iraq at that time. The historical interaction between Shia Marja'iyya (Shia Leadership) is not confined to the locality of this institution; it rather goes abroad and beyond its local border. Massive public support in Iraq

for the Tobacco Protest in Iran was mainly achieved by the Ulema framing of religious sentiments, which played a key role in defeating the Shah concession to the British. Once the Grand Ayatollah Shirazi announced his Fatwa (religious decree), which preclude people from smoking, buying, and selling tobacco, the Shah and the British, experienced the harsh reality, which constituted a major setback of the whole tobacco industry in Iran

and Iraq as well. But how did the merchants and Ulema use framing in this case? It was simply a matter of transforming the conflict, which was based on economic ground to a direct confrontation between Muslims and infidels, thereby very effectively mobilizing people against economic intervention.⁽¹⁹⁾ To

a certain degree, the role of religion is not what Marxism has expressed in its lectures throughout modern and contemporary time, which is a way of keeping the people unfocused and unpractical. It certainly does elevate human emotions in

certain situations, and leads him to be part of the universe around him.

One of the first religious principles that was invoked by Ayatollah Mirza Hasan Shirazi, the sole marja'-al-taqlid (the grand Ayatollah), is that permitting the foreigners to arbitrate in Iranian internal affairs, politically, and economically is in contrary to the Qu'ran and Godly principles, weaken the independence of the state and the order of the country, and cause the condition

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of the people to deteriorate.⁽²⁰⁾ This message that was sent by the Ayatollah Mirza Shirazi to the Shah Nasir al-Din, reflects how deeply the Shia religious institution was embedded with the daily life affairs of ordinary people. It was not only religious factors that presented by this message, even though, religion was the heart and soul of the decree, but the message went far to express the nation's concerns with British intervention in Iranian social and economic affairs, and soon the protest would breed a fruitful result, the concession was terminated by the Shah himself. Not very surprising, Shia ulema in Iraq have called to boycott the election of 1923, to form a national assembly, had they participated in it the result of that election would have changed the entire equation in Iraq. The bulk of Marj'iyya declared the illegality of this election, and that participation an election,

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which over sighted by the British occupation, would undermine the essence of Islam in Iraq and the elected assembly would ultimately serve the only interests of Britain. The resemblance between these two cases, the Iranian tobacco protest and the boycotting of the election of national assembly in Iraq have illustrated one major theoretical apprehension to some people. It does in a sense rise the question of how far religious institution may use its authority to down play the importance of religious principles, occasionally, to its benefit.

Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr, during his opposition to the regime of Saddam Hussein in the 1990s, clearly distinguished himself from the traditional apolitical Shia leaders, and having been so vocal in criticizing the regime in Baghdad, al-Sadr was considered as part of

the Speaking Jurisprudent in contrast to the Silent Jurisprudent.⁽²¹⁾ In return, al-Sadr has managed to mobilize a growing following, particularly among urban the Iraqi youth.⁽²²⁾ According to Haugh, Al-Sadr used cultural framing such as loyal Iraqi devout live by Islamic law, opposing any foreign influence, the emphasize on nationalism in dealing with the concept of Mar'jiyya (Leadership), in a sense who must be the leader, those with Arab blood, or those with Iranian blood, these frames were a key factor of mobilize young poor people in both rural and urban cities (Ibid, 3). Peaceful but blistering speeches criticizing the state and its social, political, and economic policies were delivered in mosques in Major Shia cities in the South, and in other major Shia cities such as Najif and Karbala, where the most venerated Shia shrines existed, especially, the shrines of Imam Ali and his martyr son Imam Hussein. These two places have always played key role in the Shia history, when Shia face attack on its essence.

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The Sadrist movement pragmatically utilized these mosques', informal social networks, and religious schools to mobilize people in its struggle with the regime in Baghdad. Mosques have always been the center of attention in Muslims life. Their symbolism and sensitivity in the eyes of Muslims, certainly, go beyond their actual appearance. Throughout the modern and contemporary Middle Eastern struggle with the colonial powers, mosques have attributed so much in motivating people

to challenge and make scarifies in fighting the colonial powers. Any Islamic social movement or collective action in the Middle East that seek political and social engagements with masses has had to rely on networks such as mosques to appeal to the masses and to mobilize people eventually.

As Haugh has put it, "mosques were not only utilized as mobilization structure, but as powerful symbols for movement as well".⁽²³⁾ Other historical events such as " Ashura (the tenth day of Muharram in the Islamic calendar)

can be possibly used as frame, which could be possibly a major factor in mobilizing people”.

⁽²⁴⁾ Mohammad Hafez writes, “Shia did not commemorate the Prophet’s grandson Imam Hussein in tenth of Ashura for his lineage to the prophet, instead, commemoration took place for the event that occurred on that day centuries ago, and the symbolism of Imam Hussein martyrdom contains elements of both pessimism and optimism about social activism and rebellion that can be exploited to promote either quietism or revolt in Shia Islam”.⁽²⁵⁾ Indeed, framing symbolism of “Ashura” has always been the characteristic of Shia revolt throughout the Islamic history and will play as a key factor of Shia rejection of any sense of injustice that have been imposing by unmerited regimes, and the Sadrist movement during the 1990s, and after the 2003 invasion

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of Iraq had perfectly utilized this episode and for many reasons; (a) to bring to those subjugated by the Tyrant a sense of sorrow by assimilating their situation with that of Imam Hussein, (b) to activate the hidden and burning emotion, which

people always have in remembering and actively living this episode. To its credit, the Sadrist movement enjoyed no lavish options in the fight or the struggle with the regime. For instance, the movement did not manage to establish a well-organized or sophisticated media networks such as web sites, newspaper, or any other means besides the informal social

networks and mosques to challenge the regime, this would not happen, if the government did use a monopoly on all of these imperative social networks.

Therefore, the movement was almost stripped from any meaningful sources

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to engage constructive political and social debates with the masses on daily bases, the state assumed. Nicole Watts, provides a great example which may give us a robust indication of how framing symbolic can provide us with more comprehensive explanation to major political issues. Watts put it as follows, “The burning of the sacred Monument in the city of Halabja, where thousands of innocent people in a matter of seconds have lost their lives due to the usage of Chemical Weapons by the central government in Iraq in 1986, was attributed to the sense of misuse by the two major Kurds political parties for the symbolic meaning of such place to gain more financial and political support, from the informal and formal international communities, and

the protesters of Halabja city were mainly universities students who have sensed the mismanagement and corruption within the circle of Kurds politicians, used symbolic framing to address the grievances of ordinary people caused by the illegal practices of Kurds politician to gain power and money as well, and that such use of symbolism of Halabja must serves the essential and central ideas of Kurdistan”.⁽²⁶⁾ The young Muqtada al-Sadr, who was elevated rapidly after the US Invaded Iraq in 2003, took advantage of his father al-Sadr II legacy, and very soon established himself as a prominent political figure in Iraq 2003 by appealing to massive number of dispossessed young Shia people.⁽²⁷⁾ His blistering speeches that often appealed to the young poor and marginalized Shia have made him exceptionally acceptable leader, despite the fact that he did not complete his religious studies, just the way his father the

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Sadr II did.

Framing the poor political, social, and economic conditions of the massive number of Shia in major cities such as Baghdad were Millions of poorly educated young people have placed, and other major Southern cities, and what has to be done to promote major changes in these cities, were constantly addressed by the young Muqtada, the new leader of the Sadrist movement provocative political lectures have ultimately made him a

reliable political figure for those young Shia people.⁽²⁸⁾ The next example will take us through some of the tactical and pragmatic scheme that had been used by the movement to addresses its grievances. The office of al-Sadr II, issued a strong statement right

after the closure of its weekly newspaper “al-Hawza al-Natiqa”, by the civil authority led by Bremer, because, and according to the civil authority, that the newspaper presents a sustainable danger that may put the life of American soldiers at high risk by advocating the use of violence.

The Sadrist movement responded to this matter with (a) the use of framing process that revealed the “undemocratic policies” adopted by the occupation forces, which contradicts with the democratic messages and sentiments used prior to the invasion, (b) the newspaper is appealing to the people of Iraq to use any means possible to unveil the real intent of the occupation forces represented by the civil authority to destroy the Iraqi Islamic society, and to propagate unreal messages

of democracy.⁽²⁹⁾

Movement’s capability of using framing process theory to mobilize people and make them believe in the movement’s causes, would not be a simple task, it’s rather depends on some sort of unsophisticated communication, which

make sending the messages to the masses, more simplistic and easy to comprehend. One of the unique strengths of the Sadrist movement is being very dynamic. This movement since was established during the 1990s, has secured its position between the Shia adherents despite the ups and downs that

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the movement had gone through. According to a- spokesperson for the Sadrist movement, our movement is a non-violent movement, and continuously founded upon Islamic principles and ideal thoughts that supported by the public in major cities in Iraq.⁽³⁰⁾

Having established the importance and the actual use of framing by the Sadrist movement during the difficult times in the 1990s, and during the political uncertainties that unfolded to be the only sign of Iraq 2003, the following pages, will examine, how the Sadrist movement has been successful in utilizing framing to organize people toward its causes? What essential steps for a

even though the movement has never referred to nationalism as an indispensable component in its teachings, but the sense of nationalism has been utilized in this case to discredit and to attack the legitimacy of Ayatollah al-Sistani. The Sadrist Movement has used all reachable frames that eventually focused on actions and symbols, which has made the movement more distinguishable than traditional Shia jurisprudents, and most importantly, played a very crucial role in calling for all Iraqis to unite and reject all cross sectarian behaviors that engulfed the entire society

When a religious movement is attempting to appeal to people, and in order to prove its ability to lead, and coherently disseminating the critical messages to those people, it must at least attack the legitimacy of those religious figures that are not necessarily walking or believing in the same political path or direction that the movement is walking through

movement to be successful in using frame process theory to achieve its goals must be taken? These are critical questions that need to be addressed in order to have a robust vision of the Sadrist movement, and how this movement fits amongst other popular Islamic social movement such as Hamas, Muslim Brotherhood, etc. Shi'ism politically has divided into two sections. One is a provocative, more often involved in all life affairs, and the second has been taken a silent approach to many essential issues that have direct impact on people life on daily bases. We have previously mentioned that the Sadrist movement has walked the first direction, which being very motivated and very provocative. When a religious movement is attempting to appeal to people, and in order to prove its ability to lead, and coherently disseminating the critical

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According to some researches, the Sadrist movement led by the young Muqtada al-Sadr, has fiercely used frames that have previously utilized by his father al-Sadr II, either to discredit all other prominent Shia religious figures like Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, by only accepting the religious creeds issued by the Sadr II, or by moving away and isolates itself from those who dealt with the occupation authority led by the US.⁽³¹⁾ Committed members of the movement used mosques to disseminate critical messages, which presents the movement as the only legitimate voice of the people according to Haugh, and these messages are: (a) Islamic law is the only way for those devoted Iraqis, (b) oppose foreign influence, (c) Iraqis devoted young people are not obligated to follow those religious leaders who were not born in Iraq like al-Sistani, (d) clerics who

are not born in Iraq should not speak for Iraqis.

⁽³²⁾ What we ought to deduce here, is that even though the movement has never referred to nationalism as an indispensable component in its teachings, but the sense of nationalism has been utilized in this case to discredit and to attack the legitimacy of Ayatollah al-Sistani. The Sadrist Movement has used all reachable frames that eventually focused on actions and symbols, which has made the movement more distinguishable than traditional Shia jurisprudents, and most importantly, played a very crucial role in calling for all Iraqis to unite and reject all cross sectarian behaviors that engulfed the entire society.⁽³³⁾

Stepping away from the implication of the religious and political involvements, the Sadrist movement has been focusing in all public meetings on the necessity of creating

The movement also has presented itself as the protector of the Millions of Shia by forming a militia called the “Mahdi Army”, and the forming of this militia was a response to the transitional government and the American forces malfunction to protect the Iraqi civilian, especially the Shia, and also was inspired by the symbolic martyrdom of Muqtada al-Sadr’s father

jobs opportunities and providing the compulsory services for the Millions of Iraqis. The movement also has presented itself as the protector of the Millions of Shia by forming a militia called the “Mahdi Army”, and the forming of this militia was a

response to the transitional government and the American forces malfunction to protect the Iraqi civilian, especially the Shia, and also was inspired by the symbolic martyrdom of Muqtada al-Sadr's father, the grand Ayatollah Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr who was murdered by the regime of Saddam Hussein in 1999.

⁽³⁴⁾ Much has been said about this militia, and its functioning or execution of some policies that generally have demoralized the images of the movement. According to many political figures from the inside movement, or from the outside of the movement, the chief purpose of establishing the militia (Mahdi Army), was to offset the killing equation authorized by some Sunni prominent leaders who have so much to lose, and to worry about politically to say the least, and Al-Qaeda terrorist group, which was fighting the Shia as

if they are the real threat to the whole Muslim community, on one of his visits to the United States of America.⁽³⁵⁾

This person worked for the State Department in Iraq for many years after the invasion in 2003. Thus, the establishment of this militia would not

be a reality without these two factors, internal factor, which was represented by long political Sunni rivalries, and external, which was presented by more fundamental threat from an ideological terrorist group (Al-Qaeda) that threatened the essence of Shi'ism, thus action was must be taken.

Repertoire of Action:

The Sadrist movement popularity during the 1990s did not materialize by the use of violence, and such peaceful materialization of popularity is essentially contradicting the most important component of social movements, that is violence. Not a single social movement in our modern and contemporarily time, did not utilize violence in dealing with essential

issues. Generally speaking, violence was a very distinctive aspect of social movement and collective action. In contrast, the Sadrist movement's ability to mobilize people during the 1990s up until the assassination of its leader Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr has

Not a single social movement in our modern and contemporarily time, did not utilize violence in dealing with essential issues. Generally speaking, violence was a very distinctive aspect of social movement and collective action. In contrast, the Sadrist movement's ability to mobilize people during the 1990s up until the assassination of its leader Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr has come through its ability to use non-violent repertoires of action

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came through its ability to use non-violent repertoires of action. Amazingly, not a single act of violence was reported even when the state harshly repressed the majority of the Iraqi people, especially those who were an active members of

the movement. In other words, clashes and violence with the state and its apparatus was not on the agenda of the Sadrist movement.

How can we explain this phenomenon? Why the Sadrist movement in the 1990s did not endorse violence as an essential component in combating the regime in Baghdad? Certainly, the central government ability to silence and harshly oppress all of its opponents was behind the Sadrist movement disapproval of violence as an essential part of its policy in combating the regime. The Ba'athi'st regime has adopted a policy that calls for the elimination of all political actors who oppose the regime's policies, even those who considered to be very faithful members of the Ba'ath Party. High ranked members of the Ba'ath Party were eliminated right after Saddam Hussein took over as the President of Iraq in 1979.

the Sadrist movement in the 1990s was not really interested in violence, as long as the movement is capable of sending its political and social messages to the masses through peaceful means. Certainly, the movement has evaded some of the regime brutality by creating substantial informal social networks that are capable of disseminating its messages

The regime quite frankly was indiscriminate in eliminating the oppositions. The victims of the regime were Ba'athi'st nationalist, Marxist, and religious leaders Sunni and Shia as well. Human Rights Organizations have conducted massive

studies in this regard; almost all of these studies have showed how oppressive the regime of Saddam Hussein was in the 1980s and 1990s. Those who were not executed by the regime were either jailed in secret places where prisoners tortured and humiliated every minute of their life in those secret places or were forced to leave the country with nothing. Furthermore, the Sadrist movement in the 1990s was not really interested in violence, as long as the movement is capable of sending its political and social messages to the masses through peaceful means. Certainly, the movement has evaded some of the regime brutality by creating substantial informal social networks that are capable of disseminating its messages. In other words, state's tyrannical policies toward active political opponents and the Sadrist movement refutation of violence

as an essential component in its struggle with the regime were key factors in shaping the political and social images of the movement in 1990s, even though, the movement was capable of inflicting substantial damages to the regime, if decided to do so.

It has been said that Islamic social movements are not capable of operating politically in a peaceful environment, and that is true, if we review to the history of the majority of Islamic social movements especially in the Middle East. Violence was very distinctive component of some movements such as the Jihad movement in Egypt, Hamas in Palestine, and the very violent Jammah al-Islamyyia in Algeria. By comparison, the Sadrist movement's non-violent political approach in the 1990s was very exceptional in a sense that political engagement within Iraqi society, (masses and religious leaders vs. the state) only considered legitimate when violence was not involved, even tactically. Indeed, violence was not a part of the Sadrist movement ideology, even when the regime has closed all political avenues for others to

participate in the political life. Peaceful but blistering speeches criticizing the state and its social, political, and economic policies were delivered in mosques in Major Shia cities in the South and in other major Shia cities such as Najif and Karbala, where the most venerated Shia shrines existed, especially, the shrines of Imam Ali and his martyr son Imam Hussein. In the beginning of the year 2004, the Sadrist movement has entered the second phase.

Muqtada al-Sadr targeted the young poor Shia population in the Sadr City and in other major Shia cities in the South, where millions of his slain father followers were placed. The Shia youth, especially in the Sadr City have found in Muqtada al-Sadr a new living symbol

The leadership of the movement was furious at the coalition forces, the United States civil authority in Iraq, and the Shia religious leadership presented by Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. The movement began to appeal to the masses,

and the central theme of the movement at this juncture was concentrating on addressing Shia majority grievances.

The young Muqtada al-Sadr targeted the young poor Shia population in the Sadr City and in other major Shia cities in the South, where millions of his slain father followers were placed. The Shia youth, especially in the Sadr City have found in Muqtada al-Sadr a new living symbol. In upholding the same

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observation, Shafiq Shqer wrote, the Sadrist movement popularity was mainly contingent upon the massive poor population in the Sadr City in particular and also in the Southern cities of Iraq, where Shia majority are also poor and marginalized.⁽³⁶⁾ The occupation must put into an end, Iraqis must depend on their own strength to achieve their goals, and those who accept the occupation as a fact are not Iraqi nationalists, all these sentiments were actively utilized by the young Muqtada al-Sadr to frame his case and to mobilize people behind him. Furthermore, the young Shia leader Muqtada al-Sadr wanted to put himself or the Iraqis in the same heroic situation of those who led the 1920 revolution against the British.⁽³⁷⁾ No doubt that the political opinion of the Sadrist movement in Iraq stood firmly in contrast to the political opinion and the steps that the American authority has worked on to construct a new political atmosphere in Iraq. The escalations of events between the Sadrists and the coalition forces have exacerbated the situation, and the Sadrist movement has fully

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At this juncture, the Sadrist movement shifted its strategy from non-violent repertoires of action, which mainly concentrate on peaceful means such as media and mosques to address grievances, to more complex and violent repertoires of action in addressing such grievances. The movement persistently utilized heavy machine guns and explosive devices in its struggle with the coalition forces, and with central government forces as well. Mohammed Jadid writes, the lucidity of the struggle between Muqtada and his followers and the American authority has strengthened the roots of Sadrist movement, for its contribution of unifying the whole country against the occupation forces on one hand, and stimulating the sense of nationalism by appealing to the young Arabs and Muslims people on the other hand.⁽³⁸⁾ The use of aggressive repertoires of action by the Sadrist movement was not meant only to undermine the American authority and threatening the coalition forces, it was meant

to undermine the legitimacy of the elected central government in Baghdad and the local governments in all Shia cities in the South and in Najaf and Karbala in particular as well. By doing so, the Sadrist movement has entered in a circle of uncalculated policies on two imperative stages, political stage and the military stage. Politically, the use of violence against the central government, which is mainly dominated by the Shia political and religious forces has almost ended the shining images of the movement, which took more than a decade to be established by the hard work and the blood of its leadership and its devoted followers.

The violent campaign against the elected central government not only undermined its legitimacy, but also severely damaged the images of Shia coalition and has made it possible for other political factions to look down on the government as well.

On the military stage, the Sadrist movement, even though has mobilized massive number of followers that they are capable of inflicting

so much harm to the coalition forces and the central government forces as well, but, they suffered massive losses in their struggle with the coalition in the mean time. Losses on the battlefield and on the political arena, something the movement cannot endure for too long, and that explains to us why the movement has been shifting its strategy more often. However, when the movement faced with unbearable threats has always the capability to shift course. In other words, the leadership of the movement always considers peaceful alternatives or non-violent repertoires. Mosques, charities, informal social networks, and most importantly the images of

Ashura, and what the events of Ashura are really representing in the Iraqi consciousness throughout the previous centuries, sense of injustice and moral decline within the government practices are persistently used to appeal to the masses and remind them of the

threat that is presented by the occupation forces and by those Iraqis who happened to have a different political point of view

The use of aggressive repertoires of action by the Sadrist movement was not meant only to undermine the American authority and threatening the coalition forces, it was meant to undermine the legitimacy of the elected central government in Baghdad and the local governments in all Shia cities in the South and in Najaf and Karbala in particular as well

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regarding the occupation and how to deal with it, the legality of participating in any election conducted by the American and the appointed central government, and most importantly, who should lead the country. The leadership of the movement persistently tried to answer these questions, and to answer these questions; the movement needed frames to find the solid ground to secure its position.

The uprising led by the Mehdi Army the Militant Wing of Sadrist movement in the beginning of 2004, which was instigated by the shutting down of the movement's main newspaper Al-Hawza

al-Nataqa (Vocal Hawza), had witnessed two types of repertoires of action. At the beginning of the episode, public agitation was peaceful. Demonstrations, which were mainly Shia followers of Muqtada al-Sadr, marched down Sadr's City, a poor outskirts to the east of Baghdad, protest the closure of the weekly newspaper. As I have alluded previously, the Sadrist movement, throughout its struggle with both the regime of Saddam Hussein in the 1990s, and during the stage of the occupation, which begun in 2003, was not

a stagnant or infertile movement. When the movement has exerted all peaceful solutions to come to an agreement with the American occupation, the movement shifted its course to adopt more provocative approach to the many problems, which the movement thought it was obligated to addresses. The shift came when the Sadrists utilized violence to occupy government buildings and shutting down local

government offices in Sadr' city in Baghdad or in some other Shia cities in the South besides the two major Shia cities in Najaf and Karbala as a response to the closure of their newspaper.

⁽³⁹⁾ No doubt, the Sadrist movement

has contributed so much to the revival of the modern Shia political thoughts in the twentieth century. By focusing on the establishment of a revolutionary Hawza (religious school) that gets direct involvement in political affairs, and by providing educational and religious services to the most needy people in Shia populated areas, the movement has filled a very wide gap that caused by the intentional regime's neglect. Some observers have indicated that the movement swiftly shifted its ideology.

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Once the movement put aside all peaceful approaches that were practiced during the era of the Sadr II, and adopted more violent means in dealing even with Shia factions that had different political points of view, the movement has lost some of its authenticity and in return has lost some ground in the country. Abdulltif al-Herz writes, the Sadrist movement generally went through two stages; the first stage, was initiated by Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr, who adopted a relations that were marked completely with violence and the rejection of all other opinions.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Indeed, when a movement avert from its peaceful or non-violent sentiments, it losses legitimacy, and this is what has happened with the Sadrist movement. The movement that has refused the theory of Wilayat al-Fiqh, as a form of government, because, it simply violates the essence of human political and moral rights, in contrast, it turned to be as coercive as a movement can

be by dictating all life aspects of its followers or of those who oppose it. Based on these facts, the movement suffered severely from fragmentation after its engagement in illegal confrontation with the central government in 2008 in Baghdad and in major Shia cities in Southern Iraq.

Conclusion:

The ramifications followed the events of 1991 and 2003, certainly assisted the Sadrist movement in operating more freely in society. The opening of the political environment in Iraq, which pursued the defeat of Iraq in Desert Storm in 1991, and after the operation

When the movement has exerted all peaceful solutions to come to an agreement with the American occupation, the movement shifted its course to adopt more provocative approach to the many problems, which the movement thought it was obligated to addresses. The shift came when the Sadrists utilized violence to occupy government buildings and shutting down local government offices in Sadr' city in Baghdad or in some other Shia cities in the South besides the two major Shia cities in Najaf and Karbala as a response to the closure of their newspaper

of liberation Iraq in 2003 have offered the movement with some leverages in influencing the social and political structures of the Shia society. Informal social networks, likes mosques, religious schools, and charities were essential components, which enabled the Sadrist

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movement to mobilize people during the 1990s, and during the period that followed the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. By providing financial aids to a large portion of Iraqi Shia in Baghdad and in other Shia major cities in the South, the movement presented itself as a legitimate social and political factor in Iraq. Besides

the use of informal social networks, the movement was more rational and pragmatic in utilizing framing concept to mobilize people. Cultural framing, religious symbols and other means massively

utilized by the movement to address some great social and political grievances, throughout its struggle with the regime of Saddam Hussein in the 1990s, and during its struggle with occupation forces and with the elected government in the years followed the occupation. Violence was present in some of the movement practices, especially after the invasion in 2003.

The opening of the political environment in Iraq, which pursued the defeat of Iraq in Desert Storm in 1991, and after the operation of liberation Iraq in 2003 have offered the movement with some leverages in influencing the social and political structures of the Shia society

The aggressiveness of the movement's political and social practices at some moments was justified by the movement's leadership as the only essential way to deal with a particular situation at a particular moment. How successful the movement was in its attempt to mobilize people, that is something still very

debatable. But certainly, the movement had and still has the massive support of young poor Shia all over the state of Iraq. The latest national election in Iraq that was took place on March 2010, which the movement has captured

forty seats in Parliament proved that the movement is on the rise again politically and socially. Thus, movement's contributions on so many levels, socially and politically, and its participation in the new elected government may give us some clue, which may help us characterizing the movement's success.

Notes

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