Challenges to Moderation Theory:
Muqtada al-Sadr and Iraq's Sadrist Movement

by

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Abstract

Nearly all scholarship on radical political movements suggests that participation in formal politics will lead to moderation. Yet Iraq's Sadrist Movement, the Shi'a Islamist group headed by Muqtada al-Sadr, defies the widespread assumption that political inclusion leads to moderation. This thesis will examine the Sadrist Movement to explore when political participation produces ideological moderation and when it does not. In late 2004, the Sadrist Movement recognized the legitimacy of the Iraqi state, ceased using violence and entered electoral politics. The literature suggests that the Sadrist movement should have continued to moderate in response to further political and material incentives. However, in 2006 the Sadrists returned to violence and grew increasingly hostile toward democratic politics. Why did the Sadrist Movement reverse course in this manner? This work argues that unstable environments, such as that of post-2003 Iraq, can cause parties to behave in ways that defy the assumptions of moderation theory.

Keywords: Moderation; al-Sadr; Mahdi Army; Sadrist; Moderation Theory; Islamist

Acknowledgements

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1.   Introduction

In December of 2004, after Sadrist forces lost control of the Shi'a religious stronghold of Najaf, Muqtada al-Sadr halted violence, entered politics and eventually participated in parliamentary elections. This act enabled the Sadrist Movement to gain more than ten percent of the seats in parliament and control over key service ministries such as transportation and health. Controlling these two sectors and the numerous jobs they represented benefitted the Sadrist Movement materially and politically. Moderation theory explains the Sadrists' initial entrance into electoral politics as a response to such incentives. The literature predicts that the Sadrist Movement should have continued to moderate in order to pursue greater material and political gains. However, when in 2006 fierce fighting broke out between various Sunni and Shi'a groups across the country and especially Baghdad, Muqtada al-Sadr reactivated his Mahdi Army and undid much of the moderation that his movement had previously achieved. Such a contradiction begs the question: why does the Sadrist Movement not conform to what the literature states about the path radical groups follow toward moderation?

Since reviving his father Sadeq al-Sadr's movement in 2003, Muqtada al-Sadr has intermittently ceased and returned to violence to suit his strategic goals. After the 2007 surge of coalition troops and subsequent security crackdown threatened to destroy the Mahdi Army, Muqtada al-Sadr declared a ceasefire and went into self-imposed exile in Iran. In recent months, statements made by Muqtada al-Sadr and other Sadrist officials have threatened to recall the Mahdi Army and begin violence anew if coalition forces remain after January 1st 2012 (Tawfeeq, 2011). That the Sadrist Movement has pursued its goals peacefully for the past few years in no way means that it has moderated or permanently forsworn violence. This simply means that for the time being, as in 2004-2005, it suits Muqtada al-Sadr's goals to remain peaceful. When the Mahdi Army returned in 2006 it was more powerful and more devastating than it had ever been before and with occupation forces dwindling and slated to leave entirely in 2012, this may very well happen again soon. The Sadrist Movement today stands at a crossroads:

to continue to integrate into the formal political system and pursue non-violent means of achieving its goals; or to return to violence and possibly plunge Iraq into civil war.

The behavior of the Sadrist Movement represents a distinct departure from the path toward moderation explained by the literature. Scholarship on moderation theory predicts a relatively constant trajectory toward moderation, assuming that the promise of material and political rewards in exchange for such moderation remains constant as well. The literature explains why the Sadrists initially made a strategic calculation to turn to politics, namely, to obtain material and political benefits. The literature would predict that, having made political and material gains, the Sadrist Movement would have continued moderating in order to pursue such incentives further, yet this did not occur. The Sadrist Movement returned to violence and in many respects became more radical than it had ever been before. This inconsistency implies that how radical groups are viewed and handled in certain contexts may need to be reevaluated. In particular, the example of the Sadrist Movement implies that in the environment of instability that arises from a state of civil war, previous scholarship on moderation theory may not apply. As previous scholarship has relied on the experiences of groups operating in relatively stable social and political climates, a new theoretical framework may be necessary to analyze radical groups operating in extremely unstable environments.

1.1. Methodology

This thesis seeks to determine how and why the Iraqi Sadrist Movement contradicts the literature on moderation theory and to draw lessons from this group's actions that may be applied to future policy and scholarship on radical political organizations. The first portion of this work will be dedicated to exploring previous scholarship and theory on the moderation of political parties in general and radical movements in particular, in order to determine the conditions and mechanisms that typically cause radical groups to grow more moderate. Using this theoretical component as a framework, this paper will relate the relevant background information regarding Muqtada al-Sadr, the establishment of the Sadrist Movement and its revival after the fall of the Ba'athist regime. This paper will then examine four distinct periods that have marked this movement's actions after 2003. These four distinct periods have been

defined by alternating radicalization and moderation in terms of the movement's goals and means of pursuing them. The Sadrist Movement became more radical between 2003 and late 2004, moved toward moderation through 2006, radicalized from 2006-2007 and then took some steps toward moderation thereafter.

This paper will rely upon a thorough examination of primary texts, including the words of Muqtada al-Sadr and newspaper reports of the group's activities for empirical evidence about the Sadrist Movement. By closely examining the actions of the Sadrist Movement, it will be apparent that its activities have vacillated between radicalization and moderation during different periods. This empirical evidence will be compared to the literature on moderation theory to evaluate that literature. This work shall employ Schwedler's (2006) description of moderation as a basis for determining moderate and immoderate actions. The path toward moderation will be defined primarily by the incentives identified by Schwedler (2006), the participation-moderation trade-off explained by Huntington (1991) and the median voter model described by Black (1948) and Downs (1957) and shall be supplemented by further literature on moderation theory pertaining to various Islamist and leftist groups operating in a variety of specific contexts. By using these methods, this work will argue that the Sadrist Movement has acted in a way that is inconsistent with previous scholarship on moderation theory and with the path this body of literature predicts radical movements will take toward moderation.

This thesis will examine the context in which the Sadrist Movement has operated and compare it to the conditions under which groups that have formed the basis for previous scholarship have worked. This paper will argue that while radical groups examined in previous literature on moderation theory operated in relatively stable countries, the Sadrist Movement has operated under the extremely unstable political, economic and security conditions that have characterized post-2003 Iraq. Furthermore this work argues that the Sadrist Movement's political trajectory has deviated significantly because the context in which the Sadrist Movement has operated differs significantly from those in which previously examined radical groups have operated. Given the tremendous influence of the Sadrist Movement, and the potentially grave threat it poses to the future of Iraq, it is imperative that the contradiction between this movement's actions and the literature be resolved, in order to better understand this and similar groups in the future.

2. Theory: Islamist Political Groups and the Challenge of Moderation

This section will examine the literature that informs the study of political moderation and will attempt to map the conditions under which political engagement causes Islamist political groups to become more moderate. Radicalism and moderation are often viewed as a continuum with a rise in moderation corresponding to a fall in radicalism and vice versa. Consequently it is often assumed that if inclusion leads to moderation, it must correspond with a reciprocal fall in radicalism and that exclusion from politics must have a radicalizing effect, but the complexities of political Islam belie this conclusion. Many radical Islamist groups have participated in formal politics yet maintained radical beliefs and practices, while others have become more moderate while being barred from participation in state-controlled activities. This chapter will focus on exactly how inclusion leads to greater moderation, without assuming that exclusion from politics alone causes radicalism, or that inclusion alone causes moderation. This chapter will argue that incentives tied to the formal political process encourage radical groups to moderate, assuming they are operating in a relatively stable and secure environment.

2.1. The Diversity of Islamist Groups

Islamism, as Fuller (2004) defines it, is a broad concept represented by a variety of different politically-engaged groups that derive inspiration from Islam. Fuller claims that at its core, this term describes a type of identity that may encompass a wide variety of economic, social and political functions but generally seek to advance and revitalize the Muslim community with the aid of religion. This definition is necessarily broad because the scope of political Islam and the diversity of Islamist groups are equally broad. Islamist movements espouse a wide spectrum of political beliefs varying from progressive to reactionary; therefore 'political Islam' should not be treated as if it were

monolithic phenomenon. Numerous different types of groups incorporate Islamism into their identities in a variety of ways.

Radical groups such as the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, *Takfir w'al-Hijra* and later *al-Qaeda* wish only to overthrow the existing order through *Jihad* and to create an Islamic state (see Kepel 2006; Mandaville 2007; Wiktorowicz 2001 and Zubaida 2001). Other groups, such as the Wasat party of Egypt, the Justice and Development Party of Turkey, and the Jordanian Islamic Action Front willingly acquiesce to state regulation of politics in the hopes of one day gaining greater power and the ability to affect meaningful change (see Mandaville 2007; Wickham 2002). The most progressive of Islamist political groups are what Nasr (2005) calls "Muslim democrats", such as the Turkish Justice and Development Party. Such groups are similar to European Christian democratic parties in that they derive their political values from religion but do not aspire to reshape the political order along religious guidelines. These parties reject or discount the creation of a *Shari'ah* state and seek simply to establish viable platforms to gain popular support for the purpose of creating a secure and functioning political system. Finally Zubaida (2001) and Ismail (2001) refer to important sectors of society with Islamist leanings but without a formal party such as the traditional Muslim bourgeoisie of lawyers and businessmen, the *Ulema* and the institution of *al-Azhar*. Although religiously pious and socially conservative, these groups do not question the legitimacy of the state and do not support revolutionary activities or seek to overthrow the regime.

As Fuller's definition of Islamism implies, Islamist movements vary greatly in terms of how they view political Islam and how 'moderate' or 'immoderate' they might be judged by observers. Many Islamist parties might already be considered 'moderate' by some standards, a minority of groups such as *al-Qaeda* are too radical to be drawn into the arena of democratic politics, and others, such as the establishment of *al-Azhar*, do not threaten democracy but also do not have an interest in electoral participation. Islamist groups are varied and complex and although inclusion in the political process usually has a moderating affect on participating parties, the precise outcomes will vary from group to group, for each has a different ideological starting point that has been shaped by a unique set of experiences. Therefore when studying or making policy toward any Islamist group, including the Sadrist Movement, it is necessary to examine

the intricacies of the group itself and not to assume that lessons learned from other Islamist groups will necessarily apply to the one in question.

2.2. Political Participation and Ideological Moderation

Most scholarship on the inclusion-moderation hypothesis applies some aspect of the "participation-moderation tradeoff" articulated by Huntington (1991) or what is known as the 'median voter model' derived from the works of Duncan Black (1948) and Anthony Downs (1957). In *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Samuel Huntington discusses what he calls the "participation-moderation tradeoff", in which political groups become more moderate as they submit to democratic constraints and focus on running viable and competitive political parties. Duncan Black's work "On the Rationale of Group Decision-making" demonstrates the 'median voter model', which represents voter preferences as a spectrum. This spatial analogy assumes that all voters choose the politician who most represents their own preferences. Because voter preferences are concentrated at the center of the spectrum, candidates capture a larger number of votes as their platform grows more moderate. Thus when participating in the electoral process, candidates will naturally moderate their platform in an attempt to match this 'median voter' and gain wider support.

In *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Downs also represents voter preferences in a spectrum, but argues that, in a multi-party system or a society in which there is little ideological consensus, there may be multiple 'peaks' around which voter preferences congregate. These 'peaks' may not necessarily be located near the center of the spectrum, implying that a radical group operating in a multi-party system might rationally chose to moderate (or radicalize) only to the 'peak' nearest its own ideology, rather than continuing to moderate toward the ideological median. The works of Black and Downs demonstrate how inclusion causes political parties-radical and non-radical alike- to moderate in order to appeal to a wider swath of the public. Huntington's 'tradeoff' explains why the constraints of the political system compel moderation on the part of participants. These arguments are at the core of most literature on the inclusion-moderation hypothesis, but before examining this scholarship, it is important to discuss what the concept of 'moderation' entails.

The term 'moderate' is problematic to define because, as Schwedler (2006) argues, it is not a sufficiently nuanced term to describe an entire party, as a single party may hold moderate stances on some positions and immoderate stances on others. Furthermore, Black's theorem implies that 'moderate' does not have a fixed meaning, but simply connotes a position that is palatable to a wider range of people than another alternative, thus 'to moderate' in this sense simply means to adopt positions that are favored by the public. The difficulty of defining 'moderate' leads Schwedler to *describe* rather than *define* the term, referring to categories of analysis such as "accommodationist" as opposed to "nonaccommodationist" in politics and "contextualist" as opposed to "legalist" in understanding religious texts. Furthermore, Schwedler points to differences of tactics -violence or nonviolence- and goals –overthrow the system or work within it- that distinguish moderates from radicals. Thus, although a comprehensive, fixed definition of 'moderate' cannot be formed, in terms of Islamist movements, moderation entails: political accommodation; considering context in the application of religious texts; non-violence; and accepting the legitimacy of and working within the state system. By this definition, the Sadrist Movement has vacillated between moderation and immoderation in terms of its willingness to cooperate with other political groups, to accept and work within the state system, and to use violence.

The argument that inclusion causes moderation has been advanced in various forms by a wide variety of scholars. However, it is often a challenge to channel radical groups into the democratic process. Schwedler argues that this can be done by providing immediate incentives such as "legal status, the right to publish a newspaper, and the ability to put forth alternative political agendas" (p.11) in addition to the potential to gain power and support through elections. As groups enjoy greater freedom to disseminate their message and gain a wider base of support, they begin to realize the advantages of continued participation. By incentivizing political participation, the central government can transform radical opposition into groups solely focused on maintaining a viable political platform and building a stable party.

Schwedler outlines a variety of scenarios in which, once radical opposition groups are drawn into the arena of state-controlled political participation, inclusion may lead to greater moderation of the political landscape as a whole. Radicals may alter their positions to become moderates-in which case there will be fewer radicals and more

moderates. Those wavering between moderation and radicalism may choose moderation-thereby augmenting the number of moderates. Finally, moderates may become even more moderate and/or moderates may become more vocal and more effective. Thus inclusion may have the effect of moderation by either increasing support for moderates, decreasing support for radicals, or both, but in each scenario, moderates gain support relative to radicals. Even if inclusion does not change the attitudes of individual radical leaders, it may cause them to lose the support base necessary to maintain political power. In such cases, the effect of political participation is that the most radical elements are isolated from the mainstream movement by losing much of their support base. Thus political inclusion provides an incentive for moderates to abstain from alliances with radical elements and to break with these elements if an alliance has already been formed.

2.3. The Causes of Moderation

Although political inclusion is widely accepted to cause radical groups to grow more moderate, different scholars proffer a variety of causal mechanisms for this occurrence. Wickham (2004) and Bermeo (1997) cite the learning process involved in political participation which ultimately leads to ideological moderation. Lowi (1971) contends that political movements become more moderate through inclusion as they are compelled to defend their political positions, which causes them to re-examine what beliefs are defensible and to de-emphasize their radical views. Piven and Cloward (1977) argue that inclusion forces parties to be held accountable for government efficacy -or lack thereof- necessitating a shift from opposing the regime to focusing on forming a viable party platform to engage in formal politics and achieve tangible results. Przeworski (1985) argues that moderation proceeds from a rational calculation that becoming more moderate and participating fully in the political process presents the most promising route for achieving a group's goals. The work of these social movement theorists illustrates the variety of reasons why inclusion forces political parties in general to moderate, but the works of Wiktorowics (2001), Esposito and Pescatori (2001) and Kepel (1985; 2006) provide other explanations for why Islamist parties in particular grow more moderate by participating in the political process.

Wiktorowicz (2001) argues that political inclusion does not lead to an ideological shift within Islamist parties as much as it isolates the most radical elements and rewards more pragmatic members within these movements. Wiktorowicz' work is based on observations of Islamist activism in Jordan, where the state closely monitors and controls the licensing of political parties and non-governmental organizations. The Jordanian government also tightly regulates the religious establishment by controlling appointments of Imams at mosques and the content of their sermons and by monitoring Islamic organizations. As Wiktorowicz argues, control over these three spheres enables the Jordanian government to keep the most hard-line Islamists from participation in any of these government-regulated sectors, and to reward pragmatists who are willing to submit to state regulation. As with democratic governments, the incentive of participating in state-controlled areas of social and political life drives a wedge between moderates and radicals. However in this instance it is not inclusion in democratic processes that isolates radicals, but simply inclusion in any meaningful activity that is regulated by the state.

The work of Wiktorowicz demonstrates that the incentive to participate in state-sponsored activities-even if not the electoral process- is sufficient to cause moderate members to break from the more conservative elements of an Islamist movement. However other scholars (Kepel, 1985, 2006; Esposito and Pescatori, 1991) argue that exclusion of all Islamist movements from important state-controlled political and social spaces may cause radical elements of Islamist groups to break away in order to pursue more violent methods of opposition. Kepel (1985, 2006) cites the experience of Islamist groups in Egypt such as *Gama'at al-Islamiyyah* and *Takfir w'al-Hijra*, which he believes departed from the mainstream Muslim Brotherhood because of exclusion and oppression by the regime and the resulting frustration over the mainstream's inability to gain concessions to allow Islamists more freedom to pursue their activities. In this case, these radical parties not only became more violently opposed to the Egyptian government, but came to reject the more accommodating approach of the Islamist mainstream. Esposito and Pescatori (1991) argue that state regulation of key sectors such as the religious establishment, aid organizations and political parties in Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria forced radical elements to break with their more moderate counterparts. Like Wiktorowicz, Esposito and Pescatori argue that inclusion in formal

social and political activities causes a split between radical and moderate elements of Islamist movements but concede that exclusion may have a similar effect albeit with more desirable consequences.

The works of Wiktorowicz, Espositio and Pescatori and Kepel show that both inclusion in and exclusion from political and social areas regulated by the state can cause a split between moderate and radical elements of Islamist movements. The difference is that when the split results from inclusion, radical elements are isolated and marginalized, losing their support base to the more pragmatic mainstream. When Islamists are excluded from state-controlled spaces and it is the radicals who split from the moderates, the result is that more radical-minded elements are driven to pursue extreme methods of opposition. Thus, although the result is the same-a moderate-radical split- in the cases studied by these scholars inclusion has the effect of weakening radical elements whereas exclusion has the effect of emboldening them.

Although undemocratic systems are capable of affecting a split between radical and moderate elements of opposition groups, it is through participation in formal, electoral politics that real moderation of the political system occurs. The arguments outlined above by Huntington, Schwedler and Black point to a number of mechanisms unique to the democratic system that cause radical groups to moderate. Although the experiences of Islamist parties in politics has been somewhat limited in terms of both scale and time, the experiences of radical leftist groups at the end of the Cold War also seem to support the inclusion-moderation hypothesis.

2.4. The Leftist Connection

Conclusions about the political and ideological moderation of radical groups not only apply to Islamist movements, but also to radical socialist parties. Wickham (2004) compares the moderation of leftist groups and Arab Islamist movements, particularly Egypt's *Wasat* Party on the basis that both socialist and Islamist movements initially pursued the ideal of an "end-state", that encompassed the movement's ideological goals but in which electoral processes would not be necessary. The former pursued the goal of an egalitarian society, free from class hierarchy and the latter a society governed by Islamic morals and Shari'a law. Wickham claims that political participation caused both

to moderate: socialist parties pursued new opportunities available through inclusion in the electoral process, and Egypt's *Wasat* party responded to more limited promises of participation that incentivized moderation. Przeworski (1985) shows that European socialist parties moderated ideologically on the basis of strategic calculations to gain broader support while Bermeo (1992) cites the impact of "political learning" on causing leftist groups to moderate. Wickham's work links earlier scholarship on leftist political parties, with more recent work on Islamist movements, showing that conclusions about leftist groups can be applied to the study of political Islam.

One lesson from the experience of leftist parties is that ideological moderation often occurs when radical groups choose to do so in order to gain some strategic advantage. In the case of European leftist groups, Przeworski (1985) argues that the introduction of democratic institutions and an electoral process forced radicals to either continue to pursue a socialist revolution by confronting the establishment, or work toward political change by participating in formal politics. European leftist parties overwhelmingly chose the latter because they believed they had a popular mandate and that participation in the electoral process would enable them to affect their revolution democratically. Przeworski notes that, although the democratic system offered new political possibilities to leftist groups, it also forced them to consider the economic implications of pursuing their revolution. As leftist leaders realized that embracing socialism would have severe economic repercussions and likely result in their losing popular support, they were forced to moderate and to be content with pursuing more pragmatic goals without overturning the existing system.

The process of democratization has created incentives for leftist groups to moderate not only in Europe, but also in Latin America. As Wickham (2004) notes, these incentives stem from two primary sources. The first, which illustrates Huntington's "participation-moderation tradeoff", was that socialist radicals were required to renounce violence and be accepted by opposition forces simply to participate in elections. The second reason is that leftist parties realized that moderation would be necessary to enjoy electoral support -as the median voter model predicts. Share (1985) notes the role of political participation in the deradicalization of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, whose leaders began to moderate after the 1977 elections, in order to gain more widespread support and pursue their goal of gaining a majority in parliament. Roberts

(1995) cites the effects of political participation on causing Chile's socialists to embrace a more moderate agenda. In this case, it was necessary for the Socialist Party of Chile to become more moderate in order to ally with the Christian Democrats to defeat the dictator Augusto Pinochet. This phenomenon of radical groups growing more moderate as a strategy for pursuing political goals applies to both leftist and Islamist parties alike, as evidenced by groups such as the 'Muslim democrats' mentioned above.

Nancy Bermeo's (1992) study of European and Latin American countries transitioning to democracy discusses the impact of what she calls "political learning" on causing radical groups to moderate. Bermeo argues that living under a dictatorship compels many to alter both their political beliefs and how they attempt to achieve their goals. Bermeo contends that democratic learning under dictatorships has occurred in a variety of ways. Elites experienced democratic learning by interacting with other "reference states" in Europe and Latin America. Radicals interacted with each other in prison and in exile. Labor leaders and business elites interacted and learned the value of negotiation. Finally, democratic learning occurred in those areas such as guilds, syndicates and religious spaces, where groups could act with some degree of autonomy and democratic ideals could disperse freely. This 'political learning' has historically affected the nature of political Islam, as different Islamist groups have interacted with each other and with other sectors of society in various situations including in exile, in prison and in religious spaces. Such 'political learning' has had a lasting impact on what sorts of new ideologies have emerged from Islamist groups. Thus the process of political learning that so heavily impacted leftist groups in Europe and Latin America, can also partially account for the variety of interpretations for the role of Islam in politics that are espoused by disparate movements.

Wickham's (2004) work forms the connection between previous scholarship about leftist movements and current scholarship on Islamist groups, making it possible for conclusions drawn from former radical socialist parties to be applied to Islamist movements. The works of Przeworski (1985), Bermeo (1992) and others show how inclusion has caused leftist parties to become more moderate either as a result of 'political learning' or as a 'strategic calculation', articulating either the participation-moderation tradeoff or the median voter model. Thus scholarship on the integration of

socialist opposition movements into formal politics implies that a similar moderation will occur with the inclusion of Islamist opposition groups into electoral politics.

2.5. Conclusions on Moderation Theory

The literature reviewed here reveals much about the relationship between political participation and the moderation of political parties. This scholarship suggests that once radical forces have been drawn into the arena of formal political contestation, a variety of mechanisms promote moderation such as the process of political learning, the desire to defend political gains, the need to produce a viable party platform and the motivation to capture votes closer to the ideological median. Nevertheless, causal mechanisms of political moderation adhere to the participation-moderation tradeoff and the median voter model. As Schwedler notes, the nature of inclusion in state-controlled spaces may affect the number of moderates and radicals in the political arena or the degree of moderation expressed, but the result is the same: the empowerment of moderates. The works of Wiktorowicz, Kepel and Esposito and Piscatori show that both inclusion and exclusion may cause a split between radicals and moderates, but that the outcomes of this split are more favorable if it is the result of inclusion. In any case, the literature overwhelmingly points to the benefits of political participation in causing radical groups to moderate.

Political participation has had a moderating effect on groups as disparate as Islamists throughout the Muslim world and leftists throughout Europe and Latin America. Such moderation implies that the effects of political participation are not confined to a single ideological persuasion and that the inclusion-moderation hypothesis can apply to the wide range of Islamist groups. The empirical evidence of each of the scholars examined here indicates that inclusion in state-regulated activities, particularly electoral contestation, will lead to the moderation of Islamist movements. However, it is important to consider the social and political climates in which groups examined by previous scholarship have operated. Although the leftist and Islamist groups examined in the literature have had to contend with social upheaval and often oppressive central governments, these environments were nevertheless relatively stable. Radical groups operating in contexts such as Pinochet's Chile or Mubarak's Egypt may have had to

contend with extremely adverse conditions, but the ambient political and social environments of these countries simply cannot be compared to post-2003 Iraq in terms of instability. It is for this reason that the actions of the Iraqi Sadrist Movement challenge the assumptions traditionally made in the literature.

When Saddam Hussein was toppled in 2003, Iraq had endured 35 years of Ba'athist rule that had relied heavily on central planning and a robust security apparatus. With the fall of this longstanding social and political order, the number of coalition troops committed to Iraq was simply not sufficient to cope with the power vacuum that was created. Furthermore, a wide variety of factors exacerbated the environment of instability in Iraq. First, after nearly 13 years of UN-imposed sanctions, poverty was widespread because without substantial oil revenues, the government was unable to fund the large public sector and system of subsidies on which the Iraqi economy had rested for decades. When this government collapsed, the economic situation grew even more desperate. Second, one of the results of the Iran-Iraq war was that weapons caches had been stashed in government institutions throughout the country in preparation for an invasion. Furthermore, compulsory military service under Hussein meant that most Iraqi men had at least some knowledge of firearms. These factors made it easier for armed bands and militias to form shortly after the fall of the Ba'athists. Third, order had long been kept by a strong security apparatus, but with Ba'athists abandoning their posts, and poorly-armed policemen unwilling to oppose bands of men carrying Kalashnikovs, occupation troops were the only forces left to maintain order. Fourth, the number of troops that occupied Iraq was insufficient to prevent widespread criminal activity. In order to provide security to a population occupied by an outside force, a ratio of at least 20 troops per 1,000 citizens must generally be deployed, however the force that occupied Iraq was less than half of this (Quinlivan, 2003). Finally, the religious, cultural, ethnic and tribal diversity of Iraq meant that there were numerous latent social cleavages.

Given these conditions, it is no surprise that Iraq has been an extremely unstable environment since 2003. In an environment such as this, where the security climate is constantly changing, political parties such as the Sadrist Movement may have motivations that supersede material or political gain. While these factors may apply to Iraqi radical groups in times of relative calm, in periods of instability, decision-making is likely to be affected by a variety of other factors. Such factors may depend heavily on the

goals and identity of the specific radical group; therefore it is important to understand the Sadrist Movement in order to contextualize its actions and motivations.

3. Formation of the Sadrist Movement

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the formation of the Sadrist Movement, its ideological influences and its most influential figure, Muqtada al-Sadr. By understanding the early influences and actions of this movement, it is possible to contextualize the role it has played in Iraqi society since its inception. This movement has not conformed to what the literature states about the trajectory of radical groups toward moderation, but this is not because it has acted irrationally. The Sadrist Movement deviated from the traditional path toward moderation in order to cater to the needs of Iraq's Shi'a. This deviation from what the scholarship on ideological moderation explains about the path toward moderation is the result of extremely powerful forces. The first of these forces is the circumstances under which the Sadrist Movement operated and the second, which is the subject of this chapter, is the tradition of the Sadrist Movement. This tradition has always put the needs of Iraq's Shi'a above anything else, including the lives of Sadrist leaders, thus it is no surprise that this tradition affected the decision-making of Muqtada al-Sadr, to eventually return to radicalism after having made significant progress toward moderation.

3.1. The Sadr Family

The Sadr family is one of the oldest and most respected amongst Iraq's Shi'a clerical aristocracy and over the last half century it has been closely tied to political activism. This activism began with Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (known in the movement as Sadr I or the First Martyr), who established the first Shi'a religious political party, *al-Dawa* (the call) in 1957 (Hegland, 2003). Sadrist activism continued with Baqir al-Sadr's student and cousin, Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr -Sadr II or the Second Martyr- whose work to revive and empower the Shi'a community in the 1990s would form the basis for the current Sadrist Movement. Although this movement was crushed by Saddam Hussein's assassination of Sadiq al-Sadr and his two eldest sons in 1999, it re-emerged

under the direction of Sadiq al-Sadr's youngest son, Muqtada, after the fall of Hussein in 2003 (ICG, 2006). Despite having few religious credentials, Muqtada was able to capitalize on his family name, revive and assume leadership of his father's movement and raise a powerful militia.

In addition to its leader, Muqtada al-Sadr, the Sadrist Movement has been shaped and inspired by the leadership of two previous clerics from the Sadr family. The first, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, was among the earliest to involve Iraq's Shi'a in religiously inspired activist politics and to lay the groundwork for the Sadrist Movement. Baqir's cousin, Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, inspired what would later be called the Sadrist Movement through his populist beliefs and political activism. Both of these men were high-ranking Shi'a clerics, yet each challenged the hierarchy, rigidity and quietism of the *hawza* or Shi'a seminary establishment based in Najaf, Iraq and Qom, Iran. Working to promote the rights of traditionally disenfranchised and impoverished Shi'a, each of these men developed large cult followings that viewed them as nearly messianic figures. Both were also killed by the authoritarian, secular, Baathist forces they opposed, a fact that only increased their standing within the Shi'a community, which has a long-standing tradition of pious leaders being martyred by the unjust and the secular. Muqtada al-Sadr, the son-in-law of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, and son of Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, built his claim to leadership upon the names of these two men. As the Shi'a community was historically led by learned and elderly patriarchs of high religious standing, Muqtada would not have been able to assume leadership of the Sadrist Movement at the age of thirty, with only a low ranking in the hawza, were it not for the work of his forebears, and the Sadr name (Raphaeli, 2004; ICG, 2006).

Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, also known as Sadr I or the First Martyr among Sadrists, helped to found the political party *al-Dawa* (the call) in 1957 with some support from other young activists and the *hawza* hierarchy. The purpose of this organization was to counter the rise of communism and secularism in Iraq with a political party inspired by Islam (ICG, 2006). The goal of this organization was to promote Islamic values, oppose secularism, reinvigorate the Islamic *Umma* and ultimately to create an Islamic state based on Baqir's concept of *Wilayat al-Umma* or rule of the people (Nasr, 2007). Baqir's vision challenged the authority of the *hawza* as well as that of the secular Iraqi leadership and ultimately he was pressured to cease overt political activism in

1960, although he continued to speak and engage in covert activities for the rest of his life (Aziz, 1993). In 1979, with the fall of the Iranian Shah, Baqir began to rapidly increase the level of Iraqi political activism. First, he proclaimed a three-day holiday in the Najaf *hawza* in celebration of Khomeini's success. Next, Iraq's Shi'a, inspired by the overthrow of the Iranian Shah, began to hold mass demonstrations. This activism caused Iraq's new leader, Saddam Hussein to crack down on all politically engaged Shi'a, especially the *Dawa* party. Thousands of its members were arrested, many were executed, and Baqir was put under house arrest. Baqir al-Sadr was then asked to make a public gesture in support of the government but refused. Eventually he worked to overthrow the Ba'athist regime, an act which led to his arrest and execution and likely that of his sister, the activist Bint al-Huda, in April of 1980 (Aziz, 1993).

Although a follower and cousin of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr did not rise to prominence until the early 1990s, when he received the unlikely support of Saddam Hussein. After the death of the highest Shi'a authority, the *marji' al-taqlid* or source of emulation, Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei in 1992, Saddam Hussein sought to co-opt a high ranking member of the *hawza* to serve as his instrument for maintaining the loyalty of the Shi'a community. Sadiq al-Sadr convinced Saddam Hussein's *mukhabarat* security establishment that he would be a willing follower and was given significant freedoms to speak and even publish the religious magazine *al-Huda* (ICG, 2006). Sadiq al-Sadr supported the concept of *wilayat al-faqih* that governed Iran but proclaimed himself leader of the Shi'a community. This act gave Sadiq al- Sadr the justification to disobey the orders of the regime to cease Friday prayers, by elevating him to a position equivalent - in the minds of his followers - to that of Saddam Hussein. This act challenged not only the Iraqi regime, but also the leadership of Iran's Ali Khamenei and the quietist *hawza* establishment (ICG, 2006).

Unlike Baqir al-Sadr, Sadiq al-Sadr aimed to use the political space accorded him by the regime, to revive the Shi'a community, rather than to foment revolution. Sadiq's movement was much more populous than Baqir's, with his constituents being drawn from the lower classes whereas the latter's movement tended toward elitism as it invoked complex justifications for Baqir's notion of *wilayat al-umma* that were inaccessible to the less educated. By providing social services and preaching messages aimed at Iraq's underclass of Shi'a poor, Sadiq gained a large following among youth

and city-dwellers. Sadiq was also popular among Iraq's tribes, whose fierce independence and tribal customs often conflicted with the laws and practices of the central government. But Sadiq had made an enemy of the Iraqi state and alienated potential allies in the *hawza* and the Iranian government. By 1999 he began to wear a white shroud in preparation for martyrdom, as he was convinced that his death was fast approaching (Cockburn, 2008, p. 80). On February 19, 1999, Sadiq al-Sadr's fears were realized and he was killed along with his two eldest sons Muammal and Mustafa, along with their driver when their car was attacked by men with machine guns (Iraqi News Agency, 1999).

Muqtada al-Sadr was spared the purging of his family for several reasons. First, the Iraqi government claimed that Sadiq al-Sadr and his sons had been killed by foreign assassins whom the regime had managed to apprehend. Thus it would have been difficult for the regime to take Muqtada al-Sadr's life without drawing additional attention to the murder of his father. Second, at the age of 25 and with very limited religious credentials, he seemed an unlikely person to assume Sadiq's mantle of leadership after his assassination. Finally, Muqtada acted as though he accepted the regime's explanation for the murder of his father, an act which allowed him to live under house arrest in the family home. By surviving and remaining in Iraq, Muqtada positioned himself to eventually assume the leadership of the Sadrist Movement, whose lower-class constituency would not question his limited religious education and humble social station.

3.2. Muqtada al-Sadr

Born in 1973, Muqtada al-Sadr was the youngest son of Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr and followed the traditional path of the men of his family by pursuing religious studies at the Najaf *hawza*. In 1994 he married a daughter of his father's cousin and mentor Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr. As Sadiq al-Sadr's movement grew in the mid- to late-90s, Muqtada al-Sadr ceased his religious studies to aid his father. From 1997-1998, al-Sadr oversaw the Sadrist-run religious magazine *al-Huda* and oversaw security for his father. Furthermore, al-Sadr represented the Sadrist Movement in the al-Thawra

(later Sadr City) district of Baghdad, which is where he would reconstitute the Sadrists after the fall of Saddam (Cockburn, 2009).

After his father's murder, Muqtada al-Sadr resumed his religious studies while under house arrest, as religious credentials are imperative for those who wish to assume leadership roles in the Shi'a community (Raphaeli, 2004). Although al-Sadr was relatively young and without formal religious training when he assumed leadership of the Sadrist Movement in 2003, this did not dissuade the poor Shi'a who would form his constituency. To those who form his base of power in Sadr City, Muqtada al-Sadr is the true inheritor of his father's legacy, which is more important than any religious credentials. Coupled with his own charisma and oratory skills, al-Sadr's ability to situate himself as the true heir to his father's movement has made it possible for him to gain such a large following (Raphaeli, 2004).

4.   The Sadrist Movement Radicalizes: 2003-2004

In the immediate aftermath of the invasion of Iraq by coalition forces and fall of Saddam Hussein, Muqtada al-Sadr and the former leadership of his father's organization focused on reconstituting the Sadrist Movement. Filling the void left by the fall of the Ba'athists, the Sadrist Movement began providing social services and security, gaining it much support among Iraq's poorer Shi'a. As a nationalist organization, the Sadrist Movement opposed the occupation forces from the beginning. This opposition to the occupation gradually caused the Sadrist Movement to radicalize, first by denying the legitimacy of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), then by establishing its own institutions of government and finally by using violence against coalition forces. Given what the literature states about the incentives that draw radical groups into formal politics, it is no surprise that the Sadrist Movement did not moderate during this period. Elections were not held until 2005, the Sadrists were not invited to participate in the CPA and the Sadrist newspaper *al-Hawza* was shut down. Thus there were few state-controlled areas in which the Sadrists could participate, few incentives for them to moderate and many reasons to oppose the occupation and the CPA.

4.1. The Sadrist Movement Post-Invasion

On March 19, 2003, the United States and its allies began the invasion of Iraq as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In the aftermath of this invasion and the rapid collapse of the Ba'athist regime, Muqtada al-Sadr and his followers were among the fastest to respond to the new political climate. This rapid response was made possible by Sadr's skilled political leadership and the support network that had been established by his father. This network, initially constituted to extend social services to Iraq's poorer areas, was quickly set into motion providing electricity and other vital services (ICG, 2003). Meanwhile, Ayatollah Kadhim al-Ha'iri who was named Sadiq's al-Sadr's successor and was based in Iran, had very little following in Iraq. Consequently, he accorded Muqtada

al-Sadr certain privileges that would normally be denied to one of his limited religious training. Among these privileges were the rights to issue *fatawa* (non-binding opinions based on Islamic law), deliver sermons and receive *khums* (a form of religious tax on business profits and spoils of war) (ICG, 2006). These privileges would make leading the Sadrist Movement possible, as they provided al-Sadr with the religious pretext he needed to claim divine legitimacy for his beliefs and actions and the ability to gain an income from the widespread practice of looting.

By providing social services and security and by continuing his father's populist legacy, Muqtada al-Sadr soon gained widespread popularity among the urban poor, the demographic that would prove his staunchest supporters later on. Using this base of support, Muqtada al-Sadr set out to become the leader of the Shi'a community, building a reputation based on his ability to provide security and social services, and his opposition to Ba'athists, Salafis and especially the occupying forces. The Sadrists seized control of mosques, hospitals and welfare centers and began to form local institutions of government alongside the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). These bodies challenged the CPA by providing services and security through the Sadrist militia, the *Jaish al-Mahdi* (JAM) or Mahdi Army (ICG, 2006). On April 11, Muqtada al-Sadr gave his first sermon in Kufa's Grand Mosque, formally establishing himself as his father's heir by speaking where his father had delivered many of his most influential sermons.

Muqtada al-Sadr distinguished himself from other Shi'a leaders through his outspoken opposition to the occupation. While other organizations such as *al-Dawa* and the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI; now known as Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq or SIIC) cooperated to varying degrees with coalition forces, Sadrists rejected the occupation, using their newspaper *al-Hawza* to voice opposition and, increasingly, the JAM to commit violent acts. This opposition led the U.S. viceroy (officially the Administrator of the CPA) in Iraq to target al-Sadr's organization in late March of 2004 (Bremer, 2006). *Al-Hawza* was shut down, more and more attacks were ordered against Sadrist targets and Bremer decided to arrest a senior aide to Muqtada al-Sadr (Diamond, 2004). In response to the arrest of his aide, al-Sadr made a strategic decision to escalate the confrontation with US forces.

Knowing that much of US attention and resources were concentrated on containing the growing Sunni insurgency in Fallujah, widespread protests were held and Sadrist forces began seizing cities throughout Iraq. Soon US forces were facing a widespread uprising for which neither it, nor in truth the Sadrists were prepared. Although Muqtada al-Sadr commanded the support of the poor urban masses that no one else truly represented, the confrontation with US forces began to show that he had trouble controlling a militia that was ill-trained and poorly disciplined. Eventually the CPA under the direction of L. Paul Bremer issued a warrant for al-Sadr's arrest. This act led fighting to focus around al-Sadr's home city of Najaf as his forces gathered there to prevent the arrest of their leader. Although often at odds with one another, the Sadrists received cooperation from Najaf-based forces loyal to Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, and even received aid from various Sunni sections of Sadr City (Malkasian, 2006).

Anxious to avoid a US assault on the shrine of the Imam Ali, leading religious figures in Najaf encouraged negotiations between the CPA and the Sadrists. Ultimately, the CPA withdrew its arrest warrant for Muqtada al-Sadr, and its demands that the JAM disarm and disband. In exchange, al-Sadr agreed to order his men out of the city of Najaf, which he did, instructing all fighters to return to their homes. Although most followed these orders, many remained in the city, believing that the truce would not last; consequently many JAM fighters were prepared when the second battle for this city began four months later (Cockburn, 2008).

After the conclusion of the first battle of Najaf, many predicted a second struggle for this important city. The Sadrists worked hard over the coming months to prepare for such a confrontation. Although better equipped and organized, the Sadrists still lacked the discipline and weapons needed to destroy American fighting vehicles; consequently the JAM was little more effective as a military force than it had been during the first battle for Najaf (Raphaeli, 2004). The central government in Baghdad had also benefitted from several months of relative calm by being able to train and equip the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and install a new interim government, headed by Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, ostensibly returning sovereignty to the Iraqi people (Schmitt, 2004).

In early August, tensions rose as the Sadrist representative in Karbala was arrested and demonstrations for his release occurred. Muqtada al-Sadr, sensing that

confrontation was imminent, ordered his men to tolerate no provocation. U.S. Marines then patrolled near his house in Najaf and his followers feared they meant to arrest him. Finally, Sadrists kidnapped eighteen policemen and the governor of Najaf requested support from the U.S. military. Fighting erupted between the JAM and coalition forces in Najaf, Nassariya and Sadr City and Ali al-Sistani left the country for medical treatment in London. This action was taken to indicate tacit support for military action against Muqtada al-Sadr, for previously Sistani's presence in Najaf had helped prevent the U.S. from launching a full assault on the city. At this time, al-Sadr began issuing radical statements against the "great devil, America" such as "I say America is our enemy and the enemy of the people" and "Heaven does not come without a price" (McCarthy, 2004). Feeling betrayed by other parts of the Shi'a community in the face of oppressive violence, al-Sadr became more defiant as he felt more isolated.

As fighting continued and news of al-Sistani's departure spread, the citizens of Najaf fled the city to escape danger. On August 13, Muqtada al-Sadr was wounded by bomb shrapnel. The U.S. maintained military superiority surrounding Najaf but was reluctant to launch an all-out assault on the shrine of Imam Ali as doing so would surely have had dramatic repercussions. An effort at mediation was then attempted by agents of the Iraqi Government and a peace agreement was signed by Iyad Allawi. However, when a meeting was to take place in an old al-Sadr family home for Muqtada al-Sadr to sign the agreement in front of the Iraqi National Security Advisor, the house was bombarded by U.S. Marines and surrounded by Special Forces. Although al-Sadr was not in the home when the attack ensued and thereby managed to escape, he felt betrayed by the U.S. and the Iraqi government (Allawi 2007).

Surrounded by superior armed forces, Muqtada al-Sadr began to look for a favorable compromise to end the fighting while U.S. forces considered the viability of an assault on the Shrine of the Imam Ali. Although willing to leave the city, al-Sadr was not willing to disband the JAM as many demanded (Cole, 2004). On August 19, Sistani left his hospital in London and symbolically took control of the shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf, thereby complicating plans for an assault on the Shrine. On August 25th, Sistani announced that he would lead a peace march from Basra to Najaf and the Sadrists declared a ceasefire. The following day, the Americans also declared a ceasefire and al-Sadr met with Sistani to discuss terms of a peace agreement. Under these terms, both

the JAM and foreign forces were to withdraw from Najaf and Kufa and al-Sadr was to order the JAM to come to a ceasefire throughout the rest of the country as well (Sadeq, 2004).

The loss of Najaf was a major blow for the Sadrist Movement. In addition to the removal of the JAM from the city, the Sadrists had to abandon their offices in old Najaf and its schools were placed under the control of the *hawza*, all on the orders of Sistani. For a while it seemed as though Muqtada al-Sadr had truly been defeated and that his rivals had gained ascendency. Nevertheless, the Sadrists maintained their popularity as a force opposed to the occupation. In the months after the fall of Najaf, al-Sadr remained withdrawn from public life and reconsidered his political strategy; instead of armed resistance, he would cease using violence and take up politics. The following year, the Sadrist Movement participated in the January and December 2005 Iraqi parliamentary elections as part of the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) winning 23 out of 275 seats in January and increasing that to 32 seats in December (Katzman, 2009).

This period was marked by the steady radicalization of the Sadrist Movement. When the Sadrists ceased hostilities against coalition forces in mid-2004, it was not an act of moderation so much as it was an act of defeat. It was not until the end of that year, when the CPA agreed to hold elections, that incentives were in place to draw the Sadrists toward moderation. During this time, the Sadrists were not included in the CPA, elections were not held, the Sadrists were not permitted to print a newspaper and much of its leadership was pursued for arrest. Huntington (1991) argues that radical groups will trade moderation for the incentives of inclusion and Schwedler (2006) identifies a number of such incentives, which include the ability to print a newspaper, enjoy legal status and advance alternative political agendas. The Sadrist Movement was offered none of these enticements, thus it is no surprise that it radicalized during this period.

5. The Sadrists Moderate and Turn to Politics: 2004-2006

The reason for the Sadrist's turn to politics falls partially in line with what the literature states about incentives for political moderation. After being defeated militarily in Najaf, Muqtada al-Sadr had few options left and made a tactical decision to enter politics. As Schwedler (2006) argues, certain incentives initially draw radical parties into formal political contestation. In this case, these incentives were the promise of continued involvement in shaping the Iraqi political landscape and the ability to use this elevated platform to oppose the occupation. Piven and Cloward (1977) would suggest that this participation should have caused the Sadrist Movement to grow more moderate as it was held accountable for the government's failures and corruption. Yet al-Sadr adeptly sidestepped the potential problem of being associated with the government's failures by moving to control the health and transportation ministries. These important sectors have always employed large numbers of Iraqis, and controlling them enabled al-Sadr to favor his constituents with employment and access to government services yet distance himself from the security and public policy ministries that aroused the ire of many Iraqis (ICG, 2006). In this way al-Sadr does conform to some predictions of the literature, but challenges others.

By becoming involved in electoral politics, Muqtada al-Sadr benefitted greatly from his ability to provide material benefits to his constituents. In areas such as Sadr City, where unemployment had been close to seventy percent, Sadrist control over sanitation, transportation and healthcare meant that supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr could finally find employment (ICG, 2006). The Shi'a underclass, which had always been accorded a meager share of the government jobs upon which so many Iraqis relied, finally started to reap real financial benefits and enjoy a higher standard of living. Needless to say, al-Sadr's ability to respond to his constituents' desperate yearning for employment in a way that his militia never could have done, only served to increase his popularity.

The literature on moderation suggests that Muqtada al-Sadr should have made the strategic calculation to continue to moderate or at the very least, to continue to abstain from violence and other radical activity. At first, the Sadrists did seem to adhere to this prediction. Although the JAM remained in existence, it was largely dormant and did not engage in any large-scale confrontations with the Iraqi government, occupying forces or other militias. Institutions and neighborhoods controlled by Sadrists were forced to observe Muslim dress and stores selling liquor, music and videos continued to be barred from Sadr City (Cockburn, 2009). While not compromising their conservative ideology, the Sadrists did take a second important step toward moderation by participating in politics. In addition to halting violence, it also tacitly recognized the legitimacy of the Iraqi State, first by participating in elections and second by closing its Shari'a courts, which it had previously run parallel to the Iraqi courts that it considered illegitimate (Korany, Hilal and Abul Kheir 2008).

By early 2006, the Sadrist Movement seemed to be adhering precisely to the path toward moderation that the literature predicts. In order to enter into electoral politics, as predicted by Huntington's participation-moderation tradeoff, the Sadrist Movement made real strides toward moderation: it had largely abstained from violence for more than a year; it had recognized the legitimacy of the Iraqi government; and it had ceased running its own courts. The Sadrist Movement had also benefitted from significant rewards as a result of democratic participation; by controlling service ministries, the Sadrist Movement was able to provide desperately needed jobs to its constituents and increase its base of support. At this point, the median voter model would predict that, assuming greater rewards could be obtained through political participation and that the original incentives remained in place, the Sadrist Movement would see the rewards of inclusion and wish to reap further benefits. Bermeo's (1992) work would also suggest that interacting with other armed groups who had succeeded in politics, such as SCIRI and the Badr Organization, would demonstrate the benefits of political participation to the Sadrists. Judging by the literature, it would not have been unwise to predict in 2006 that the Sadrist Movement would seek to capture more of the 'median vote' by growing more moderate. Yet because of the factors mentioned above created such an unstable environment in Iraq, the Sadrist Movement did not conform to the literature. Because the context of Iraq varies so significantly from the contexts upon

which moderation theory is based, rather than continue toward moderation as previous scholarship would suggest, the Sadrists became more radical, more violent and even less appealing to median voters as it became embroiled in sectarian violence.

6.   The Sadrists Return to Radicalism: 2006-2007

After the 2003 occupation of Iraq, sectarian violence grew steadily with each passing year. As Sunni's were forced from their traditional seat of power, radical militias began employing violence as a means of creating chaos in the hopes that it might allow the Sunnis to gain greater political might. By 2005, sectarian and retributive violence had escalated and executions by both Shi'a and Sunni became common occurrences in Baghdad and across the country (al-Khalidi and Tanner, 2006). By February 2006 Shi'a outrage over the sectarian violence reached a peak when the al-Askari Shi'a shrine in Samarra was bombed. This act escalated the violence that had been occurring across the country into a fierce sectarian conflict, especially in Baghdad (Lischer, 2008).

Shortly after the bombing, JAM combatants began attacking Sunni mosques and killing Sunni civilians in Baghdad and throughout Iraq (al-Khalidi and Tanner, 2006). Although he had previously halted violence, Muqtada al-Sadr was soon embroiled in sectarian conflict. As attacks between Shi'a and Sunni militias increased, many Iraqis previously unaffiliated with militant groups either joined militias or, often, carried out violence independently. Attacks were frequently perpetrated by one religious sect against another, but the reasons for such acts varied. Violence often had nothing to do with sectarian motivations, but was simply a means of obtaining material gains through extortion, looting and so on. As fighting continued, many fled or were expelled from their formerly mixed neighborhoods and much of Baghdad and other cities became religiously homogenous (Lischer, 2008). Although the fighting involved Shi'a militias other than the JAM, areas with the worst violence against Sunnis, such as Sadr City, Shu'ala and Sha'b in Baghdad, and Basra in the south, were all controlled by Sadrist forces (al-Khalidi and Tanner, 2006).

Sadrist involvement in this violence helped them to expand tremendously by gaining revenue from protection money and from individuals who engaged in the lucrative practice of assassinating Sunnis for money (ICG, 2008). Although Muqtada al-

Sadr may not have directly ordered or even condoned much of this violence, he did not hesitate to capitalize on it either. Sadrists expanded their influence by opening new offices throughout disputed areas of the country and especially Baghdad. Isolated Shi'a communities received protection and those who had been displaced were given financial support to help them resettle (ICG, 2008). Thus the Sadrists gained from this violence in terms of material support and by widening its base of constituents-benefits that might, under more stabile circumstances, be associated with moderation and political inclusion.

The radicalization of the Sadrist Movement during this period was not limited to carrying out acts of violence. Throughout 2006 and 2007, the Sadrists had gradually withdrawn from the Iraqi government, first by freezing ministerial activity, then by withdrawing several ministers from Parliament and finally by quitting the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) altogether. Ministerial activity was halted in November, 2006 after Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki met with President George W. Bush. Six Sadrist members of Parliament were withdrawn in early 2007 when al-Maliki failed to set a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. troops ("Al-Sadr orders his bloc's ministers", 2007). Al-Sadr would ultimately withdraw from the UIA in late 2007 over the group's numerous disagreements with the Prime Minister (CNN Wire, 2007). This period was marked by the Sadrists' unwillingness to be politically accommodating and to work within the state, both of which are characteristics that Schwedler (2006) claims moderation entails. Thus the Sadrist Movement radicalized not only in terms of its use of violence, but also in terms of its relationship with the state and other political parties.

This period of violence demonstrates how the Sadrist Movement, which had largely ceased using violence and been drawn well into the arena of formal political contestation did not simply regress in terms of its progress toward moderation but in many ways became more radical than it had ever been before. In addition to engaging in the widespread use of violence, the Sadrists gradually withdrew from politics, despite having previously benefitted from their inclusion in politics and despite the promise of further political and material benefits available through continued participation. The reason for this is primarily that unstable conditions caused the priorities of the Sadrist Movement to shift to the defense of its constituents. However, engaging in violence eventually came to offer the Sadrists political and material rewards that had previously been provided by inclusion in the political process. Ultimately the violence did not cease

until changing circumstances made halting violence the best strategic option for Muqtada al-Sadr.

Muqtada al-Sadr eventually turned away from violence for two basic reasons. First, he could no longer control the actions of those who claimed to fight in his name. Such uncontrolled violence not only had the potential to undermine his authority, but support for his movement as well. Second, the possibility of a security crackdown by Iraqi and coalition forces threatened to inflict another defeat on the Sadrists. Although the JAM was simply supposed to protect Shi'a and confront Ba'athists and occupation forces, JAM units often turned into armed gangs that demanded protection money and used violence without reason (Williams, 2009). Even Iraqi police were complicit in the Mahdi Army's actions, providing cover for illegal JAM activities, releasing Sunni prisoners into the custody of the JAM and even taking an active role in violence against Sunni militants (ICG, 2008). Although discipline in the JAM had always been weak, as violence increased and the number of al-Sadr's supporters swelled, it is not surprising that al-Sadr had difficulty gaining control of his militia. Furthermore, many declared themselves loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr in order to carry out acts of violence, extortion or theft with impunity. Although Muqtada al-Sadr tried to instill discipline and Islamic virtues in his men, the violence continued unabated. This situation eventually prompted al-Sadr to give around 450 names of criminals and sectarian killers within the JAM to Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki for arrest (Cockburn, 2008).

On January 10, 2007, George W. Bush announced that an additional 20,000 troops would be sent to Iraq to address the "escalating danger from Shi'a extremists" and restore order to the capital in an effort that would later be known as "the Surge" (President's Address to the Nation 10 Jan 2007). This action convinced Muqtada al-Sadr that the U.S. would target him in the coming months. Feeling threatened by the U.S. and isolated from the Iraqi government, Muqtada al-Sadr went underground (Cockburn, 2008). Periodically he re-emerged to order the Mahdi Army not to resist the 'surge' of US troops and to preach anti-occupation sermons. When in the summer of 2007 inter-Shi'a violence broke out between the JAM and the Badr Brigades of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (formerly SCIRI), al-Sadr ordered the JAM to stand down for six months in order to prevent its violent activities from tarnishing the reputation of his movement (ICG, 2008).

6.1. The Sadrists After 2007

Since 2007, the Sadrist Movement has remained relatively non-violent. Muqtada al-Sadr has worked to improve his religious credentials while keeping his Mahdi Army largely inactive. In the 2009 Iraqi provincial elections, the Sadrists ran as the Independent Free Movement and won 41 of 440 seats. In the 2010 parliamentary elections, the Sadrists were part of the National Iraqi Alliance and won 39 out of 325 seats (Katzman, 2009). Although this may signal a return to moderation on the part of the Sadrist Movement, recent threats made by Muqtada al-Sadr to resume violence if all symbols of the occupation have not left by 2012 suggest that perhaps his militia has merely been biding its time, waiting to return once the American threat is gone (Sattar, 2011). Whether violence resumes or not, if Muqtada al-Sadr can claim to have chased the occupation forces from Iraq, it will certainly be an important coup for him and his movement.

The Sadrist's return to violence could not have been predicted by current scholarship. Moderation theory would suggest that since the incentives that originally drew Muqtada al-Sadr toward moderation were not withdrawn and since there were still 'median votes' to be gained by growing more moderate, a return to radicalism should not have occurred. The literature implies that motivations such as widening ones constituency and gaining political power are the most relevant factors in understanding how parties act and what will compel them to moderate. Yet the example of the Sadrist Movement suggests that perhaps this logic does not apply to parties operating under near civil war conditions and that moderation theory must be reinterpreted in order to study political movements in such contexts.

7.   Conclusion

The Sadrist Movement is associated with populism, martyrdom and resistance to tyranny, all important symbols in the Shi'a tradition and potent forces among the poor and historically disenfranchised Shi'a of Iraq. Through his personal charisma, political acumen and powerful name, Muqtada al-Sadr has become one of the strongest adversaries of the occupation forces in Iraq and one of the most powerful figures in Iraqi politics. Although Muqtada al-Sadr's militia has been mostly inactive in recent years, it has never been disarmed and may become a powerful destabilizing force in post-occupation Iraq. Whether the Mahdi Army grows more moderate may be the key to determining whether peace will fail or flourish in Iraq over the coming years.

Moderation theory assumes that political groups will make rational decisions to benefit themselves and their supporters. Groups will moderate or radicalize on the basis of a strategic calculation of what will enable them to pursue two basic goals: first, to represent their constituents and second, to gain greater support. Muqtada al-Sadr's actions represent a deviation from previous work on moderation theory, but they do not represent irrational decision-making. This group has constantly acted to provide its supporters with what they need most: be it security, identity or employment. Moderation theory assumes a straight path toward moderation, but such a stable trajectory implicitly assumes relatively stable social and political conditions in which the needs of a party and even to a certain extent of its followers remain fixed. In an environment such as post-2003 Iraq where the political ground is constantly shifting and a climate of sectarian conflict is perpetually waxing and waning, neither the political situation nor the needs of a party's constituents are stable enough to apply moderation theory or any other that relies on security and political stability.

The literature on moderation theory would suggest that, once a radical movement has foresworn violence, recognized the legitimacy of the central government, participated in electoral politics and seen the advantages of participation, it should not

regress toward radicalism assuming incentives to participate in politics remain. Yet this is precisely what happened with the Sadrist Movement. Prior to being defeated militarily during the second battle for Najaf, the Sadrist Movement had refused to recognize the central government, even going so far as to run its own courts and form its own ministries ("Parallel 'government' finds support", 2003). The Sadrist Movement had also maintained an ideology too radical for most Iraqis and pursued its goals through violence. After the defeat in Najaf, the Sadrists recognized the Iraqi central government, ceased violence, participated in elections and reaped great rewards through its inclusion in formal politics. At that point, the literature seemed to apply precisely to the case of the Sadrists. Yet after sectarian violence against Shi'a reached an unacceptable level the Sadrists returned to radicalism and undid all progress that it had previously made. Not only did the Sadrists engage in the widespread use of violence, but also froze ministerial activity, withdrew members of parliament, and broke from the United Iraqi Alliance, thereby making it difficult for the Prime Minister to govern Iraq.

Numerous factors played a role in forcing the Sadrists away from violence and back toward it. The Sadrists were not enticed into politics by any of the traditional incentives-such as legitimacy, the ability to openly campaign, the ability to print a newspaper etc. It was not until the Sadrists were defeated militarily and the needs of their constituents changed that they became more moderate. The first reason for this is that the Sadrists, like all political parties, must respond to the demands of those who support it, which at first it calculated to be security and the need to remain true to its ideology. The Sadrists first began using violence as a means of staying true to the ideology that had won it many followers-namely, that of opposing the occupation. After being militarily defeated, the Sadrists turned to politics and sought control over ministries that would enable them to provide employment for its supporters. The Sadrists later used violence as a means of responding to its constituents need for security. Thus the Sadrist leadership has used both peace and war solely to serve the needs of its supporters, to give them what they want and need most-be it security, material comfort, or an identity.

The second factor that has affected the Sadrists decision to radicalize or moderate has been its perceived military capabilities. In 2004, the Sadrists escalated their confrontation with the U.S. and the CPA because they felt they could safely do so.

With much of the CPA's attention and fighting power focused on Sunni insurgents in Fallujah, the military option seemed a reasonable response to U.S. actions against the Sadrist Movement. Later in that year, violence again appeared to be a viable response to U.S. provocations as the JAM had grown stronger by receiving arms and training. Finally, when the Sadrists resumed violence in 2006, it was due to a combination of will and ability: the will of Sadrist supporters to be protected, and the ability of a larger, better funded Sadrist Movement to face the threat from anti-Shi'a extremists. The Sadrist Movement has only ceased violence when further military action was not possible, due to the presence of an overwhelming U.S. military force.

The future of the Sadrist Movement - and possibly of Iraq itself- may very well depend on the actions of one man, Muqtada al-Sadr. For the past few years he has largely abstained from violence, but previously he has proven that he can and will radicalize and return to violence if necessary. If security in Iraq deteriorates, creating the will among his supporters to use violence to confront a perceived threat, it may be that the waiting Mahdi Army will reemerge. Likewise if the Iraqi security establishment appears weak, unable or unwilling to confront the JAM, the Sadrists may use military action to pursue its goals in the absence of a force capable of stopping it. Thus, whether the Sadrist Movement becomes more moderate or more radical may depend more on whether the Iraqi security establishment can maintain stability in the country than on traditional motivations articulated by moderation theory.

The example of the Sadrist Movement provides several insights into the moderation of radical groups. While previous scholarship has applied well to a variety of contexts, ranging from leftist groups to Islamist movements, it seems to be challenged by the context of post-2003 Iraq. The reason for this is that this political climate is extremely different from those on which moderation theory is based. Moderation theory is built primarily on the study of leftist groups in Europe and South America and Islamist groups in authoritarian Middle Eastern states. But both of these represent relatively stable social and political environments. Even in those countries that have faced significant upheaval, few have reached the level of sectarian, ethnic, tribal, inter- and intra-religious conflict that has been seen in Iraq. In fact, civil strife that mirrors the motivations and levels of violence witnessed in Iraq may only have been witnessed in Somalia, Afghanistan and Lebanon in recent years. Yet if such differences have been

sources of strife in these countries, is it not conceivable that they might become problems for religiously, ethnically and tribally diverse nations such as Sudan, Pakistan, Yemen and Libya in the future? If this is the case, then surely Middle East scholars at least, if not all who study radical groups are in need of a new theoretical framework to inform the study of radical political groups.

Moderation theory has helped scholars and policymakers study the challenging questions of how, whether and when to integrate radical groups into formal politics. This body of literature will undoubtedly prove useful again and again in studying radical groups in stable countries. But the Sadrist Movement shows that an entirely different set of motivations may drive the activities of radical groups in states that are failing, failed, or in a state of internecine conflict. In these situations, an organization is much more likely to be driven by the needs and military capabilities of its supporters than by the desire of its leadership to gain political power and material benefits through participating in the electoral process. If this is the case, then dealing with radical groups in these situations must rely more heavily on attending to the needs of their constituents and less on appealing to the ambitions of their leaders. Furthermore, this may imply that, in such contexts, allowing radical groups to participate in government, while retaining its normative appeal, may not be as tactically desirable as was previously assumed. If this is the case, then policy towards radical groups needs to be context-specific and should rely heavily on the physical security and political stability of the context in which the group is operating.

Scholarship on moderation has provided a framework for studying numerous radical groups in the Middle East and throughout the world. Yet this literature seems less able to provide guidance for dealing with a context that varies from those that informed the literature in the first place. To study radical groups in the context of sectarian conflict, where the tectonic plates of social and political life are constantly shifting, what is needed is a body of literature that is based on precisely such conditions. Just as one cannot expect those living in stable countries to have the same motivations as those living in war-torn countries, one cannot expect a single theory to apply to both contexts, especially when that theory is applied to such complex environments as war-torn countries.

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