



Reflection of Iran's Islamic Revolution in Iraq: A Case Study of the Sadr Movement

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Research Article	Objective: The absence or weakness of political structures and institutions in the new Iraqi political and social sphere has led to a political leader, whether in power or in opposition, playing the most significant role in political actions. Therefore, an analysis of political and social trends in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 indicates that the Sadr Movement has become the undisputed actor in the Iraqi political and social arena. This is attributed to its reliance on doctrines such as Arab nationalism, adopting an independent approach from other regional actors, fighting corruption, advocating for justice, equality, and eliminating political and social discrimination, and solving Iraq's economic problems.
Article history: Received: 2025/1/30 Received in revised form: 2025/2/12 Accepted :2025/5/26 Available online:2025/6/10	Method: The present study aims to systematically examine the evolution and development of the Sadr Movement in Iraq, stemming from the reflections of the Islamic Revolution. It will achieve its objectives and findings through a scientific, integrated approach combining historical, documentary, and in-depth, purposeful interview methods.
Keywords: Iraq, Sadr Movement, Muqtada Sadr, Islamic Revolution, Nationalism, Shia parties	Results: The findings and documentation of the article indicate that the Sadr Movement, throughout its formation and evolution, which originated from the anti-American and anti-authoritarian discourse of Iran's Islamic Revolution, has gradually, under the leadership of Muqtada Sadr and according to the exigencies of the Iraqi political and social arena, reproduced itself from an anti-authoritarian and anti-occupation movement into a new political and social movement opposing the status quo. It has adopted a pragmatic approach and actions that are often contradictory to other Shia parties and groups by highlighting pluralistic identities, symbols, and policies based on Arab nationalism.
	Conclusions: The overall process of the Sadr Movement's evolution and development shows that Muqtada Sadr's activism has been very turbulent amidst transformations, and this personality has never considered himself to have a fixed role. Furthermore, Sadr has consistently adopted contradictory and unpredictable stances in his actions and statements, which has surprised political observers. This has caused ambiguity and confusion for other domestic and foreign actors in their interactions with him.

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Introduction

Iraq, as one of the states established in 1921 AD/1299-1300 SH following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, has faced numerous crises and political and social transformations since its inception. The administrative and political structure of Iraq, formed under the British mandate as one of the victorious superpowers in World War I, was established without regard for demographic and ethnic divisions. As a result, despite Iraq's decades-long history, significant political and social developments have occurred in the country. The rule of a Sunni Arab minority over Shias, who constituted about 65% of the population of this newly established country, led to the formation of latent and permanent protests in Iraq. Consequently, Shias have always been dissatisfied with the existing governance in Iraq and have raised objections to governmental authority in the country. In this context, the religious authority (Marja'iyya), in the absence of politicians and political parties, played a crucial role in managing Shia protests. Especially after the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979 AD/1357-1358 SH, Shias, under the guidance of religious authorities and institutions, organized their first political uprisings against the Ba'ath regime's dictatorship. Amidst these developments, the Sadr Movement took on the role of managing all struggles. This movement, despite the assassination and killing of its esteemed religious figures in the 1980s and 1990s, continued its political struggles, and this trend has persisted to date. Currently, Muqtada Sadr and his movement are considered one of the main and dominant actors in Iraq's political and social arena.

To understand the origins of the Sadr Movement and analyze Muqtada Sadr's political actions, it is essential to consider the history of political struggles and the formation of this movement. Many authors trace the movement's formation back to the 1960s and 1970s, with the joining of Martyr Muhammad Baqir Sadr to the al-Da'wa Party. The popularity of Muhammad Baqir Sadr grew after his execution by Saddam Hussein's regime, creating a support network for his cousin, Sayyid Muhammad Sadiq Sadr, which enabled him to lead a popular movement primarily involving charitable activities for rural migrants who arrived in Baghdad from various parts of Iraq in the 1990s. Muhammad Sadiq Sadr, like his cousin, was martyred along with his two elder sons by Saddam's regime. After his martyrdom, the movement largely continued its social and charitable activities until the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 AD/1381-1382 SH.

After the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Muqtada Sadr, the younger son of Sayyid Muhammad Sadiq Sadr, mobilized a militia group called Jaysh al-Mahdi (Mahdi Army) with the aim of fighting American forces. Jaysh al-Mahdi also participated in fighting Sunni insurgents as a Shia militia group until 2008 AD/1386-1387 SH, when Nouri al-Maliki's government took harsh measures against Sunni militias. Muqtada then traveled to Iran to study at the Qom seminary as part of his political activities. Upon his return from Iran, he presented himself as an Iraqi nationalist who opposed not only the U.S. presence in Iraq but also Iran's influence in Iraqi politics. When ISIS captured Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, in June 2014 AD/June-July 1393 SH and declared the establishment of its caliphate, Shias formed various militia groups, including Saraya al-Salam, to fight ISIS alongside Iraqi security forces (ISF). Saraya al-Salam was organized by Muqtada from among his supporters and former Jaysh al-Mahdi fighters who remained loyal to him.

With the defeat of ISIS in Iraq and the strengthening of peaceful political competition among various Iraqi elites and political parties for political power, Muqtada Sadr and his movement emerged as the dominant and victorious actor in the Iraqi parliamentary elections of 2018 AD/1396-1397 SH and 2021 AD/1399-1400 SH. They remain a key player in Iraq's political and social developments. To achieve its theoretical objectives, this research first examines the Sadr Movement's role in initiating political and social struggles against the internal authoritarianism of the Ba'ath regime, and then delves into the maturity and growth of the Sadr Movement under Muqtada Sadr's leadership.

1. Historical Roots of the Sadr Movement in the 1960s and 1970s

In July 1958 AD/July-August 1337 SH, a military coup led by General Abd al-Karim Qasim overthrew the Hashemite monarchy of King Faisal II of Iraq. The military government, inspired by Pan-Arabism ideology, managed to gain the support of the Iraqi Communist Party and began spreading communist ideas. The Iraqi clergy and religious authority were divided on how to deal with this new situation. Traditionalist clerics continued to emphasize political isolation and staying out of politics and government, while others adopted a more active and engaged approach, calling for a struggle against the regime and its anti-Islamic policies.

In this context, Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Sadr, as a young cleric who had not yet joined the supreme circle of Mujtahids, led the protests against the Iraqi political system (Aziz, 1993).

Muhammad Baqir Sadr theorized the foundations for confronting contemporary ideologies, such as capitalist democracy and communism, by authoring two books, *Our Philosophy* and *Our Economy*. As a result of this active engagement in political and social spheres, his popularity and that of the Sadr family significantly increased in Iraqi society (Thurber, 2014). With the Ba'ath Party's rise to power in 1968 AD/1346-1347 SH, led by General Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr, Muhammad Baqir Sadr, as one of Iraq's high-ranking Mujtahids and religious authorities, took on the leadership of the struggle against the Ba'ath government's authoritarianism. With the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979 AD/1357-1358 SH, he showed his support for it through public statements and articles that presented his understanding of an Islamic governance system.

Saddam Hussein's rise to power on June 16, 1979 AD/June 26, 1358 SH (Macfarquhardec, 2006), further complicated the Sadr family's conflict with the Ba'ath regime. Ultimately, Muhammad Baqir Sadr was martyred by Saddam Hussein's government in 1980 AD/1358-1359 SH after refusing to condemn his previous fatwa, which prohibited Muslims from joining the Ba'ath Party (Aziz, 1993). The martyrdom of Muhammad Baqir Sadr transformed him into a symbol of resistance against the oppressive regime for Iraqi Shias, elevating the Sadr family's standing among them and laying the foundations for the Sadr Movement's formation in the 1990s by Muhammad Sadiq Sadr, Muhammad Baqir Sadr's cousin (Thurber, 2014).

After the martyrdom of Muhammad Baqir Sadr, his cousin Muhammad Sadiq Sadr¹, who was a student of Muhammad Baqir Sadr, Muhammad Baqir Hakim, and even Imam Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian Islamic Revolution (Thurber, 2014), quickly managed to connect with and gain the support of Shia tribes who had migrated to Baghdad from southern Iraqi provinces due to the eight-year Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988 AD/1359-1367 SH) and economic pressures and unfavorable living conditions. Like his cousin, he was a staunch critic of the

¹. The Sadr movement consists of a social body of activists linked not by formal ideological or organizational structures, but by a shared identity and devotion to their deceased leader, the martyr Sayyid Muhammad Sadiq Sadr (Harling and Hamid, 2007). The movement has a distinct social and geographical origin among tribes who migrated from the southeastern regions to the suburbs of Baghdad, Basra, and other cities during the Ba'ath regime (Batatu, 2012). Muhammad Sadiq Sadr strengthened his popular bases in the *al-Thawra* area of Baghdad and in the *Maysan* province, and over time, the Sadrist movement established a strong base in Najaf as well, developing a different culture and conflicting interests with the Shia elites in Najaf and Karbala (Crisis Group, 2006). Muhammad Sadiq Sadr accused the seminaries known as the "Silent Hawza" of political passivity towards political power. Lamenting their "silence," he advocated for an active alternative under the title of "Vocal Hawza."

regime and, through his Friday prayer sermons, was able to directly communicate with a large number of Iraqi Shias, gradually creating the necessary grounds for the Sadr family, especially Sadiq Sadr, to establish their movement (Abood, 2013).

Sadiq Sadr's activities differed significantly from his cousin's. While Muhammad Baqir Sadr's activities can be categorized as political activities targeting mostly the Iraqi elite and educated class, Muhammad Sadiq Sadr was primarily a social activist who established informal networks with the underprivileged classes of Iraq (ibid.).

Sadiq Sadr addressed the problems of poor Shias in his Friday prayer speeches and criticized Saddam's regime, which in turn led the government to target him. On February 19, 1999 AD/February 30, 1377 SH, he was assassinated along with his elder sons, Mustafa and Mu'ammal, by Saddam's regime (Thurber, 2014).

After Muhammad Sadiq Sadr's assassination, the movement was forced underground, and funding became very difficult. The subsequent years until the fall of Saddam's regime in 2003 AD/1381-1382 SH at the hands of the United States and its international allies were accompanied by relative inactivity for the Sadr Movement. However, with the U.S. invasion, Iraqi society in general and the Sadr Movement in particular entered a new period of their political and social life.

2. Muqtada Sadr and the Revival of the Sadr Movement After 2003 AD/1381-1382 SH

Muqtada Sadr was born in Najaf in 1973 AD/1351-1352 SH.² Muqtada began his seminary studies at the age of 14 and, over 16 years of study, successfully completed preliminary and intermediate levels and engaged in advanced studies (Dars Kharij). Although Muqtada did not reach the rank of Ijtihad in seminary sciences, his followers refer to him as "Ayatollah." He is a follower of Ayatollah Kazim Ha'iri, who resides in Qom (Felter and Fishman, 2008: 30).

Muqtada Sadr was 17 years old when the Shia uprising in southern Iraq in 1991 AD/1369-1370 SH was suppressed by Saddam, and 24 years old when his father Muhammad Sadiq was martyred. After the martyrdom of his father and two brothers, the young and inexperienced Muqtada took over the leadership of the Sadr political and religious movement. However,

² . Muqtada, in an interview with the Iraqi website "al-Kataba," stated that he was born in 1974, corresponding to 20 Dhu al-Hijjah 1393 AH.

Muqtada was not alone in this position and benefited from his father's advisory staff, including Qais al-Khazali, Sayyid Mustafa Yaqubi, Sayyid Haider Musawi, and Ayatollah Sayyid Kazim Ha'iri.

Muqtada continued his activities by focusing on religious and social duties and avoiding any open confrontation with the then-regime, taking steps to strengthen his political teachings and skills. Unlike other Iraqi leaders, both Shia and Sunni, he was able to operate and be present in Iraq under the Ba'ath regime without arousing the regime's sensitivities.³ Muqtada had, in fact, taken on the seminary and cultural responsibilities of his father's extensive organization before his father's assassination and had tried to establish strong relationships with his father's followers and associates since that time. After his father's assassination, he formed the initial core of the organization that later became known as "Jama'at Sadr al-Thani" (Second Sadr Group) (Abbasi and Salimi, 2016 AD/1396 SH: 26-28).

Parallel to the institutionalization of the Ba'ath Party's dictatorship, relying on the core principle of ethnic and Arab nationalism, Muqtada was waiting for an opportunity to emerge as a popular political leader like his father and create a personality cult among Iraqi citizens. Thus, the grounds for leading the movement quickly became available for Muqtada, and four years after his father's martyrdom, the necessary space was provided in 2003 AD/1381-1382 SH for Muqtada Sadr's emergence and entry into the Iraqi political and social arena.

2.1. The Sadr Movement, Flag-bearer of Anti-American Struggles in Iraq

The U.S. invasion of Iraq on March 20, 2003 AD/March 29, 1382 SH, created a power vacuum in the Iraqi political sphere, and political and social movements opposing Saddam's regime found a favorable breathing space. In this regard, on April 9, 2003 AD/April 20, 1382 SH, Muqtada Sadr resumed Friday prayer sermons, which had been suspended during Saddam Hussein's era.⁴ He even criticized other clerics for not taking a stance against the

³. Muqtada has consistently used the lever of presence and struggle in Iraq during Saddam's rule against Shia leaders who resided outside the country in his political rivalries with other Shia parties. According to him, these leaders did not understand the pain and suffering of the Iraqi people during Saddam's era and, therefore, are not legitimate representatives of Iraq. Muqtada has always used this tactic to present himself as an authentic Iraqi and a man of the people.

⁴ . It is interesting to note that Muqtada al-Sadr still uses Friday prayer sermons as a tool to mobilize his supporters. In July 2022, amidst the developments and political instability in Iraq regarding the formation of a government, Muqtada al-Sadr stated in a declaration: "Unified Friday prayer is a sincere act of worship, and

Ba'ath regime and for not confronting American forces, specifically criticizing Ayatollah Sistani, the spiritual leader of the majority of Iraqi Shias. Supporters of the Sadr family, in appreciation of Muqtada's father, Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq Sadr, changed the name of "Saddam Madina" to "Sadr City" and placed his picture on every street corner (Haugh, 2005: 4). After the fall of Saddam, Muqtada, following his father's path, emphasized the necessity of establishing an Islamic government and opposing the presence of foreign forces in Iraq. He reactivated the charitable and missionary offices affiliated with the Sadr family and his father and, with the support of Shia forces in Sadr City, formed the initial nuclei of a political, social, and military movement. The anti-occupation discourse, fiery speeches, and his taking control of religious centers and reactivating charitable institutions and religious offices, along with his exploitation of the semi-revolutionary atmosphere, led to his social acceptance (Abbasi and Salimi, 2016 AD/1396 SH: 40). Muqtada, who was 30 years old in the post-occupation period, with his fiery speeches and by displaying a brave, militant, and charismatic personality, was able to attract millions of poor, deprived, and passionate people from Shia cities in Iraq, especially Sadr City in Baghdad, and gather many followers around him (Haugh, 2005: 6).

In his first political stances, Muqtada Sadr, on August 14, 2003 AD/August 23, 1382 SH, declared his opposition to UN Security Council Resolution 1500, which approved the establishment of a temporary governing council in Iraq. In Sadr's view, this resolution, because it was issued by Western countries and the United States, lacked legitimacy and was invalid. During this period, Sadr primarily sought to establish an Islamic government in which religious authorities would be at the head of governance (Salah, 2010). Muqtada Sadr encouraged his followers to hold various demonstrations in 2004 AD/1382-1383 SH and in 2005 AD/1383-1384 SH expressed his opposition to holding parliamentary elections in Iraq to establish a permanent government; because, in Sadr's view, this government and the elections, being under American supervision and control, lacked legitimacy.

In general, in the early years after 2003 AD/1381-1382 SH, Muqtada Sadr sought to increase his movement's political weight by advocating against government corruption and fighting against the presence of foreigners in Iraq. Sadr repeatedly requested Iraqi military forces to

therefore, you must adhere to the instructions and order. He emphasized that the voice of Friday prayer is louder than any other protest."

cease cooperation with the American occupation forces. Therefore, in the post-Saddam era, due to the existence of a common enemy, the United States, and the necessity of fighting the occupying force, the movement became closer to the Islamic Republic of Iran, and consequently, Iran began its comprehensive support for this movement (Kaymaz, 2019: 9-10). Muqtada Sadr had important differences from his father in his fighting style, and his speeches had a realistic approach (Cockburn, 2008: 117). There was little room for humor or lightheartedness in Muqtada's life. He always sought to push the Americans out of Iraq and reclaim the country. He criticized Ayatollah Sistani for staying out of politics and disparaged the Hakim family for migrating to Iran during the Shia uprising between 1991 AD/1369-1370 SH and 1992 AD/1370-1371 SH (Katzman, 2008: 1-2).

2.2. Muqtada Sadr and the Formation of Jaysh al-Mahdi

During the years of Iraq's occupation, due to the coalition forces' failure to provide law and order in all parts of Iraq, including the south and the Kurdistan region, Iraq experienced unprecedented sectarian violence during the first four years of occupation, creating an environment for the growth of Sunni and Shia militia groups (International Crisis Group, 2006: 7). Among these militia groups was Jaysh al-Mahdi, affiliated with Muqtada Sadr's movement (Bayless, 2012). Muqtada became a symbol of resistance against the occupiers by forming Jaysh al-Mahdi and attacking the invading forces (Matthew Jeffrey Godwin, 2011). Jaysh al-Mahdi declared its goal to be expelling the occupying forces from Iraq and establishing order in the country; a goal that Muqtada Sadr still claims and pursues. However, they also participated in the bloody sectarian civil war against Sunni armed groups and in defending the Iraqi Shia community against their attacks (Abood, 2013).

As a result of Muqtada Sadr's anti-American actions from the very beginning of 2003 AD/1381-1382 SH, Paul Bremer, the U.S. military administrator in Iraq, placed Muqtada Sadr on the list of rebellious and lawless individuals who, along with his supporters who continuously held street protests, were not subject to any legal immunity (Abdul Ameer, Al Khairalla, 2007). The establishment of Jaysh al-Mahdi was by no means acceptable to American officials, to the extent that they considered this group to be the most extremist Shia group in Iraq and America's fiercest enemy in the country. For this reason, American officials used the actions of some of Muqtada Sadr's supporters against coalition forces in the spring of

2004 AD/Spring 1383 SH as a pretext and arrested many of his associates, and made efforts to arrest Muqtada Sadr himself, which led to widespread clashes between his supporters and foreign forces. With the escalation of clashes to the cities of Karbala and Najaf, criticism of Muqtada increased, which ultimately led to a calm situation through the mediation of Ibrahim al-Jafari's government and Ayatollah Sistani. However, most Shia scholars emphasized the urgency of the occupiers' withdrawal but did not endorse Muqtada Sadr's practical approach (Cockburn, 2008: 163).

As a result of these developments, the military power of Jaysh al-Mahdi grew day by day, and the popularity and public standing of the Sadr Movement dramatically increased between 2004 AD/1382-1383 SH and 2006 AD/1384-1385 SH, which witnessed the largest volume of clashes and violence in Iraq. Following these events, a war of attrition began between Iraqi and American security forces and Sadr-affiliated military forces, which continued until 2008 AD/1386-1387 SH, after Jaysh al-Mahdi was dissolved by Muqtada Sadr. During these years, Sadr City in Baghdad and the cities of Najaf and Basra also became centers of protests by Sadr's supporters who demanded the withdrawal of American forces from Iraq (Abbasi and Salimi, 2016 AD/1396 SH: 43).

From late 2004 AD/late 1383 SH, the Sadr Movement joined the Iraqi political process after Saddam, but still harbored doubts about relations with the Americans and their continued presence. However, this participation did not lead to good relations with the Americans. From 2004 AD/1382-1383 SH to 2010 AD/1388-1389 SH, the majority of the Sadr Movement's organizational efforts were spent on confronting coalition forces, both militarily and politically, in an attempt to expel the Americans from Iraq. Even in 2006 AD/1384-1385 SH, the Sadristes conditioned their continued presence in Nouri al-Maliki's government on the establishment of a timetable for American forces; otherwise, they would withdraw from the government, which is what happened.

2.3. Civil War 2006 AD/1384-1385 SH to 2007 AD/1385-1386 SH and the Dissolution of Jaysh al-Mahdi

After the first parliamentary elections on December 15, 2005 AD/December 24, 1384 SH, and the formation of the first parliamentary term with the participation of all different Shia, Sunni, Kurdish, and other minority groups and parties, the difficult task of forming a permanent Iraqi

government began. In the December 2005 AD/December 1384 SH elections, Shias participated with greater cohesion and unity, and a complete agreement was formed among all Shia political figures and leaders. The United Iraqi Alliance (consisting of the Supreme Islamic Council, the Dawa Party, the Sadr Movement, and the Fadila Party), although it won a large share of parliamentary seats, did not have enough seats to form a cabinet alone (Wong, 2006). Therefore, the formation of the government became a challenging and prolonged process due to disagreements and conflicting views among various groups (Kurds, Sunni Arabs, and secular Shias) regarding important ministerial posts, especially the premiership of Ibrahim al-Jafari, as well as the distribution of ministerial positions.⁵

In the absence of a strong central government, the terrorist attack on the al-Askari Shrine in Samarra on February 22, 2006 AD/March 3, 1384 SH by members of al-Qaeda in Iraq and other terrorist acts unleashed an unprecedented wave of violence in Iraq. In July 2006 AD/July-August 1385 SH, over three thousand civilians were killed as a result of military attacks. Almost daily during this period, bombings occurred against Shia or Sunni civilians in gathering place, including mosques, shrines, and markets. The recorded average number of civilian casualties was fifty per day (Haddad, 2011). In this context, Jaysh al-Mahdi was a significant part of this civil war. Although the civil war lost its intensity in late 2007 AD/late 1386 SH, the problems caused by the presence of Jaysh al-Mahdi militias⁶ and pressure from the U.S. government forced then-Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to act against armed groups in the country (Cbsnews, 2009).

Continuing the political tensions between Nouri al-Maliki's government and Muqtada Sadr, one of al-Maliki's important actions during his premiership (May 6, 2006 AD/May 16, 1385 SH to September 8, 2014 AD/September 17, 1393 SH) was confronting the Sadr-affiliated militias in Basra. Nouri al-Maliki believed that there was strong evidence and reasons for the connection of smugglers, criminal gangs, and organized crime in southern Iraq with the Sadr Movement. Therefore, in March 2008 AD/March-April 1387 SH, he ordered the Iraqi army to retake the port city of Basra in the south, which was under Jaysh al-Mahdi's control. Maliki

⁵ . As political disputes escalated, on April 20, 2006, the United Iraqi Alliance nominated Nouri al-Maliki, another member of the Da'wa Party, as a candidate for the post of Prime Minister. After a month of negotiations between Maliki and political groups, Maliki finally introduced his cabinet to the parliament, and his cabinet won the vote of confidence from the parliament on May 20, 2006.

⁶ . Nouri al-Maliki had previously stated publicly in a press interview that the Mahdi Army was worse than al-Qaeda and emphasized the need to fight it.

believed that Sadr Movement representatives had turned government organizations into sites for their economic corruption⁷ and even prevented Iraqi oversight bodies from inspecting their ministries.

As political disputes intensified between Maliki and Muqtada, British forces withdrew from Basra, and control of the city thus fully fell to Jaysh al-Mahdi, and gradually insecurity spread throughout Basra.

With the beginning of 2008 AD/1386-1387 SH and the approaching provincial and municipal elections, Jaysh al-Mahdi's movements against other Iraqi parties, such as the Supreme Islamic Council and the Dawa Party, increased, and Sadr Movement supporters set fire to the offices and buildings of these parties in the cities of Basra and Diwaniyah. A report by Barham Salih, Deputy Prime Minister and Maliki's special representative, on the dire situation in Basra at a cabinet meeting, regarding theft, murder, kidnapping, and arbitrary actions by Jaysh al-Mahdi-affiliated groups, led Maliki to launch a large-scale military operation against Jaysh al-Mahdi with U.S. support while stationed in Basra. Maliki stated that the goal of this military operation was to confront criminal and violent groups and emphasized that he had no intention of restricting the political space against the Sadr Movement.

The Iraqi army, in its first operation known as "Charge of the Knights," faced heavy resistance from Jaysh al-Mahdi forces. The U.S., by supporting the Iraqi army, helped its penetration deep into Basra, and ultimately this battle ended with a ceasefire mediated by Iran.⁸ Muqtada Sadr announced the dissolution of Jaysh al-Mahdi in 2008 AD/1386-1387 SH and declared his decision to go to Qom to continue his religious studies (International Crisis Group, 2008). Apart from residing in Tehran and regularly traveling to Qom for studies, little is known about his activities in Iran. Even his teacher's name is not known (Rahimi, 2010). Many observers believe that the main reason for Muqtada's staying out of public view was to distance himself from his militias' actions and the threats from American forces against Muqtada (Bayless, 2012).

⁷ . According to the agreement of the Shiite groups of the United Iraqi Alliance, the Sadr movement held about four ministries in the cabinet of the Maliki government.

⁸ . The negotiations between the Iraqi government and Muqtada al-Sadr, who was in Iran during these conflicts, took place independently, and the Iraqi officials reminded the Iranian side of the Iraqi government's duties regarding ensuring Iraq's security. In the negotiations, the representatives of the Iraqi government, consisting of Ali al-Adib, Qasim al-Sahlani, and Hadi al-Amiri, representing the United Iraqi Alliance, with Muqtada al-Sadr in Iran, Muqtada finally admitted that some groups affiliated with him had engaged in illegal actions and, by issuing a 9-article statement, declared his disavowal of individuals and groups fighting government forces, and thus the conflicts ended.

After his trip to Iran, the Sadr Movement primarily focused its activities on political participation and engaging in elections, to the extent that in future political processes, representatives of this movement had an active presence in temporary and permanent parliaments, as well as in the governments of Jafari and Maliki (Abbasi and Salimi, 2016 AD/1396 SH: 45).

While many analysts considered the Basra war to be a war between the legitimate Iraqi government and illegal militias (International Crisis Group, 2009: 11), this battle should be seen as an internal power struggle between Iraqi Shia parties. Maliki and the Supreme Council, as his partners in government, had begun an intense political rivalry with the Sadr Movement to gain the political support of the Shia majority in Iraq (International Crisis Group, 2006: 8-9). In this political competition, which was evident in the Basra war, the U.S. stood by one of the warring parties, and Iran adopted a neutral approach.

2.4. Muqtada Sadr's Revisionist Activism in the Iraqi Political Sphere

In early 2010 AD/early 1389 SH, Muqtada Sadr returned to the Iraqi arena as a political leader after the success of his electoral list in the March 2010 AD/March 1389 SH Iraqi parliamentary elections in alliance with other Shia parties. Although Muqtada sought to reorganize Jaysh al-Mahdi by helping Iraqi security forces in securing Shia neighborhoods (Rahimi, 2010), his movement's primary focus until 2014 AD/1392-1393 SH, when ISIS rose to power and finally officially declared its Islamic caliphate in Iraq by capturing Mosul, was primarily on political and social activities. Despite the dissolution of Jaysh al-Mahdi in 2008 AD/1386-1387 SH, armed struggles by military forces loyal to Sadr continued until the withdrawal of U.S. army forces from Iraq in 2011 AD/1389-1390 SH. However, after 2009 AD/1387-1388 SH, following Muqtada Sadr's consent to participate in provincial council elections, the military activities of groups affiliated with the Sadr Movement decreased, and Muqtada, as a political leader, while opposing the division of Iraq and advocating for the country's unity, has emphasized the unity of all Shia, Sunni, Kurdish, Turkmen, and even non-Muslim ethnic groups (Abbasi and Salimi, 2016 AD/1396 SH: 47).

The Sadr Movement did not participate in and boycotted the first elections in Iraq after the fall of Saddam on January 30, 2005 AD/February 11, 1383 SH, which aimed to elect 275 representatives for the transitional national assembly, essentially a temporary parliament or

transitional house of representatives, as well as the provincial council elections for the eighteen provinces in the same year (Schmidt, 2009: 126). However, in the first general Iraqi parliamentary elections in December 2005 AD/December 1384 SH, Shia Islamist political forces, namely the Da'wa Party, the Supreme Islamic Council, and the Sadr Movement, which had previously been active in opposing the Ba'ath regime, along with a group of independent political figures, formed the seven main members of the "United Iraqi Alliance" (the Da'wa Party with the Da'wa Party - Iraq Organization, the Supreme Council with the Badr Organization, and the Sadr Movement with the Fadhila Party). As a result of these elections, Nouri al-Maliki was elected as Prime Minister of Iraq.

The Sadr Movement's first effective participation in the Iraqi provincial council elections was in 2009 AD/1387-1388 SH. In this period, the Sadr Movement succeeded in winning 43 out of a total of 440 seats in the provincial councils of 14 out of 18 Iraqi provinces. A significant fact in these elections was the emergence of intra-Shia differences. The result of disagreements among Shia groups was the separate participation of each party and political group in the provincial council elections, which also led to different results for each group (Asadi, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 64).

One of the reasons for the lack of a Shia alliance in the 2009 AD/1387-1388 SH elections was the Shia groups' attempt to determine their political standing and weight within the Iraqi political and social structure. Since in the December 2005 AD/December 1384 SH parliamentary elections, Shia groups had participated as a united alliance and specific quotas and therefore positions had been predetermined for each group, the actual weight of small and large groups within the alliance was not clear. Therefore, in these elections, to clarify their political and social weight and role, the Shia parties voluntarily agreed to participate individually in the elections and then form an alliance after the election results were clear.

While until these elections, the Supreme Islamic Council was considered the most important Iraqi Shia party and participated as the leading party in the United Alliance in the first Iraqi parliamentary elections in December 2005 AD/December 1384 SH, in the 2009 AD/1387-1388 SH provincial council elections, the "State of Law" list, supported by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, won the elections, and the Supreme Council's list, "Shahid Mehrab" (Martyr of the Altar), and the list attributed to the Sadr Movement, "Al-Ahrar al-Mustaqillun" (The Free Independents), came in subsequent ranks (Eslami, 25 Mordad 1401, The Author In-person Interview).

The Sadr Movement achieved great success in the second parliamentary elections in March 2010 AD/March 1389 SH. In this period, the Sadr Movement participated in the elections as part of the "Iraqi National Alliance," consisting of Shia parties such as the Supreme Council led by Ammar al-Hakim, the Fadhila Party, and the "National Reform" movement led by Ibrahim al-Jafari (Strategic Research Center, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 5). In these elections, the Sadr Movement, by winning 40 out of 70 seats obtained by the Iraqi National Alliance, emerged as the most powerful political party in the alliance and demonstrated its influence in Iraq (Nouriyan, 14 Tir 2022 AD/1401 SH: The Author In-person Interview).

The third Iraqi parliamentary elections in 2014 AD/1392-1393 SH were held after American forces had withdrawn from Iraq, making them the first governance experience that Iraqis themselves planned and implemented independently and completely. This political campaign to elect 328 representatives began with voting by Iraqis residing abroad, followed by security forces, prisoners, and patients casting their votes. Iraqi citizens also went to the polls on April 30, 2014 AD/May 10, 1393 SH, and the participation rate of Iraqis in these elections reached 62%. In the third parliamentary elections in 2014 AD/1392-1393 SH, the trend of Shia alliances continued, and two alliances turned into three: "State of Law," "al-Muwatin" (Citizen), and "Ahrar" (Free), formed respectively around the Da'wa Party, the Supreme Council, and the Sadr Movement (Nouriyan, 14 Tir 2022 AD/1401 SH: The Author In-person Interview).

The Sadr Movement participated in the third Iraqi parliamentary elections in 2014 AD/1392-1393 SH as part of the independent "Ahrar" alliance and, through three factions – "Kutlat al-Ahrar," "Tayyar al-Nukhba," and "Tajammu' al-Sharaka al-Wataniya" – succeeded in winning 9.49% of the Iraqi popular vote. This movement also secured 10.93% of the total seats in Iraq and 15.38% of the seats in Shia-majority areas. However, the number of seats for this movement decreased by 12.5% compared to the second parliamentary term (Zari'an, 2015 AD/1395 SH: 213). In the 2014 AD/1392-1393 SH elections, the Sadr Movement, as part of the Ahrar alliance, won 34 parliamentary seats, becoming the second-largest political alliance in parliament; whereas in the 2010 AD/1388-1389 SH parliamentary elections, despite participating in the Iraqi National Alliance, its affiliated representatives won 39 seats. However, in the 2014 AD/1392-1393 SH elections, the Sadr Movement faced a decrease in the number of its parliamentary seats, indicating a weakening of its popular base. The Sadrists lost 5 parliamentary seats in these elections compared to the previous term. But the Ahrar list,

by winning 6 out of 69 Baghdad seats, showed that Sadr City in Baghdad still constitutes the center and core of the Sadr Movement in Iraq (Abbasi and Salimi, 2016 AD/1396 SH: 49-50). The Ahrar Bloc in the 2014 AD/1392-1393 SH elections, despite being Shia, widely promoted Iraqi nationalism and, on the other hand, claimed to form a technocratic government. By "Technocratic Government," Muqtada meant a government that, regardless of religious values or identity, could hold government positions solely based on expertise. In this regard, Muqtada Sadr even supported a Marxist person simply because they were a technocrat. In the discourse realm, the Sadr Movement and the Ahrar alliance stood against some other ethnic discourses, such as Shiism or Sunnism, and seriously called for the preservation of Iraq's independence and respect for its national sovereignty at the national and regional levels. Based on this, Muqtada also strongly opposed any presence of foreign forces inside Iraq (Nouriyan, 14 Tir 2022 AD/1401 SH: The Author In-person Interview).

2.5. War on ISIS Terrorism and the Reproduction of the Sadr Movement's Smart Power

In June 2014 AD/June-July 1393 SH, the terrorist group ISIS, known as the "Islamic State of Iraq and Sham," captured Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city after Baghdad, and ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared himself caliph of Muslims in a sermon in Mosul. Ayatollah Sistani issued a fatwa calling on all able-bodied individuals to take up arms to defend their country. Thousands quickly volunteered and formed new militia groups or joined existing ones. Muqtada Sadr also formed a new group called Saraya al-Salam to fight ISIS (O'Driscoll and van Zoonen, 2017).

Although in the fight against ISIS, militia groups, numbering over 60, participated in an organization called "Popular Mobilization Forces" (PMF), known as Hashd al-Sha'bi, which was united under the Prime Minister's Office, Shia militias were divided into three ideological lines:

- A) Groups that volunteered at the call of Ayatollah Sistani;
- B) Groups that were already active in Iraqi political and military developments and were loyal to Iran, such as the Badr Organization, Nujaba, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, Kata'ib Hezbollah, and Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada;

C) Sadrists who had a more independent ideological and operational approach toward Iran and its Iraqi allies and were organized as Saraya al-Salam militias (O'Driscoll and van Zoonen, 2017).

Throughout the years of fighting ISIS, despite the existence of a common enemy between Iran and the Sadr Movement and Iran maintaining communication and support channels for Muqtada Sadr, the Sadr Movement increasingly distanced itself from Iran and its allied groups in Iraq. By late 2017 AD/late 1396 SH, Muqtada Sadr began to criticize the PMF-led militias, calling their nature and actions "sectarian" and emphasizing that "Hashd al-Sha'bi has no place in Iraq." (Rasheed, 2018; Steele, 2017)

In 2018 AD/1396-1397 SH, then-Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced victory over ISIS and that Iraq would hold parliamentary elections in May 2018 AD/May 1397 SH. Before the elections, various alliances were formed among different political actors, including Iranian-aligned Shia militias, former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, current Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, and Muqtada Sadr. However, for various reasons, these political alliances were not stable and were dissolved; because an examination of the Sadr Movement's political behavior in the recent Iraqi elections had shown that this movement pursued a pragmatic approach, and its main goal was to achieve the largest number of parliamentary seats and ultimately hold government positions. Their non-electoral political participation also indicated an anti-elite viewpoint with a demand for effective governance. A notable example in this regard was the storming of Baghdad's Green Zone by Sadr Movement supporters in 2016 AD/1394-1395 SH, during which Sadrists breached the Green Zone's security walls and protested against corrupt government officials, bureaucrats, and politicians, demanding the replacement of the government with a non-partisan technocratic cabinet (al-Tarafi and Jawad, 2016).

Of course, this event led to a split among some important military and political leaders of the Sadr Movement, such as Sheikh Qais al-Khazali, Shaykh Akram al-Ka'bi, and Shaykh Tabataba'i. At the intellectual core of the Sadr Movement, the differences between Muqtada and Qais al-Khazali led to a complete separation between the Sadrist line and the Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq group. Based on this, since 2016 AD/1394-1395 SH, Muqtada Sadr, by raising the slogan of fighting corruption and carrying out reforms in the country, has called his followers and supporters to rallies and demonstrations at various times (Abbasi and Salimi, 2016 AD/1396 SH: 61).

The parliamentary elections in 2018 AD/1396-1397 SH were of great importance in the Iraqi political and social arena for various reasons, such as Iraq entering the post-ISIS phase, the Kurdistan Region's demand for independence, the specific situation of Sunnis at that time, and the relative divergence among Shias compared to previous elections.⁹ On the other hand, while the war with ISIS crisis, economic crisis, government service crisis, administrative and political corruption were all problems that had turned the Iraqi government into a failed state, Muqtada tried to lead popular protest movements by raising slogans of reform and fighting corruption and pressuring al-Abadi's government to gain the largest share for himself in Iraq's political future. Therefore, in these elections, the Sadr Movement participated in the Iraqi political arena with a populist discourse. By emphasizing the employment of any qualified Iraqi, regardless of their religion or ethnicity, in political and administrative positions, and the absence of differences between Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish groups in Iraq's political power structure, Muqtada Sadr managed to attract many supporters among various social strata in Iraq.

Finally, in the May 2018 AD/May 1397 SH elections, the Sadr Movement, by forming an alliance with the "Iraqi Communist Party," adopted the title "Revolutionaries' Alliance towards Reform," known as the "al-Sairoon" (Forward) alliance. The Sairoon alliance, led by Muqtada, although it won 54 seats, could not secure an absolute majority of seats. The "al-Fatah" alliance, led by Hadi al-Amiri and Qais al-Khazali and composed of figures allied with Iran, and the "Al-Nasr" alliance, led by Haider al-Abadi, secured 48 and 42 seats in the Iraqi parliament, respectively. Also, the Sadr Movement, which had spoken of the necessity of non-interference by Iran in Iraqi affairs for years, in this period emphasized maintaining a distance from Iran more than ever before and allied itself with communist and secular (non-religious) civil parties (Afshoun, 25 Tir 1401 SH: The Author In-person Interview) .

The final understanding of the attitudes and political behaviors of Iraqi Shia political forces in the 2018 AD/1396-1397 SH elections was that there was a kind of consensus among them regarding the theoretical and practical frameworks of domestic and foreign policy, which could broadly be termed "Shia-Iraqi nationalism." Although some individuals or parties might not have a strong inclination towards it, in practice and in the face of Iraqi public opinion,

⁹ . The participation rate in the 2018 Iraqi parliamentary elections was less than 45%. Although this rate of participation is sufficient under the constitution to recognize the election results, it represents a decrease of approximately 15 to 20 percent compared to previous elections, such as those in 2010 and 2014.

they were compelled to accept and go along with it, and only resistance groups outside the political process and the official government framework freely expressed their true views. The main elements of this discourse were:

- A) Emphasizing the priority and precedence of Iraq's national interests over international Islamic and Shia interests;
- B) Emphasizing the necessity of maintaining neutrality in international and regional conflicts and competitions and maintaining equal distance from various parties (in other words, maintaining balance in foreign policy and avoiding axes);
- C) Maintaining independence from Iran;
- D) Developing relations with Arab countries;
- E) Moving away from Islamism and towards alliance with secular and non-religious political forces.

What made the situation more difficult for the Islamic Republic of Iran during the 2018 AD/1396-1397 SH elections were Muqtada Sadr's stances. Perhaps Muqtada Sadr is not entirely opposed to Iran's presence in Iraq, but this movement has a specific approach to foreign policy, which is a balancing approach. According to the balanced view in Iraqi foreign policy, other foreign actors, including Saudi Arabia and Turkey, should have the same share and role as Iran in Iraqi developments (Eslami, 25 Mordad 1401 SH: The Author In-person Interview).

Iraq witnessed widespread street gatherings and unrest in October 2019 AD/October-November 1398 SH in protest of corruption, government and state institutions' inefficiency in providing services, poverty, unemployment, and also opposition to the Iraqi political system which divides important positions such as the presidency, premiership, and parliamentary speakership based on sectarian systems and general ethnic and religious lines. Therefore, protesters demanded widespread reforms in Iraq's political and economic structure. Amidst these protests, Muqtada tried to gather the revolutionary demands of the protesters under his unified leadership by strengthening Arab and Iraqi nationalist variables in his political actions and presenting revolutionary slogans. In these protests, known as the "Tishreen Revolution," demands were made regarding blaming Iran for the inefficiency of Iraqi Shia governments in solving people's livelihood and welfare problems, and slogans such as "Iran out of Iraq" were raised, and attacks were also carried out on Iranian consulates in Najaf and Karbala. The continuation of these demonstrations and unrest led to the instability of political and

economic continuity in Iraq and ultimately resulted in the resignation of then-Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi's government (October 2018 AD/October-November 1397 SH to February 2020 AD/February-March 1398 SH), a political figure aligned with Iran and a member of Iraq's Supreme Islamic Council, and the rise of the fragile governments of "Adnan al-Zurfi" (March 17, 2020 AD/March 27, 1398 SH to May 7, 2020 AD/May 18, 1399 SH) and "Mustafa al-Kazimi" (May 7, 2020 AD/May 18, 1399 SH to October 28, 2022 AD/November 6, 1401 SH), and finally the holding of early parliamentary elections in October 2021 AD/October-November 1400 SH (Afshoun, 25 Tir 1401 SH: The Author In-person Interview).

In the October 2021 AD/October-November 1400 SH elections, the Sadr Movement won the election campaign by a significant margin over its rivals, securing 73 out of 329 seats in the country's parliament (Qolizadeh, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 2). In his 2021 AD/1399-1400 SH election campaign, Muqtada Sadr unveiled an exceptional characteristic that other parties and groups do not possess to the same extent: the ability to mobilize street protests and disrupt order and security to gain his desired concessions. For example, in the short time remaining before the 2021 AD/1399-1400 SH parliamentary elections, when Muqtada intended to withdraw from the political process and, in a way, boycott the elections, most political groups tried to prevent this decision from being implemented. It seems that political parties at that time believed that Muqtada's participation or non-participation in the elections would be threatening to his rivals; but certainly the Sadr Movement's non-participation would ultimately lead to the government's defeat and fall. In such a situation, political leaders like al-Kazimi, al-Amiri, al-Hakim, and Barham Salih asked Muqtada Sadr not to abandon the political arena; because they believed that his absence would be a more serious threat to the next government and other parties; therefore, they called for Muqtada's return to the political arena (Qolizadeh, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 3). This return ultimately led to the decisive victory of the Sadr Movement in the 2021 AD/1399-1400 SH elections.

After winning the elections, the Sadr Movement's representatives entered parliament clad in shrouds, declaring their readiness to serve Iraq to their last breath with slogans of reform and establishing a majority government, not a quota-based one. During the months following the 2021 AD/1399-1400 SH elections, the two main blocs in the Iraqi parliament, "Inqadh al-Watan" (National Salvation Alliance) with 173 representatives and the "Shia Coordination

Framework"¹ with 83 representatives⁰, competed with each other to form a government. The National Salvation Alliance (consisting of the Sadr Movement Alliance, the Kurdistan Democratic Party, and the Iraqi Sovereignty Sunni Alliance) led by Muqtada Sadr sought to form a national majority government (Hukumat Aghlabiya al-Wataniya), while the Shia Coordination Framework—as Shia parties aligned with Iran—sought to achieve a consensus and inclusive government (Muhasasa). This disagreement and confrontation between the two main Shia poles in Iraq led to the failure to reach the quorum (220 out of 329 representatives) for the election of the president. This is because, according to Iraqi law, until a president is elected, a prime minister cannot be nominated. Therefore, the failure to elect a president also led to a delay in the election of a prime minister; so much so that after two sessions for the election of a president, the Shia Coordination Framework in Iraq, led by Nouri al-Maliki, Muqtada Sadr's long-time rival, using a legal interpretation by the Iraqi Federal Supreme Court¹ and bringing together the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and some independents, and forming a bloc with more than 110 seats, engaged in obstruction¹ and the "Suspension of one-third" option (preventing the parliamentary session from reaching quorum for the presidential election), preventing the election of "Riber Ahmed," the Kurdistan Democratic Party's candidate, as president, and Muhammad Jafar Sadr, Muhammad Baqir Sadr's son, as prime minister of Iraq. This led to a political deadlock in Iraq (Alizadeh, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 4). During this period, Muqtada Sadr also tried to act in the Iraqi political arena through various methods of political action, including isolation, political silence during the holy month of Ramadan, a forty-day deadline for the Shia Coordination Framework, the independents' option, and turning towards opponents; however, in all these cases, the movement's plans failed (Qolizadeh, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 7).

¹ . The most important groups⁰ forming the Shiite Coordination Framework (Ittar al-Tansiqi) are: "State of Law" (Nouri al-Maliki), "Fatah" (Hadi al-Amiri), "Hikma Movement" (Sayyid Ammar Hakim), "Nasr" (Haider al-Abadi), "National Contract" (Faleh al-Fayyad), "Al-Fadhila Party" (Abdul Hussein Mousavi), and "Huquq" (Hussein Mounes), Humam Hamoudi (Head of the Supreme Islamic Council).

¹ . Supporters of the Sadr movement consider "Faiq Zaidan," the head of the Federal Supreme Court of Iraq, to be Iran's preferred candidate and view the court's interpretation as a result of pressure from the Quds Force and the Iranian side. Therefore, they have launched extensive negative publicity campaigns against Iranian officials and Quds Force commanders on virtual networks affiliated with the Sadr movement, including "Qanat Hozah Natiqa" and "Uruk News."

¹ . Abstruction or breaking the quorum is the intentional absence of a group of parliament members during voting, with the aim of depriving the parliament of a majority and preventing the approval of a bill or plan.

Following the political deadlock and failure to form a government, in June 2022 AD/June-July 1401 SH, the resignation of 73 representatives of the Sadr Movement from the fifth parliament brought a new crisis to Iraqi politics. The leader of the Sadr Movement, considering the deadlock in forming a government in Iraq to be artificial, stated, "I was not concerned with power and politics; I only wanted to expose every corrupt oppressor. The majority is for us (and not for others)." Addressing the Shia Coordination Framework, he emphasized, "I will not participate in a consensus government and have decided to withdraw from the political process so that under no circumstances will I be with the corrupt (Shia Coordination Framework) neither in this world nor in the afterlife." (Alizadeh, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 4-5)

After the resignation of the Sadr Movement representatives, the Shia Coordination Framework issued a joint statement, respecting the Sadr Movement representatives' action and emphasizing the formation of a "National Service" government. Despite all the differences within the Shia Coordination Framework, this committee, on July 25, 2022 AD/August 3, 1401 SH, in a meeting at Hadi al-Amiri's house, unanimously agreed to nominate "Muhammad Shia' al-Sudani,"¹ a politician and former³ member of the Dawa Party and the State of Law coalition led by Nouri al-Maliki, as prime minister to the parliament;¹ a decision that was met with strong reaction from Muqtada Sadr and his supporters and ultimately led to the occupation of the Iraqi parliament by Sadr Movement supporters, once again entangling Iraq in a confusing web of increasing political instability caused by political and ethnic differences.

It seemed that Muqtada Sadr's main goal in encouraging his supporters to continue their sit-in in parliament was to dismantle the Shia Coordination Framework; thus initiating the project of holding new early elections and electing his preferred individual as interim prime minister. However, in October 2022 AD/October-November 1401 SH, finally, after a year since the 2021 AD/1399-1400 SH Iraqi parliamentary elections and the events that occurred in the country during this period, Iraqi political parties, centered around the Shia Coordination Framework, reached a final agreement to elect Abdul Latif Rashid as president and

¹ . As a result of the Tishreen Revolution protests in 2019, Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani separated from al-Maliki's State of Law Coalition and founded the al-Furatain party.

¹ . On October 13, 2022, Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani was tasked by the then President of Iraq, Abdul Latif Rashid, with forming a cabinet, and his government officially began its work on October 27, 2022, after obtaining a vote of confidence from the Iraqi Parliament.

Muhammad Shia' al-Sudani as prime minister. Now, the challenge related to the election of the president and prime minister has been resolved with the agreement of the Shia, Kurdish, and Sunni factions, and Iraq is on the right path. Al-Sudani is also a personality close to the religious authority and accepted by Shias, Sunnis, and Kurds. However, in the future, Muqtada Sadr, who still has high influence among the Iraqi masses, may obstruct al-Sudani's cabinet and bring people to the streets. In any case, the election of these two figures, Rashid and Sudani, was a smart move, after a year of disagreement and instability in the Iraqi political arena, the faction leaders concluded that Iraq should return to its true position in the region and the world.

Conclusion

One of the significant figures among Iraqi politicians, who has had a remarkable impact on Iraq's political equations in the last two decades, is Muqtada Sadr. In fact, Muqtada Sadr, as a young politician benefiting from his family's good reputation, became an active player in the Iraqi political arena after 2003 AD/1381-1382 SH. He was initially placed on the blacklist of Paul Bremer, the American administrator in Iraq; then he began his armed struggle against the American occupation; subsequently, with the official end of the armed struggle, he entered the political competition, and in the years after the emergence of ISIS in 2014 AD/1392-1393 SH, he reorganized his affiliated military forces, Saraya al-Salam, among the Popular Mobilization Forces.

This overall trend indicates that Muqtada Sadr's activism has been very turbulent amidst transformations, and this personality has never considered him to have a fixed role. Furthermore, Sadr has consistently adopted contradictory and unpredictable stances in his actions and statements, which has surprised political observers. This has caused ambiguity and confusion for other domestic and foreign actors in their interactions with him. What is observed in the genealogy of Muqtada Sadr's actions is that Muqtada has repeatedly made high-level decisions in the course of Iraqi political and social developments but has then reversed them after a while. For example, Muqtada Sadr announced in 2013 AD/1391-1392 SH that he would boycott the Iraqi political mechanism and system, but then participated in the 2014 AD/1392-1393 SH elections and in the 2018 AD/1396-1397 SH elections formed a large part of the government.

Despite presenting itself as the flag-bearer of political system reforms and fighting corruption in Iraq's political and administrative structure, the Sadr Movement continues to have an active and effective presence in Iraqi government centers and positions. In the period before the 2018 AD/1396-1397 SH elections, Muqtada Sadr adopted a civil and secular approach and even allied with Iraqi communists and participated in the elections. At that time, Muqtada called resistance groups aligned with the Islamic Republic of Iran "Impudent Militias" and spoke of the necessity of dissolving the Popular Mobilization Forces. However, to the utter surprise of all ideological currents, including seculars and Islamists, after winning the elections, they formed an alliance with a supporter of the Popular Mobilization Forces and these so-called militias, namely the Al-Fatah alliance, an alliance called the Al-Bina (Construction) alliance, and both sides worked together to elect Adil Abdul-Mahdi as prime minister. Perhaps it was based on this that there was little reaction in the Iraqi political arena and public sphere to the Sadr Movement leader's stances and his decision not to participate in the 2021 AD/1399-1400 SH elections.

Another point that strengthened suspicions about the publicity nature of Muqtada's actions before the 2021 AD/1399-1400 SH elections was that he stated in a video message that he would soon be martyred; because he had risen to establish reforms, and the corrupt would kill him. However, elsewhere he attributed the cause of his martyrdom to his opposition to recognizing Israel and establishing relations with this regime, emphasizing that he is the only obstacle to establishing relations with Israel, and this would be a strong reason for his elimination by ill-wishers.

Muqtada Sadr's decision to suspend all political activities of the movement for at least one year with the aim of reforming it on April 14, 2023 AD/April 25, 1402 SH brought Iraq into a new phase of political developments. This decision confirms all the author's statements and field findings regarding Muqtada's unpredictability in political action, character distortion, and severe fluctuating and unstable decision-making. Based on this, it can be expected that Muqtada will soon, by adopting new stances, continue to subject Iraq's political future to uncertainty, complexity, and political and social instability.

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