

LOOKING BEYOND THE BATTLEFIELD:
CHARTING ISLAMIST MILITANT PATHS TO NON-
VIOLENT POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

The growing participation of militant groups in non-violent political activities poses a vexing conundrum to citizens and policymakers: to risk legitimizing violence by allowing militants to have a political voice, or to risk perpetuating violence by proscribing militants' participation. Before militant groups even decide to become involved in non-violent political activity, however, they must experience some form of transformation that alters their view of violence as the best or sole means by which to achieve their political goals. What factors, then, encourage these groups to decide ideas are more effective at achieving political goals? This is the question I will answer in this thesis.

In chapter one, I examine the history of two *Shia* Muslim militant groups—the Sadrists in Iraq and Lebanese Hizballah—who now play significant if not dominant political roles in their countries. I show that the political and theological reputation of each group among Shia played a significant role in their decision to make this transition. Further, I demonstrate that despite ties to Iran, domestic concerns were more influential in their transformations.

In chapter two, I examine two *Sunni* Muslim groups, Palestinian HAMAS and the Philippines' Moro Islamic Liberation Front. I study their transitions through the lens of the evolution of Islamic political thought since the 19th century. In that context, I demonstrate that the political transitions of these groups are a natural step, despite regional differences in their approaches.

In chapter three, I re-visit the examples of HAMAS, Hizballah, and the Sadrists to evaluate their actions amid the explosion of turmoil in the Middle East since 2011—with

the Syrian civil war, the rise of the self-styled Islamic State in Iraq, and the 2014 Israel-HAMAS war—against conclusions I reached in previous chapters. I show that while the Sadrists and Hizballah largely acted to preserve their domestic political legitimacy, HAMAS took risks that jeopardized it.

In conclusion, I demonstrate militant groups do not respond to solely to a standard menu of influences when deciding to transition to non-violent politics. Instead, each responds to variables unique to their respective domestic contexts when deciding to exchange bullets for ballots, as the expression goes.

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INTRODUCTION

A complex and lethal trend has sharpened amid developments in the Muslim world over the past decade: the growing involvement of militias and terrorist groups in non-violent political activities. The rise of contemporary militant groups such as those we see today in the Muslim world accelerated in the 1980s, but their roots reach much further back into Muslim and Arab history. Academics, analysts, and pundits often characterize the emergence of these groups as responses—legitimate or otherwise—to the temporal and spatial occupation of the Middle East and Muslim world by western influences and the Israeli state, respectively. However, their emergence has arguably as much to do with the exposure of Muslim and Arab leaders of the Middle East as corrupt, self-preservationist, beholden to the West and Israel, and toothless—particularly after consecutive defeats by Israel in the 1967 and 1973 wars. The people of the Muslim world have lost confidence that their leadership will ever improve their lot in life.

A culmination of this growing discontent was the Arab Spring revolts that began in Tunisia in late 2010 and spread as far east as Syria. However, the impact of growing popular discontent was apparent before that. In January 2006, Palestinian HAMAS won parliamentary elections, effectively ending the historic dominance of Fatah in Palestinian politics. Earlier in the 2000s in Iraq, both the Sadrist Trend and, to a lesser extent, Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq and Fadhila Party began sending members to parliament while maintaining militias. In Lebanon over the past two decades, Hizballah has demonstrated perhaps the greatest political success of any organization that also fields a military wing. HAMAS, the Sadrist Trend, and Hizballah are now among the most

influential elected political actors in the region. To be sure, none has come close to renouncing violence, but they increasingly pursue their goals through non-violent means.

Why do militant and terrorist groups such as these, with roots in violent resistance to foreign occupation, decide to begin participating in non-violent political activities, particularly when they have yet to achieve the goals that drove them to militancy in the first place? Israel played a large role in Hizballah and HAMAS's rise, but the Jewish state is by no means on the verge of destruction. The United States has left Iraq, depriving the Sadrists of a key foil, but the country is nowhere near pacified and Shia Muslim interests that Sadrists represent are under severe threat from Sunni militants. Why, then, has the balance of Hizballah's, HAMAS', and the Sadrists' activities continued to tilt toward non-violent political pursuits? This is a key question for policymakers to answer, and forms the overarching focus of this thesis.

Methodology

Chapter one adopts a most-similar approach to the case studies of Hizballah and the Sadrist Trend, *Shia* Muslim groups that emerged in similar geopolitical conditions. Each responded to the occupation of a foreign power: in Lebanon, it was the Israelis, and in Iraq, the U.S. Each group is also a prominent representative of its nation's Shia Muslim community, with influential clerics or clerical figures playing important leadership roles in both. Finally, each has close ties to Iranian political and religious leaders; Iran had been the only majority Shia country ruled by a Shia regime—until Saddam Hussein's ouster in Iraq.

To place the case studies in the appropriate larger academic context of this topic, the chapter first reviews what the existing body of scholarly literature concludes about

the primary factors pushing militant groups toward non-violent political activity. Then, it turns its attention to the history of violence of each group, weaving that history in with other key domestic and geopolitical developments to allow an assessment of why each group began to take part in non-violent politics. It then briefly compares conclusions about each group's transformation to identify any broader trends that may exist and may apply to similar types of militant organizations. Finally, it assesses whether the body of existing literature is comprehensive enough to explain the transition of Shia militant organizations like the Sadrists and Hizballah.

Chapter two also adopts a most-similar case study approach, but uses a different lens. It examines whether the broader evolution of primarily *Sunni* Islamic political thought in the Muslim world in the past two centuries can help explain why Islamist organizations transition toward electoral politics. This is an important question to ask because a typical critique of Islam, particularly since the September 2001 al Qaeda attacks on the U.S., is that the religion has no history of or connection to democracy. Bukay argues that

Arab and Islamic leadership are patrimonial, coercive, and authoritarian. Such basic principles as sovereignty, legitimacy, political participation and pluralism, and those individual rights and freedoms inherent in democracy do not exist in a system where Islam is the ultimate source of law.¹

To accept Bukay's view uncritically is to therefore dismiss the possibility that armed Islamist political groups might transition to electoral politics. Moreover it renders as illegitimate those political systems that do not look like the western democracies, which Bukay strongly implies should be the standard for Muslim societies.

¹ Bukay, David, "Can There Be an Islamic Democracy?" *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2007, accessed 04 Apr 2014 at <http://www.meforum.org/>.

However, history shows such assumptions to be short-sighted. Hizballah has demonstrated that Islamic groups can become at least partially legitimate political actors, even if they do not give up all of their militant or terrorist activities. Furthermore, despite differences in political norms between places such as Muslim and Judeo-Christian western nations, Hizballah has achieved a degree of legitimacy in the context of the Lebanese political system.

Therefore, chapter two will demonstrate that the evolution of Islamic political thought over the past several hundred years, which has promoted the notion of consensus-based rule that promotes and abides Islamic values, will help identify several reasons why Muslim militant groups begin a political transition. As with chapter one, this chapter reviews both the militant history of the two case studies, HAMAS and the MILF, as well as the existing literature about the evolution of Islamic political thought to explore whether that literature helps explain the transition of HAMAS and the MILF.

Although some readers may encounter a modicum of difficulty finding the thread linking chapters one and two, my approach is, I think, quite simple. I focus on Shia militant groups in chapter one because of my long-standing professional experience examining these groups' activities and learning about what influences their decisions. In particular, with the experience of the Shia ascendance to power in Iraq after the toppling of Saddam Hussein, I wondered if the Shia clerical community and competition for influence within it had any impact on the Sadrists' transition to non-violent political expression in Iraq. This made Hizballah, the Lebanese Shia militant group, a natural second case study for the chapter.

In chapter two, I sought to determine whether the same influences that exist in the Shia community also exist in the Sunni community. However, because the Sunni community, generally speaking, does not have the same kind of hierarchy of influence one sees in the Shia world, I felt I had to look for another angle from which to study Sunni militant groups. As I read more about people and ideas that influenced Sunni political activity, I determined that the evolution of political thought in that community in the past two centuries might offer insights into why Sunni militant groups began taking part in non-violent politics.

Chapter three brings us to the political and security conditions in the Middle East and North Africa in fall 2014, which are probably not what most Western analysts anticipated when the Arab Spring erupted in late 2010 and began toppling autocrats in the region. A modicum of stability has returned to Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and several other countries where protests had erupted. However, at the other end of the spectrum, Yemen's capital is under effective rebel control, Egypt is battling a terrorist insurgency, and Syria remains fully engulfed in civil conflict.

Moreover, the war in Syria—which began as an indigenous popular effort to topple the Assad regime—has instead helped enable the fall of another regional leader, Iraq's Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki. The group formerly known as al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI) may have regenerated in the political stalemate of Maliki's Iraq, but its fighting and proto-governance efforts expanded most significantly in the near-failed state of eastern Syria, allowing the group to eventually become the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Having morphed further into the so-called 'Islamic State' in June, it now controls large swaths of the neighboring regions of each country. Moreover, while Assad

remains in power, Maliki was ousted this summer in Iraq, a victim of ISIL's rise, his own divisive politics, or a combination of the two, depending on which analysis one accepts.

ISIL's rise echoes other developments in the region since the beginning of the Arab Spring. In 2011, al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula temporarily declared an Islamic state in parts of southern Yemen, capturing and governing several urban centers there before the Yemeni military regained control in summer 2012.² Similarly, Islamist militant groups in Libya may be on the verge of establishing governance and implementing Islamic law in regions of the country where they have enjoyed growing influence in the instability following the fall of former dictator Muammar Ghadafi.³

As chapters one and two do, chapter three examines the question of why some militant groups decide to pursue their goals via non-violent political activity. However, chapter three evaluates the trajectories of three of my case studies—those of the Sadrists, Hizballah, and HAMAS—since I assessed their initial transitions to non-violent political activity in chapters one and two. In doing so, I will seek to determine whether the activities of these groups support or undercut my conclusions in chapters one and two.⁴ Broadly speaking, I concluded in chapter one that both the Sadrists and Hizballah were interested in building and expanding their legitimacy within their respective Shia communities. They were also responding more directly to the needs of their constituents than to those of external patrons like Iran. Finally, they were acknowledging that they were likely to have more influence over achieving their goals if they were inside the political system. This was particularly true for the Sadrists, who suffered some

² ---, 'Al-Qaeda's Remaining Leaders,' *BBC*, September 4, 2014.

³ Shuaib, Ali, 'After Fall of Benghazi, Libya Fears Islamic State,' *al-Monitor*, August 1, 2014.

⁴ The analysis will cover events through September 2014. It will review academic literature since spring 2011, but will also rely heavily on news reporting from the time period.

significant military setbacks in the mid-2000s. For HAMAS, the transition was more about ridding Palestinian society of western influences and corrupt Arab Muslim leadership, themes which feature prominently in the evolution of Islamic political thought.

Contribution to the Literature

This study builds on the current literature on the issue in at least two important ways. First, through the examination of two Shia militant groups, chapter one illustrates that much of the existing literature is too general in its approach. The amalgamation studies into ‘macro’ categories is useful as a starting point, but regional, cultural, and contextual and other deeper influences sometimes unique to each group play a more important role in encouraging militant groups to pursue non-violent politics. For example, for the Shia case studies in question, this thesis illustrates the influence that reputation within the Shia clerical class has on a group’s leadership’s decision to pursue non-violent politics. Policymakers must acknowledge this level of nuanced detail when attempting to address this question.

Of course, many scholars have already given in-depth attention to the question of how terrorism declines or ends. Among the most notable of these academics is Audrey Kurth Cronin and Martha Crenshaw; Cronin’s *How Terrorism Ends* is among the most valuable recent examples of such studies. However, arguably fewer academics have looked individually at militant groups that have begun to embrace non-violent politics to determine the factors, on an organization-by-organization basis, that push such groups into these activities, instead focusing more heavily on categories and trends. This thesis

will expand the body of literature by dissecting the experiences of a select group of case studies.

Second, in chapter two, this thesis takes a nearly unique approach to studying this question by looking at this issue through the lens of debates within the Sunni Muslim community in the past two centuries about how best to integrate their religious views with their political goals. This integration is a popular theme in commentary about the potential for Islamist movements to embrace some form of democratic government that mirrors western values. However, that Islamic values may result in political norms that may or may not disagree with ours is not the point. The point is Muslims have been in a vigorous debate for at least two centuries about political participation in ways that upholds Islamic values but also minimizes harm to basic human dignities.

CHAPTER ONE

As Iraq flirts with fracturing and Lebanon teeters on the precipice of another civil war, the role of militant groups participating in non-violent political activity is a front-line issue in academic studies of the Middle East and Muslim world. This chapter examines the role two Shia militant groups—the Sadrists of Iraq and Hizballah in Lebanon—play in each country. In particular, I identify key factors that caused each to begin pursuing political goals through non-violent means, not just violence.

I begin the chapter by reviewing the literature scholars have already produced on the topic. Some of the most straightforward assessments appear to come from scholars who approached the question in the 1980s and 1990s, when nationalism, separatism, and anti-capitalism seemed to be among the stronger forces behind terrorist and other militant ideologies. Even the literature in the 2000s, however provides valuable insights into militants' political decision-making, despite what appears to be a growing politicization of the issue, particularly since the September 2001 terrorist attacks on the U.S. Overall, the literature is comprehensive in that it captures the key overarching themes. However, the individual case studies remain the place where, I believe, one finds the real insight and which help illustrate that while each group may respond to similar overarching influences, it is the unique characteristics of each group and corresponding conflict that play the biggest role in their transformations. By examining the existing literature, and then the history of the Sadrists and Hizballah, I will seek to show that there are factors about each that scholars have not fully examined which demonstrate that the current literature treats group motivations too generally.

Existing Literature

Scholars have identified three primary external and several internal forces that help push a militant group toward politics.⁵ There are three main external forces, the first being a paradigm shift that changes the playing field in such a significant way that typically obviates the need for a group to use violence to achieve its goals, or renders violence impossible or ineffective.⁶ A second factor is a backlash against a militant organization that reduces the appeal of violence as a tactic, and therefore reduces the group's appeal to its audience due to its use of violence.⁷ A third external factor is an offer of amnesty to members of a terrorist or militant organization in exchange for participation in the political sphere.⁸ Finally, the primary internal factors include pressures that build inside groups causing them to break apart, modify their goals, or undergo some other transformation that reduces the importance of violence to achieving their goals.⁹

Paradigm Shift

As stated, there are several main reasons scholars have identified that influence militant decision-making when it comes to advancing their goals through violence or politics. The first might be characterized as a paradigm shift. This is essentially an evolution of the political landscape in which a militant group operates that is so great that

⁵ Leonard Weinberg, Ami Pedahzur, and Arie Perliger reach a similar conclusion; see p. 75 of *Political Parties and Terrorist Groups*.

⁶ Weinberg, L., Pedahzur, A., & Perliger, A. (2009). *Political Parties and Terrorist Groups* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge; Richards, A. (2001). Terrorist groups and political fronts: The IRA, Sinn Féin, the peace process and democracy. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 13(4), pp. 72 – 89; and, Frisch, H. (2009). Strategic change in terrorist movements: Lessons from Hamas. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 32(12), pp. 1049 – 1065.

⁷ Ross, J. I., & Gurr, T. R. (1989). Why terrorism subsides: A comparative study of Canada and the United States. *Comparative Politics*, 21(4), pp. 405 – 426.

⁸ Weinberg, et al.

⁹ *Ibid*; Ross, et al.

it overwhelms the violent tactics the group uses to promote its agenda. These types of shifts come in many forms.

One is the achievement of the group's goals. Van Engeland illustrates this by describing the evolution of the African National Congress (ANC). The ANC's roots can be found in non-violent politics in the early 1900s, but its military wing, the 'Spear of the Nation' (MK), did not carry out its first terrorist act until 1961.¹⁰ The MK remained active in anti-apartheid violence in South Africa until the early 1990s when, through negotiations with the apartheid regime there, the ANC eventually won control of the government, folded the MK into the South African military, and elected ANC leader Nelson Mandela president.¹¹ In other words, the ANC achieved its goal through a combination of negotiations and violence, obviating the need for continued terrorism.

Phillips evaluates the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt to illustrate the role of deterrence as a paradigm shift. The Egyptian government banned the Brotherhood, which seeks to bring Islamic values to politics in Egypt, forcing it underground in 1948 after Brothers assassinated an Egyptian prime minister. Consequently, and in the face of constant state security repression, the Brotherhood has to therefore been forced to persist as an underground organization. And it has, largely renouncing violence and, in 2005, winning 88 of the 444 elected seats in the Egyptian People's Assembly, one of two houses of the Egyptian legislative branch.¹² The Egyptian government's crackdown was a major factor that caused the Brotherhood to pursue politics to achieve its goals.

¹⁰ Van Engeland, A. (2008.) A successful 'turnover:' The African national congress moves from sabotage to a legitimate political force and from apartheid to democracy, pp. 13 – 27.. In A. Van Engeland and R. Rudolph (Eds.), *From Terrorism to Politics*, (p. 19). Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 24.

¹² Central Intelligence Agency (2010). *CIA World Factbook*.

Frisch concludes HAMAS experienced several paradigm shifts almost simultaneously. Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations had essentially collapsed by the 2000s, and HAMAS's terrorist attacks were also killing fewer Israelis while relatively more HAMAS fighters were being killed. Conversely, Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, which HAMAS interpreted as a victory for its 'resistance' attacks against Israel. HAMAS also exploited the growing discontent within Palestinian society with the ruling Fatah party by winning the January 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections by portraying itself—successfully—as the less corrupt choice. The resulting shift in the Palestinian political order that dislodged is still evolving.

Richards argues that one underappreciated factor in the IRA's transformation is the role President Clinton played in the peace negotiations.¹³ Clinton's position as an external mediator is one Wilkinson identified as a sometimes "invaluable" factor in convincing IRA militants to pursue politics.¹⁴ From this perspective, one reason the IRA agreed to negotiations was that they recognized Clinton's involvement likely achieved more for the IRA than the group may have achieved under different circumstances.¹⁵ IRA members also correctly assessed that Clinton's successor, George W. Bush, would not be as engaged in the negotiations as was Clinton.¹⁶ Therefore, Clinton's patronage and his pending departure from office helped push the IRA toward non-violent politics.

Backlash

A second factor is the role a backlash plays in a group's decision to go political. In evaluating the decline of domestic terrorism in North America in the U.S. and Canada,

¹³ Richards, p. 82.

¹⁴ Wilkinson, P. (1999). Politics, diplomacy and peace processes: Pathways out of terrorism?, p. 72. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 11(4), pp. 66 – 82.

¹⁵ Richards, p. 82.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 72.

Ross and Gurr describe the essential collapse of the Canadian separatist group Front de Liberation du Quebec (FLQ) after its members kidnapped and murdered a Canadian politician in 1970. Almost immediately thereafter, the FLQ's appeal among Canadians plummeted, the group ceased operations, and support for the non-violent separatist Parti Quebecois (PQ) jumped.¹⁷ As a result, PQ attracted "the support of most ex-FLQ activists,"¹⁸ including key leader Pierre Vallieres in 1971. And though PQ was not affiliated with the FLQ, the support the PQ received from former FLQ members suggests the FLQ might have had potential as a political party if it had chosen that route earlier in its existence, such as before FLQ members murdered the Canadian politician. In this way, the experience of the FLQ illustrates the effect backlash can have on a militant group, influencing some or all of its members to turn toward politics.

Amnesty

A third factor is amnesty. Weinberg, et al., who have compiled arguably the most comprehensive study on why terrorist groups go political, cite the example of the Colombian group M-19 to illustrate this point. Led by a former Colombian military dictator, the group carried out a campaign of bombings and other attacks on mostly political targets in Colombia in the 1970s and 1980s. However, in 1990, then President Betancur offered the group's members amnesty if they laid down their weapons and joined the political process, which most M-19 members agreed to do. Debate exists over whether M-19 completely ended its terrorist campaign as a result,¹⁹ but the point is clear—the amnesty allowed the group's leader and much of its membership a pathway out of violence and into politics.

¹⁷ Ross, et al, p. 413.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 422.

¹⁹ Wilkinson, p. 78.

Internal Forces

A fourth factor involves internal forces that affect a group's ability to operate. For example, several groups have recognized the drawbacks of operating in a clandestine manner. Weinberg, et al, observe that the IRA and other groups recognized that if the only way to connect with the outside world was through the group's acts of violence, they were not likely to win lasting support.²⁰ Similarly, Ross and Gurr cite the example of FLQ leader Vallieres who, after his defection from the FLQ to join the PQ wrote of the difficulties of operating in a clandestine environment. He acknowledged that there never existed "an FLQ organization...but rather a collection of groups or cells with little or no contact between them, with no guiding nucleus and no real strategy."²¹ In other words, operating in a clandestine manner made it very difficult for the FLQ to coordinate its activities to best promote its cause.

Finally, it is worth noting that very few groups have *completed* the transition to politics, HAMAS, Hizballah, and remnants of the IRA included. This leaves unanswered the question of whether we can truly encourage terrorists and other militants to become non-violent political movements. As Cronin suggests, some groups may be irreconcilable.²² What does this mean for the study of militant evolution to politics? These are among the many questions scholars are trying to answer.

Hizballah: From Rejection to Accommodation

As political strife challenged and felled autocrats across the Middle East throughout spring 2011, one of the few countries there that experienced relative calm was, ironically, Lebanon. This was despite the protracted negotiations at the time to form

²⁰ Weinberg, et al, p. 77.

²¹ Ross, et al, p. 414.

²² Cronin, A. (2009). *How terrorism ends*, p. 40. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

a new government: Lebanese politicians were seeking to replace the previous ruling coalition that crumbled in anticipation of a United Nations (U.N.) ruling that Hizballah members were involved in the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. The unlikely scenario of Lebanon as an oasis of relative stability in the Middle East ran counter to the country's reputation as a symbol of political violence that has plagued the region for decades. That a country with one of the bloodiest contemporary histories of civil strife avoided sliding back across that precipice speaks to the country's political maturation since its civil war ended in 1990.

Lebanon's ability to pull back from the brink was also a partial byproduct of the collective memory of Lebanese of their 15-year civil war. However, it illustrated another significant political evolution in Lebanon: the growing power of Hizballah, the Lebanese Shia militant-political group that the United States, Israel, and many of their allies consider a terrorist organization. As speculation mounted the U.N. would accuse Hizballah of involvement in Hariri's assassination, Hizballah's political allies forced the government's collapse to help prevent it pursuing charges against Hizballah suspects, subsequently securing enough votes to elect their own candidate prime minister.²³

That Shia Muslim Hizballah has become a significant political force in Lebanon may, in retrospect, not necessarily be surprising, given that Muslims comprised nearly 60 of Lebanon's approximately citizens as of July 2011.²⁴ However, that Hizballah would become a key political player in Lebanon was no foregone conclusion when the group emerged in the early 1980s, when its political activities consisted of intra-sectarian

²³ --, "Thousands in Lebanon Demand Hezbollah Be Disarmed," *Associated Press*, March 13, 2011.

²⁴ --, *CIA World Factbook*, April 2011. Curiously, the CIA declines to detail its estimate any further which proportion of the Muslim population is Shia, Sunni, etc. This illustrates the difficulty and, perhaps, the political sensitivity of doing so in a country that has not had an official census since the 1940s because of the political disruption its findings could cause.

attacks during the Lebanese 1975 – 1990 civil war, and terrorist and ‘resistance’ attacks against American, French, Israeli, and other targets in Lebanon and abroad. It was these attacks that helped earn the group its reputation as the “A team” of terrorism.²⁵

Moreover, Hizballah’s declaration of support—in its first public communication, its so-called “Open Letter to the Downtrodden in Lebanon and the World” of 1985—for an Islamic state on the order of the Islamic Republic of Iran²⁶ left little room for political compromise with the other main sectarian groups in Lebanon with which Muslims have nevertheless shared power since 1943.²⁷ Further, while Israel withdrew its troops from Lebanon in 2000—largely because of persistent Hizballah attacks—Israel remains an immutable fact, anathema to Hizballah’s platform of anti-Zionist resistance. The Lebanese government also continues to deny Hizballah another key goal, recognition of Hizballah’s militant activities against Israeli targets as non-violent “resistance.”²⁸

In light of these conditions, it is reasonable to ask why Hizballah added non-violent political activities to its standard menu of suicide bombings, hijackings, kidnappings, and other acts of terrorist, insurgent, and resistance violence—even if it has not completely abandoned terrorism or other forms of violence. What forces drove Hizballah’s leadership to accept the group’s participation in a government it previously rejected?

²⁵ Richard Armitage, then the Deputy Secretary of State, made this remark during a question-and-answer session following his speech, “America’s Challenges in a Changed World,” to the United States Institute of Peace, in Washington, DC, on September 5, 2002.

²⁶ Hizballah. “*Nass al-Risalah al-Maftuhah Allati Wajahaha Hizballah Ila al-Mustad’afin fi Lubnan wa al-‘Alam* (‘Open Letter to the Downtrodden in Lebanon and the World’),” February 15, 1985. Translated by Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS).

²⁷ Norton, Augustus Richard. *Hezbollah*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 11.

²⁸ Hamzeh, Nizar. “Lebanon’s Hizbullah: from Islamic revolution to parliamentary accommodation,” *Third World Quarterly* 14:2 (1993), 334.

Shia Activism and the Rise of Hizballah

Conventional wisdom holds Iran created Hizballah in the early 1980s as a proxy by which to export Iran's Islamic revolution and fight the Israelis;²⁹ Israel invaded southern Lebanon in 1982 primarily to stop Palestinian militant attacks from Lebanon. However, the reality is far more complex. A confluence of Lebanese domestic and Middle Eastern regional political conflicts dating back to the 1950s and 60s coalesced by the early 1980s, launching Hizballah as the organization most capable of resisting the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon and of uniting Shia as a powerful political body.³⁰

Until the early 1980s, the dominant Shia political organization in Lebanon had been Amal, which formed in the previous decade. However, by the late 1970s, Shia began breaking with Amal because of its perceived lack of effectiveness fighting for Shia rights, particularly after the Israeli invasion of 1982. Hizballah exploited this emerging rift,³¹ with an assist from the fallout of various other regional developments: Arab-Israeli wars, coups, revolutions, the rejection of western influence, and foreign interventions in the region. Additionally, several domestic factors exacerbated the growing unrest among Lebanese Shia, particularly the perceived growing politico-economic disparities between upper-class Lebanese Sunni and Christians and the poorer Shia underclass, and the collateral Shia casualties from Israeli counterstrikes against Palestinian militants in Lebanon. In other words, Hizballah arose amid a "convergence of [a variety of

²⁹ For example, see Berman, Ilan, "Hezbollah: Made in Tehran," testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation and Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia, September 28, 2006.

³⁰ For detailed analyses of these and other factors in the rise of Hizballah, see Deeb, Marius, "Shia Movements in Lebanon: Their Formation, Ideology, Social Basis, and Links with Iran and Syria," *Third World Quarterly* 10:2 (April 1988), 683 – 698; Norton, Augustus Richard, *Hizballah*; and Saad-Ghorayeb, Amal, "Factors Conducive to the Politicization of the Lebanese Shi'a and the Emergence of Hizb'ullah," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14:3 (2003), 273 – 307.

³¹ AbuKhalil, Asad. "Ideology and Practice of Hizballah in Lebanon: Islamization of Leninist Organizational Principles," *Middle Eastern Studies* 27:3 (July 1991), 391.

socioeconomic and geopolitical] conditions”³² that influenced Shia political activism in Lebanon and the broader Middle East at the time.

Hizballah’s apparent popularity and political influence has grown ever since, with the group participating in the every parliamentary election since the civil war. Although Hizballah does not now hold a majority in the parliament, it still wields effective veto power in the cabinet—granting it sufficient power to collapse the government.

The Evolution from Shia Activist to Power Broker

When Hizballah emerged, its primary goals were to push the Israelis, Americans, French, and other Western powers out of Lebanon; end the sect-based political system in Lebanon that had existed since 1943; promote the rights and goals of Shia Lebanese; and to ultimately create an Islamic state on the model of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Indeed, Hizballah wasted little making its presence known in the early 1980s, largely through three main forms of violence: intra- and inter-sectarian attacks in the context of the Lebanese civil war; so-called resistance attacks against Israeli military targets in Lebanon and Israel; and terrorism, in the form of attacks against ostensible peacekeeping forces (particularly American and French) in Lebanon and against Israeli civilian targets in Israel and abroad. The latter included materiel and rhetorical support to Palestinian rejectionist groups in the West Bank and Gaza.³³

Anti-American Violence

From the American perspective, perhaps the most iconic attack Hizballah allegedly perpetrated was the suicide truck bombing of the U.S. Marine Corps barracks in

³² Saad-Ghorayeb, 275.

³³ Attacks against non-Israeli military targets in Lebanon present a complex case. From an emotional and U.S. policy perspective, it is perhaps natural to want to characterize such violence as terrorism. However, there exists considerable debate within the academic and other communities interested in terrorism about whether attacks against a foreign military in another country constitutes terrorism.

Lebanon in October 1983. Hizballah denied involvement, and then-Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger claimed in 2001 the U.S. did “not have the actual knowledge of who did the bombing.”³⁴ However, the U.S. State Department squarely blames Hizballah.³⁵ Moreover, while the attack was only one of three bombings of U.S. and French military and diplomatic installations that year blamed on Hizballah, the October 1983 bombing firmly established Hizballah as a lethal threat to U.S. security interests. Hizballah later blamed the U.S. in its ‘Open Letter’ for “all our catastrophes,” echoing the group’s role model Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran and helping set the tone for a decade of Hizballah terrorist strikes on U.S. targets until the early 1990s.³⁶

While that decade is perhaps best-known for Hizballah’s suicide and car bombings of the U.S. and French facilities, Hizballah also executed a series of hijackings and kidnappings of approximately 30 Americans and other Westerners during that period, often seeking the release of Hizballah prisoners.³⁷ The hijackings included that of TWA Flight 847, in June 1985, during which Hizballah sought the release of prisoners in Kuwait, south Lebanon, and Israel, and ultimately murdered a U.S. Navy diver. Hizballah probably even kidnapped and later murdered the CIA station chief in Beirut, William Buckley, in March 1984.

However, the attacks on American targets inside Lebanon and abroad were only partly about winning the release of Hizballah and other prisoners. They also were part of the larger struggle between Hizballah’s chief state sponsor, Iran, and the United States. The Iranian regime, which had just pulled off the only Islamic revolution in modern

³⁴ Weinberger, Caspar in “Target America,” PBS *Frontline*, September 2001.

³⁵ U.S. Department of State. *Country Reports on Terrorism, 2009*, August 5, 2010.

³⁶ Hizballah, “Open Letter,” 3.

³⁷ PBS. “Target America: Terrorist Attacks on Americans, 1979 – 1988,” *Frontline*, September, 2001.

history, sought to spread its ideology through regional proxies like Hizballah, prompting the U.S. to conduct overt and covert activities in the region to check Iran's growing influence. And ever since Hizballah's earliest days, when the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps—Iran's elite regime defense force and exporter of revolution—sent advisers to Lebanon's Bekaa Valley to train Hizballah's first organized forces,³⁸ Iran has remained Hizballah's chief external sponsor of weaponry and other support.³⁹ According to Augustus Richard Norton, Hizballah's 'Open Letter' "bears a strong made-in-Tehran coloration," with "the 1978-79 revolution in Iran [serving] as an inspiration to action" for Hizballah.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the level of influence Iran continues to buy through this support remains a divisive topic among scholars and analysts who study the issue. Moreover, although the U.S. alleged Hizballah and Iranian support to Shia militants in Iraq targeting U.S. and other Coalition forces,⁴¹ by the early 1990s, direct Hizballah attacks on the U.S. largely ceased.

Anti-Israel Violence

Conversely, Hizballah has continued to target Israeli diplomatic, cultural, military, and civilian installations and personnel ever since its first attacks on Israeli troops in southern Lebanon in the early 1980s—albeit at a pace that has slowed and in a style that has evolved significantly. Hizballah's attacks against Israeli interests during the 1980s were largely characterized by "resistance" against Israeli troops in Lebanon. These included not only a mix of car and other suicide bombings of Israeli military posts—perhaps most notably against an Israeli military headquarters in Tyre in

³⁸ Ranstorp, Magnus. *Hizb'allah in Lebanon*, (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 34.

³⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism*, 2009.

⁴⁰ Norton, 35 – 36.

⁴¹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism*, 2009.

November 1982, killing nearly 80 Israeli service members—but also a range of guerilla battles with Israeli and Israel-allied Lebanese troops in southern Lebanon. As with Hizballah violence on U.S. targets, Hizballah’s attacks on Israeli interests were also related to Iran’s broader desire to harass Israel. Moreover, except for a few notable events, relatively little Hizballah violence spilled over into Israel, even when accounting for rhetorical and other Hizballah support to Palestinian rejectionist groups.

The 1990s marked something of a shift for Hizballah. Although the Lebanese civil war ended at the beginning of the decade, Israel still occupied a buffer “security” zone in southern Lebanon to prevent Hizballah infiltration or rocket attacks into Israel. This occupation was an issue that pitted the Israeli public and, increasingly, politicians against the military, who noted the zone’s success largely securing Israel from Hizballah violence.⁴² Hizballah guerilla squads were successful penetrating the Israeli security zone on only nine occasions from 1985 to 2000, and only twice were they able to infiltrate into Israel. Moreover, despite Hizballah’s launching of more than 4,000 rockets during that period, “only” seven Israeli civilians died.⁴³ Nevertheless, the Israeli public grew increasingly skeptical of the utility of Israel’s occupation of southern Lebanon, especially since Israel had achieved its goal of ejecting the Palestinian Liberation Organization from Lebanese territory almost immediately after the 1982 invasion yet lost, on average, 16 Israeli soldiers each year from 1985 to the 2000 withdrawal.⁴⁴

⁴² For a deeper examination of the reasons behind the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, see Dalia Dassa Kaye’s “The Israeli Decision to Withdraw from Southern Lebanon: Political Leadership and Security Policy,” *Political Science Quarterly* 117:4 (2002-3), 561 – 585.

⁴³ Kaye, quoting Gal Luft, “Israel’s Security Zone – A ‘Tragedy?’” *Middle East Quarterly* 7 (September 2000), 14 – 15.

⁴⁴ Kaye, 570.

For its part, during the 1990s Hizballah continued its low-level guerilla war with the Israeli military, and its rocket launches against Israel. However, in a major departure from its earlier approach to—or rejection of—Lebanese politics, Hizballah officials decided in 1992 to take part in the first parliamentary election since before the civil war. According to Saad-Ghorayeb, Hizballah “metamorphosed from a revolutionary ‘total refusal’ anti-system party, into a ‘protest’ anti-system party.”⁴⁵ In other words, no longer rejecting the Lebanese political system outright, Hizballah decided to protest its structure from within. It has participated in every national parliamentary vote since, with varying degrees of success, but with support that has ultimately grown in the two decades since.

Nevertheless, despite Hizballah’s participation in non-violent politics, it still continued its attacks on Israeli targets in the 1990s in Lebanon, Israel, and abroad, even if at a slower pace. While much of the violence was characterized by largely inaccurate rocket fire into northern Israel, or harassing attacks on Israeli military convoys along the border with Lebanon,⁴⁶ the U.S. State Department and other sources allege Hizballah involvement in attacks on the Israeli Embassy in Argentina 1992, and on an Israeli cultural organization there in 1994, at the direction of Iran.⁴⁷

By the turn of the millennium, as Hizballah became increasingly intertwined with the Lebanese political system, direct Hizballah violence continued to wane, again characterized by cross-border attacks on Israeli soldiers in Israel, and rocket fire into Israel. Nevertheless, Hizballah still remained an important factor in Israeli internal

⁴⁵ Saad-Ghorayeb. *Hizbu'llah* (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2002), 26 – 27.

⁴⁶ Inbar, Ephraim. “How Israel Bungled the Second Lebanon War,” *Middle East Quarterly* XIV:3 (Summer 2007).

⁴⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism, 2009*; and, --. “Investigation finds Iranian, Hezbollah and Syrian involvement in 1994 bombing of Argentine Jewish Community Center,” *Anti-Defamation League*, October 2003.

security. According to the State Department, Iran used Hizballah as a conduit through which it could send “funds and guidance”⁴⁸ to anti-Israel Palestinian militant organizations, primarily the al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, a chief perpetrator of suicide bombings and other attacks in the early 2000s during the second Palestinian intifada.

However, a key event in 2006 marked yet another shift in Hizballah violence. When Hizballah conducted a cross-border raid in July into Israel and captured two Israeli soldiers—possibly as bargaining chips for Hizballah prisoners—it sparked a month-long war with Israel. During that period, Hizballah performed more like a state military, firing more than 4,000 thousand rockets into Israel, and waging a successful guerilla counteroffensive against the Israeli ground invasion of southern Lebanon. Despite drawing heavy fire from the Israeli Air Force—and outrage from some corners of the Lebanese populace for the damage and deaths the Israeli counterattacks caused—Hizballah emerged intact with what its leader called a “divine victory.”

Since that war, Israel’s northern front has been largely quiet, with little Hizballah terrorist or other militant violence. In fact, most of Hizballah’s direct militant activity has been against other political factions within Lebanon, while its indirect militant activity has been focused on, if not limited to, support to Shia groups in Iraq. Absent a new major conflict with Israel, geopolitical conditions do not appear to favor a new outbreak of Hizballah terrorism against Israeli or other targets.

Muqtada al Sadr: Petulant Son, Unlikely Kingmaker

As the United States entered the final phase of its military drawdown in Iraq in early 2011, it was increasingly evident Iraq’s evolving alliance of Shia political parties and movements would, for the foreseeable future, maintain their grip on the power they

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism, 2009*.

have earned as a representation of their majority status in Iraq and through a succession of reasonably fair local and national elections. However, a prominent player in that alliance—the so-called Sadrist Trend, whose followers are aligned with an amorphous political and social movement loyal to prominent Shia clerical figure Muqtada al Sadr—still maintained a fierce if largely rhetorical animosity toward the U.S. presence and role in Iraq at the time. According to media reports, thousands of members and supporters illustrated this opposition in protests in early April of that year after then-U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates suggested U.S. troops could remain in Iraq for years at the invitation of Iraqi officials. Media reporting as of early May indicated al Sadr was considering reactivating his Mahdi Army militia to attack U.S. forces if they stay longer than the 2009 Status of Forces Agreement with the Iraqi government originally agreed.

That Sadrist officials now even participate non-violently in the government at all was never a foregone conclusion. Al Sadr rejected the early transitional governing bodies the U.S. established after Saddam's overthrow and, for much of the first 5 years of Iraq's post-Saddam era, fighters aligned with al Sadr fought a list of enemies—the Iraqi government, other Iraqi political militias, and, most importantly, U.S. troops—cementing their early role as political outcasts. Moreover, though Sadrists hardly promote a substantive, matured, or unified political platform today, in the earlier post-Saddam days, al Sadr's vision consisted of little more than forcing a U.S. withdrawal and promoting Shia rights, particularly those of his own followers, through a strategy largely defined by violence.

Therefore, as of mid-2011, while al Sadr could command a significant and influential political following, and though the U.S. remained on schedule to significantly

reduce its military presence in the coming year, al Sadr had yet to realize his key goals of forcing a complete U.S. withdrawal and or to ending the U.S. political role in Iraq. And while the status of forces agreement between the U.S. and Iraq called for an end to the U.S. military presence in Iraq by December 31, 2011, approximately 50,000 U.S. troops remained in spring 2011, roughly half of which were training Iraqi forces and supporting their pursuit of high-profile targets, like al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI).⁴⁹ Moreover, the U.S. Embassy in Iraq was already the largest U.S. diplomatic facility in the world, likely ensuring a robust if behind-the-scenes U.S. role in Iraqi politics: in April 2011, the U.S. planned to double the number of employees at its embassy there.⁵⁰

Therefore, if al Sadr had yet to fully realize his goals, why did he decide to apparently shift from his early approach—promoting his primarily through violence, including terrorism against Sunni civilians—to his more recent pursuit of political gain through electoral politics? As journalist Patrick Cockburn wrote, toward the end of 2005 al Sadr “replaced military with political action,”⁵¹ telling an *al-Arabiya* interviewer in January 2006 that his “movement first resorted to peaceful resistance, then to armed resistance, and finally to political resistance. This does not present any problem: every situation requires its own response.”⁵²

The rest of this section will lay out a timeline of events in Iraq relevant to the Sadrist movement. This will serve as a springboard from which to assess why al Sadr began pursuing a new approach that largely abandoned the primarily insurgent attacks his

⁴⁹ Cunningham, Henry. “Helmick says US withdrawal from Iraq is ‘incredibly complex,’” *The Fayetteville Observer*, April 2, 2011.

⁵⁰ --. “US Embassy in Baghdad to double staff,” *The Telegraph* (UK), April 1, 2011.

⁵¹ Cockburn, Patrick. *Muqtada al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq*. (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 165.

⁵² Muqtada al Sadr quoted on *al-Arabiya* cable news channel on January 13, 2006, as cited in Cockburn, 165.

fighter conducted in the middle part of last decade in Iraq in favor of non-violent political participation. The chapter will demonstrate that myriad reasons al Sadr made this transition, some having to do with the peculiarities of the Shia religious class in Iraq, others based on al Sadr's reaction to Iraqis' perceptions of him and his movement, and some resulting from al Sadr's practical calculations about his chances for success in his military-terrorist campaign.

Emerging from the Shadows

Though Muqtada al Sadr is the son and nephew of two major figures in recent Shia clerical history, few analysts, let alone American policymakers, expected him to emerge as an important figure in the intense jockeying for influence and power after Saddam Hussein overthrow. Born in August 1973,⁵³ al Sadr held a variety of lower-level jobs for his father's clerical network leading up to the 2003 U.S. invasion. This included working on his father's security detail and helping publish an Islamic magazine.⁵⁴ And though he was approximately 30 years old when American tanks rolled into Baghdad, he had nothing of the religious credentials that vaulted his father and uncle to their positions of respect in the Iraqi and other Middle Eastern Shia communities—and which rendered them targets of the Hussein regime because of their respective popularity. Instead, according to one analyst, al Sadr was also known as “Mullah Atari” because of his preference for video games over religious studies.⁵⁵ As a result, as a member of a sect of Islam led by an informal “hierarchy of clerical leadership based on [the] superiority of

⁵³ Cockburn, 14.

⁵⁴ Cockburn, 112.

⁵⁵ --. “Profile: Muqtada al-Sadr,” *Al-Jazeera.net*, March 7, 2010.

learning,”⁵⁶ Muqtada al Sadr fell far short of the requisite schooling which prominent Shia clerics consider necessary to become part of the sect’s religious hierarchy. Moreover, according to an International Crisis Group (ICG) analysis at the time, “many Shia were repelled by Muqtada’s improvised, disorganised style and demagogic, seemingly futile hostility toward the [U.S.] occupation.”⁵⁷ Nevertheless, many poorer Iraqis backed al Sadr because he stayed in Iran during Hussein’s rule, as opposed to many of the exiles who returned to staff key government positions.⁵⁸ Consequently, within a matter of weeks after the U.S. invasion, al Sadr began to emerge as a key figure in Iraq’s post-Hussein political transformation.

Perhaps the first development that augured well for al Sadr was his appointment on April 8, 2003, by an Iraqi cleric in Iran—Ayatollah Kadhim al Haeri—as al Haeri’s representative in Iraq.⁵⁹ This conferred a degree of legitimacy on al Sadr could not otherwise have earned on his own religious credentials: Haeri was the designated successor to al Sadr’s father, the venerated Iraqi cleric Ayatollah Mohammad Sadiq al Sadr, whom the Hussein regime likely executed in 1999. In addition to the prestige it brought the younger al Sadr, the appointment also allowed him to take advantage of the networks and resources his father had and uncle, Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al Sadr,⁶⁰ had built and accumulated, as is customary for the most senior Shia clerics. And in a reflection of this new-found influence, one day after Muqtada’s appointment by al Haeri,

⁵⁶ Walbridge, Linda S. *Without Forgetting the Imam*, (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 65.

⁵⁷ International Crisis Group (ICG). “Iraq’s Muqtada al-Sadr: Spoiler or stabilizer?” *Middle East Report* N° 55, July 11, 2006, 8.

⁵⁸ Cockburn, 114.

⁵⁹ Smith, Craig S. “Aftereffects: Iran’s Influence; Cleric in Iran Says Shiites Must Act,” *The New York Times*, April 26, 2003.

⁶⁰ While many sources refer to Baqir as Muqtada’s uncle, according to Maj. Timothy Haugh, Juan Cole’s research leads Cole to believe Baqir is Muqtada’s father’s cousin and, therefore, Muqtada’s second cousin.

Sadrist preachers were leading Friday prayers in mosques in major Shia cities across southern Iraq.⁶¹ Soon after, on July 18, al Sadr announced the creation of the Mahdi Army, which al Sadr said, according to Cockburn, would “fight the American and British occupiers.”⁶²

Though the early days of post-Hussein Iraq did not witness significant levels of sectarian or score-settling violence, several events occurred in those first months after the U.S. invasion that served as harbingers for the slide toward sectarian and political violence by political actors like al Sadr. One was the murder in April 2003 of Abd al Majid al Khoei, the son of the late Ayatollah Abd al Qasim al Khoei. Some analysts suspect al Sadr was behind the murder as part of an effort to eliminate competitors for influence within Iraq’s crowded Shia political sphere, a charge al Sadr’s allies have denied.⁶³ A second was the establishment in May 2003 of the Coalition Provisional Authority, an interim governing body led by U.S. Iraq envoy Paul Bremer and staffed primarily by prominent Iraqi former political exiles, which al Sadr rejected as an illegitimate pawn of the Americans.⁶⁴ A third was the bombing in August of the U.N. headquarters in Baghdad, killing 19 people, including the chief of its mission in Iraq at the time. It was one of the first of what would become dozens of major AQI attacks across the country in the coming years that helped spark and sustain the grisly sectarian war that gripped Iraq in the mid-2000s in which al Sadr’s Mahdi Army played a key role.

⁶¹ Haugh, Maj. Timothy. “The Sadr II Movement: An Organizational Fight for Legitimacy within the Iraqi Shi’a Community,” *Strategic Insights* IV: 5 (May 2005), 4.

⁶² Cockburn, 135.

⁶³ For example, see Fayad, Ma’ad. “Muqtada al-Sadr Not Involved in Al-Khoei Murder – Leading Sadr Figure,” *Asharq alawsat*, September 16, 2007.

⁶⁴ --. “Sadr calls for an end to ‘US occupation,’” *Al Jazeera.net*, April 9, 2011.

By 2004, amid and partly because of these developments, al Sadr was well on his way to being considered one of the U.S.'s top enemies in Iraq. This was borne out in a number of ways, perhaps most graphically in two battles between U.S. forces and Mahdi Army fighters in the Shia city of Najaf, in April and August of that year. Najaf, one of the holiest sites and a key learning center in Shia Islam, has been the object of political strife within the Iraqi Shia community since Hussein's ouster, given the religious prestige and financial largesse that Shia clerics derive from primacy over the city. To the dismay of other Shia factions, al Sadr hoped to establish his politico-religious machine in Najaf at the expense of competing prominent Arab Shia clerical families, such as the al Hakims, or of the most influential Shia cleric there, ethnic Persian Ayatollah Ali al Sistani. Al Sadr has derided al Sistani as an outsider for his Iranian birth, but many analysts characterize al Sistani as the most influential cleric in Iraq, if not in all of Shia Islam.⁶⁵

The first battle of Najaf, however, was sparked not by these intra-Shia tensions, but instead by a conflict over the closing by Coalition forces in March 2004 of a newspaper loyal to al Sadr, to which his followers responded with a series of protests in Baghdad, Najaf, and other key Shia regions of Iraq.⁶⁶ As a result, U.S. troops battled al Sadr's forces until a fragile cease-fire in May, which held only until August, when al Sadr's forces attacked U.S. troops they feared were coming to arrest al Sadr for the murder of al Khoei.⁶⁷ This second battle of Najaf ended only through the negotiations of

⁶⁵ Rahimi, Babak. "The Sadr-Sistani Relationship," *Terrorism Monitor* 5:6 (March 30, 2007), The Jamestown Foundation; and, for example, see Visser, Reider, "Sistani, the United States and Politics in Iraq;" Rahimi, Babak, "Ayatollah Sistani and the Democratization of Post-Ba'athist Iraq;" or Khalaji, Mehdi, "The Last Marja."

⁶⁶ Cochrane, Marisa. "Iraq Report 12: The fragmentation of the Sadrist movement," *The Institute for the Study of War* (January 2009), 14.

⁶⁷ Lasseter, Tom. "U.S. troops clash with al-Sadr's supporters in Najaf," *Knight Ridder*, August 2, 2004; and, Sarhan, Saad. "Muqtada al-Sadr returns from exile in Iran," *The Washington Post*, January 6, 2011.

Sistani,⁶⁸ and cost al Sadr the support of al Haeri, with al Sadr deciding to flee into hiding until early 2005 and to largely sit out the January 2005 provincial elections amid questions from some Shia about why he would risk fighting in a holy city like Najaf.⁶⁹

Nevertheless, several other events since the battles of Najaf have helped al Sadr sustain his relevance. By December 2005, he had reemerged and regained enough composure that he and his followers ran in the parliamentary elections as part of the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), the Shia political coalition that had al Sistani's tacit backing and which Shia saw as a path by which they could—and did—put aside intra-sectarian conflict and win leadership of the Iraqi state. The UIA won 128 of 275 seats, with al Sadr's bloc winning 32 and 6 cabinet posts, and casting the final vote for Nuri al Maliki's election as Prime Minister.⁷⁰ Al Sadr's political rehabilitation appeared well under way.

An unexpected turn toward widespread sectarian violence in Iraq in early 2006 also gave al Sadr another opportunity for political gain, at least within the Shia community. Despite proclamations by U.S. and Iraqi officials that the December 2005 election represented a key milestone of stability in Iraq, the country plunged into its most vicious cycle of violence after suspected AQI militants bombed a key Shia shrine in Samarra the following February. Al Sadr responded by essentially reactivating his Mahdi Army, whose fighters began a campaign of sectarian killings, primarily of Sunnis, often in response to Sunni killings of Shia, but also, increasingly, in an attempt to simply clear areas of Iraq of Sunnis for the benefit of Shia.⁷¹ By the end of 2006, the U.S. Department of Defense declared that the Mahdi Army “is currently having the greatest negative

⁶⁸ --. “Al-Sadr fighters leave Najaf shrine,” *Associated Press*, August 27, 2004.

⁶⁹ Cockburn, 160.

⁷⁰ --. “Guide to Iraqi political parties,” *BBC*, January 20, 2006; and, Dagher, Sam. “Iraqi Shiite Party rises as Sadr falls,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 7, 2008.

⁷¹ ICG. “Iraq’s civil war, the Sadrist and the surge,” *Middle East Report N° 72*, February 7, 2008, i.

[effect] on the security situation in Iraq,” replacing AQI “as the most dangerous accelerant of potentially self-sustaining sectarian violence in Iraq.”⁷²

However, these good times did not last long for al Sadr and his followers, with late 2006 and early 2007 marking a second, more significant decline in al Sadr’s fortunes. At some point in early 2007, al Sadr left Iraq for Iran, and while his followers have maintained he did so to pursue religious studies, enough reasons exist to suspect he also feared for his life in Iraq, in part because of the “surge” of U.S. forces who might follow through on the arrest warrant the U.S. issued in 2004, and also possibly because of growing dissatisfaction within the Shia community about al Sadr’s actions.

Clashing increasingly frequently with the rest of the government, by April 2007 al Sadr’s ministers left the government in protest to its failure to negotiate with the U.S. an end to its presence in Iraq.⁷³ Around the same time, frustrated with al Sadr’s political and militant activities, the Iraqi government rescinded a ban on U.S. military engagements in the poor, Shia section of eastern Baghdad known as Sadr City. By late summer, al Sadr’s militants were battling with those of another Shia political group, the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq’s (SCIRI)⁷⁴ Badr Brigades, in the Shia shrine city Karbala. The battles resulted in the damage of a shrine which, along with the Mahdi Army’s suspected assassination of two Shia southern Iraqi governors, cast the Mahdi Army in an increasingly unfavorable light in the Iraqi Shia community and likely influenced his decision to declare a cease-fire in August.⁷⁵

⁷² --. “Measuring stability and security in Iraq,” *U.S. Department of Defense*, November 30, 2006, 19.

⁷³ Dagher.

⁷⁴ SCIRI is now known alternatively as the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) or the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC).

⁷⁵ --. “Profile: Moqtada Sadr,” *BBC*, January 8, 2011.

In retrospect, that August 2007 cease-fire helped curb the Mahdi Army's prominent role in the violence in Iraq and marked a turning point for al Sadr's own approach to his building his political standing within the Iraqi Shia community. It also was a major contributor to the decline in violence in Iraq.⁷⁶ But the real death knell for the Mahdi Army—at least in the form in which it existed until that point—were the joint raids by U.S.-backed Iraqi forces in the spring of 2008 in key southern Shia cities, particularly Basra and Amarah, to take on Shia militias there, especially al Sadr's. Though al Sadr had extended his cease-fire in February, there still existed significant internecine strife in Shia regions of southern Iraq that threatened Shia unity and, ultimately, Shia power in Iraq. There was also significant strife between Shia parties over who would lead the Shia coalition that led the government. This meant that many Shia also viewed the Iraqi government's actions in spring 2008 in southern Iraq through the prism of intra-Shia politics, with al Sadr's supporters accusing Prime Minister Maliki, a member of the Shia Da'wa party, of seeking to neutralize a growing and competing Shia political threat in al Sadr.⁷⁷

Partly as a result of the raids, al Sadr announced in June 2008 the demobilization of the Mahdi Army and its transformation into a socio-cultural organization that would support his political goals.⁷⁸ But so as not to remove options, al Sadr in mid-November 2008 announced the creation of the Promised Day Brigades, an armed wing charged with carrying out attacks against Coalition targets until their complete withdrawal.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ United States Department of Defense. (November 2009). *Measuring stability and security in Iraq*, p. 22.

⁷⁷ --. "Maliki-Sadr Power Struggle Continues," *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, April 10, 2008.

⁷⁸ Paley, Amit R., and Saad Sarhan. "Powerful Iraqi Cleric Recalibrates Strategy," *The Washington Post*, June 15, 2008.

⁷⁹ United States Forces – Iraq. "The Insurgency," *Operation New Dawn*, July 31, 2009.

Between 2008 and 2011, al Sadr was almost entirely absent from the Iraqi scene, appearing only in messages from Iran and a short visit to Iraq in early 2011. He did, however, reenergize his political movement, participating again in local and national elections and again playing a key role electing Maliki as Prime Minister.⁸⁰ Despite continued protests against the U.S. presence, there was little evidence in the lead-up to the Coalition withdrawal of the kind of Sadrist violence against those forces seen in the middle part of last decade; al Sadr's Mahdi Army militants abided the cease-fire.

Hizballah and the Sadrists: Common Roots, Divergent Ends

Factors in Hizballah's Political Evolution

Hizballah as a group emerged with grand goals for Lebanon and the Middle East, and the group indeed played a major role in Israel's departure from Lebanon. However, Israel still exists, the U.S. plays a major part in regional affairs, key Lebanese government leadership posts 'belong' to confessional groups, and the government has yet to recognize Hizballah attacks on Israel as legitimate "resistance." Why, then, amidst this apparent failure, did Hizballah leaders decide—during its "extraordinary conclave" in Tehran in 1989, and with the blessing of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali al Khamenei—to participate in the 1992 Lebanese parliamentary vote? There are at least four key reasons why, ranging from internal debates and ideological views of Lebanon's political system, to regional considerations. Some involve the group's relationship with and view of Iran as a 'mentor;' others have only to do with Hizballah as a group of its own standing.

⁸⁰ Ahmed, Hamid. "Sadr followers spurn front-runners in Iraq," *Associated Press*, April 8, 2010; Leland, John. "Baghdad's Shiite heart beats as war ebbs," *The New York Times*, October 29, 2010; and, Sarhan.

The Decline of the Iran Model

One of the earliest influences on Hizballah's decision to become involved in non-violent political activity in Lebanon had to do with the decline of the influence in the Muslim world Iran had already begun to experience by the early 1990s. While the Islamic Republic burst onto the scene in 1979 as the first Muslim revolution and a model to be replicated across the Muslim world, a key event in the 1980s undermined that image: Iran's essential defeat in its eight-year war with Iraq. During the conflict, Iran portrayed itself as the defender of Shia tradition and rights against a Sunni Iraqi military backed by the very same forces against which Ayatollah Khomeini led the revolution in Iran—primarily the United States.⁸¹ As a consequence, Hamzeh argues that “the shift in [Hizballah's] orientation [toward participation in Lebanese elections] was tied largely to shifts within Iran's leadership,” which “had begun charting a more pragmatic course in politics after” Khomeini's death and, therefore, after the war.⁸² However, I interpret both shifts—the election of more pragmatic Iranian leaders and Hizballah's decision to take part in Lebanese elections—as symptoms of the same cause: the defeat of the Islamic Republic in the Iran-Iraq war and consequent decline in attraction to the Iran model. The Conservative movement in Iran had taken a major hit, and its project of transnational revolution suffered consequences.

For Hizballah, it represented a major defeat, a paradigm shift. Because the Iranian Revolution played such a large ideological role in Hizballah's creation, Iran's loss deprived Hizballah of a role model political system that could promote Shia interests beyond its own borders. As Arjomand concludes, in signing Iran's cease-fire with Iraq,

⁸¹ See Farzaneh, Mateo Mohammad. “Shi'i Ideology, Iranian Secular Nationalism and the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988),” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 7:1 (2007).

⁸² Hamzeh, 323.

Khomeini “admitted defeat” and “acknowledged the definitive failure to export the Islamic revolution.”⁸³ Therefore, Hizballah could not hope to create a revolution in Lebanese politics as an actor outside that system, and within 4 years of the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Hizballah had decided it would run candidates in Lebanese elections.

Hizballah’s Shifting View of Being on the Outside

A second factor in Hizballah’s evolution had to do with a maturing view of the Lebanese political system itself. Having originally rejected the sect-based structure since its earliest days, Hizballah’s move to join the government in 1992 was therefore quite momentous. According to Norton, the decision was driven largely by Lebanon’s most influential Shia cleric at the time, Sheikh Muhammad Husain Fadlallah, who remained a powerful influence on Hizballah up until his death in 2010. Fadlallah “argued that, because revolutionary transition to Islamic rule and an Islamic state was impossible in the diverse Lebanese society, gradual reformation was necessary. And that, insisted Fadlallah, required participating in the political system.”⁸⁴ Moreover, according to Saad-Ghorayeb, Hizballah accepted democracy on a pragmatic level, not an ideological one. It could not force an Islamic government on people who were not likely to want such a government,⁸⁵ so Hizballah would join the political process in order to influence the process for Hizballah’s benefit. However, Hizballah’s ideological loyalty remained with creating an Islamic republic.⁸⁶

Moreover, Hizballah recognized the Lebanese political system was one avenue by which it could gain a measure of international legitimacy. By participating in the

⁸³ Arjomand, Said Amir. *After Khomeini: Iran under His Successors* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 25.

⁸⁴ Norton, 99.

⁸⁵ Saad-Ghorayeb. *Hizb ’ullah*, 49.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 55.

political process, Hizballah could hope to undercut arguments that the group had no interest but to remain a lethal threat to Israel. Further, Hizballah hoped to win a measure of legitimacy for acts of “resistance” to Israel,⁸⁷ a wish the Lebanese government has nevertheless failed to grant Hizballah.

This would fall into the category of internal factors. It took many years of internal debates for Hizballah leadership to finally decide the best path of action was to pursue its goals through political participation, at least as part of its overall strategy.

Playing to the Constituency

A third key factor in Hizballah’s political evolution is its dual nature as a militant-terrorist organization on one hand, and on the other as one that provides a range of social services to indigent Shia and other constituents. While Hizballah has historically been able to rely on Iran and its own Shia clerical networks to fund such activities, Hizballah also recognizes the power and influence inherent in a few well-chosen cabinet posts.

According to Norton, the evolution of this element of Hizballah’s political platform occurred gradually between the 1980s and 1990s. While Hizballah’s view of Lebanese politics was more ideological in the group’s earlier years—more strongly committed to its goal of continuing the Islamic Revolution begun in Iran—after Khomeini’s death and other developments in the 1990s, Hizballah realized it had to sustain and build its political legitimacy and constituency through means other than just “resistance” to Israel. In Norton’s words, Hizballah “[retained] a fierce commitment to [confronting] Israel’s occupation...while engaging in precisely the game of confessional Lebanese politics that they previously had denounced...there is little doubt that [Hizballah] has proved responsive to the attitudes and aspirations of its domestic

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

constituency.”⁸⁸ Hizballah’s interest in providing services to its constituency is reflected in the cabinet posts its allies have held, which include Health, Water, and Labor, among others.⁸⁹ Despite skepticism in the west about Hizballah’s true intentions with respect to delivering social services, Hizballah Deputy Secretary Naim Qassem wrote that although social

services do have a considerable effect on the populace, the essence of participation ultimately resides in belief in the overall path. Social work serves to enrich supporters’ confidence in the viability of the Party’s cause and course, as it cooperates, collaborates and joins forces to remain strong and tenacious in its political and resistance roles.⁹⁰

Evolution of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

A fourth reason Hizballah has moved into the sphere of non-violent political activity relates to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Though Saad-Ghorayeb argues Hizballah is ultimately not likely to participate in a government that undertakes peace negotiations with Israel, the confluence of several events in the early 1990s strongly suggests Hizballah was responsive to Israeli-Palestinian efforts to end their conflict.

Negotiations between the parties began soon after the first Palestinian intifada and Gulf War, and were, in part, an element of the U.S. effort to win Arab support for the war against Iraq. However, when separate Israeli and Palestinian negotiators announced a secret deal they reached in Oslo, it changed the political landscape for militant groups operating in the region. No longer was the Palestine Liberation Organization—which claimed the mantle of representing

⁸⁸ Norton, 45.

⁸⁹ Karam, Zeina. “Lebanon’s National Unity Government Collapses As Hezbollah Pulls Out,” *Associated Press*, January 12, 2011.

⁹⁰ Qassem, Naim. *Hizballah* (London, UK: Saqi Books, 2005), 86.

Palestinian interests—considered a terrorist group. It recognized Israel and became the internationally-recognized political representative of the Palestinian cause. This helped delegitimize terrorism as a tool of Palestinian resistance, and though that did not mean the end of Palestinian terrorism, it made it more difficult for Hizballah to continue their own attacks, or to support Palestinian groups in their anti-Israel violence.

It is far from clear if Hizballah is on the road to giving up violence as an avenue of political expression. Indeed, many signs suggest otherwise. Most prominently, Hizballah is the only Lebanese militia to have successfully resisted disarmament, a central element of the Taif Accord that ended the Lebanese civil war. Moreover, though conditions do not now seem ripe for another flare-up in Hizballah-Israel violence, regional events are so unpredictable that such a development is likely never far in the background. Nevertheless, these four key factors are instructive in helping us understand and conceptualize the forces that can push groups that use terrorism toward non-violent political activity.

Assessing al Sadr's Evolution

While it is clear al Sadr has undergone a political evolution, he has given relatively few clues why. However, the timeline I've laid out allows us to identify precipitating factors that caused al Sadr to decide in recent years to pursue his political objectives through relatively non-violent means. I believe four key factors, some related to each other, drove al Sadr to change his approach. These include: 1) al Sadr's perception of his standing in the Shia community and his own designs on continuing his family's honored tradition of clerical leadership; 2) his understanding of the backlash

within the Shia community against his violent tactics; 3) his recognition of the imbalance in power between his militia and the U.S.-backed Iraqi government forces; and, 4) his recognition of the structural opportunities that lay in the very being of a Shia-led Iraqi government.

Preserving the al Sadr Legacy

In Shia Islam, and as described earlier by Linda Walbridge, clerics derive power through an informal “hierarchy of clerical leadership based on [the] superiority of learning.”⁹¹ Because each lay Shia makes a personal decision to follow the teachings and religious proclamations of a cleric he or she considers most learned, religious study is the key element of any cleric’s status. A cleric whom Shia choose to follow, then, is generally known as a *marja e taqlid*, or source of emulation. Because a top *marja* usually has hundreds of thousands if not millions of followers paying religious taxes to his clerical network—which usually provide a range of social services to Shia—a *marja* can also become very rich, and very powerful.

As the son of one prominent Iraqi cleric and nephew of another, Muqtada al Sadr surely felt the pressure of family lineage. Soon after the invasion, his religious stature was under fire. According to one student, as told to an International Crisis Group interviewer,

When...Muqtada first made his appearance by forming his own shadow government and so-called Jaysh al-Mahdi militia, many Shiites were shocked. They felt that he was too young, that he was nothing but a za’tut [an ignorant child in Iraqi dialect] who wished to ape his father...and that he quickly would calm down because nobody would follow him. (brackets in original)⁹²

⁹¹ Walbridge, Linda S. *Without Forgetting the Imam*, (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 65.

⁹² ICG. “Iraq’s Muqtada al-Sadr: Spoiler or stabilizer?”

Therefore, we can judge al Sadr's escape to Iran to be an implicit acknowledgment of his perceived theological shortcomings; al Sadr has, by many accounts, spent much of his time working on his religious studies in the Iranian Shia learning center of Qom.

More recently, during his brief return to Iraq in early 2011, al Sadr was more direct acknowledging the effect his followers' unruly behavior can have on his status in the Shia community. He admonished the crowds of supporters that had appeared in the streets to welcome him, telling them,

The lack of discipline of some of you as I performed my religious rituals bothered me and hurt me...Please exercise discipline and refrain from excessive chants and pushing which harms me, others, you, your reputation and the reputation of the Sadr family.⁹³

This statement represents a shift in al Sadr's relationship with his followers. No longer is he seen as a Koran-thumping evangelical speaker trying to whip his followers into frenzied opposition to the occupation. Instead, he is trying to appeal to their intellect, thereby portraying himself as a mature leader who possesses some measure of control over his followers, who look to him at least as much because of his ideas as because of his history of militancy. This also allows him to be perceived as a non-violent political actor who helps run the state, which, in turn, can help him maintain and expand his base.

Backlash

The second key reason al Sadr became involved in non-violent politics relates closely to the first. Just as al Sadr has sought to portray himself as a reasoned thinker, he was also keenly aware of the backlash his Mahdi Army was creating, within Iraq, in general, but more importantly within the Shia political class that was jockeying for power to lead the majority population in Iraq. For example, whereas in the early days after the

⁹³ Shadid, Anthony. "Sadrist Project Confidence in Iraq," *The New York Times*, January 6, 2011.

U.S. invasion, many Shia perceived al Sadr and his nascent Mahdi Army as almost the only segment of the Shia population willing to speak out against the U.S. occupation and put words into actions, al Sadr began to lose control of various elements of the Mahdi Army—which itself was not always focused on protecting Shia interests—as sectarian violence spun out of control in the middle part of the 2000s.

Media reports and think tank analyses at the time provide both anecdotal and empirical evidence of the effect this dissolution in focus the Mahdi Army seemed to be experiencing at the time. According to the ICG, soon after the invasion, al Sadr’s newspaper was publishing lists of names of Iraqis cooperating with the new government and U.S. forces, as if to imply they were legitimate targets.⁹⁴ By 2007, reports described a more proactive role for Mahdi Army splinter groups, portraying them as little more than gangs who threatened Shia Iraqis for not joining the Mahdi Army or who demanded bribes. “It’s almost like the old Mafia criminal days in the United States,” a senior U.S. military officer told *The New York Times*, which reported that, in summer 2007, the Mahdi Army

was involved at all levels of the local economy, taking money from gas stations, private minibus services, electric switching stations, food and clothing markets, ice factories, and even collecting rent from squatters in houses whose owners had been displaced. The four main gas stations in Sadr City were handing over a total of about \$13,000 a day, according to a member of the local council.⁹⁵

Such reports continued into 2008, and as American military analyst Anthony Cordesman argued, “the arrogance and private criminal activities of many [Mahdi Army] members”

⁹⁴ ICG. “Iraq’s Muqtada al-Sadr: Spoiler or stabilizer?” 10.

⁹⁵ Tavernise, Sabrina. “A Shiite Militia in Baghdad Sees Its Power Wane,” *The New York Times*, July 27, 2008.

did not help win al Sadr any more support from the very population he sought to represent.⁹⁶

Imbalance of Power

The third reason al Sadr moved toward non-violent political activity was because of a demonstrated perception of the imbalance of power between his unruly forces and those of the U.S.-backed Iraqi military and security services. At least two events illustrate al Sadr's recognition of this imbalance. The first came in 2004, after the second battle of Najaf. Pinned down in the alley ways and shrines of the holy city, al Sadr's fighters could make little or no headway against U.S. forces, and al Sadr ultimately decided to heed a cease-fire Sistani brokered. Not only did this cease-fire offer al Sadr a way out of a tricky situation that presented few favorable potential outcomes for his fighters, but it also allowed al Sadr to be seen as someone who respected the guidance of a popular senior Shia cleric—an act that must have been a bitter pill for al Sadr to swallow.

The second time al Sadr reacted to this imbalance was in spring 2008, after the offensive by the Iraqi government in southern Shia Iraqi cities. Once again, al Sadr's fighters were outmanned and outgunned, and it took a delegation from competing Iraqi Shia political groups—in this case, Da'wa and SCIRI, along with a reported assist, according to at least one report, from Iranian intelligence officers—to fashion a cease-fire

⁹⁶ Badkhen, Anna. "Al-Sadr militia deserters hold fast to terror," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 19, 2008; and, Cordesman, Anthony and Jose Ramos. "Sadr and the Mahdi Army," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, August 4, 2008.

that offered al Sadr a way out.⁹⁷ Soon after, al Sadr announced the demobilization of the Mahdi Army, and he already had fled to Iran fearing for his life.

Political Opportunism

A final key reason al Sadr decided to move from insurgency and other violence toward a strictly non-violent political approach was simply because of the structural opportunity it provided his movement to increase and solidify its support among its Shia base. As do other Islamist organizations such as Lebanese Hizballah or Palestinian HAMAS, the Sadrist Trend provides a range of social services to its followers. For al Sadr, this is but a continuation of the work his father's and cousin's clerical networks provided and on which, according to the ICG, the two men helped turn the al Sadr family into "one of those large, transnational and learned families that, from one generation to another, pass on the requisite attributes of power and legitimacy in the Shia world: prestigious ancestry, knowledge and accumulated resources."⁹⁸ In this way, not only was al Sadr protecting Shia and their interests from Sunni terrorists, the U.S. occupation, and an Iraqi government it saw as illegitimate, but his social services network also provided healthcare, food, electricity, and other services to poor Shia where the Iraqi government fell short.⁹⁹

Al Sadr and his followers have also sought to build on the movement's existing social services by controlling government agencies charged with providing the same kinds of services. After the December 2005 parliamentary elections, Sadrist politicians "demanded control of a greater share of Iraq's public-service ministries," likely in an

⁹⁷ Hinckley, David. "Shiite cleric al-Sadr pulls fighters off streets," *New York Daily News*, March 30, 2008; and, Cochrane, 32 – 33.

⁹⁸ ICG. "Iraq's Muqtada al-Sadr: Spoiler or stabilizer?" 1.

⁹⁹ McNamara, Melissa. "Baghdad's Secure Shiite Slum," *CBS News*, September 26, 2006.

effort to bolster their political base.¹⁰⁰ A similar scenario emerged after the 2010 parliamentary elections, this time drawing in U.S. opposition when Sadrist parliamentarians demanded key health, education, and transportation Cabinet posts.¹⁰¹ By winning successively higher proportions of the seats in parliament, and by making savvy political calculations—such as supporting Shia rival Maliki as Prime Minister—al Sadr and his followers have put themselves into position to use political patronage to bolster their influence. As the Iraqi government appears to have gained legitimacy among its constituents, al Sadr appears to have realized he could lose ground to political rivals if he remained on the outside.

Gaps and Wildcards

Certainly, other factors have influenced al Sadr's move toward non-violent politics, one likely being the influence of Iran, a major element of Iraqi Shia politics. However, since al Sadr has arguably demonstrated more nationalist tendencies, it is not likely Iran has been a major influence on al Sadr's political evolution. What also remains unclear is al Sadr's commitment to the peaceful, electoral promotion of his political goals. As noted, as of spring 2011, al Sadr and his supporters still demonstrated the ability and will to come out in public—if so far peaceful—opposition to any suggestion the U.S. military presence in Iraq could continue longer than is currently anticipated. Additionally, continued tensions within the Iraqi Shia political community could convince al Sadr of the need to return to violence.

¹⁰⁰ Daragahi, Borzou. "Sadr Loyalists Push for More Cabinet Posts," *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 2006.

¹⁰¹ Arraf, Jane. "US warns of aid cuts if Sadr bloc takes certain Iraqi ministries," *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 6, 2010.

Divergent Evolution

Having now analyzed the political evolution of both Hizballah and the Sadrists, groups that, on their face, seemed to arise from similar conditions, it is possible to determine whether any common themes actually do exist between the two that may allow for broader application to other Shia militant groups who grew out of the same geopolitical factors. Unfortunately, however, the indicators suggest there are not. While both Hizballah and the Sadrist Trend arose, in part, because of a foreign occupation, claim to represent similar constituencies, and play major roles in their countries' political systems, important differences exist between the two groups' experiences that affect why they moved into the world of non-violent politics.

First, Hizballah is a far more politically mature organization, with a hierarchy and platform that the Sadrist Trend lacks. Part of this first difference is rooted in a second distinction between the groups: whereas the Sadrist Trend is largely a personality-based political organization, arguably driven as much by loyalty to one individual or family as it is by political ideology, Hizballah appears to rely more heavily on strong ideological commitment to its platform among its supporters. Third, the Sadrist Trend lacks the external bogeyman that Hizballah still claims to have in Israel. Now that the United States has left Iraq (notwithstanding the recent deployments of 'advisers'), it is not be practical for Sadrists to attack American interests in the same way it is for Hizballah to strike Israeli targets. There is also the glaring difference between Hizballah's state-like military capabilities and the Sadrist Trend's dormant militia and barely active (as of this writing) terrorist-insurgent wing. Finally, there is the issue of Iran. Though Hizballah has demonstrably modulated its commitment to the creation of an Islamic state like Iran,

it still maintains strong links with the country, both on the political and military levels. Moreover, though most Shia look to Iraqi clerics for religious guidance, many senior Hizballah leaders consider the Iranian Supreme Leader to be their religious guide. Conversely, though al Sadr has spent considerable time studying Shia religious texts in Iran in an effort to bolster his leadership credentials, there is little evidence he receives—or is interested in—levels of political or military support anywhere approaching those which Hizballah receives. Whereas Hizballah, from the outset, saw itself as an extension of the Islamic Revolution, al Sadr has always considered himself an Iraqi nationalist.

Therefore, there is little in this study to suggest a pattern we may hope to anticipate in the emergence and evolution of any future Shia militant movements. This does not mean there are not useful lessons in juxtaposing the experiences of these two groups; it is just that we cannot tease out any patterns in doing so. Nevertheless, there is one over-arching conclusion we may make: though each situation seemed similar at the outset, the divergence of the factors that pushed each group toward non-violent political activity suggests the unique contexts in which each organization operates complicates efforts to generalize and forecast the potential evolution of Shia militant groups.

CHAPTER TWO

By the year A D 2000 it seems probable that Islam will be one of the half-dozen significant political forces in the world ... To many Europeans and Americans it may seem strange to include religions among political forces ... They are misled, however, by the divorce of religion and politics in the West since the European wars of religion.¹⁰²

Montgomery Watt could not have predicted the so-called “Arab Spring” when he made that statement 46 years ago. However, even by the time he published it in 1968, significant political tumult in the Muslim world was transforming the relationship between subjects and rulers, helping set the stage for the Arab Spring. Western powers—the victors in World War I—had dismantled the Ottoman Empire, ending the centuries-old Muslim Caliphate and imposing Western-styled parliamentary rule across much of the modern-day Middle East. The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and its subsequent wars with its neighbors displaced millions of Muslims and exposed their rulers as toothless and self-aggrandizing. Since the beginning of the Arab Spring in late 2011, probably unprecedented numbers of Muslims from Morocco to Syria have been waging struggles to increase their equity in the function of government.¹⁰³

Accordingly, a key question generated by the Arab Spring is the role Islam can or will play in forming and operating new governments. So far, the record has been mixed at best; any official power Islamists have accrued since 2011 has been ephemeral. For example, in Tunisia, the Islamist party Ennahda, which won an October 2011 post-dictatorship election, resigned in January 2014 under pressure from the opposition party

¹⁰² Watt, W. Montgomery, *Islamic Political Thought*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968), p. ix.

¹⁰³ Falk, Richard, [“Tears for ‘The Arab Spring’?: Recalling the Orientalist overview,” *Al Jazeera* \(English\)](#), 22 Jul 2013, accessed 23 Feb 2014.

related to Ennahda's alleged sympathies with Islamist militants.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, in July 2013, the Egyptian military ousted President Mohammed Morsi, who won popular election in 2012, also over fears of ties to militant Islamists.¹⁰⁵ If popular will is as seemingly vulnerable to political expediency as it appears in Tunisia and Egypt, why would armed groups ever consider running for office?

As chapter one illustrates, the existing literature that seeks to answer this question, while extensive, focuses far more heavily on the key external factors, but also increasingly the internal group dynamics, that push armed political groups toward non-violent political activity. These insights into the political transformation of armed groups are valuable to understanding armed groups' decision to pursue non-violent politics. However, by focusing on the impact that narrower contemporary events have on such a decision, many studies miss the broader historical context which influences these transitions.

As Watt notes, for Muslims "it is particularly necessary to look at the past...A remark about an incident concerning one of Muhammad's wives in the year 627, when made in the Sudan in 1965, led to riots and the declaration that the Communist party was illegal."¹⁰⁶ Even for scholar Bernard Lewis, an influential critic of Islam's failure to reform, Muslims, "like everyone else...are shaped by their history...Their awareness dates however from the advent of Islam," over 1,400 years ago.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Gall, Carlotta, ["Tunisia's Premier Resigns, Formally Ending His Party's Rule,"](#) *The New York Times*, 9 Jan 2014, accessed 25 Feb 2014; however, it is also appropriate to note that Tunisians elected a new, secular government in October 2014.

¹⁰⁵ Hauslohner, Abigail, W. Booth, and S. al-Hourani, ["Egyptian military ousts Morsi, suspends constitution,"](#) *The Washington Post*, 3 Jul 2013, accessed 25 Feb 2014.

¹⁰⁶ Watt, W. Montgomery, *Islamic Political Thought*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968), p. ix.

¹⁰⁷ Lewis, Bernard, *The Crisis of Islam*, (New York: Modern Library, 2003), p. xix.

Many of Islam's detractors, moreover, argue the religion has yet to adapt to the demands of modern political systems and their citizens, or worse, that it is incapable of doing so. Lewis, perhaps not surprisingly, is among those who find little hope in Islam's political track record thus far.

Modernization [of Islam] in politics has fared no better—perhaps even worse—than in warfare and economics. Many Islamic countries have experimented with democratic institutions... [but the] record ... is one of almost unrelieved failure. Western-style parties and parliaments almost invariably ended in corrupt tyrannies, maintained by repression and indoctrination.¹⁰⁸

For Elie Kedourie, it is not just Islam's track record that squashes hope. Instead, it is Islam's character that prevents it accommodating democratic ideals.

...the notion of popular sovereignty as the foundation of governmental legitimacy, the idea of representation, or elections, of popular suffrage, of political institutions being regulated by laws laid down by a parliamentary assembly, of these laws being guarded and upheld by an independent judiciary...all of these are profoundly alien to the Muslim political tradition.¹⁰⁹

In other words, Lewis and Kedourie see little in Islam's content or history to suggest armed Islamist groups can find political guidance in their religion.

However, as I noted earlier, there are examples that strongly suggest Islam *does* have the ability to offer political guidance and that Islamic groups have demonstrated a willingness to embrace non-violent political activity. Therefore, a variation of Lewis's thesis would be that Islam has not *yet* adapted to the modern world. This does not rule out the possibility Islam *can* or *will* adapt. It also seems a reasonable compromise between those like Lewis who are more critical of Islam's perceived failings, and those who see the potential for, or even a track record of, accommodation between Islam and politics.

¹⁰⁸ Lewis, Bernard, *The Crisis of Islam*, (New York: Modern Library, 2003), pp. 117 – 118.

¹⁰⁹ Kedourie, Elie, *Democracy and Arab Political Culture*, (London: Frank Cass, 1994), pp. 5-6.

Although the literature about the evolution of Islamic political thought is extensive, much appears in dense scholarly language, Arabic, or a combination of both—particularly that which pre-dates September 2001. The al Qaeda attacks on the U.S. that year created a new demand to understand the religion the group claimed justified the attacks, but a not insignificant proportion of the new literature is polemical and superficial, regardless of its view of Islam. Moreover, very little if any of the literature makes an effort to tie the emergence of new ideas in Islamic political thought to the transition of present-day armed Islamist political groups into politics.

For this reason, I examine two broad but key themes that Islamic political thinkers began to adopt during the late 1800s in order to determine whether links exist between their ideas and contemporary Islamist militant groups' transitions to non-violent political activities. I chose this time frame because that is when the evolution of Islamic political thought really began to gain steam; Muslim reformers were growing increasingly concerned over the direction of the Ottoman empire, and some prominent Muslims “under the influence” of emerging European political ideals really began agitating for greater citizen involvement in politics.¹¹⁰ I believe this approach adds important historical context to the existing literature on the topic.

¹¹⁰ Watt, p. 116. Watt further notes that Islamic political literature that appeared in the 19th century and was influenced by European ideals “grew to a flood” in the 20th century (p. 116). Similarly, in *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (1982), Enayat characterizes the “vigorous debate between the modernists and traditionalists” at end of the 1700s as “the beginning of a real regeneration of Islamic political thought (p. 52).” Salem notes that such “reformers perceived the decline of the Muslim world in general, and of Ottoman Empire in particular, to be the result of an increasing disregard for implementing the Shari’ah (Islamic law).”

Freeing Islam from External Influence

The first of the two key themes emerged out of the Muslim anti-colonial sentiment and the growing introspection about and disgust for corrupt Muslim rulers of the 1800s and 1900s.¹¹¹ This sentiment grew quickly if disjointedly into a pan-Islamic, often Arab nationalist view whose advocates sought to remove Western influences permeating Islamic life as a result of European colonial rule. These reformers also sought to re-elevate the status of Islam in the Muslim world, to make it the proud source of scientific and other discovery it had been in centuries past.¹¹²

According to Keddie, a “pioneer” of this anti-imperialist line of thought, Iranian-born Islamic philosopher Jamal al Din al Afghani, found inspiration for his work in his distaste for British rule in India.¹¹³ In writings and speeches from centers of political foment such as Turkey, India, England, and Iraq, Afghani promoted an approach to governance that aimed be traditionally Muslim and anti-Western, yet which also sought to inject independent reason and modern interpretation of the Quran (the Islamic concept of ‘ijtihad’) along with the “good” parts of Western governance and public welfare into political debates.¹¹⁴

Afghani was also an equal opportunity critic. He dismissed not only Western influence on Muslim society, but also Muslims who failed to modernize

¹¹¹ Salem, Ahmed Ali, “Challenging Authoritarianism, Colonialism, and Disunity: The Islamic Political Reform Movements of al-Afghani and Rida,” *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* (21:2), 2004, p. 25.

Salem, Ahmed Ali, “Challenging Authoritarianism, Colonialism, and Disunity: The Islamic Political Reform Movements of al-Afghani and Rida,” *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* (21:2), 2004, p. 26.

¹¹³ Keddie, Nikki, “Sayyid Jamal al-Din ‘al-Afghani’,” *Pioneers of Islamic Revival* (Ali Rahnama, ed.), (Zed Books, 1994), pp. 11-29.

¹¹⁴ Keddie, p. 11; Fadel, Mohammed, “Modernist Islamist Political Thought and the Egyptian and Tunisian Revolutions of 2011,” *Middle East Law and Governance* (3), 2011, p. 102.

and see in Islam a political path forward. He felt it was a mistake to either dismiss modernity in its entirety, or conversely to unquestioningly embrace Western culture and contemporary thought.¹¹⁵ This was a key theme of his short-lived Arabic journal, in which Afghani “urged Muslims [worldwide] to unite and restore the lost glories of Islam.”¹¹⁶

One of Afghani’s best-known followers, Syrian-born Muhammad Abdu, largely echoed that view. For Abdu, “a recognised [*sic*] Islamic scholar...who became Grand Mufti of Egypt,” Muslims needed to modernize, but to do so under the guidance of Islam.¹¹⁷ He pointed to the scientific, technological, and other achievements of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties as beacons for modern-day Muslims.¹¹⁸ Moreover, Abdu sought to return the practice of Islam to that which existed during the days of the earliest Muslim caliphs, but also saw no inherent clash with their practice of Islam and the demands of modern-day society.¹¹⁹ Abdu stressed “the need to balance the pursuit of technological development while...ensuring that Muslims remain true to their moral values and social structure.”¹²⁰

Abdu did diverge with Afghani on some key issues, such as whether Muslim peoples were educated enough to rule themselves. He also at times

¹¹⁵ Keddie, p. 11; Fadel, Mohammed, “Modernist Islamist Political Thought and the Egyptian and Tunisian Revolutions of 2011,” *Middle East Law and Governance* (3), 2011, p. 11.

¹¹⁶ Busool, Assad Nimer, “Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Rida’s Political Activities: A Struggle for the Revival of an Orthodox (Salafi) Islamic State” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California-Berkeley, 1974), p. 48.

¹¹⁷ Volpi, Frederic, “Understanding the Rationale of the Islamic Fundamentalists’ Political Strategies: A Pragmatic Reading of their Conceptual Schemes during the Modern Era,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* (1:3), Winter 2000, p. 75.

¹¹⁸ AlJuneid, Syed Muhd Khairudin, “Western sociology and the Muslim world: Syeikh Muhammad Abduh’s ideas on societal reform,” *Asia Europe Journal* (3), 2005, pp. 423-424.

¹¹⁹ Enayat, p. 69.

¹²⁰ AlJuneid, p. 4323.

demonstrated a willingness to abide British colonial rule when it helped his longer-term goal of revitalizing Islam. Nevertheless, he “saw [in Islam] an ideology capable of mobilizing people and advancing their social condition...”¹²¹

Syrian-born Rashid Rida, another follower of Afghani’s, added yet a third prominent critical voice to the “sorry state of affairs” in the Muslim world at the time. He did so most prominently through the Islamic reform journal al-Manar (“The Lighthouse”), which he published while he lived in Cairo.¹²² According to Seferta, Rida believed “a restored caliphate” the only way to rectify the “backwardness, disunity, and apathy” of Islam at the time.¹²³ However, Rida’s approach was different from Afghani and Abdu’s in one key way, and that was in his greater focus on Arab unity. For Rida, Islam was an inherently Arab religion, and for any revitalization of Islam to occur, there first needed to be unity among Arabs.¹²⁴ Moreover, that unity had to occur under a new caliph who descended from the Prophet’s Arab tribe, the Quraysh.¹²⁵

A New Approach to Islamic Governance

Another key theme that emerged during this period was the reinterpretation of Islam to allow it to serve as a political guide. This was a natural extension of the effort to rid of Islam of destructive foreign influences like secularism or Christianity. Again, Afghani, Abdu, and Rida were among the most

¹²¹ Khoury, Nabeel A. and Abdo I. Baaklini, “Muhammad Abduh: An Ideology of Development,” *Muslim World* (69:1), 1979, p. 44.

¹²² Haddad, Mahmoud, “Arab Religious Nationalism in the Colonial Era: Rereading Rashid Rida’s Ideas on the Caliphate,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (117:2), 1997, p. 254; Tauber, Eliezer, “Rashid Rida as pan-Arabist before World War I,” *Muslim World* (79:2), 1989, pp. 102-103.

¹²³ Seferta, Yusuf H.R., “Rashid Rida’s Quest for an Islamic Government,” *Hamdard Islamicus* (VIII:4), 1985, pp. 36, 42.

¹²⁴ Tauber, Eliezer, “Rashid Rida as pan-Arabist before World War I,” *Muslim World* (79:2), 1989, p. 103.

¹²⁵ Haddad, Mahmoud, “Arab Religious Nationalism in the Colonial Era: Rereading Rashid Rida’s Ideas on the Caliphate,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (117:2), 1997, p. 256.

prominent thinkers promoting this new approach to religion and state. As Volpi describes it, in the effort to reform Islam from within, “Abduh and Afghani [in particular] went against established Islamic conventions” by envisioning a greater role for members of society than in traditional Islamic society, in which the caliph was supreme.¹²⁶

Afghani was perhaps the least specific of the three when it came to offering a detailed roadmap to this political reform and revitalization. According to Keddie, Afghani was instead more interested in advocating modern notion of rational thought and analysis (*ijtihad*)—as opposed to the uncritical acceptance of all previous Islamic interpretations—than he was in promoting popular sovereignty; in other words, he was more interested in encouraging Muslims to find ways to interpret the Quran and Sharia law to fit modernity than he was in establishing a democratic political structure.

Regardless, Afghani was among the first to advocate the re-creation of the Islamic caliphate based on a modern interpretation of Islam and through a consultative approach to decision-making, as described by the Arabic word *shura*.¹²⁷ Part of this philosophy grew out of Afghani’s interaction with Western intellectuals and exposure to their ideas of government while he lived in Paris and edited a philosophical newsletter.¹²⁸ In terms of the mechanics of political

¹²⁶ Volpi, Frederic, “Understanding the Rationale of the Islamic Fundamentalists’ Political Strategies: A Pragmatic Reading of their Conceptual Schemes during the Modern Era,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* (1:3), Winter 2000, p. 76.

¹²⁷ Salem, Ahmed Ali, “Challenging Authoritarianism, Colonialism, and Disunity: The Islamic Political Reform Movements of al-Afghani and Rida,” *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* (21:2), 2004, p. 28.

¹²⁸ Volpi, Frederic, “Understanding the Rationale of the Islamic Fundamentalists’ Political Strategies: A Pragmatic Reading of their Conceptual Schemes during the Modern Era,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* (1:3), Winter 2000, p. 76.

reform, he envisioned a two-step process by which religious and other societal elites would first “educate the masses about the corrupt ruling regime by comparing it to the Islamic and modern standards of government as reflected in the Islamic sources...and western democracies.”¹²⁹ Then, if necessary, the masses would overthrow the regime to install a new, contemporary Islamic government which would operate by the will of the people.

On a more practical level, Afghani “helped introduce and disseminate tools of political education and action” such as books, political pamphlets, and speeches.¹³⁰ This certainly helped ensure his ideas’ enduring appeal in the Muslim world. However, Keddie also ascribes the endurance of Afghani’s influence to his tight adherence to Islamic ideals, as compared with Islamic reformers who were more willing to accept new Western ideals uncritically.¹³¹

Though Abdu was a close follower and personal acquaintance of Afghani’s, served in the Egyptian government, and advised authors of the Egyptian Constitution, Abdu was less focused in the specific details of the state or legislation than he was in the education of the Muslim masses as a key step in preparing for a new Islamic state.¹³² This reflected his view that theocratic rulers neither deserved absolute authority nor were infallible. Instead, the Muslim community, or *umma*, was the sole source of a ruler’s legitimacy and had the right

¹²⁹ Salem, Ahmed Ali, “Challenging Authoritarianism, Colonialism, and Disunity: The Islamic Political Reform Movements of al-Afghani and Rida,” *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* (21:2), 2004, p. 28.

¹³⁰ Keddie, p. 11; Fadel, Mohammed, “Modernist Islamist Political Thought and the Egyptian and Tunisian Revolutions of 2011,” *Middle East Law and Governance* (3), 2011, p. 23-24.

¹³¹ Keddie, p. 11; Fadel, Mohammed, “Modernist Islamist Political Thought and the Egyptian and Tunisian Revolutions of 2011,” *Middle East Law and Governance* (3), 2011, p. 12.

¹³² Khoury, Nabeel A. and Abdo I. Baaklini, “Muhammad Abduh: An Ideology of Development,” *Muslim World* (69:1), 1979, p. 45.

to elect and remove rulers as it saw fit, within certain guidelines.¹³³ Moreover, Abdu recognized the key documents in Islam could not possibly have anticipated how history would change the way humans lived their lives. Accordingly, he “realized that, as times change, new legislation is required that is not directly contained in the Qur’an.”¹³⁴ As a result, Abdu “revealed the potential of Islamic principles to be translated into legislation.”¹³⁵

Like Afghani and Abduh, Rida envisioned a rejuvenated role for Islam in the politics of the Muslim world. However, unlike his two predecessors, Rida was highly focused on the restoration of the caliphate, driven largely by his interest in Islamic unity. As I noted earlier, his focus on the role and position of Arabs in the Muslim world colored his view of which citizens should or could fill which roles in society. Nevertheless, “real power is meant to be in the hands of the *umma*, or, more precisely, the representatives of the *umma*, rather than in the hands of the caliph himself, for fear of abuse and tyranny.”¹³⁶

The characterization of these scholar-thinkers as key influences on the evolution of political thought does not mean they were the only scholars who had such influence. Additionally, the theories of each of the individuals I discussed here had many shortcomings. For example, Salem sees Afghani as somewhat more of a pragmatist than one may expect in an Islamic reformer, due to his willingness to set aside his distaste for autocratic rule temporarily in favor of

¹³³ alJuneid, p. 425.

¹³⁴ Khoury, Nabeel A. and Abdo I. Baaklini, “Muhammad Abduh: An Ideology of Development,” *Muslim World* (69:1), 1979, p. 48.

¹³⁵ Khoury, Nabeel A. and Abdo I. Baaklini, “Muhammad Abduh: An Ideology of Development,” *Muslim World* (69:1), 1979, p. 45.

¹³⁶ Seferta, Yusuf H.R., “Rashid Rida’s Quest for an Islamic Government,” *Hamdard Islamicus* (VIII:4), 1985, p. 45.

longer-term gains (such as when he lived in London despite his opposition to British influence in the Muslim world).¹³⁷ Seferta viewed Rida's efforts to reconstruct the classical caliphate as "neither realistic nor thorough enough," and that his view of the community's role in government is not to contribute to the creation of law, but rather to have a voice in the implementation of God's word.¹³⁸ Kerr views Rida's efforts to promote reform as an utter failure, and labels Rida an apologist for Islam rather than someone interested in true reform.¹³⁹

Nevertheless, many scholars see an almost linear connection between these individuals and later prominent Islamists. Aboul-Enein notes that "Rida's work left an indelible mark on Hassan al-Banna, founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood...the first Islamist political party..."¹⁴⁰ Tamimi observes that al-Banna relied heavily on the works of Afghani, Abduh, and Rida in formulating his "grass roots" approach to reform in the Muslim world.¹⁴¹ His group, of course, is an ideological pre-cursor to al-Qaida and many other militant Sunni Islamist groups. In this way, the discussion of the literature and the analysis of these scholars' contributions offer an appropriate bridge to the case studies, first

¹³⁷ Salem, Ahmed Ali, "Challenging Authoritarianism, Colonialism, and Disunity: The Islamic Political Reform Movements of al-Afghani and Rida," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* (21:2), 2004, p. 31.

¹³⁸ Seferta, Yusuf H.R., "Rashid Rida's Quest for an Islamic Government," *Hamdard Islamicus* (VIII:4), 1985, pp. 39, 48.

¹³⁹ Kerr, Malcolm, "Rashid Rida and Islamic Legal Reform: An Ideological Analysis (Part II)," *Muslim World* (50:3), 1960, p. 181.

¹⁴⁰ Aboul-Enein, CDR Yousseff, USN, "The Evolution of the Concept of Jihad Part II: The Late 19th and 20th Centuries," *Infantry*, Mar-Jun 2009, p. 14.

¹⁴¹ Tamimi, Azzam, *HAMAS: A History from Within* (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2007), pp. 4 – 5.

the Palestinian militant group HAMAS, and second the Filipino separatist organization the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

These case studies are appropriate for several reasons. First, because each initially rejected participation in existing political structures, their transition into political naturally raises the question of why they made that decision. Second, each is a Sunni Muslim group whose goal is the establishment of an Islamic state. Therefore, their similarities may help identify trends or, alternatively, differences among Sunni militant groups who decide to make this decision. Finally, the groups are roughly part of the same generation of Islamist militant groups and their transitions occurred in similar geopolitical conditions, even if their local experiences differed.

HAMAS Upends the Palestinian Political Landscape

On the evening of January 25, 2006, tens of thousands of Palestinians poured into the streets of cities across the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.¹⁴² They were celebrating not another Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian territories, as they did in Gaza the previous September. Nor was it a Muslim holiday. Instead, the many Palestinians who turned out were celebrating the victory of the political wing of the Islamist terrorist organization HAMAS in Palestinian parliamentary elections that day.

That the victory represented the essential end of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)-descended rule in the Palestinian territories—at least for a short period—would have been cause for celebration on its own. Palestinians had grown progressively disillusioned over the previous decade with their oldest political party, Fatah, which was

¹⁴² McGreal, C., “ Hamas shock victory poses new Middle East challenge,” *The Guardian*, 26 Jan 2006, accessed 29 Mar 2014 at www.theguardian.com.

the political arm of the PLO. According to Shiqaqi, this was partly due to general political alienation, regardless of political faction, but also because of its inability to show real progress in negotiations with the Israelis.¹⁴³ Additionally, since 2000, it was also a result of rising support for HAMAS at Fatah's expense because of HAMAS's willingness to confront the Israeli military.¹⁴⁴

But HAMAS's 2006 victory was symbolic for arguably a more important reason: as an offshoot of the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, HAMAS had thus far been committed to Israel's destruction through violent struggle and in rejection of intra-Palestinian national politics.¹⁴⁵ So, that the group to decide to take part in a non-violent political process marked a significant strategic shift. No longer was it the Palestinian opposition party and perceived spoiler of Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts. Instead, it had a responsibility to govern and provide for its people.

But why would a group that had so far shunned participation in non-violent national politics decide to make such a strategic change in its approach to participation in the Palestinian struggle for nationhood, particularly when it hadn't yet achieved statehood? Many scholars of terrorism and of human behavior have offered historical, sociological, or theories from other disciplines to explain this transformation. I take a largely new approach and argue that the evolution in Islamic political thought over the past two centuries also offers important insights into and helped set the stage for HAMAS's political metamorphosis.

HAMAS from Violence to Politics

¹⁴³ Shiqaqi, Khalil, "Sweeping Victory, Uncertain Mandate," *Journal of Democracy* (17:3), July 2006, pp. 117 – 8.

¹⁴⁴ Shiqaqi, Khalil, "Sweeping Victory, Uncertain Mandate," *Journal of Democracy* (17:3), July 2006, pp. 117 – 8.

¹⁴⁵ Levitt, Matthew, *HAMAS* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, p. 8.

HAMAS emerged as a Palestinian political faction in 1987, amid the first Palestinian uprising against Israeli control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. However, HAMAS descends from an older Palestinian organization, the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood, itself an offshoot of the main Egyptian branch of the organization by the same name. Founded in 1945, the Palestinian Brotherhood shared the goals of its Egyptian counterpart: to check the modern, secular, and other influences Western colonialism had brought upon Muslims; and to do so through “the upbringing of an Islamic generation” and establishment of a Muslim state.¹⁴⁶ Although Israel had existed for nearly 40 years before HAMAS emerged, there is no evidence in Israeli records or other accounts of widespread or systematic Brotherhood attacks against Israel before HAMAS’s appearance.¹⁴⁷ Instead, the Brotherhood focused on peaceful religious, social, and financial outreach and proselytization.¹⁴⁸ According to Palestinian scholar Ziad Abu Amr,

the first priority is the Islamic transformation of [Palestinian] society, which [the Brotherhood] sees as a prerequisite to the liberation of Palestine. According to the Brotherhood, armed struggle (jihad) cannot be undertaken until the society is reformed, until secular ideas are abandoned and Islam adopted.¹⁴⁹

However, as Palestinian and broader Arab popular discontent with Israel’s existence grew in the late 1960s and early 1970s—and particularly with its successive defeats of Arab armies in that period—so grew demand for a different, more militant

¹⁴⁶ Pargeter, Allison. *The Muslim Brotherhood*. (London: Saqi, 2010), pp. 18, 20; Janssen, Floor. (2009). “Hamas and its positions toward Israel,” *Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael*, p. 14; and Levitt, Matthew, *HAMAS* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 8.

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.mfs.gov.il> includes a variety of pages dedicated to listing terrorist attacks during most periods of Israeli history; and Levitt, Matthew, *HAMAS*, (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2006), pp. 20-1.

¹⁴⁸ Abu-Amr, Ziad. (1993). “Hamas: A Historical and Political Background,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 22:4, p. 8.

¹⁴⁹ Abu-Amr, Ziad. (1993). “Hamas: A Historical and Political Background,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 22:4, p. 9.

approach to fighting what became after 1973 the Israeli annexation and occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The key voice of the Palestinian cause that emerged in the early 1970s were the PLO and Fatah. Although the Israelis (and U.S.) viewed the PLO as a terrorist organization, in 1974 the Arab League recognized the PLO and its leader Yasser Arafat as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people; the United Nations followed suit in 1988.¹⁵⁰

However, the PLO and smaller Palestinian militant and political groups had primarily secular goals for Palestinian society. Moreover, they had proved themselves incapable of rolling back any of the effects of the recent Arab-Israeli wars, or of ameliorating the effects of the occupation on average Palestinian citizens. Therefore, by the mid-1980s, many members of the Brotherhood agitated to create a more religious and proactive counterweight to such influences. Thus was born HAMAS, whose charter called for the destruction of Israel and its replacement with a Muslim Palestinian state.¹⁵¹

To understand HAMAS's evolution from violent outsider to would-be political kingmaker, it is helpful to understand the key phases of the group's history; to do so, Janssen provides a useful timeline, which divides roughly into four key periods.¹⁵²

The first begins with the group's founding in 1987 and lasts until the early 1990s. It was a period of intense violence between Palestinian factions and Israel, but also growing tension among Palestinian groups to represent the Palestinian struggle.

¹⁵⁰ Levitt, Matthew, *HAMAS* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, p. 8; "Chronicling the PLO," *Al Jazeera*, 31 Aug 2009, accessed 29 Mar 2014 at <http://www.aljazeera.com>; and Schlein, Lisa, "Arafat Unveils Peace Plan; Israeli Leader Shamir Calls The Proposal A 'Deception'," *The Sun-Sentinel*, 14 Dec 1988, accessed 29 Mar 2014 at <http://www.sun-sentinel.com/>.

¹⁵¹ Levitt, Matthew, *HAMAS* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, p. 8.

¹⁵² Janssen divides HAMAS's history into three "phases:" the first stretches from HAMAS inception through the first intifada against the Israelis; the second begins in the 1990s and lasts until the end of the second intifada, around 2005; the final phase begins roughly around the time HAMAS won the Palestinian parliamentary elections, in January 2006. See p. 13 for more detail.

Members of HAMAS were among many in Palestinian society who felt a growing sense of helplessness deciding their own future.¹⁵³ Citing Hroub, Janssen further argues that many Brotherhood members also grew concerned that secular groups were outflanking religious Palestinians in fighting the Israeli occupation.¹⁵⁴ In that sense, HAMAS was responding to a struggle for ideological dominance within the Palestinian movement perhaps as much as it was seeking to end the occupation or destroy Israel.

The second period, which ended approximately in late 2000 with the essential death of the so-called Oslo Accords, was marked by the series of direct but secret negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis in Norway that had begun after the first intifada ended.¹⁵⁵ In 1993, the first Oslo Accord helped establish a process by which Israelis and Palestinians would build trust based primarily on security issues that would eventually lead to greater autonomy and then independence for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. However, what is now known as the Oslo Process had instead stalled by the first years of the 21st century due to a variety of failures by all participants in the conflict. Nevertheless, according to Janssen, Oslo inaugurated a period during which many in Israel and around the world accepted the PLO alone as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, rendering HAMAS an opposition group.¹⁵⁶ Though HAMAS refused to take part in any of the processes and structures Oslo

¹⁵³ Janssen, Floor. (2009). " Hamas and its positions toward Israel," *Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael*, p. 16.

¹⁵⁴ Janssen, Floor. (2009). " Hamas and its positions toward Israel," *Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael*, p. 16.

¹⁵⁵ For a good summary of the Oslo Accords, see "Shattered Dreams of Peace," *PBS Frontline*, accessed 29 Mar 2014 at <http://www.pbs.org/>.

¹⁵⁶ Janssen, Floor. (2009). " Hamas and its positions toward Israel," *Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael*, p. 18.

inaugurated, it made no concerted effort to disrupt Palestinians' involvement in the nascent indigenous political system.¹⁵⁷

The third phase of HAMAS's evolution began around the start of the second Palestinian intifada, in late 2000, and lasted essentially until January 2006, when HAMAS won Palestinian parliamentary elections and took control of the government. HAMAS not only resumed high levels of terrorism against Israelis during this period, but that violence grew more lethal. According to Frisch, "Israeli casualties were over *seven times higher* [in the first four years of the second intifada] than...in the first five years of the [first intifada] (emphasis added)."¹⁵⁸

Not surprisingly, by 2000, most observers of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict would arguably have agreed the Oslo Process and PLO attempts to establish a Palestinian state were failing; for HAMAS, Oslo was dead.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, Palestinians viewed Fatah's continued domination of Palestinian politics as plagued by "authoritarianism, centralization, personalism, neo-patrimony, violence, lack of rule of law, and arbitrariness in decision-making."¹⁶⁰ HAMAS's return to violence in this period was therefore its renewed effort to establish primacy in the Palestinian struggle for statehood: the PLO and Fatah failed you, so HAMAS will remind you it alone can resist the occupation.

The final phase began with HAMAS' capture of power in the Palestinian parliament in January 2006. The election sparked a vicious power struggle between the

¹⁵⁷ Hovdenak, Are, "Hamas in transition: the failure of sanctions," *Democratization* (16:1), 2009, p. 66.

¹⁵⁸ Frisch, Hillel. (2009). "Strategic Change in Terrorist Movements: Lessons from Hamas," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, p. 1051.

¹⁵⁹ Hovdenak, Are, "Hamas in transition: the failure of sanctions," *Democratization* (16:1), 2009, p. 68.

¹⁶⁰ Schulz, Helena Lindholm, "The 'Al-Aqsa Intifada' as a Result of Politics of Transition," *Arab Studies Quarterly* (24:4), Fall 2002, p. 22.

two main Palestinian factions months later but HAMAS ultimately ejected Fatah from Gaza in summer 2007, effectively leaving HAMAS in control of Gaza and Fatah of the West Bank. Since then, despite several minor to reasonably severe flare-ups of violence between HAMAS and Israel, the group has largely stuck to a cease-fire and at least in words sought to minimize attacks against Israel by other militant factions in Gaza. In April, the group also reached another deal meant to bring reconciliation between HAMAS and Fatah, though the deal's chances remain a question mark.

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front's New Chance in Philippines Politics

On March 27, 2014, one of the world's longest-running insurgencies came to an ostensible end. That's when the largest Muslim militant separatist group in the Philippines—the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)—and the Filipino government signed a deal they reached two months earlier. Upon implementing the deal, the MILF agreed to give up its weapons in exchange for greater political autonomy in the Muslim regions of southern Philippines.¹⁶¹

However, that significant next step faces an “assorted political and organizational agenda” among the remaining Muslim insurgent groups in the country, and ultimately represents a step back from the goal of independence many Filipino Muslims originally sought.¹⁶² It may also face political challenges in the Philippines Congress, which must

¹⁶¹ Sabapathy, Kanaha, “After decades of conflict Philippines rebel group Moro Islamic Liberation Front has signed a peace treaty,” *Australia Network News*, 28 Mar 2014, accessed 30 Mar 2014 at <http://www.abc.net.au/>.

¹⁶² Buendia, Rizal G., “The State-Moro Armed Conflict in the Philippines: Unresolved national question or question of governance?” *Asian Journal of Political Science* (13:1), p. 119; and Orendaine, Simone, “Philippines, MILF Rebels Sign Historic Peace Deal,” *VOA News*, 27 Mar 2014, accessed 30 Mar 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/>.

create a ‘basic law’ that recognizes and establishes the autonomous region.¹⁶³ But irrespective of these and other potential deal-breakers, one local scholar characterized the deal—17 years in the making—as “an unprecedented opportunity to end one of the world’s longest-running intrastate conflicts” which has killed an estimated 120,000 people.¹⁶⁴

Why, however, would a Muslim militant group committed to armed struggle for independence since its founding in the late 1970s decide to participate in non-violent political activity, particularly without gaining the full independence it originally sought?¹⁶⁵ To be sure, the ink on the agreement is barely dry. However, by reviewing the history of the MILF and important inflection points in its quest, as I did with HAMAS, I assess whether the evolution in Islamic political thought in recent centuries influenced the MILF’s decision.

MILF from Violence to Politics

As with so many other Islamist militant movements that emerged in the late 20th century, MILF’s struggle has its roots in the experience of colonial rule, primarily by Spain and the U.S. The U.S. granted Philippines independence in 1946, but before doing so, it unified the largely Muslim southern governorates of Mindanao and Sulu with the largely Christian regions of the rest of what is now Philippines.¹⁶⁶ The newly-

¹⁶³ Sabapathy, Kanaha, “After decades of conflict Philippines rebel group Moro Islamic Liberation Front has signed a peace treaty,” *Australia Network News*, 28 Mar 2014, accessed 30 Mar 2014 at <http://www.abc.net.au/>.

¹⁶⁴ Whaley, Floyd, “Philippines and Rebels Agree on Peace Accord to End Insurgency,” *The New York Times*, 25 Jan 2014, accessed 30 Mar 2014 at <http://www.nytimes.com/>.

¹⁶⁵ Buendia, Rizal G., “The State-Moro Armed Conflict in the Philippines: Unresolved national question or question of governance?” *Asian Journal of Political Science* (13:1), p. 121.

¹⁶⁶ *CIA World Factbook*, accessed 30 Mar 2014 at <https://www.cia.gov/>; and Martin, G. Eugene and Astrid S. Tuminez, “Toward Peace in the Southern Philippines: A Summary and Assessment of the USIP Philippine Facilitation Project, 2003–2007,” *United States Institute of Peace Special Report* (202), Feb 2008, p. 1.

independent government subsequently continued colonial policies of settling Christians in Muslim regions, slowly but decisively ending the majority status of local Muslims, known as Moros.¹⁶⁷ In 1913, approximately 98% of the population of Mindanao was Muslim; by 1999, that figure plunged to approximately 19%.¹⁶⁸ The economic results have also been devastating. Ozerdem notes that though Muslim regions contain most of the country's valuable resources, Muslims own only a small percentage of land and receive miniscule benefits from the multinational corporations operating there.¹⁶⁹

By the late 1960s, according to Podder, these and a variety of additional factors exacerbated the growing discontent over Muslims' declining economic and social status in the formerly Muslim-dominated regions and gave rise to a new Muslim separatist sentiment in Philippines.¹⁷⁰ Key among them was the growing links between Filipino Muslims and emerging Islamic movements outside Southeast Asia, particularly those in the Middle East reacting to the tumultuous events there in the 1960s and 1970s, which helped give Moros hope they could achieve something in their own struggle.

Additionally, at least one significant misstep by the Philippines military helped galvanize separatist sentiment in Philippines. In 1968, the military slaughtered 27 Filipino Muslim soldiers who were to infiltrate neighboring Muslim-majority Malaysia to help seize land there. This event virtually coincided with the creation of the Moro

¹⁶⁷ Martin, G. Eugene and Astrid S. Tuminez, "Toward Peace in the Southern Philippines: A Summary and Assessment of the USIP Philippine Facilitation Project, 2003–2007," *United States Institute of Peace Special Report* (202), Feb 2008, p. 1.

¹⁶⁸ Ozerdem, Alpaslan, "The Contribution of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference to the Peace Process in Mindanao," *Civil Wars* (14:3), September 2012, p. 399.

¹⁶⁹ Ozerdem, Alpaslan, "The Contribution of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference to the Peace Process in Mindanao," *Civil Wars* (14:3), September 2012, p. 399.

¹⁷⁰ Podder, Sukanya, "Legitimacy, Loyalty and Civilian Support for the Moro Islamic Liberation Front: Changing Dynamics in Mindanao, Philippines," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* (13:4), December 2012, pp. 499 – 500.

National Liberation Front in 1968, one of the first and most prominent separatist groups to fight for Muslim autonomy in southern Philippines.¹⁷¹

By the late 1970s, approximately 150,000 Filipino Muslims had died in separatist-government violence but with little to show for the cost.¹⁷² Moreover, some members of the MNLF were growing disillusioned with the group's secular vision and its 1976 peace deal with the Philippines government. As a result, many of these members broke from the MNLF in the following year to form the 'New MNLF' under the leadership of Hashim Salamat, an MNLF co-founder and former member of its leadership.¹⁷³ In 1984, the New MNLF became the MILF, which Salamat led until his death in July 2003. At that time, in a break from the MNLF's secular vision, Salamat declared Islam to be the group's official ideology.¹⁷⁴ The ultimate goal of Salamat and his successor, Ebrahim El-haj Murad (who signed the March 2014 peace deal with the government), was to establish an Islamic state for Moros.

Again, as with HAMAS, we can divide the history of MILF's struggle into fairly distinct periods to understand its trajectory and gain insight into the influences on its decision-making. The first phase began in the early 1980s with the group's emergence as MILF, and ended in approximately 1996. With the groups now pursuing divergent goals, MNLF reached a final peace deal in 1996 with the Philippines government, again in

¹⁷¹ Arguillas, Carolyn O., "Lone survivor of Jabidah Massacre dies in vehicular accident," *Minda News*, 14 Feb 2011, accessed 30 Mar 2014 at <http://www.mindanews.com/>.

¹⁷² Taya, Shamsuddin L., "The Political Strategies of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front for Self-Determination in the Philippines," *Intellectual Discourse* (15:1), 2007, p. 61.

¹⁷³ Taya, Shamsuddin L., "The Political Strategies of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front for Self-Determination in the Philippines," *Intellectual Discourse* (15:1), 2007, p. 61; Abuza, Zachary, "The Moro Islamic Liberation Front at 20: State of the Revolution," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (28), 2005, p. 453; and Buendia, Rizal G., "The State-Moro Armed Conflict in the Philippines: Unresolved national question or question of governance?" *Asian Journal of Political Science* (13:1), pp. 115 – 116.

¹⁷⁴ Buendia, Rizal G., "The State-Moro Armed Conflict in the Philippines: Unresolved national question or question of governance?" *Asian Journal of Political Science* (13:1), p. 116.

Tripoli, that created the so-called Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The leader of MNLF became governor of the ARMM, which comprised most of four southern provinces and a key Muslim city.¹⁷⁵ But the Tripoli Accord, as it was known, did not go far enough for MILF. The group rejected the deal outright as secular and encompassing too small a region, vowing to fight for a much larger and independent Muslim nation carved from the southern Philippines.¹⁷⁶

Nonetheless, during a relatively short second phase from approximately 1997 to 2001, the group also continued negotiating with the government, but with its own goals in mind. And results were perhaps unexpectedly quick, particularly considering the group's outright rejection of the ARMM. Less than a year after disavowing Tripoli, the group established technical committees that met with government counterparts beginning in early 1997 to negotiate a cease-fire.¹⁷⁷ This resulted not only in a halt to fighting later that year, but also in recognition by the government of MILF's important base camps. These camps were both key havens for MILF military forces and according to Taya, represented administrative and societal models of statehood for how an "Islamic polity" would function in a future autonomous region.¹⁷⁸

Unfortunately, the 1997 cease-fire broke down soon after the election of President Joseph Estrada the next year, beginning a violent if brief third phase of the MILF's history. In 2000, Estrada "declared... 'all-out war' against the MILF" and abandoned

¹⁷⁵ Abuza, Zachary, "The Moro Islamic Liberation Front at 20: State of the Revolution," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (28), 2005, p. 454.

¹⁷⁶ Abuza, Zachary, "The Moro Islamic Liberation Front at 20: State of the Revolution," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (28), 2005, p. 454.

¹⁷⁷ Abuza, Zachary, "The Moro Islamic Liberation Front at 20: State of the Revolution," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (28), 2005, p. 455.

¹⁷⁸ Taya, Shamsuddin L., "The Political Strategies of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front for Self-Determination in the Philippines," *Intellectual Discourse* (15:1), 2007, p. 62.

peace talks, suspicious of the MILF's commitment.¹⁷⁹ Fortunately for the MILF, however, Estrada was deposed in 2001, and his successor (and jailer) Gloria Macapagal Arroyo responded to Estrada's campaign with an "all-out peace" with the MILF. This ushered in a more productive, longer phase for MILF's effort to achieve some form of self-determination.¹⁸⁰

However, even this next phase, from approximately 2001 to 2008, was not void of threats to the peace process. Periodic spasms of violence by each side repeatedly stalled or set back talks, as in 2003 when the government attacked one of the MILF's key camps; the MILF interpreted it as an attempt to kill Salamat.¹⁸¹ Moreover, in 2008, the Philippines Supreme Court declared unconstitutional a proposal by the government and the MILF to expand the ARMM.¹⁸² This drew a new wave of fighting between the MILF and the government until July 2009, when the government declared another cease-fire and later resumed talks.¹⁸³

The government cease-fire and subsequent resumption of talks marks the beginning of the most recent phase of MILF's evolution toward non-violent political participation, bringing us to the present. Despite the breakdown of talks in 2008, the MILF and the government renewed their peace effort in September 2009 by establishing a new contact group. A series of meetings and talks involving a wider range of committees from each side occurred over the next 3 years despite periodic bursts of

¹⁷⁹ Ozerdem, Alpaslan, "The Contribution of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference to the Peace Process in Mindanao," *Civil Wars* (14:3), September 2012, p. 405; and Martin, G. Eugene and Astrid S. Tuminez, "Toward Peace in the Southern Philippines: A Summary and Assessment of the USIP Philippine Facilitation Project, 2003–2007," *United States Institute of Peace Special Report* (202), Feb 2008, p. 3.

¹⁸⁰ Ozerdem, Alpaslan, "The Contribution of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference to the Peace Process in Mindanao," *Civil Wars* (14:3), September 2012, p. 405.

¹⁸¹ Abuza, Zachary, "The Moro Islamic Liberation Front at 20: State of the Revolution," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (28), 2005, p. 456.

¹⁸² "Key Obstacles to Lasting Peace in Mindanao," *Asia Monitor* (20:12), 12 Dec 2009, p. 1.

¹⁸³ "Key Obstacles to Lasting Peace in Mindanao," *Asia Monitor* (20:12), 12 Dec 2009, p. 1.

fighting, with 2012 becoming the first skirmish-free year between MILF and government forces.¹⁸⁴ In October of that year, MILF and the government signed a framework agreement for the establishment of a Muslim new geopolitical entity in Philippines, and in January 2014 they reached the final deal they signed in March.

With an agreement only weeks old, the MILF's transition to non-violent political activity is in not only its most nascent stage, but perhaps its most fragile. However, we have enough evidence about the MILF's motivations to evaluate whether this transformation is symptomatic of trends in Islamic political thought we've seen in other parts of the Muslim world, or if the reasons are more local.

Factors Driving HAMAS and MILF into Politics

Dividing the histories of each group into phases has helped isolate and identify some of the key influences that caused the groups move from rejection of non-violent non-violent political participation into embracing an existing or new political entity. By juxtaposing these reasons, we can determine whether they bolster or weaken the theory that the evolution of Islamic political thought influenced these groups, or even if the factors suggest further study.

Like its Muslim Brotherhood ancestors in the Palestinian territories and Egypt, HAMAS wanted to rid Palestinian political life of the influences of Western colonialism, and viewed Israel's existence as a manifestation of that influence. As Sandhu notes, the HAMAS Charter makes a point of highlighting colonialism and imperialism as key sources of humiliation for Muslims.¹⁸⁵ HAMAS viewed the Oslo Accords as an

¹⁸⁴ "Timeline: GRP-MILF peace negotiations," *The Philippine Star*, 26 Jan 2014, accessed 31 Mar 2014 at <http://www.philstar.com/>.

¹⁸⁵ Sandhu, Amandeep, "Islam and Political Violence in the Charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) in Palestine," *The Review of International Affairs* (3:1), autumn 2003, p. 9.

illegitimate extension of such Western and Israeli efforts to impose a political system on Palestinians.

HAMAS demonstrated its opposition to the processes Oslo helped spawn by boycotting the 1996 Palestinian parliamentary elections—but not out of ideological opposition to democracy, at least according to the head of its election committee at the time. Rather, Izzat al-Rishiq said HAMAS's decision

was based only on our own assessment of what was in the interest of our cause and our people... We knew the Oslo Accords were doomed and that it was only a matter of time before the peace process between the Palestinian Authority and Israel reached a dead end and collapsed... Our participation at that time would have bestowed legitimacy on what was in our opinion illegitimate.¹⁸⁶

Similarly, the key grievance the MILF held against the Philippines government was the modernizing Western, Christian, and colonial influences it continued to impose on Filipino Moros long after the end of colonial rule in the country. Chalk notes that “the arbitrary imposition of colonial borders [on Filipino Muslims]... failed to take account of the region's enormous ethno-religious diversity.”¹⁸⁷ In Philippines, this means 13 ethno-linguistic groups among the approximately 6 million Muslims.¹⁸⁸ Moreover, the modernization efforts Southeast Asian states have implemented to grow their economies “aggravated the situation by undermining traditional authority and socio- economic structures.”¹⁸⁹ The increased economic and social bifurcation between Muslim and non-Muslim Filipinos that have resulted from these phenomena have been a key influence on the conflict.

¹⁸⁶ Al-Rishiq in Tamimi, Azzam, *HAMAS: A History from Within* (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2007), pp. 210 – 211.

¹⁸⁷ *CIA World Factbook*, accessed 30 Mar 2014 at <https://www.cia.gov/>.

¹⁸⁸ Taya, Shamsuddin L., “The Political Strategies of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front for Self-Determination in the Philippines,” *Intellectual Discourse* (15:1), 2007, p. 60.

¹⁸⁹ Chalk, Peter, “Separatism and Southeast Asia: The Islamic Factor in Southern Thailand, Mindanao, and Aceh,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (24), 2001, p. 242.

As I discussed earlier, Muslim thinkers at the turn of the 20th century—Afghani, in particular, among the three I discussed—were motivated primarily by throwing off these burdens of colonialism and ousting corrupt Muslim rulers who were in the pockets of colonial powers. The same dynamic is at play in Philippines, with Moros rejecting the country that primarily Christian Filipinos built after gaining independence. As Stark notes, Moros’ perception “that they are being left behind the Christians politically, economically and educationally has not only alienated the Muslims from the Christian minority [in southern Philippines] but has also strengthened the separatist movement.”¹⁹⁰ In a similar fashion to the Muslim thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries, MILF is also seeking to create a Muslim state.

The new agreement with the Philippines government illustrates this desire. Though Muslim regions will remain under Philippines federal control, Moros will be able to implement Islamic policies and govern locally by Islamic mores. For example, as part of the agreement, the government recognized the MILF’s right to “strengthen the Shari’ah courts and to expand their jurisdiction.”¹⁹¹

A second similarity between the groups’ transitions appears in the way each viewed the leadership of the political system it initially refused to join. HAMAS viewed the Palestinian leadership, particularly in the person of PLO leader Yasser Arafat, as unworthy of the responsibility. According to another top HAMAS official, Mahmoud Zahar, control of the Palestinian Authority “was completely in the hands of Yasser Arafat. He cheated and fabricated results in the 1996 elections.”¹⁹² Moreover, as

¹⁹⁰ Stark, Jan, “Muslims in the Philippines,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* (23:1), April 2003, p. 205.

¹⁹¹ GPH-MILF Decision Points on Principles as of April 2012, Section 9, *Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro*, 27 Mar 2014, accessed 31 Mar 2014 at <http://issuu.com/>.

¹⁹² Hovdenak, Are, “ Hamas in transition: the failure of sanctions,” *Democratization* (16:1), 2009, p. 66.

Hovdenak notes, HAMAS leaders believed Arafat made a strategic mistake in “offering Israel recognition at the outset of peace negotiations” without receiving anything in return.¹⁹³ In short, Arafat was a corrupt Muslim in the pocket of Israeli and American leaders whose death represented a strategic turning point for HAMAS. It helped free the Palestinian cause from the grip of the man who had personified it for more than three decades.

This desire to overthrow a corrupt Muslim leader also carries direct echoes of earlier Muslim movements and thinkers. HAMAS’s Egyptian progenitor, the Muslim Brotherhood, opposed the secular leadership of Presidents Nasser and Mubarak as corrupt and beholden to either godless (i.e., Soviet) powers or corrupt Western societies. This was a view Muslim Brotherhood leaders adopted from thinkers like Rida, who, for example, opposed the absolutist rule of the Muslim Ottoman Empire, preferring instead even the constitutionalism European polities espoused.¹⁹⁴

The MILF held similar views of Philippines leadership. As I earlier noted, Moros grew increasingly disenfranchised by the demographic, economic, and power shifts the government of the new state effected through its policy of settling Christians in historically Muslim regions of the country. This caused Moros to view the country’s leadership as simply a corrupt extension of the colonial leadership that ostensibly ended decades before the MILF emerged.

A third parallel appears in the groups’ emergence amid the broader tumult of the Muslim world in the mid-to-late 1900s. As a descendant of the Muslim Brotherhood, HAMAS has always sought to build an Islamic state. One can argue over the methods by

¹⁹³ Hovdenak, Are, “ Hamas in transition: the failure of sanctions,” *Democratization* (16:1), 2009, p. 66.

¹⁹⁴ Haddad, Mahmoud, “Arab Religious Nationalism in the Colonial Era: Rereading Rashid Rida’s Ideas on the Caliphate,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (117:2), 1997, pp. 256 – 257.

which it has sought to do so, whether its attacks are “terrorism” or “legitimate struggle,” or whether an Islamic state would be the kind of pluralistic government Western politicians would like to see in a Palestinian state. Regardless, there is little evidence that HAMAS ever intended to install an autocratic or other type of dictatorial regime in any future Palestinian state. Instead, to the extent that the group’s rhetoric and writings have discussed political structures and theories and institutions, much of it has stressed “the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.”¹⁹⁵ This directly echoes the Muslim thinkers of the late 1800s and early 1900s who influenced the Muslim Brotherhood and found strong support in Islamic history and documents for pluralistic, republican types of government that heed popular will.

Here we see another similarity with the MILF. The group’s leadership and members participated to a degree in the growing global Muslim resurgence that several scholars observed was emerging around the time of MILF’s founding. For example, Middle East-based Muslim organizations were busy reaching out to Muslims outside the Arab world, in places like the Philippines. As Tan notes, certain Muslim regimes, notably in Libya, established official offices to aid the Moro cause. Indeed, Libya was for a time an active participant in negotiations over the MILF’s fate.¹⁹⁶

This relationship between Muslim separatism in Philippines and the broader so-called “Islamic resurgence” also went both ways. Salamat attended al Azhar University, a center of Islamic learning in Cairo, and earned degrees in 1963 and 1967, a period of Middle East history was replete with coups, a range of new Islamic militant groups, and

¹⁹⁵ HAMAS Political Bureau, “This is what we struggle for,” Memorandum prepared at the request of Western diplomats in Jordan in the 1990s, in Tamimi, Azzam, *HAMAS: A History from Within* (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2007), p. 269.

¹⁹⁶ Tan, Andrew, “Armed Muslim Separatist Rebellion in Southeast Asia: Persistence, Prospects, and Implications,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (23), 2000, p. 271.

war between Arabs and Israelis. And while it is unclear what direct influence these events had on Salamat's thinking, he attributed the creation of the MILF to "the realization of the ideas, efforts and sacrifices of Bangsamoro [Filipino Muslim] students in the Middle East and clandestinely organized themselves."¹⁹⁷ It is evident many members of the MILF found intellectual partners and nourishment for their separatist cause in Muslims of the Middle East.

Final Analysis/Conclusion

These parallels offer strong evidence that HAMAS's transformation from armed political group to non-violent political actor, while far from complete, is not simply a canard meant to please international observers and win Palestinians concessions from the international community, as Western and Muslim observers often allege about Islamist reformers.¹⁹⁸ Rather, the group has tapped into a longer line of Islamist political thinking that has sought, since at least the 1800s, to establish Muslim rule in Muslim lands, and based on Muslim notions of ruler, citizen, and society. Therefore, HAMAS's participation in the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections can be seen as just another step in the group's evolution.

The same can be said of the MILF's transformation. While the group has participated in both insurgent and terrorist violence, its goal has always remained either independence or autonomy in an Islamic state. Moreover, the lulls in fighting it has observed at times of perceived progress in negotiations with the government strongly

¹⁹⁷ Interview of Hashim Salamat by Nida'ul Islam magazine April – May 1998, accessed 31 Mar 2014 at <https://www.fas.org/>.

¹⁹⁸ For example, see Worth, Robert F., "Conservative Saudi Cleric's Political Shift Leaves Many Perplexed," *The New York Times*, 4 Apr 2014, accessed 6 Apr 2014 at <http://www.nytimes.com/>.

suggest the group is serious about its interest in transitioning to non-violent politics, and transition whose roots we can see in Islamic political thought of the 1800s and 1900s.

Therefore, as this short list of case studies suggests, the (at least partial) adoption by armed political groups of non-violent political activity has direct links to the evolution of Islamic political thought. This is not merely an academic observation; it carries real-world implications. Many influential voices argue there is little hope of prying weapons from militant Islamists, of integrating them into political systems, or that they're even ready to do so. To the contrary, the examples of HAMAS and the MILF demonstrate it is possible, and that it is not a short-term response to international pressure. Instead, groups like HAMAS and the MILF can find justification for participating in non-violent politics in the writings and deeds of their intellectual progenitors; in other words, they do not need to turn to Western or colonial powers to find justification for their pursuit of non-violent political activity.

However, the case studies also point to a potential new line of study – whether the evolution of Islamic political thought has a greater influence on Arab Islamic groups than it has on those of different ethnicities in different parts of the world. Though the examples of both HAMAS and the MILF suggest Muslim groups, in general, can find in Islamic political thought intellectual support for non-violent political activities, the evidence also suggests the influence was stronger on HAMAS. As an Arab group, it was in closer geographic and ethnic proximity to those promoting new ways for Muslims to think about politics in the 1800s and 1900s. This physical proximity to the debates in Islamic political thought placed HAMAS more directly in the path of its influence, to be

sure. HAMAS's descent from the Egyptian Muslim brotherhood is one manifestation of that influence.

The MILF, on the other hand, had no such apparent ethnic or geographic provenance. Moreover, according to Buendia, Moros practiced a slightly different version of Islam than Arabs. Moros' "less than orthodox practice of Islam among Filipino Muslims" allowed the MILF to work more freely with "competing Moro revolutionary organizations."¹⁹⁹ The MILF wanted an Islamic state, but understood there were variations within the Moro community about how to negotiate with the Philippines government, and what kind of deal to seek.²⁰⁰ The early days of the separatist era in the Philippines's history illustrate this point; there were different strains of separatism among Moros. Some sought a secular state, others religious. Some sought a complete break from Philippines, while others were content with greater autonomy.

On the other hand, while HAMAS was prepared to allow for non-Muslims to be part of a Palestinian state, the state itself was to be Muslim, not secular. Moreover, there was no talk of autonomy within an Israeli state; it has always been about complete independence. These views have been more uniform, at least in HAMAS's case than in the MILF's.

These variations add weight to the view that strategies to convince armed political groups to pursue non-violent political activity work best when they respond to ethnic, regional, or other differences. Regardless, the notion that the evolution of Islamic political thought has helped pave the way for armed Islamist groups to pursue non-violent

¹⁹⁹ Buendia, Rizal G., "The State-Moro Armed Conflict in the Philippines: Unresolved national question or question of governance?" *Asian Journal of Political Science* (13:1), p. 120.

²⁰⁰ Buendia, Rizal G., "The State-Moro Armed Conflict in the Philippines: Unresolved national question or question of governance?" *Asian Journal of Political Science* (13:1), p. 120.

political activity is a more common thread than policymakers appear to realize, and may provide useful guidance when seeking to convince other Islamist groups to make similar transitions.

CHAPTER THREE

Three of the four militant groups the previous chapters examined have been near or at the center of new crises that have expanded or took place wholly in the last three years. This chapter will examine each of those groups' activities to determine whether the conclusions the previous chapters made about them—the Sadrists, Hizballah, and HAMAS—served as accurate predictors of their behavior in the interim since 2011.²⁰¹ This chapter will show that for the Sadrists and Hizballah, concern about political and theological reputations remained driving factors in their continued non-violent political activities. However, Hizballah adopted a somewhat state-like role in defending the Syrian regime from rebels there in order to protect its own vital lines of support from Iran through Syria. Conversely, HAMAS, which fought a war with Israel this summer, appears to have veered more dramatically from the course chapter one anticipated.

Hizballah

In chapter the spring of 2011, Hizballah was deadlocked with other members of the Lebanese political ruling elite over creating a new government. The group was seeking to prevent a coalition forming that would back United Nations efforts to investigate and possibly indict Hizballah members in the 2005 assassination of Lebanon's former Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri. Fortunately for Hizballah, it retained enough influence—largely political but probably also through the implied threat of force—to effect the collapse of the placeholder government and engineer the ascension of an ally as prime minister.²⁰²

²⁰¹ This chapter addresses events through September 30, 2014.

²⁰² ---, 'Thousands in Lebanon Demand Hezbollah Be Disarmed,' *Associated Press*, March 13, 2011.

More importantly, however, Hizballah did not react by instigating widespread violence in reaction to this development, nor has Lebanon yet descend into renewed widespread civil conflict. This is despite the explosion of violence in neighboring Syria, a war that has represented a strategic threat not only to Hizballah's pipeline of weapons, money, and other aid, but also its ability to retain its political influence in Lebanon. Syria's civil war since 2011 has threatened the rule of one of Hizballah's two key state sponsors—the Assad regime—and so has resulted in increasing spillover violence in Lebanon. This raises the question, has Hizballah's actions since the Arab Spring and, in particular, in response to the Syria war validated earlier assessments this thesis made about the group? To answer this question, we must review the four central conclusions about Hizballah from chapter one.

The first was the role the decline of Iran as a model for Hizballah to pursue in Lebanon played in the group's political evolution. The second was Hizballah's evolving view of the value of being an outsider in the Lebanese political environment, as opposed to one that worked from the inside and used the non-violent political mechanisms available. The third was Hizballah's interest in responding to the needs of its Lebanese Shia constituents, and its recognition of the growing influence and legitimacy the provision of social services provided the group. The fourth factor was the influence the Palestine Liberation Organization's disavowal of violence had on Hizballah's struggle with Israel.

Newer analyses of Hizballah may also increase our ability to forecast the group's trajectory. In his article, Saouli argues that Hizballah will increasingly resort to state-like activities, including violence, as the ability of the Lebanese state to conduct its own state

responsibilities erodes further.²⁰³ Hizballah does so to portray itself as a legitimate protector of Lebanese interests and to strengthen its popular standing in Lebanon in preparation for future wars with Israel. In Saouli's view,

the driving force of Hizballah's behaviour has been the war with Israel, which has debilitated Hizballah's aim of establishing an Islamic state in multisectarian Lebanon... Hizballah's war and preparation for war with Israel have required a domestic security, socioeconomic and political policies that reinforce its external strategy... The domestic socio-political constraints and the war with Israel have tempered the movement's ideology and rationalised its behaviour. In seeking domestic legitimacy, Hizballah has conformed to Lebanese civil notions and discourse.²⁰⁴

In other words, Hizballah is trying to increase its legitimacy at home to increase the legitimacy and support it will have in any future conflict with Israel.

The geopolitical analysis firm Stratfor in 2012 added that Hizballah is planning for the two most likely scenarios the group predicts will result from the Syria war.²⁰⁵ Should the Assad regime retain power in Syria, Hizballah will continue to integrate itself more heavily into Lebanese political life. Much as Saouli argues, as the ability of the Lebanese government and military to protect the Lebanese populace declines, the opportunity for Hizballah to portray itself as a leader grows. Should Assad lose power, Hizballah is also planning for a scenario in which Syria fractures. In the event, Hizballah would seek to link itself with a new Alawite Shia-dominant enclave in coastal Syria that houses remnants of the Alawite Assad regime and its supporters.

The first conclusion—the decline of the Iran model—suggests that Hizballah would not seek to exploit the Arab Spring or related unrest try to create a Shia theocracy like that which exists in Iran. Hizballah realized that Iran's poor performance in its 1980

²⁰³ Saouli, Adham, 'Hizballah in the Civilising Process: Anarchy, Self-restraint and violence,' *Third World Quarterly* 32:5 (June 2011), p. 925.

²⁰⁴ Saouli, Adham, 'Hizballah in the Civilising Process: Anarchy, Self-restraint and violence,' *Third World Quarterly* 32:5 (June 2011), p. 926.

²⁰⁵ ---, 'Hezbollah's Contingency Planning,' *Stratfor*, October 18, 2012.

– 1988 war with Iraq limited the Islamic Republic’s allure as a model of government. When Hizballah decided several years later to participate in the 1992 Lebanese parliamentary elections, it was seeking to project legitimacy and to solidify its position as the primary representative of Shia interests in Lebanon through means that the Lebanese people deemed credible—not through Shia revolution. That said, Hizballah continued to rely on Syria and Iran as its enablers of the weapons and other materiel upon which Hizballah still relies to help sustain its influence, despite the opposition of its Lebanese political opponents and of the majority of the international community.

Therefore, the first conclusion in chapter one suggests Hizballah would walk a fine line in reaction to the Arab Spring. It would likely support the regime in Damascus to preserve its access to vital resources that even to this day help sustain its influence in Lebanon. At the same time, Hizballah would seek to avoid upsetting the delicate confessional political balance in Lebanon that pitted Hizballah against foes of Assad. Hizballah would resort to violence there and in Syria only amid existential threats to its interests.

Predictions based on the second conclusion about Hizballah’s political evolution—its interest in becoming an ‘insider’ in Lebanese politics—echo those based on the first conclusion. Hizballah may initially have felt it had to fight its way into Lebanese political life back when it emerged in the early 1980s. However, by the early 1990s, its leaders also recognized the group could achieve their goals more effectively and legitimately by winning elections. Therefore, the Assads and Khameneis—who ruled more by force of personality than by any attraction to their approach to governance—were not the kinds of leaders Hizballah should necessarily emulate. The

Arab Spring appears to have confirmed Hizballah's calculation that a personality-driven form of government would not succeed in Lebanon. As a result, this second conclusion suggests the Arab Spring would cause Hizballah to focus on the specifics of its governing platform rather than on forcing any specific leader or political system on Lebanon.

The third conclusion suggests Hizballah would continue to regard the interests of its constituents—the Shia of Lebanon—as its highest political duty. One message the fall of governments in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Yemen made clear was the demand in the region for governments to allow people to achieve a sense of dignity and accomplishment. After all, the spark of the Arab Spring was the self-immolation of a Tunisian fruit vendor whose business the government shut down because he did not have a permit. Similarly, Hizballah arose in the early 1980s amid the perception and reality of growing inequities between the elites and the increasingly marginalized and poor peoples of the region, of which Shia represented a significant percentage in Lebanon. This suggests Hizballah would react to the Arab Spring and any spillover in violence in ways that shielded their constituents from harm and opened up opportunities to become productive members of society.

The fourth conclusion suggests Hizballah would maintain its uneasy *détente* with Israel over the country's dispute with the Palestinians. Hizballah by the mid-1990s recognized that the nature of that conflict was evolving, and that parties to each were clamoring for ways out of the violence that had plagued it in the decades since Israel's creation in 1948. After the chief Palestinian terrorist organization—the Palestine Liberation Organization—disavowed violence in the early 1990s, Hizballah recognized it could not promote its opposition to Israel, or its own struggle to fight for Lebanese Shia

rights, through violence. Instead, it had to be far more selective in its use of violence, and to rely more heavily on its non-violent political activity. This conclusion also suggests Hizballah would weigh the international legitimacy of anti-Israel violence when deciding to use force anywhere.

As for the newer analyses, what Saouli's theory suggests is that Hizballah would promote stability in Lebanon while protecting the interests of the civilians, particularly their Shia constituents. Stratfor's analysis goes a step further and suggests Hizballah contingency planning is even more sophisticated than Saouli suggests. Hizballah is not only preparing for the erosion in security in Lebanon. Hizballah is also preparing for a re-drawing of the regional maps that puts its lines of control at risk. In each scenario, we would expect Hizballah to use non-violent political means inside Lebanon to promote its interests; the question there is degree of influence. Conversely, outside Syria, where the question is access to the very lines of control that sustain Hizballah in Lebanon, Hizballah is far more likely to resort to violence.

The Sadrists

In spring 2011, the U.S. was winding down its overt military presence in Iraq, but had yet to fully withdraw. Al Sadr had only recently returned to Iraq from nearly four years of self-imposed exile in Iran, and had helped former Prime Minister Maliki win another term in that role. Al Sadr's parliamentary block had grown by about 25 per cent, to 40, with about 8 of the 25 cabinet posts.²⁰⁶ Regardless, al Sadr's return raised questions about his intentions, and whether he planned to resume his campaign of sectarian violence to achieve his political goals.

²⁰⁶ Sarhan, Saad and Aaron C. Davis, 'Cleric Moqtada al-Sadr Returns to Iraq after Self-Imposed Exile,' *The Washington Post*, January 6, 2011.

Chapter one also reached four key conclusions about al Sadr's political evolution. First, al Sadr was keenly aware of the need to build his legitimacy in the Iraqi Shia community if he was going to continue his family's honored tradition of clerical leadership in the Shia world. Second, al Sadr understood the backlash within the Shia community that his violent tactics were drawing. Third, al Sadr recognized a significant imbalance of power between his forces and the U.S.-backed Iraqi government troops of the time. Finally, al Sadr recognized that Iraqi Shia stood to gain the most in a post-Saddam Hussein government because of simple math: they were a majority in a country that had installed a reasonably open electoral system. Al Sadr knew it was a structure that would afford Shia great power.

Newer analyses of Sadrist political activities may also inform forecasts of his activities since 2011. Broadly speaking, according to Bernhardt, legitimacy within the Shia community is one of the driving factors behind Shia Islamist behavior.²⁰⁷ As I argued in chapter one, this search for legitimacy within the Shia community helped drive al Sadr into more non-violent political activities after the acute sectarian violence in Iraq between 2005 and 2008 had eroded his popularity in that sector of Iraqi society. Accordingly, as someone who lacked political and religious credibility in the Iraqi Shia community at the time of the 2003 U.S. invasion, al Sadr's move away from violence after the middle of last decade and his support for rival Shia Maliki illustrated this search for legitimacy in the Shia community. I would also expect this search for legitimacy to drive his actions in the post-Arab Spring environment, perhaps to an even greater degree

²⁰⁷ Bernhardt, Florian, 'The Legitimacy of Party Politics and the Authority of the 'Ulama' in Iraq's Shia Islamist Movement: The Example of the Islamic Dawah Party (1957 – 1988),' *Journal of Shia Islamic Studies* IV:2 (Spring 2011), p. 164.

given the movement's grass-roots nature and al Sadr's own interest in sowing popular support.

As Schmidhauser notes, however, al Sadr had an additional motive: he wanted to prop up the Maliki government so as to inoculate it from Sunni overthrow. However, he also retained the option to undercut Maliki when it served his own political interests.²⁰⁸ This helps explain why Sadr has both cast the deciding vote to put Maliki into power and, conversely, joined a coalition that sought a vote of no confidence in Maliki's leadership.

For Godwin, Sadr's original move toward politics in 2004 was motivated by his desire to avoid further damage to his reputation after early political defeats at the hands of the U.S. and Iraqi governments.²⁰⁹ Conversely, his move back into violence beginning in 2006 was intended to protect his Shia constituents amid the rising sectarian strife that followed the Sunni bombing of a key Shia shrine that year.²¹⁰ In other words, while Sadr saw a place for violence, he also appears to have recognized its limits, particularly with respect to his militia's inability to achieve the Sadrist movement's political goals.

The first conclusion suggests that Sadr would continue to seek to build his own legitimacy and protect his family's clerical reputation despite persistent political stalemate and anti-Shia violence in Iraq. Much like Hizballah did as a group, Sadr as an *individual* rose to political prominence as a fierce defender of Shia interests in Iraq against Sunni attacks and perceived inequities the U.S. presence injected into Iraqi political life. However, he also rose on the back of the reputation of his clerical lineage,

²⁰⁸ Schmidhauser, Nathalie Miria, 'A Balancing Act: The Sadrist Movement between Nationalist Rhetoric and Sectarian Politics,' *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 7:2 (2013), p. 118.

²⁰⁹ Godwin, Matthew J., 'Political Inclusion in Unstable Contexts: Muqtada al-Sadr and Iraq's Sadrist Movement,' *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 5:3 (2014), p. 455.

²¹⁰ Godwin, Matthew J., 'Political Inclusion in Unstable Contexts: Muqtada al-Sadr and Iraq's Sadrist Movement,' *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 5:3 (2014), p. 455.

particularly through his father and uncle.²¹¹ Therefore, in order to retain an influential voice in the clerical community, he would have to act within the bounds of what its leadership—particularly Grand Ayatollah Ali al Sistani—has prescribed as appropriate. Except for the march of ISIL across much of Sunni Iraq in recent months, Sistani has consistently counseled restraint from violence.²¹² Moreover, he would have to continue to build credibility as a religious scholar. Bernhardt’s more recent analysis amplifies this view of Sadr’s need to solidify his theological credibility to boost his political influence.

The second conclusion is intertwined with the first. In order to protect his family’s reputation, he needed to exercise restraint not only in the Iraqi Shia community’s conflict with Sunni Arab Iraqis, but also within his own Shia community. Although his Mahdi Army of fighters became an important check on Sunni attacks on Shia between 2003 and 2007, it also earned a reputation for corruption and brutality against fellow Shia.²¹³ Moreover, splinter groups began to emerge, some arguably under greater Iranian influence, indicating Sadr was losing control of something he created.²¹⁴ By 2007, his reputation suffered enough that he ordered his militant wing to stand down, an order it has largely obeyed since, and sought self-imposed exile probably in Iran.²¹⁵ This suggests Sadr would refrain from violence and focus on non-violent political activity even in a politically-stalemated environment in Iraq.

²¹¹ Walbridge, Linda S. *Without Forgetting the Imam*, (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 65; and, International Crisis Group, ‘*Iraq’s Muqtada al-Sadr: Spoiler or stabilizer?*’ (2006).

²¹² Mamouri, Ali, ‘Clerics Play Crucial Role in Iraq’s Sectarian Violence,’ *al-Monitor*, September 16, 2013; and, Mamouri, Ali, ‘Sistani Issues Fatwa against Sectarian Violence in Iraq,’ *al-Monitor*, October 11, 2013.

²¹³ Tavernise, Sabrina, ‘A Shia Militia in Baghdad Sees Its Power Wane,’ *The New York Times*, July 27, 2008.

²¹⁴ Badkhen, Anna, ‘Al-Sadr militia deserters hold fast to terror,’ *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 19, 2008.

²¹⁵ Williams, Carol J., ‘Sadr Orders His Militia to Stand Down,’ *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 2007.

The third conclusion in chapter one has more complicated implications. Although it holds that Sadr recognized the imbalance in power between his militia and the U.S.-backed Iraqi security forces and therefore began to pursue non-violent political representation, the effectiveness of Iraqi security forces have at best stagnated since 2011.²¹⁶²¹⁷ More realistically, their capabilities have probably deteriorated since then. Moreover, the U.S. withdrew from Iraq in 2011, removing its overt military presence and leaving only a relative handful of advisers. Therefore, Sadr would seem to have lost its most formidable military foil in Iraq and would have strong reason to contemplate a return to violence to achieve his goals. However, Sadr's political ambitions appear to have subsumed his military decisions, suggesting that even in the absence of U.S. forces or a formidable Iraqi military, Sadr would remain focused on maintaining or increasing his share of the political pie in Iraq.

The fourth conclusion also ties in with the first three. Although Sadr has yet to become the most influential political voice in Iraq, he knows that Iraqi demographics favor Shia there. This suggests Sadr would try to strike a delicate balance between protecting Shia interests against others' in Iraq while maintaining his influence within the Shia community. Sistani—the most revered and influential Shia cleric among Iraqis—has consistently urged Iraqi politicians to pursue a government that represents all Iraqis' interests. His membership among the Iraqi Shia elite probably renders Sadr all too aware that Sistani's stance prevents Sadr setting a strictly sectarian political agenda that impinges the rights of the country's other ethnic, religious, and political factions.

²¹⁶ Hinckley, David, 'Shia cleric al-Sadr pulls fighters off streets,' *New York Daily News*, March 30, 2008.

²¹⁷ Cochrane, Marisa, 'Iraq Report 12: The fragmentation of the Sadrist movement,' *The Institute for the Study of War* (January 2009), 32 – 33.

HAMAS

The analysis of HAMAS' actions will focus on a far narrower timeframe, essentially between May and the end of September 2014. Chapter two ended as HAMAS was seeking to implement a reconciliation deal with its Palestinian political rival Fatah to unify the two factions, which ruled Gaza and the West Bank effectively as separate countries. HAMAS had largely observed a cease fire with Israel despite continued low-level rocket fire into the country from Gaza, probably by more radical Palestinian factions. However, the group was growing increasingly desperate for resources amid an Israeli effort to prevent potential dual-use materiel—that which could be used for humanitarian or terrorist purposes—passing through checkpoints into Gaza. Though it had begun to show signs of responsible governance and a move away from violence since it won parliamentary elections in 2006, its trajectory was far from clear in spring 2011.

Chapter two reached three primary conclusions about why HAMAS began to transition to non-violent political activity, each of which is couched in the broader evolution of Islamist political thought of the last two centuries. First, HAMAS was seeking to remove Western influence from Palestinian territories, manifested in the involvement of Israel in Palestinians' every-day life, and began to see the value in pursuing non-violent political representation among Palestinian factions. Second, HAMAS wanted to replace their own corrupt leadership, whom HAMAS believed exploited their positions of power for personal gain and did more to protect Israeli and Western interests than Palestinian. Finally, HAMAS was seeking to exploit regional changes to benefit its cause. The war in Iraq that began in 2003 and growing discontent among Arabs about their leadership led to a boost in prestige for organizations like

HAMAS whom citizens viewed as less corrupt and more effective than the leading Palestinian political faction of the time, Fatah.

The first conclusion in chapter two about HAMAS suggests the group would continue to focus on building governance and institutions in Gaza and minimize its military conflict with Israel. A key HAMAS political goal—rooted in its emergence as an offshoot of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood—is to remove Western and Israeli influences from Palestinian political life. Therefore, in order to govern properly, HAMAS would have to build the institutions that allowed it to do so. The only way it could do that is to ensure minimal interference in Palestinian affairs—‘minimal’ at least in the context of historic Palestinian-Israeli relations. A key way to achieve this goal would be to restrain or, to the extent that it could, restrict any attacks on Israelis from Gaza. Despite multiple Israeli military operations against HAMAS in Gaza since HAMAS took power there in 2006, the group has remained relatively restrained in its attacks on Israel from Gaza. Moreover, it has conducted none of the gruesome bus bombings inside Israel that gripped the Israeli public with fear in the early 2000s.

The second conclusion about HAMAS suggests the group would continue to seek political accommodation with its chief Palestinian rival, Fatah, but not at the expense of its own political power. This suggests HAMAS would be hard-pressed to reach a political agreement with Fatah that did not bring clear benefits to the Palestinian people that would boost support for HAMAS. HAMAS won the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections on a platform of transparency and reform, so to reverse any of those gains through a weak peace deal with Fatah would be to undermine their own goals of replacing what HAMAS perceives to be a corrupt historical political dynasty.

The third conclusion about HAMAS suggests the group would seek to build on the regional unrest of the Arab Spring to advance its priorities. The Arab Spring was about giving dignity to ordinary citizens, and allowing them to elect a representative government.

Hizballah: Crisis Abroad Hits Home

The most pressing political and security concern for Hizballah since spring 2011 has been the conflict in Syria. Syria has been a key enabler of both Hizballah's political rise in Lebanon, and its militant activities against Israel. Therefore, as the civil war in Syria has threatened the survival of the Assad regime there, it has jeopardized the materiel and other support that flow through Syria to Hizballah's activities in Lebanon and beyond, and begun to threaten the internal stability of Lebanon itself. As a result, in April 2013 Hizballah's leader confirmed what already had become conventional wisdom by then: Hizballah had advisers and fighters in Syria defending the Assad regime.

There are two key ways instability in Syria spilled over into Lebanon. First, it has increased the polarization of the Lebanese political class between supporters and opponents of the Assad regime there. The countries share deep, long-standing historical and cultural ties. Syrian political and security influence in Lebanon also remain strong, rooted in the nearly 30-year occupation of Lebanon by Syrian troops who entered Lebanon in 1975 at the outset of its civil war ostensibly to prevent further erosion of stability there.²¹⁸ Despite their withdrawal in 2005, the Lebanese and international community harbor deep suspicions that Syrian political and security officials retain a strong hand in Lebanese politics. Moreover, ordinary Lebanese fear Hizballah and the

²¹⁸ Fatah, Hassan M., 'Syrian Troops Leave Lebanon After 29-Year Occupation,' *The New York Times*, April 26, 2005.

Syrian regime—which follows a variation of Shia Islam—are seeking to expand Shia power in the region at the expense of Sunnis.

One example of the polarization was the resignation in March 2013 of Prime Minister Najib Mikati—a Sunni whose ascension Hizballah had supported in 2011—because of the increasing sectarian tensions in Lebanon stemming from the war in Syria.²¹⁹ Mikati stepped down after the Hizballah-dominated cabinet rejected his request to extend the tenure of a key Sunni security official in Lebanon.²²⁰ Lebanese Sunnis sought the official's re-appointment to protect their interests as Lebanese security forces themselves grew more factionalized over the war in Syria.²²¹ Instead, the main pro- and anti-Hizballah coalitions that currently dominate Lebanese politics had to agree on a new Prime Minister in April that year, who only announced formation of his government in February 2014.²²²

A more ominous manifestation of the Syrian war's effects in Lebanon is the spasms of violence the country has begun to experience more frequently since 2011. These bursts have echoed the fighting of the Lebanese civil war, have fallen largely along pro- or anti-Assad and sectarian lines, and have occurred in two primary forms.²²³ The first has been periodic clashes in Sunni areas of Lebanon, the last of which took place in the southern city of Sidon in June 2013 when the Lebanese army clashed with supporters

²¹⁹ Barnard, Anne, 'Lebanese Premier Resigns as Syrian War Fuels Sectarian Split,' *The New York Times*, March 22, 2013.

²²⁰ Chulov, Martin, 'Lebanon's Government Collapses as Miqati Cabinet Resigns,' *The Guardian*, March 22, 2013.

²²¹ Barnard, Anne, 'Lebanese Premier Resigns as Syrian War Fuels Sectarian Split,' *The New York Times*, March 22, 2013; and, Chulov, Martin, 'Lebanon's Government Collapses as Miqati Cabinet Resigns,' *The Guardian*, March 22, 2013.

²²² Mourtada, Hania, 'Sunni Leader is Named Prime Minister in Lebanon,' *The New York Times*, April 6, 2013.

²²³ ---, 'Fallout from Syrian Conflict in Lebanon: Timeline,' *AFP*, August 4, 2014; and, ---, 'Lebanon Profile,' *BBC*, April 4, 2014.

of a radical Sunni sheikh who backed the anti-Assad revolt. The second has been the at least five bombings of Iranian cultural and diplomatic interests, of Hizballah neighborhoods, and of other symbols of Iran- and Syria-backed Shia power in Lebanon since the Syria war began, probably in retaliation for Hizballah's involvement in the war. However, the increased violence in Lebanon since 2011 has also involved the assassination of anti-Syrian Lebanese politicians and border skirmishes between the Lebanese military and Syria-based rebels.

Hizballah appears to have adopted a dual strategy to protecting its interests amid this instability. In Syria, it has taken the militant route, more openly supporting the regime both in rhetoric and substance. Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah assured the regime in April 2013 that its "friends in the region," referring not only to Hizballah but likely also Iran, stood ready to support the regime. Hizballah has provided training and advisory support to the Syrian military, and begun to lead offensives on behalf of regime troops, particularly in key embattled areas like the capital Damascus and Qalamoun, a region of Syria that borders Lebanon between Damascus and Homs, a Syrian rebel stronghold.²²⁴ Moreover, it has lionized as 'martyrs' Hizballah fighters killed in battle in Syria.²²⁵

In Lebanon, Hizballah appears to be taking a more moderate approach. Although political paralysis continues to afflict the country, Hizballah has not abandoned any of its non-violent political activities or responsibilities; its allies still serve in the cabinet, and the group still provides the social services that have become the bread and butter of its constituent support in Shia regions of the country. Moreover, despite the uptick in

²²⁴ Sullivan, Marisa, 'Hezbollah in Syria,' *The Institute for the Study of War* (April 2014), p. 21.

²²⁵ ---, 'Hezbollah Military Commander "Killed in Syria",' *BBC*, October 2, 2012; and, ---, 'Are Hezbollah's Mysterious 'Martyrs' Dying in Syria?' *France24*, October 7, 2012.

attacks against Hizballah-linked targets in the country, it has thus far responded primarily with rhetoric, or at least diligently cloaked any involvement in violence. In short, whereas Hizballah has openly celebrated the role its members have played in supporting the Syrian regime, it has sought to promote calm in Lebanon and has not acknowledged any overt role in the assassinations of anti-Assad politicians or other acts of violence against Assad foes in Lebanon.

Al Sadr: One Enemy Leaves, another Re-emerges

Two-thousand eleven represented a potentially landmark year for Sadrist and broader Shia political aspirations in Iraq. Shia Prime Minister Maliki's coalition maintained *de facto* if tenuous executive control of the government. Sadr had returned to Iraq in January from nearly four years of self-imposed exile in Iran. Sadrists parliamentarians continued to play an important role in promoting social welfare and the interests of Iraqi Shia, having been a key vote in Maliki's ability to retain power during the previous year's elections. In December, the U.S. ended its overt military presence in Iraq. On paper, the conditions seemed ripe for a continued improvement in the lot of the Sadrist political movement: its main foe had left Iraq and the movement itself was embedding itself deeper into the ruling class.

In retrospect, however, 2011 was the start of Iraq's slide back to the worst days of the civil conflict of the previous decade. Though AQI violence had far from ended after that period, the massive suicide bombings, beheadings, psychological intimidation, and general terrorization of Iraq's Shia population and government had moderated, to an extent. 'Only' approximately 4,400 Iraqis died in militant attacks each year in 2011 and

2012.²²⁶ This compares with more than 7,800 in 2013—the deadliest year in Iraq since 6,700+ in 2008—and more than 9,300 in 2014 with three months left in the year.²²⁷ According to the United Nations (U.N.), ISIL has committed more than half of the killings this year, which the U.N. characterized as “increasingly sectarian,” a clear reference to the Shia victims of the militant Sunni group.²²⁸

Meanwhile, Iraq’s political paralysis sharpened, as both a cause and symptom of the increasing violence. Sunnis complained of increasing marginalization by the Shia-led government. They pointed, in particular, to the continued Shia domination of the Iraqi security establishment, and its abuses of Sunnis.²²⁹ On December 12th, 2011, the day after the U.S. completed its combat withdrawal from Iraq, Maliki’s Shia government issued an arrest warrant for a key Sunni politician on murder charges. This sparked months-long nationwide Sunni protests that drew violent Iraqi security responses. Partly as a result, Sunni militant attacks expanded nationwide, though primarily in the central and northern regions of Iraq, and worsened yet after Maliki arrested the aides to yet another key Sunni politician in December 2012. Though Maliki had survived a no-confidence vote in June that year, his ability to maintain the Shia-led coalition seemed more tenuous than ever as 2013 dawned.

Indeed, the situation did grow worse from there. In April 2013, Iraqi forces raided a Sunni protest camp near Kirkuk, killing dozens of civilians and fueling further AQI attacks and violence by other Sunni militants. An arrest warrant for a third Sunni

²²⁶ Brett McGurk, ‘[Al-Qaeda’s Resurgence in Iraq: A Threat to U.S. Interests](#),’ Testimony to the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, February 5, 2014.

²²⁷ [United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq and Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), October 2, 2014; and, [United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq](#), January 2, 2014.

²²⁸ [United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq](#), January 2, 2014.

²²⁹ Katzman, Kenneth, ‘[Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights](#),’ *Congressional Research Service*, September 15, 2014, pp. 15, 17.

politician and yet another sharp increase in monthly Sunni attacks in Iraq at the end of 2013 encapsulated the country's predicament as it slid back to civil war. In November 2013, there were approximately 50 suicide attacks—a hallmark of AQI—as compared with 5-10 per month in 2012.²³⁰ AQI also expanded control of large parts of Sunni-dominated Anbar Province, with the group capturing Fallujah and part of Ramadi, two key Anbar cities, early in 2014, presaging AQI's seemingly unstoppable march across northern Iraq and consolidation of control in eastern Syria as the war raged there.

In short, the three-and-a-half year period since 2011 has witnessed the acute erosion of security and stagnation of politics to levels Iraq has not seen since 2008, despite the several incremental political concessions by Maliki, and regional and national elections in the intervening period.

Amid this chaos, Sadr and his movement have walked a fine line. On one hand, he has criticized Maliki's governing approach as sectarian. To promote cross-confessional political participation, Sadr joined the loose alliance of Iraqi politicians who sought the no-confidence vote that Maliki ultimately survived in June 2012. Conversely, Sadr has sought to prevent the country sliding into further chaos and distance himself from what he sees as a corrupt, sectarian government.

In a more pointed example of his evolution, in August 2013 Sadr announced his intention to withdraw from politics in the near future. It was a decision he apparently confirmed in February 2014, concerned that sectarianism was again spreading beyond the

²³⁰ Brett McGurk, '[Al-Qaeda's Resurgence in Iraq: A Threat to U.S. Interests](#),' Testimony to the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, February 5, 2014.

government's control. He also sought to distance himself from Iraq's governing elite, which civilians increasingly view as corrupt, illegitimate, and incapable.²³¹

In reaction to the most significant change in security conditions in Iraq, Sadr seems to have pursued a moderate response to ISIL's expanded its control across large swaths of Iraq and Syria. While he has remobilized his Mahdi Army militia—a main player in the sectarian atrocities between 2005 and 2008—to defend Shia civilians and religious sites, there is no evidence he has issued formal orders for the militia to conduct offensive operations against ISIL or that he has authorized a remobilization intended to bolster the Sadrists' non-violent non-violent political activities.

HAMAS: What's New is Old

The relative stability in the Gaza Strip and West Bank in spring 2014 contrasted with the chaos that engulfed much of the rest of the Middle East at the time. Although U.S.-brokered peace talks between the Palestinians and Israelis that began the previous July had essentially faltered by then, the two chief Palestinian political factions—HAMAS ruling Gaza and Fatah the West Bank—were close to creating their first unity government since 2007. That's when HAMAS ejected Fatah from Gaza in a bloody factional battle that witnessed HAMAS backers throwing Fatah supporters off rooftops in Gaza. Therefore, the announcement in April 2014 that the groups had agreed on a blueprint for joint governance raised hopes of a new approach to peace talks with the Israelis and a turnaround in the dismal conditions in the Palestinian territories. However, such hopes were short-lived. Israel labels HAMAS as a terrorist group—as does the

²³¹ Cockburn, Patrick, 'Iraq's Disillusioned Shia Leader Says He's Leaving the Political Front Line,' *The Independent*, February 18, 2014.

U.S.—and rejected the possibility of new negotiations with any political body that included it.

Nor did the Palestinian political agreement raise hopes for the lifting of Israel sanctions and import restrictions that prevented many vital humanitarian materials entering the West Bank and Gaza.²³² Although the announcement of the unity government was a bright spot in an otherwise familiar chapter of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the continued division of labor between HAMAS rule in Gaza and Fatah rule in the West Bank exacerbated the erosion of living standards in each territory. Israel used it as justification to limit the imports of many goods Palestinians and the international community deemed humanitarian and essential to re-growing the Palestinian economy. Moreover, despite conventional wisdom, the well-being of West Bank Palestinians under Fatah rule was not much better—and in some cases worse—than that of their counterparts in Gaza under HAMAS rule according to poverty, unemployment, child hunger, and other social and economic indicators.²³³

Conditions in Gaza eroded even further, however, in late June after the kidnapping and murder in the West Bank of three Israeli youths, which Israel immediately blamed on Gaza-based HAMAS. The deaths sparked a five-week military operation in Gaza that enjoyed near-universal support in Israel: a post-operation poll of public opinion there found that more than 90 per cent of Israeli Jews believed the government was justified launching Operation Protective Edge in response to the murders.²³⁴ By the end of the operation, approximately 2,100 Palestinians had died,

²³² Gross, Aeyal, 'Why Did Israelis Support the Pointless Gaza War?' *Ha'aretz*, August 19, 2014.

²³³ CIA World FactBook (2014); and, ---, 'Gaza: Fact Sheet,' *The World Bank*.

²³⁴ Gidda, Mirren, 'Poll: 92% of Israeli Jews Say Operation Protective Edge Was Justified,' *TIME*, August 19, 2014.

nearly three-quarters of which were civilians.²³⁵ Israel lost 66 soldiers primarily in fighting and six Israeli civilians to rocket fire from Gaza.²³⁶

Operation Protective Edge and the apparent terrorist acts that sparked it were somewhat of a departure from the relative calm of previous years. The cause of the last Israeli operation in Gaza—Operation Pillar of Defense, which lasted 8 days in November 2012—appears to be in far greater dispute than that of the most recent Israeli offensive. Palestinians claimed the Israeli killing of a mentally unstable man sparked the violence that led to Pillar of Defense; the Israelis claimed it was a response to the Palestinian rocket fire.²³⁷ By contrast, HAMAS admitted having conducted the kidnappings and murders of the Israeli youth preceding that caused Israel to launch Protective Edge in Gaza, although it is possible a tribal faction aligned with HAMAS carried out the attack without HAMAS' approval.²³⁸

Retrospective Analysis

A review of the forecasts for these three groups based on earlier chapters' analyses reveals a mixed record of success for the predictions. Although only one group appears to have deviated wildly from the general trend toward non-violent political activity among the three, each behaved in ways the theories did not entirely predict.

In the Rear View: Hizballah

Broadly speaking, and as the earlier theories suggested, Hizballah did continue to participate in non-violent Lebanese political activity, moderate its conduct of violent activities in Lebanon, and seek to protect its vital interests outside Lebanon (in Syria) as

²³⁵ ---, 'Gaza Crisis: Toll of Operations in Gaza,' *BBC*, September 1, 2014.

²³⁶ ---, 'Gaza Crisis: Toll of Operations in Gaza,' *BBC*, September 1, 2014.

²³⁷ Wright, Robert, 'Who Started the Israel-Gaza Conflict?' *The Atlantic*, November 16, 2012.

²³⁸ ---, 'HAMAS Admits to Kidnapping and Killing Israeli Teens,' *Associated Press*, August 22, 2014; and, Eldar, Shlomi, 'Accused Kidnappers Are Rogue HAMAS Branch,' *al-Monitor*, June 29, 2014.

though it were a state actor. Hizballah also maintained a relative détente with Israel, conducting only limited exchanges of fire with its arch enemy. Further, Hizballah chief Hassan Nasrallah continued to trumpet Hizballah's actions in Syria, in particular, as protecting Muslims against Western and Israeli aggression and promoting Shia interests.

However, the group or its supporters also participated in numerous sectarian skirmishes around Lebanon that the war in Syria encouraged. There are also strong reasons to suspect Hizballah involvement in the several political assassinations or attempted killings of Assad foes in Lebanon since the Syria war's outbreak. Hizballah along with Syrian and Iranian intelligence support has a long history of conducting such attacks, and with one of Hizballah's two key patrons under severe threat, it is reasonable to assume some faction of the group played a hand in such violence. This was the case, for example, after the December 2013 assassination of a Sunni potential prime minister candidate, who also happened to be an advisor to an earlier prime minister whom the U.N. believes Hizballah helped assassinate.

Nevertheless, Hizballah remained at least outwardly committed to the political process in Lebanon. It may have brought government activities to a halt at time, and even caused the collapse of yet another government. However, its leadership made at least nominal moves to encourage unity. These came in the form of public rhetorical flourishes from Hizballah leadership and in such cases as Hizballah supporting a Sunni candidate for Prime Minister who was a known critic of the Assad regime in Syria.²³⁹

²³⁹ Nasrallah, Hassan, 'Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah Calls for Unity among Muslims,' February 8, 2012; ---, 'Nasrallah, Aoun Urge Political Powers to Safeguard Lebanon against Strife,' *Naharnet*, September 9, 2014.

In the Rear View: Sadr

The arc of Sadrist political activities appears too to have comported with the predictions chapter one implied. Much like Hizballah in Lebanon, the Sadrists in Iraq remained committed to the non-violent political process they joined several years earlier. Again like Hizballah, there were significant changes in the Sadrists' security environment, though this time not just on their border in Syria, but also inside Iraq.

Based on the Sadrist militia's participation in the sectarian violence in the previous decade, it would be reasonable to suspect Sadr would again unleash the Mahdi Army as sectarian violence again crept back in the early 2010s. However, as chapter one suggested, Sadr also was keenly aware both of the limitations of the Mahdi Army's capabilities, and also his ability to control the Mahdi Army. Therefore, it is not actually surprising that Sadr has yet to reactivate his militia into a fighting role, but instead just a defensive role to protect his constituents from the expansion of the 'Islamic State.'

Sadr's departure in February 2014 from Iraqi politics altogether presents a more peculiar turn of events. In one respect, it somewhat fits the model chapter one laid out. Sadr knew Iraqi politics were devolving into a level of corruption and ineffectiveness Iraq had rarely seen, and he wanted to protect his and his family's reputation from this descent. On the other hand, Sadr's removing himself from any non-violent political activity to return to religious studies defies any model. However, it is hard to conclude the model failed completely, because he did not abandon non-violent politics to return to violence, or at least has not yet.

In the Rear View: HAMAS

The case of HAMAS represents the clearest-cut example of the three in which a militant group apparently deviated from its non-violent political activities to return, if temporarily, to attempting to achieve its goals through acts of violence. When HAMAS-aligned militants in the Fatah-controlled West Bank kidnapped and murdered three Israeli teens on June 12th, they did so ostensibly to force the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails. The murders occurred as HAMAS was growing more desperate in Gaza under the crushing economic and ultimately political toll of Israeli sanctions and import restrictions. Therefore, HAMAS may also have been seeking to force Israel to the negotiating table to help relieve some of the mounting pressure HAMAS was feeling. Needless to say, the strategy failed.

Nor did the model chapter two suggested about future HAMAS behaviors succeed. Through its negotiations with Fatah, HAMAS did seek to build the necessary technocratic institutions Palestinians needed to build a state. However, HAMAS jettisoned any hopes of internal political progress by murdering the Israeli teens just days after reaching a deal on a unity government with Fatah.

Moreover, HAMAS appears to have violated one of its own key tenets, removing the corrupt leadership of the old guard, particularly in the form of Fatah. Until 2006, Fatah had been the dominant faction in Palestinian political life. However, in the wake of the Israeli withdrawal from its settlements in Gaza the year before, for which HAMAS sought to claim credit, Palestinians began to view HAMAS as the more effective, less corrupt option, and the one that was not in bed with the Israelis or Americans. This move at the same time suggested a commitment to the political process, but also an

acknowledgment of the limits of their efforts to purge the Palestinian political elite of perceived corrupt elements.

Conclusion

Although the predictions earlier chapters made about these groups' trajectories were reasonably accurate, there are many factors we did not have the time to discuss which could have an impact on near-term developments and cause these groups to reverse any progress toward non-violent political activities. The downfall of the Assad regime—which now appears unlikely—could elicit more overt and extensive Hizballah and Iranian involvement in Syria, each of which risks an Israeli response. The U.S. re-engagement in Iraq is likely to have unintended consequences beyond Iraq's borders which will undoubtedly affect at least the Sadrists' and Hizballah's calculations. Moreover, the general climate of instability in the region appears to have a significant shelf life, leaving open the opportunity for other actors to emerge and gain a vote in how these three groups act. In short, these predictions themselves may not have a long shelf life.

CONCLUSION

The study of militant groups, particularly those in the Middle East, is becoming an increasingly fraught pursuit for academics, as political rhetoric dominates the discourse about what these groups do and whether their violent means negate their political aspirations. Often, what appears most important to analysts of or speakers about the issue is whether a group fits a particular category rather than why a group does what it does and how we can influence that. For example, when Bukay dismisses the possibility that Muslims can ever remain true to their religious values while also pursuing democratic governance, he is seeking to completely delegitimize any political aspiration Muslims and Muslim militant groups may have that fall short of the western democratic model. This further delegitimizes any effort to understand these groups, what makes them tick, and how to influence them.

However, as this thesis demonstrates, looking at each group in their own domestic context, rather than primarily through academic or other analytic models, allows us to better understand the subtleties of what drives their decision-making. This approach, and my conclusions, can have important implications for policy-making.

For example, the U.S. Government has kept a list since October 1997 of so-called Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO), along with a corresponding body of code, each of which guides policymakers devising strategies to combat these groups. However, of the 59 groups the U.S. had designated as of October 2014, almost none are defunct. This includes al-Qa'ida, which has been on the list since October 1999. Moreover, U.S. policy did very little if anything at all to bring about the downfall of any

of the groups that are or are close to being defunct. If we accept that most of these militant groups have political aspirations—even if they are not political aspirations with which we necessarily agree—then maybe there is a better way to combat them than through the FTO approach. Rather than attempting to combat these groups through a standard set of laws, perhaps, as this thesis suggests, the U.S. should take a more tailored approach to each group. This is a policy approach that deserves more attention; it may also be something that is happening right now, as the Obama Administration attempts to create counterterrorism policies to combat various regional al-Qa‘ida affiliates as opposed to fighting a so-called ‘war on terrorism,’ which focused improperly on the tactic rather than the drivers of the violence.

Understanding and influencing factors that drive militant political decision-making also requires a sustained effort to understand local conflicts in which the U.S. decides it has a stake, and strong executive leadership. However, this is where the classic problem of making foreign policy in a democracy comes into play and requires strong leadership. Whereas autocrats and dictators can make and execute foreign policy with little or no domestic resistance, policy-makers in democracies must appeal to a wide range of special interests that often have significant influence on the direction of U.S. foreign policy. In the resulting battle for rhetorical and, thus, policy influence, the nuances of conflicts in distant locales end up distilled, papered-over, and buried.

As such, the effort by countries like the U.S. to create policies that encourage the political transformation of militant groups remain vulnerable to narrow interests that typically have more to do with domestic political jockeying than with the conflict the policy-makers want to solve. This is the case with efforts to solve the Israeli-Palestinian

crisis. A loosely-connected but effective group of organizations that promote Israeli interests in the U.S. have thus far outmaneuvered less-organized, less well-funded groups backing Palestinian statehood rights. The issue often plays out in national and local political campaigns across the U.S., but in the form of simplistic language that seeks to demonize and delegitimize either Palestinian or Israeli demands. If the U.S. is to truly deal with militant groups in a way that encourages their transformation, policy-makers and, in particular, members of the Executive Branch must be willing to speak in specifics. Broad brush strokes do not solve political conflicts in faraway lands.

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