



The Calm before the Storm

The British Experience in Southern Iraq

Michael Knights and Ed Williams

Policy Focus #66 | February 2007

All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

© 2007 by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Published in 2007 in the United States of America by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1828 L Street NW, Suite 1050, Washington, DC 20036.

Design by Daniel Kohan, Sensical Design and Communication

Front cover: Supporters of the radical Shiite militia Jaish al-Mahdi march over a depiction of the British flag during a demonstration in Basra, Iraq, November 28, 2006. Copyright AP Wide World Photos/Nabil al-Jurani.

From Ed Williams:

To the Williams family in general, for making sure I was a reader, and to Dad in particular, for funding my education. To Laura and my other friends for putting up with my conversation, to my friends Larry Attree, Fergie May, and John McCarthy for their advice, and to my colleagues Dave Clark, Meg Williams, Paddy Ogilvy, Sarah Le Mesurier, and Eva Molyneux for their generous help and good company in recent years.

About the Authors

Michael Knights is a London-based Lafer international fellow of The Washington Institute, specializing in the military and security affairs of Iraq, Iran, and the Persian Gulf. He also serves as vice president of Olive Group's Analysis and Assessments business, A2.

Working with the U.S. Defense Department, he has undertaken extensive research on lessons learned from U.S. military operations in Iraq during and since 1990. He earned his doctorate at the Department of War Studies, King's College London, and has worked as a defense journalist for the *Gulf States Newsletter* and *Jane's Intelligence Review*. His past publications include the compendium *Operation Iraqi Freedom and the New Iraq: Insights and Forecasts* (The Washington Institute, 2004) and *Cradle of Conflict: Iraq and the Birth of the Modern U.S. Military* (U.S. Naval Institute Press, 2005).

Ed Williams is a senior analyst at the integrated security provider Olive Group. Since summer 2003, he has been producing detailed reporting from Iraq on behalf of the group, briefing and debriefing security teams and advising government and corporate clients operating in the country. He also authored the 2005 Olive Group study *Kidnapping in Iraq: Deconstructing the Threat*. Mr. Williams earned his master's degree at Edinburgh University.



The opinions expressed in this Policy Focus are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, its Board of Trustees, or its Board of Advisors.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction	1
Iraq's Deep South in March 2003	2
The Summer of Discontent	6
Rise of the Parties	11
The Uprising	17
Between the Elections	22
The Descent	27
Forecasts and Lessons	32

Illustrations

Southern Iraq: Oil Infrastructure (map)	viii
Provincial Election Results, January 2005	23

Acknowledgments

THE AUTHORS WOULD LIKE to thank all those who made possible the commissioning and completion of this study. Special thanks go to the board and research staff of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, particularly Patrick Clawson and Michael Eisenstadt for their encouragement and attention to detail. Within the academic community, the authors would like to express their appreciation to Reidar Visser, an expert with unparalleled historical insight into Basra and the “deep south” of Iraq.

The study would also not have been possible without the generous support of Olive Group, which was the first private security provider in Iraq and has been operating in-country for nearly four years. In addition to making it possible for Ed Williams to undertake the research, other Olive Group analysts deserve thanks, including Meg Williams, Dave Clark, Sarah le Mesurier, and Paddy Ogilvy. The authors would also like to express appreciation to the many U.S. and British military personnel who fed their views into the study. Finally, they would like to give special thanks to Mazin Yousef for his insights from southern Iraq.



Introduction

IN IRAQ, all politics are local. Political, military, and economic power have increasingly devolved to the local levels as a result of the weakness of central government institutions. The indicators of such devolution are plain to see: the provincial hoarding of national resources such as the electric grid supply, the habit of Iraqis to put their faith in militias to protect them, the diversion of oil to local communities for personal use or resale for profit. Despite this dynamic, most analyses of the situation in Iraq focus on the national level and the actions of the central government rather than those of provincial, municipal, and neighborhood-level actors.

This study looks at the dynamics that have unfolded within the deep south of Iraq—the four southernmost provinces of Basra, Maysan, Dhi Qar, and Muthanna. This area of Iraq is singled out for in-depth analysis for three principal reasons.

First, the deep south is indicative of the very high levels of autonomy enjoyed by Iraq's provinces since the fall of Saddam's regime. The deep south was always geographically detached from Baghdad under the Baath government and its Iraqi and Ottoman forerunners. Basra and the southern surrounding provinces have a long history of autonomous and even secessionist ambitions. Under primarily British administration since 2003, the provinces of the deep south continued to operate semi-autonomously vis-à-vis Baghdad.

A second reason to focus on the deep south of Iraq is the vital resources that are tied up in the four southernmost provinces. These include an estimated 71 percent of Iraq's proven oil reserves and over 95 percent of government revenues. Boasting an estimated

59 percent of the country's proven oil reserves, the nation's only access to the Gulf, and Iraq's second-largest city with 1.3 million people, the province of Basra is particularly vital to Iraq's future. The enormous oil revenues generated by Basra alone are a massive draw for all shades of political factions, militias, and criminal groups.

A third and final reason to focus on Basra in particular is that the province has suffered one of the worst reversals of fortune of any area in Iraq since the fall of Saddam's regime. Once a relatively calm part of postwar Iraq, where multinational forces were able to undertake community policing at acceptable risk without helmets or body armor, Basra has since been overwhelmed by a storm of violence and disorder, becoming an area where it is impossible to undertake road moves without heavily armored vehicles. Although it was one of the more liberal and cosmopolitan areas in Iraq during the 1980s, Basra has transformed into a bastion of Islamist groups and their associated militias, afflicted with high levels of insurgent and criminal activity. From being the heart of Iraq's oil industry, Basra is increasingly a kleptocracy used by Islamist militias to fill their war chests.

Basra's slide into chaos poses many uncomfortable questions. What dynamics caused the dramatic reversal? What role has Iran played in the region? Was Britain fully committed to the task of bringing representative moderate governance to the deep south? Did the British style of community soldiering and minimal use of force help or hinder the effort to stabilize southern Iraq? Can the deterioration be reversed? Most important, what happens next?

Iraq's Deep South in March 2003

THE “DEEP SOUTH” denotes the four southernmost provinces in Iraq—Basra, Maysan, Dhi Qar, and Muthanna. These four predominately Shiite Arab areas have a longstanding southern identity that is distinct from that of central Iraqi metropolises and provinces such as Baghdad, Najaf, and Karbala. This identity has been reinforced by the austerity of recent times, particularly in Basra and Maysan. These two provinces bore the brunt of fighting during the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq War and suffered grievously during and after the 1991 uprising. Throughout the 1990s, the provinces of the deep south suffered from a deliberate and systematic policy of neglect. Distrusted by the Baath government, the southern provinces were milked for their oil wealth but starved of provincial and municipal funding. In addition to the burden of heavy garrisoning, the livelihood of those in the rural deep south was devastated over a period of twenty years of economic mismanagement and punitive draining of the marshes between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers.

The collapse of the rural economy brought rapid urbanization under the worst possible socioeconomic conditions. The population centers of the deep south simmered with discontent throughout the 1990s. In the rural communities of the Euphrates and Tigris river valleys, lawless tribes fought a low-intensity battle with government forces in defense of their prerogative to engage in banditry and smuggling. In essence, this struggle was a battle between the modernity of a centralized state and the traditional privileges of local and tribal blocs. In Basra, the second-largest city in Iraq and home to 1.3 million people, the city's reversal of fortunes was particularly stark. Once the capital of a powerful province within Ottoman Mesopotamia and a bustling trading entrepot, Basra had been relegated to a distant and disadvantaged province of the centralized

Iraqi state. Basra's oil fields made it the economic powerhouse of the country, and its Gulf access made it the principal import-export terminal for the national economy, yet the city suffered systematic underdevelopment throughout the last decade of Baath rule.¹

‘Émigré’ versus Domestic Political Groups

The concept of “émigré” versus “native” political groups is central to any discussion of politics in southern Iraq. This schism occurred in the early 1980s as a result of different reactions to a major regime crackdown on Shiite Islamists. The clash between secular and Islamist communities had been building since the 1950s, when the first Islamic political party—al-Dawa al-Islamiya (Islamic Call)—formed in response to the threat of atheistic Arab nationalist and communist movements. Throughout the 1970s, relations between Dawa and the Baath parties spiraled downward, reaching a nadir following the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. On March 30, 1980, Dawa membership was made a capital offense and Ayatollah Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr (Sadr I), one of the two most senior Dawa clerics (or *marja*), was executed. Two tracks of the Islamist movement took separate paths from this day onward.²

One portion of Dawa, led by the other most senior cleric, Ayatollah Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim, chose exile in the newly formed Islamic Republic of Iran. A new organization, al-Majlis ala lil Thawra al-Islamiyah fil al-Iraq (Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, or SCIRI),³ was formed in November 1982 under the leadership of émigrés from the high-born al-Hakim family. Unlike the Dawa party itself, SCIRI was willing to act as an unquestioning proxy arm of Iranian policy. SCIRI supported the Iranian aim of establishing a theocracy in Iraq, resembling the same

1. Juan Cole, “The United States and Shi’ite Religious Factions in Post-Ba’thist Iraq,” *Middle East Journal* 57, no. 4 (Autumn 2003), p. 547. Also see Najib al-Salihi, *Al-Zilzal* (the earthquake) (London: Al-Rafid Distribution and Publishing, 1998), p. 237.

2. See Cole, “The United States and Shi’ite Religious Factions,” p. 547.

3. Literally, the Supreme Assembly for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, or SAIRI, which was later changed to the SCIRI variant.

velayat-e faqih system used in Iran,⁴ and Tehran developed SCIRI as the core of an alternative seat of government to be established in Basra if the city fell to Iranian forces. Iran helped SCIRI form a militant wing called the Faylaq al-Badr (Badr Brigades), using other exiles and Iraqi prisoners of war captured during the 1980–1988 war. This force fought against the Iraqi military and later undertook cross-border operations against the Iraqi government in the years following the 1988 ceasefire.

A separate set of Dawa members remained in Iraq after 1980. The most exceptional figure to emerge from among them was Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr (Sadr II), the nephew of the martyred Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr. Sadr II was born into one of the two greatest clerical families, but he focused his attention on the *mustazafin* (dispossessed), the rural poor who migrated to Iraq's cities during the 1980s and 1990s. Sadr II reached the masses by reinvigorating the practice of Friday sermons and sending young, passionate trainee preachers to mosques across the country. Sadr II identified himself as a “speaking jurisprudent”—a cleric willing to challenge the regime and issue religious rulings (*fatawas*) on temporal issues, as opposed to the “silent jurisprudents” of the traditional *hawza* (religious establishment), whom Sadr accused of kowtowing to the regime. His message was multifaceted:

- Sadr II was intensely nationalistic, bordering on xenophobic, and highly critical of America, Iran, and the exiled Iraqis who settled in Iran.
- He nonetheless supported the *velayat-e faqih* concept of an activist clergy like that in Iran and established unofficial *sharia* courts in Iraq during the Baath years.

- Sadr II was highly critical of corruption and inefficiency, and focused his sermons on practical demands for electricity, clean water, and so on.
- He encouraged adherence to Shiite mysticism (*al-irfan*), particularly belief in the return of the Hidden Imam (or the Mahdi), at which time all temporal power will be null and void.⁵

This message and the mechanisms used by Sadr II alienated him from the traditional *hawza*, whose theological interests remained inward-focused, academic in nature, and disconnected from the common man.

After a lifetime of pushing the limits, Sadr II tested the patience of the Baath regime one time too many, and he was murdered by the regime as Saddam sought to recover authority in the aftermath of December 1998's Operation Desert Fox bombings of regime targets. On February 19, 1999, Sadr II was killed along with his two eldest sons, Mustafa and Muammal. Many al-Sadriyyun (Sadrist) rose up to avenge their fallen *marja al-taqid* (object of emulation), which refers to the Shiite practice of selecting a particular cleric's teachings to follow; the cleric also serves as the trustee of religious taxes contributed by the follower.⁶ For two days, uprisings occurred in cities across the south, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of Sadrist supporters, and retaliatory assassinations of Baath Party members continued for months afterward. As in the 1991 uprisings, Sadrist followers blamed SCIRI and other exile groups for failing to support the 1999 uprising.⁷ Some followers turned to Sadr II's stated successor as their object of emulation, an Iranian cleric called Ayatollah Kadhim Husseini Haeri. Because Haeri was based in Iran, however, many Sadrists preferred to continue following Sadr II's preachings even

4. This system was developed by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and was applied in Iran following the 1979 Islamic revolution. The doctrine challenged centuries of Shiite clerical thought on noninvolvement in politics by advocating that stewardship of temporal power should be held by theological *fuyuhaba* (jurists).

5. Cole, “The United States and Shi'ite Religious Factions,” pp. 251–253; Rory Stewart, *Occupational Hazards: My Time Governing in Iraq* (London: Picador, 2006), p. 252. Also see Bartle Bull, “Iraq's Rebel Democrats,” *Prospect* (May 19, 2005); Ahmed Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 267.

6. Howard Schneider, “Clashes Reported in Iraq,” *Washington Post*, February 24, 1999; Sean Boyne, “Troubles for Saddam,” *Jane's Intelligence Review* 11, no. 8 (August 1999).

7. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, p. 267.

after his death. This practice marked a major deviation from the Shiite tradition of following a living *marja*. Many Shiites adopted Sadr's remaining son, Muqtada, now under a loose form of house arrest, as his representative. As Rory Stewart argued, the martyrdom of Sadr II and the 1999 uprising marked an important change in Shiite religious practice in Iraq, underlining the fallen cleric's profound legacy: "When Saddam killed Sadr II, he completed the cleric's transformation of Iraqi Shi'ism. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis no longer deferred to the great theologians of Najaf but instead—and almost blasphemously—regarded the dead Sadr II as 'their source of emulation' and even followed his twenty-eight-year-old son, Moqtada."⁸

The followers of the martyred cleric continued to run an office, the Jamaat al-Sadr al-Thani (hereafter the Organization of the Martyr Sadr, or OMS)⁹ and preach the message developed by Sadr II. The OMS used its network of young preachers—typically men in their late twenties led by somewhat older colleagues of Sadr II—to continue building a youth movement among the urban poor across the south.

The Prewar Political Landscape

As the events and actors just described shaped the Islamist dimension of Iraq's political landscape, the regime and the millions of Iraqis it controlled went about their daily lives. Government suppression and shortages of funding reduced the traditional *hawza* to roughly a tenth of its original size in the quarter of a century since the Baath Party declared war on political Islamists, yet it remained a relatively well-financed and potentially influential entity led by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, a "silent jurist" in the terminology of Sadr II. The mercantile, religiously moderate, urban middle classes also remained, as Ahmed Hashim explained: "Even though the middle class in Iraq had collapsed as a material sector in terms of salaries, it exists in the sense of values and beliefs held

by a group of Iraqis who consider themselves middle class. While it is true to say that years of sanctions had eroded the clear-cut lines between classes, it is true to say that deep fault-lines exist between the haves and the have-nots."¹⁰

These "have-nots" comprised the urban and rural poor: the uneducated masses, or "the mob," as the upper and middle classes might have characterized them. Because of the rapid urbanization of southern Iraq, most of the urban poor were only a single generation removed from what Juan Cole described as "the hardscrabble farms of the south." They "retained their tribal identities, customs, rituals and ties in their new environment." This heritage meant that they were never far from their weapons. Like their rural cousins, they were nepotistic in the extreme and particularly receptive to the pragmatic religious preaching of Sadr II and his followers, as opposed to what Juan Cole called "the scholastic and bookish Shi'ism of the semi-urban cities."¹¹

Overlaying the already stratified society, Saddam Hussein ran the nation in a highly centralized and bureaucratized manner. Provincial governors, mayors, and police chiefs were centrally trained and appointed. A parallel layer of centrally appointed Baath Party officials were overlaid on these levels of government to supervise their counterparts in the executive. A highly bureaucratic system for monitoring tribal politics was painstakingly maintained, even if it did begin to fray during the regime's final decade of control. Great swaths of the populace—Sunni and Shiite alike—were inculcated into the Baath Party to allow them access to jobs or merely to earn the yearly stipend. The entire population relied on the government for subsidized food and fuel. Multiple security agencies maintained an effective watch. In essence, as Anthony Cordesman noted: "Iraq had evolved into both a well-policed and a 'self-policing' society, in which the populace internalized 'correct' patterns of conformity and norms

8. Stewart, *Occupational Hazards*, p. 551.

9. This translation is not exact; Jamaat al-Sadr al-Thani might translate as "the Sadr movement" or the Sadrist "trend" or "current." In coalition circles, OMS is a more widely used term for Muqtada al-Sadr's office.

10. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, p. 268

11. Cole, "The United States and Shi'ite Religious Factions," pp. 546, 548.

of behavior. The slightest sign of discontent was dealt with ruthlessly and effectively.”¹²

This description is not an endorsement for Saddam’s Iraq, but rather a clear-sighted characterization

of an intricate and carefully balanced security state in which all citizens knew their place and understood the boundaries of acceptable behavior appropriate to a person with a particular level of patronage.

12. Anthony Cordesman, *Iraq: Sanctions and Beyond* (Washington: CSIS, 1997), p. 103.

The Summer of Discontent

THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT entered into the complex political and factional environment of southern Iraq with a very simple plan. Furthermore, the plan was hatched at a very late stage, even compared to broader coalition planning. Phases I–III of Operation Telic, the British code name for the British part in Operation Iraqi Freedom, comprising the military campaign, saw considerable change up to the invasion. Most significant, British forces were originally intended to enter Iraq from Turkey to secure a number of northern cities, an option that was dropped only in January 2003 when British forces were instead given responsibility for Basra and Maysan provinces at the exact opposite end of the country. The British government failed to develop a fully integrated Phase IV plan covering Iraq’s postconflict stabilization, recovery, and transition to self-rule, largely because of the need within the British government—deeply divided over the invasion—to be seen to give diplomacy every chance to work. As a result, postwar planning was held tightly in a small insular cell of the Cabinet Office and only gradually involved the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DfID).¹

Britain’s “Vision for Iraq and the Iraqi People,” launched at the Azores summit on March 17, 2003, outlined British hopes that Iraq would become “a stable, united and law-abiding state within its present borders, cooperating with the international community, no longer posing a threat to its neighbors or to international security, abiding by all its international obligations and providing effective representative government to its own people.”² Britain’s campaign objectives focused on the disarmament of Iraq and the removal of the Baath regime as well as the security of essential economic

infrastructure, “the creation of a secure environment so that normal life can be restored,” and the transition to a “transitional civilian administration” to enable British forces to “withdraw as soon as practicable.”³

Entering the South

When the British military entered southern Iraq on March 20, 2003, their operational objectives and tasks were clear. Critical economic infrastructure, such as the oil fields and the port of Umm Qasr, were first to be secured. The Iraqi Army III and IV Corps based in Basra and Maysan provinces were then to be “masked” by a screen of British forces to prevent them from striking at the coalition’s lines of supply from Kuwait. Although the urban centers of Basra and Maysan provinces were due to be secured eventually, they were not to be entered until serious resistance could be discounted, perhaps only after the regime had been removed from Baghdad. Within four days, British forces had achieved their initial goal of relieving U.S. military units holding the oil fields and Umm Qasr, as well as surrounding Basra in a loose encirclement from the north, west, and southeast. In the small towns outside the cities, British forces began to put into effect aspects of Phase IV operations, transitioning to humanitarian support and delivering “quick impact projects” administered directly by unit commanders. Despite these worthy efforts, as early as March 24, 2003, British cabinet ministers were answering parliamentary questions about the apparent lack of jubilation among liberated Iraqis. This discomfiting phenomenon was more often attributed to the intimidation capacity of Baathist diehards than the deep distrust of the coalition felt by the same Iraqis who had seen Anglo-American forces return Iraq to Baath control after months of coalition

1. See House of Commons uncorrected transcript of oral evidence to be published as HC 1241-I, minutes of evidence taken before the Defense Committee, “UK Operations in Iraq,” June 20, 2006. Available online (www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmsselect/cmdfence/uc1241-i/uc124102.htm).
2. See U.K. Ministry of Defense, *Operations in Iraq: First Reflections* (London: Director General Corporate Communication, 2003), chapter 7. Available online (www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2003/iraq2003operations_ukmod_july03.pdf).
3. See House of Commons, “UK Operations in Iraq,” June 20, 2006.

occupation in the spring of 1991 and had since suffered a dozen years of Western-imposed sanctions.⁴

Britain studiously avoided issuing any call for an uprising in Baath-occupied cities, such as Basra and the satellite cities of Abu al-Khasib and al-Zubayr, wishing to limit the potential for civilian as well as British casualties.⁵ Defense Secretary Geoff Hoon summed up British thinking when he stated on March 24, 2003: “These towns and cities have no military strategic significance. Clearly they will have to be liberated, but I think it is best to be patient about the way we deal with them, rather than risking regular forces to, in effect, clean up those pockets of resistance when it is not militarily necessary to do so in the short term.”⁶

Instead, British forces undertook a very methodical approach to liberating these areas that eventually proved difficult to sustain politically. In the opening week of the war, the British government stressed Baathist intimidation of the Basrawi population, which eventually translated into an imperative to liberate the city. British minister of state for the armed forces Adam Ingram reacted to press queries about the siege of Basra on April 4, 2003, noting: “Our restraint should not be interpreted as weakness, rather it is a sign of care borne out of the commitment we made not to harm the Iraqi people.”⁷ Between March 29 and April 1, the outlying cities of Abu al-Khasib and al-Zubayr were liberated as trial runs, using precision strikes on Baath headquarters and eventually armored raids akin to the American “thunder runs” used in Najaf and Baghdad.

Operation James, the effort to liberate Basra, began in earnest on April 4–5 with “thunder runs” and snatch operations against Baath Party targets identified by British intelligence gatherers operating inside Basra city. These teams next identified what they thought was

the location of the notorious “Chemical” Ali Hasan al-Majid, Saddam’s appointed commander of the Baath defense effort in the deep south. The location was struck by precision air attack on April 5, and Chemical Ali’s death was announced shortly afterward.⁸ British intelligence gatherers in Basra reported signs that the citizenry were mobilizing to take control of their individual neighborhoods by erecting barricades and forming armed militias. British forces launched a series of major “thunder runs” into the city on April 6, striking from almost all points of the compass and collapsing the Baath defense of the city. After nineteen days of siege, Basra’s liberation was announced on April 7.⁹

Reluctance to Police

As British forces completed sweeps of Basra city and the province from April 7 in search of Baathist die-hards, urban areas suffered from an orgy of looting. British forces were unprepared for the collapse of law and order, having received no advice on their legal responsibilities in Iraq. At this time, the coalition had not accepted the legal mantle of occupier, including the legal responsibility to prevent looting. British forces were also too thin on the ground to have a serious effect. The ratio of British troops to Iraqi civilians in Basra was approximately 1:370, in sharp contrast to the 1:50 ratio of British peacekeepers to civilians in Kosovo or 1:65 in the Belfast area of Northern Ireland, and in even sharper contrast to the 1:40 proportion of security personnel to populace in Saddam’s Basra. As a result, the British military largely ignored the looting, which occurred wherever the British vacated an area. One reporter witnessed such an event, writing: “When British troops pulled out of their temporary base at Basra Polytechnic College, a cheer arose from

4. Secretary of State for Defense Hoon’s comments are available online (www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iraq/2003/iraq-030324-uk-mod01.htm).

5. On February 15, 1991, President George Herbert Walker Bush issued the famous appeal: “[T]here’s another way for the bloodshed to stop, and that’s for the Iraqi military and the Iraqi people to take matters into their own hands to force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside.” See *Human Rights Watch World Report 1992*, “Endless Torment: The 1991 Uprising in Iraq and Its Aftermath” (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1992).

6. Available online (www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iraq/2003/iraq-030324-uk-mod01.htm).

7. Ingram’s press conference is available online (www.operations.mod.uk/telic/press_4april.htm).

8. In fact, “Chemical” Ali was not killed in the attack, but the coalition’s announcement of his death proved a decisive factor in reducing the fear felt by Basrawis and hastening the end of the siege.

9. Williamson Murray and Robert Scates, *The Iraq War: A Military History* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003), p. 145. Also see authors’ interviews with UK intelligence and military personnel.

hundreds of looters waiting outside the gate in cars three deep. In a cloud of dust, they rushed into the campus to strip air conditioners, oscilloscopes, drafting tables and blackboards from classrooms.”¹⁰

The British government sought to downplay the looting as a “redistribution of wealth amongst the Iraqi people” that was solely aimed at regime establishments.¹¹ In fact, alongside government offices, the looting targeted banks, shops, hotels, and homes. Carjacking became widespread. In retrospect, British parliamentary committees have probed whether such looting should have been anticipated.¹² A cursory look at recent Iraqi history suggests that looting was a predictable Iraqi reaction to a loosening of state authority. The Iraqi military had a longstanding tradition of allowing its soldiers to confiscate property in conquered towns, resulting in the traditional officer’s adage “*Ru’ous al-nas ilaya wa’amwaaibum ilayka*” (the heads of the people are for me, their property is for you). In civilian society, *farhud* (government-sanctioned looting) was a part of the judicial system and involved townspeople being allowed to loot private properties of convicted hoarders or tax evaders. In the 1991 uprising, looting had also been endemic, both against government facilities and against commercial and private property.¹³

Far from clamping down on looting, Britain let the spree burn itself out for four days and focused on its rote intentions of “normalizing” the province as quickly as possible. To the Iraqis, their post-Saddam experience was proving to be anything but normal, and the coalition’s actions were difficult to fathom. Regime changes in Iraq were usually orderly affairs that were resolved quickly and decisively; they included predictable features, such as martial law, curfews, and rapid

communication of the new pecking order through television and radio. In contrast, the British army was already reducing its presence in Basra by April 11, pulling out its heavy armor and eschewing curfews and vehicle checkpoints in an attempt to “normalize” the environment.¹⁴ About 900 unarmed Iraqi police personnel were quickly reconstituted and put on the streets, allowing the British military commander in Basra to announce on May 9 that “we have a functioning police force.”¹⁵ In fact, even at its estimated full pre-war strength, the Basra police force had only ever acted as eyes and ears of the security establishment. The real muscle and authority lay with the Baath intelligence services and the military, which were dismantled immediately after the war. British forces were reluctant to become the muscle; as one officer noted in an April 2003 interview: “We can’t provide law and order. Only a police force can do that. No one’s actually started planning how it’s going to go after the war. There’s a real vacuum.”¹⁶

The Summer of Discontent

In the absence of either a functioning Iraqi bureaucracy or new multinational partners, the vacuum became the responsibility of the coalition presence in the deep south, represented by the Coalition Provisional Authority–South (CPA South) and the British-led Multinational Division South East, or MND(SE), both based in Basra.¹⁷ The former organization consisted of only a thirty-odd-person regional staff plus a governate coordinator and small civil-military team in each province. Drastically downsized from the 26,000 troops present in the southeast in May 2003, MND(SE) was formed in July around a

10. Mark Magnier, “People of Basra Hope for Trust, Security,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 9, 2003.

11. George Jones, “Carry on Looting, Hoon Tells Civilians in Basra,” *Daily Telegraph* (London), April 12, 2003; also see Adam Ingram’s press conference, available online (www.operations.mod.uk/telic/press_4april.htm).

12. See House of Commons uncorrected transcript of oral evidence to be published as HC 1241-I, minutes of evidence taken before the Defense Committee, “UK Operations in Iraq,” June 20, 2006. Available online (www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmdfence/uc1241-i/uc124102.htm).

13. Najib al-Salihi, *Al-Zilzal* (the earthquake) (London: Al-Rafid Distribution and Publishing, 1998), pp. 68, 237–238. Also see *Human Rights Watch World Report 1992*, “Endless Torment: The 1991 Uprising in Iraq and Its Aftermath” (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1992).

14. See Adam Ingram’s press conference, available online (www.operations.mod.uk/telic/press_4april.htm).

15. Mark Santora, “Under Low-Key British Rules, Basra Shows Signs of Coming Back to Life,” *New York Times*, May 9, 2003.

16. Magnier, “People of Basra Hope for Trust, Security.”

17. These organizations shared the same area of operations: Basra, Dhi Qar, Maysan, and Muthanna provinces.

core of 9,000 British troops spread between Basra and Maysan provinces.

As Andrew Garfield noted, the British quickly adopted a limited set of objectives focused on restoring essential services, getting the population back to work, and achieving a basic level of security.¹⁸ CPA South and MND(SE) became involved in reconstruction on a far broader scope than envisaged in the initial humanitarian aid package to be delivered under Phase IV of the war plan. Multinational assistance was sorely lacking, forcing the British military to play a far more direct role in reconstruction than it had anticipated. Nevertheless, MND(SE) began its very full program of reconstruction work with tremendous industriousness, and many individual utilities and services were restored to prewar standards, improved on prewar standards, or were even introduced where they had never been available before.

What the coalition did not anticipate, however, was that the Iraqis of the deep south were not patient, nor were their expectations based on what they had experienced in the past. Their expectations were, in many senses, far higher than they had ever been. They were partly driven by material reasons—inflation causing a higher cost of living, or greater demand for electricity and fuels caused by the massive import of cars, air conditioners, and other machinery. The removal of well-understood social mechanisms also drove expectations higher. Under Saddam, for instance, jobs were handed out on the basis of patronage, so if 2,500 jobs were available, only the chosen 2,500 need apply. Under the coalition, 11,000 applicants might arrive at the make-work scheme of 2,500 jobs and face the unfamiliar disappointment and uncertainty of the open market. Mostly, however, Iraqi expectations were based in the belief that the coalition was capable of solving almost any problem, in part reflecting the message of the coalition's own Information Operations broadcasts before and during the war. As CPA South spokesman

Iain Pickard noted in August 2003: “There’s no question in my mind that people’s expectations were raised very high and they felt we had led them to expect dramatic improvements when Saddam was toppled. We’ve not managed to meet those expectations. Until we got here, we didn’t appreciate the scale of the task.”¹⁹

The summer of discontent was marked by two notable expressions of growing impatience with the coalition. The first was the onset of increasingly violent demonstrations, typically linked to pay disputes, unemployment, or electricity and fuel shortages. These began in June and reached a crescendo in August, when a two-day outage of electricity and concurrent fuel shortage brought Basra to a standstill in the sweltering midsummer heat. A fight over high fuel prices at one gas station sparked a wave of protests citywide, with thousands on the street burning tires and hurling rocks at British troops, who returned fire with rubber bullets, killing three Iraqis. A more profound breakdown in security was prevented only by the issuance of a *fatwa* by Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and the coalition’s timely move to import fuel from Kuwait and improve protection for fuel convoys and petrol stations.

The End of Innocence

MND(SE) also faced pressure to increase public security in the face of deteriorating security in the deep south. By late summer 2003, a paid-for assassination cost the equivalent of approximately sixty dollars, and carjacking, kidnapping, housebreaking, and extortion were all rising sharply.²⁰ Without an improvement in security, the coalition could expect its reconstruction efforts to fail and even greater public resentment to build. Lt. Col. Matt Maer termed this dynamic “a vicious cycle of non-engagement.”²¹ As important, even moderate Basrawis were attending demonstrations to berate the coalition for failing to maintain security.

In such a well-armed society—glutted with weaponry looted from the detritus of two Iraqi army corps

18. Andrew Garfield, *Succeeding in Phase IV: British Perspectives on the U.S. Effort to Stabilize and Reconstruct Iraq* (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2006), p. 56.

19. Anthony Shahid, “In Basra, Worst May Be Ahead,” *Washington Post*, August 12, 2003.

20. Bill Neely, “Crime-Racked Basra Calls on British Troops to Get Tougher,” *The Independent on Sunday* (London), October 12, 2003.

21. Richard Holmes, *Dusty Warriors* (London: Harper Press, 2006), p. 113.

stationed in the deep south—any attempt to restore basic security was bound to incur serious risks. All Iraqi factions were exceedingly well armed by the summer of 2003, as Brig. Gen. William Hewitt Moore, then the British commander in Basra, noted:

Iraq is the most volatile and violent place in which I have served. The population as a whole possessed a lot of weaponry, with at least two weapons in most households. In addition, the tribes and criminal gangs were very well armed, with heavy machine-guns, rocket-propelled grenades and bombing-making kit... When criminals conducted their activities, they went heavily armed and they were always ready to shoot at us if we came across them... I suspect we have two or three shooting incidents involving armed criminals every night.²²

The attempt to restore basic security led British forces to adopt high levels of patrolling—between 1,000 and 2,000 patrols per week by the brigade-sized force—and led to increasing numbers of contacts. Most involved exchanges of small-arms fire with metal thieves, car-jackers, kidnap gangs, smugglers, and river pirates, but an increasing number of deadlier roadside bombs targeted British forces throughout the summer, indicating more-organized opposition by a combination of tribal and Islamist forces involved in organized crime.

The ultimate expression of the violence lying just beneath the surface in the deep south was the June 24, 2003, slaying of six British Royal Military Police officers in Majar al-Kabir. Even by the standards of Maysan province, Majar was a tough, densely populated city that had proven ungovernable during Saddam's time and had a proud record of resistance during and

after the 1991 uprising. Like the rest of Maysan province, Majar had liberated itself from Baath rule; so when British forces arrived, they were received frostily by the locals.²³ British attempts to collect heavy weapons engendered considerable ill will, as one local police recruit commented: "After three months and more, they still don't understand us. Guns are precious to these people. We didn't give them up to Saddam Hussein and they won't to the British. The attitude of men here is, 'kill my son, but don't take my gun.'"²⁴

British troops had also caused considerable anger in Majar by undertaking house searches and using dogs to search for explosives, and fighting broke out between the British and locals on June 24 as the result of a misunderstanding. A number of British patrols were attacked in a mini-uprising, and an isolated detachment of six British military police were overrun at an Iraqi police station and killed during a desperate close-quarters fight.

The brutality of the incident cut through an air of complacency that had developed in the relatively quiet MND(SE) area of operations and exposed some uncomfortable truths. The local population was neither patient nor harmless. Consent for occupation was exceedingly fragile. Despite their reputation for more enlightened "community soldiering," British soldiers had crossed local red lines without knowing it. Put plainly, MND(SE) did not know enough about the cultural environment it was operating in.²⁵ The latent hostility of that environment first came to the surface in Majar. As Richard Holmes noted in his account of Britain's experience in Iraq, "the honeymoon was over."²⁶

22. Brigadier General Moore's testimony to the House of Commons is available online (www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk/judgmentsfiles/j2980/al_skeini-v-ssfd.htm).

23. For background on Maysan, see Rory Stewart, *Occupational Hazards: My Time Governing in Iraq* (London: Picador, 2006). Also see Holmes, *Dusty Warriors*, pp. 6, 116; Michael Schwartz, "Forgotten Iraq: The War in Maysan Province," November 4, 2005 (available online at www.tomdispatch.com); also see al-Salih, *Al-Zilzal*, pp. 98, 103, 122–124, 130.

24. Quoted in Daniel McGrory, "Locals Predict More Bloodshed in Murder Town," *London Times*, July 1, 2003.

25. See House of Commons uncorrected evidence on "UK Operations in Iraq," June 20, 2006; Holmes, *Dusty Warriors*, p. 71; Garfield, *Succeeding in Phase IV*, pp. 31, 60; Kim Sengupta, "British Troops Agree to Suspend Arms Searches," *The Independent* (London), June 27, 2003.

26. Holmes, *Dusty Warriors*, p. 99.

Rise of the Parties

ALONGSIDE RECONSTRUCTION and security, the third core task of the coalition was the preparation for transition to Iraqi self-rule. In the deep south, at least as much as elsewhere in Iraq, the coalition started from a knowledge base of zero. Although British officers complained about the lack of predeployment political briefing by FCO in 2003, they probably would not have learned much of use about the politics of the deep south from the diplomatic corps.¹ Britain's foreign office and intelligence services had long maintained contacts with the exiled Shiite opposition, albeit mainly the more genteel clerics who were sometimes mocked as "the opposition of the four-star hotels" or the "Rolex-wearing" opposition. Relationships were more distant with the Iranian and Syrian-based opposition groups, such as SCIRI, and next to nothing was known about domestic Iraqi movements, such as the OMS.² Intelligence gathering prior to Operation Telic had not improved the situation measurably because Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) was primarily tasked with advising the British military and scraping together a haphazard range of contacts to facilitate contact between advancing British troops and local community leaders in and around Basra. Indeed, as Basra's neighborhoods began to self-organize in early April, the SIS presence in the city was more focused on the narrow military task of locating "Chemical" Ali.

In the weeks that followed the fall of Basra, Britain's intelligence community contributed little to the military's initial understanding of the political landscape. The priority for coalition intelligence gatherers remained the location of regime leaders and the search for weapons of mass destruction. In those early days, when a speedy withdrawal was envisaged, the immediate

priority for military leaders on the ground was the identification of municipal and administrative leaders suitable for service on municipal councils or in reconstituted government branches. In a small town such as Umm Qasr, the first Iraqi town to be liberated, the process was rough and ready, resulting in a handoff to a locally selected council of notables by May 16, 2003. In Amara, the capital of Maysan province, a solution presented itself. The British forces arrived a week after the locals threw off the Baath yoke and found a council of sorts already in place under the chairmanship of a leadership figure, Karim Mahood Hattab, also known as Abu Hatim, the "Prince of the Marshes."

Tribes and Urbanites in Basra

In cosmopolitan Basra, a highly political city of 1.3 million with a large urban class and a dozen major tribes, the identification of a provincial leader proved more difficult. The first British candidate to lead Basra's advisory council was a religious tribal sheikh, Muzahim Tamimi, but his appointment as well as those of the police officers he selected prompted violent condemnation from protesters decrying his alleged links to the former regime. As he fell from favor a prominent businessman and more secular figure, Ghalib Kubba, was pushed forward. However, Kubba was also viewed with suspicion by critics who refused to believe that he could have accrued wealth without close ties to Saddam's family.³ Although de-Baathification would stymie much of Britain's institution-building in southern Iraq because almost all professional persons held party membership, the problems Britain faced in appointing an advisory council also pointed to the broader difficulty of reaching consensus on a single leader acceptable to all the

1. Richard Holmes, *Dusty Warriors* (London: Harper Press, 2006), pp. 71, 113.

2. Juan Cole, "The United States and Shi'ite Religious Factions in Post-Ba'athist Iraq," *Middle East Journal* 57, no. 4 (Autumn 2003), p. 543; Andrew Garfield, *Succeeding in Phase IV: British Perspectives on the U.S. Effort to Stabilize and Reconstruct Iraq* (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2006), p. 61.

3. Robyn Dixon, "A Dust-Up in Basra's Leadership Vacuum," *Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 2003. For example, Abbas Muhammad Musa, a fertilizer merchant, said of Kubba, "He's a partner of Uday Hussein. It's well known. . . . All commercial people from the first class in Iraq, all of them are partners of Saddam Hussein. We want somebody representative of Iraqi people."

factions present in Basra. Not until July 5, 2003, was Judge Wael Abdul Latif selected by the interim advisory council as the interim governor of Basra province, and even then his rule was beset by challenges to his authority.

The initial failure of the appointment of Sheikh Tamimi was also indicative of a broader phenomenon across the deep south, namely the initial power struggle between local tribal and urban commercial classes to control the major cities. The commercial middle class has been described as “politically immobile” and “innately conservative,” a reactionary social group that habitually kept a low profile. This moneyed class feared a major shift in power following the fall of the Baath regime, whether that change might come from an influx of rural tribes, the return of exiled Islamist radicals, or the rise of urban have-nots collectively viewed as the “mob.”⁴ In the weeks after the liberation of Basra, the commercial middle classes mounted a vigorous campaign against Tamimi and other potential tribal candidates across the south.

After the postwar window of opportunity closed, it never reopened again for the tribes in Basra. The factors that once made the tribes seem like attractive partners to the British newcomers—their apparent secularity and hierarchical structure—were soon overshadowed by their many negative traits. The venal nature of tribal sheikhs was one problem, with Wasit province CPA governate coordinator Mark Etherington describing tribal power as “a selfish and self-aggrandizing impulse that by its very nature could not be conscripted for national ends.”⁵ Rory Stewart, Etherington’s counterpart in neighboring Maysan, went further. Although tribal leaders could be influential in the countryside, Stewart noted:

The tribes, who were the most clearly defined and long-established group, were collapsing. . . . Social change and government policy had eroded their power. . . . Most urban Iraqis perceived the tribes as illiterate, embarrassing, criminal, powerful anachronisms who should

be given no official recognition. The sheikhs could no longer, despite their claims, raise thousands of men. . . . Their daily visits to our offices to request building contracts, clinics and the chance to form militias proved how short they were of money and patronage power. In the struggle to remain, they relied on theft, kidnapping, smuggling and looting.⁶

In conclusion, Etherington noted: “What the tribes principally offered was protection, and their main sanction was its removal.”⁷ As such, they quickly ceased to be seen as a part of the solution and were increasingly viewed by coalition officials as part of the problem as 2003 unfolded.

The Domestic Islamist Parties

In May 2003, a major CPA policy decision was made to put a freeze on the devolution of power to Iraqis. In the month since the fall of Baghdad, all sorts of municipal and provincial advisory councils had begun to form, and small caucuses or even “one man, one vote” local elections were being planned across the south. This process was halted by the CPA, which instead sought to hold political power within itself during a longer transitional period and directly control the means used to choose Iraqi representatives on municipal and provincial councils. CPA Baghdad decided the new course unilaterally and communicated it to the regions. On May 26, CPA South put the order into effect by launching Operation Phoenix, a civil-military operation to dissolve all unofficial councils and remove them from government premises. The new model for municipal government now placed executive power in the hands of Ole Wohlers Olsen, CPA governate coordinator for Basra, and Brig. Adrian Bradshaw, commander of the Basra garrison, who were supported by an interim committee of Iraqi technocrats appointed to run local ministry branches (water, police, health, education, electricity, and so forth) and a separate civic forum without executive powers.⁸

4. Mark Etherington, *Revolt on the Tigris* (London: Hurst and Company, 2005), p. 212.

5. Etherington, *Revolt on the Tigris*, p. 199.

6. Rory Stewart, *Occupational Hazards: My Time Governing in Iraq* (London: Picador, 2006), pp. 230–231.

7. Etherington, *Revolt on the Tigris*, p. 104.

8. William Booth, “Chafing at Authority in Iraq; Firing of Council in Basra Upsets Middle Class,” *Washington Post*, May 30, 2003.

Operation Phoenix was in large part designed to shield nascent political structures from the gathering strength of Islamist parties, who were already clearly capable of overpowering the kinds of secular moderates that the coalition hoped would be important political players in the new Iraq. Popular reaction instead saw it as a denial of space for Iraqis to govern. The inaugural meeting of the interim committee on June 1, which coincided with Prime Minister Blair's first visit to Basra, was fraught. In a symbolic moment, Brigadier Bradshaw intended to select an Iraqi to act as co-chairman, but no Iraqi would fill the seat Bradshaw left open. Outside, a crowd of thousands marched on the city hall, denouncing "British rule" and the "anti-democratic" actions taken by the coalition, and forced their way past the British military police cordon. Two sheikhs who led the demonstration, the Sadrists Ahmed al-Maliky and Khazal al-Saedy, were invited in and duly persuaded the other Iraqis present that the British should not be selecting representatives. The Iraqis left, saying they would reconvene after Iraqi backing had been secured, and the meeting broke up. The sheikhs, initially excluded from the meeting, had thus succeeded in spoiling a process designed specifically to limit their influence.⁹

Shiite Islamists were thus highly active from the outset, showing that politics did not halt in the Shiite deep south merely because the coalition said it should. In fact, opportunistic intra-Shiite politicking and violent power-brokering had been ongoing since April 2003 across the south and center of Iraq. The most dramatic factional play was the adoption of strong-arm tactics by Muqtada al-Sadr's movement to take control of key shrines in Najaf, which can only be described as a carefully planned coup attempt. Sadrist supporters occupied the Imam Ali shrine as soon as Baath fedayeen vacated the site, seizing Shiite Islam's holiest shrine and the richest source of *khums* (religious taxes) in Iraq.

When Abdul Majid al-Khoei, the son of a legendary Shiite cleric, was flown into Najaf in a coalition-backed attempt to influence Shiite politics at the highest level, he was promptly murdered by Sadrist militiamen at the Imam Ali shrine on April 9. Armed Sadrists then moved against the traditional *hawza* and surrounded the houses of all foreign-born grand ayatollahs (two from Iran, one from Afghanistan), including that of Iranian-born Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, and gave them forty-eight hours to leave Najaf. By April 14, the Sadrist threat had been faced down by armed tribal elements loyal to the Najaf city elders, but the incident served as a warning that the Sadrists were serious about displacing the existing order and replacing it with a new order based exclusively on the teachings of Sadr II.¹⁰

Alongside the establishment of an alternative *hawza*, the Sadrists immediately announced the establishment of an alternative government and later proceeded to establish alternative councils to mirror coalition-backed structures at the provincial level. The Thawra district of eastern Baghdad, renamed Sadr City, was quickly established as a "no-go zone" for both coalition forces and other Islamist parties, such as SCIRI, resulting in the eviction of Badr Brigades militiamen as early as April 17, 2003. The OMS developed an alternative legislature confirmed by plebiscite, plus an executive branch staffed by movement activists. It organized the provision of food, water, fuel, and medical services. Law and order fell within the OMS's remit, resulting in a Sadr-controlled police force, *sharia* courts, and clerical jurisprudence on legal disputes.¹¹ Perhaps most important, the OMS became a mouthpiece of the discontent felt by the Shiite community and quickly attained a high profile by publicly criticizing any hiatus in service provision and organizing local work-arounds, much as Sadrist clerics had done throughout the latter decade of Saddam's rule.

The OMS very quickly boosted its following among the young urban poor, exploiting the massive

9. Mark Lacy, "Plans for a British-Appointed Ruling Council in Basra Go Awry," *New York Times*, May 1, 2003. Also see Cole, "The United States and Shi'ite Religious Factions," p. 351.

10. Cole, "The United States and Shi'ite Religious Factions," pp. 549, 554–556. Also see Ahmed Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 234, 265.

11. Michael Schwartz, "The Taming of Sadr City," *Asia Times*, January 12, 2005. Also see Cole, "The United States and Shi'ite Religious Factions," pp. 557, 564.

unemployment caused by the combination of long-term structural factors, near-term collapse of uncompetitive Iraqi industries exposed to the free market, and mass dissolution of the armed forces. The Sadrists' key demographic—"the mob"—caused alarm in the established political elites, summed up in Abu Hatim's withering epithet, which described Sadrists as "unemployed illiterates who like to riot."¹² The movement and its newly formed Jaish al-Mahdi (Mahdi Army) militia not only offered its young dispossessed followers an identity and a job, complete with ID card, but also displayed many characteristics likely to alarm the well off. As Juan Cole noted, the Sadrists "were characterized by a Puritanism, militancy and intolerance that was very different from the genteel Najaf tradition."¹³ A key difference, Cole noted, was the Sadrists' exclusivity in making their members swear to select Sadr II as their object of emulation, a decision that is usually a sacrosanct personal choice in Shiite Islam. The revulsion the established political classes felt toward this new sect was entirely mutual, as Juan Cole noted when he wrote that the Sadrists' "antagonism to the secular middle class values of the Iraqi political elite is often extreme." The destruction or forced closure of cinemas, video and music shops, internet cafés, barbers, and liquor stores may have been ordered by Sadrist clerics, but such acts were willingly undertaken by the have-nots of Iraqi society.¹⁴

Enter SCIRI

Although the established political classes also feared and resented émigrés such as those forming SCIRI, the latter proved to be a much slicker and infinitely more palatable partner for the coalition and the Shiite establishment than the Sadrists. Following months of accelerated infiltration of SCIRI officials in early 2003, SCIRI militiamen from the Badr organization entered

Iraq as formed military units in March 2003 and established bases in Baquba and Kut, quickly infiltrating fighters to the base of the Hakim family in Najaf. Once there, the educated middle-class SCIRI leadership aligned with the traditional *hawza* and lent support in facing down further Sadrist challenges in June and July 2003.¹⁵ SCIRI's greatest asset was its tightly centralized party structure, which generated powerful internal cohesion. This quality allowed the organization to survive the August 2003 assassination of its long-term leader, Ayatollah Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim, and press on with its energetic quest for influence almost without missing a beat.

Although SCIRI quickly began to establish bottom-up grassroots recruitment and youth programs, its initial focus was a top-down courting of the coalition at the national, regional, and provincial levels. In the deep south, where SCIRI had relatively weak ties and faced an especially difficult challenge to extend its influence, the organization took pains to build its ties with the British military by meeting with them on a daily basis throughout early summer 2003. Though SCIRI had only recently ideologically accommodated itself to holding dialogue with Western powers, it quickly became a favored partner of the British on interim advisory councils across the south. Provincial governorships, council seats, and police chief appointments all fell to SCIRI as soon as these institutions were established. Badr Brigades, renamed the Badr Organization for Reconstruction, quickly gained the posts of head of intelligence and head of customs police in Basra.

The activities of Badr-affiliated security organs gave some insight into the true nature of SCIRI's paramilitary elements. Abbas Abd al-Ali, the deputy director of a secret Istikhbarat al-Shurta (Police Intelligence Unit) gave an interview in December 2003 that highlighted

12. Stewart, *Occupational Hazards*, p. 230.

13. Cole, "The United States and Shi'ite Religious Factions," p. 554.

14. Cole, "The United States and Shi'ite Religious Factions," pp. 544, 554, 564. Also see Etherington, *Revolt on the Tigris*, p. 257.

15. See Reidar Visser, "Beyond SCIRI and Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim: The Silent Forces of the United Iraqi Alliance," January 20, 2006, and "Britain in Basra: Past Experiences and Current Challenges," July 11, 2006, paper presented to the Global Gulf conference, University of Exeter, July 4–6, 2006, and originally titled "Melting Pot of the Gulf? Cosmopolitanism and Its Limits in the Experience of Basra's British Community, 1890–1940"; published with some additional reflections on multiculturalism in contemporary Basra and the current British role in the city; both available online (www.historiae.org).

Badr's strong presence in the organization, which was involved in illegal de-Baathification activities in Basra.¹⁶ While Badr elements in police intelligence identified former Baathists and detained some in unauthorized prisons, other SCIRI-affiliated movements used police-supplied intelligence to undertake targeted killings of Sunnis and Shiites accused of Baath-era crimes. The best known of these organizations was Thar Allah (Revenge of Allah), an Islamist movement with ties to both Iran-based émigrés and the tribal community in Basra. Although British forces had strong indicators to suggest such activities were carried out by SCIRI-affiliated groups, the movement's careful courting of the coalition and its use of "cutouts" such as the police intelligence unit and Thar Allah shielded it from further scrutiny.¹⁷

In addition to its security ties, SCIRI was well resourced. Funding and logistical support from Iran initially included water trucks and other vital supplies to support Badr "hearts and minds" operations in spring 2003, supported by access to Iranian-established radio stations to provide SCIRI with direct communications with the Iraqi people. Iran later added to SCIRI's financial coffers to begin a massive program of land, property, and economic infrastructure purchases. In the first wave of privatizations of state-owned assets, SCIRI bought controlling shares in electricity companies, flour mills, and oil services companies, as well as farms, commercial businesses, and factories. The subsidized return of SCIRI's émigré community, consisting of tens of thousands of Iranian-based former prisoners of war and other exiles, strongly inflated prices and rents in cities across the deep south.¹⁸

The Scramble for Power

The coalition's November 2003 announcement that an Iraqi government would be formed in the summer of 2004 signaled the beginning of an intensified scramble

for power across Iraq. As Mark Etherington noted, the sudden announcement undercut the already weak municipal and provincial structures being developed by the CPA and meant that the factions never had to adapt to the rule of law because the CPA tenure was so short.¹⁹ Patrimony of a traditional kind saw leaders emerge from their local communities and establish a community of trust (*abl al-thiqa*) based on their ability to distribute tangible and concrete material awards and to demonstrate ruthlessness.²⁰ As Etherington noted: "What Iraqis sought was the power of patronage: the key was to ensure that one's group—whether tribe, immediate family or friends—remained in the ascendant. This was regarded as the primary task of each member of the clan."²¹ Such Iraqi leaders came to the CPA expecting it be able to decisively grant that kind of patronage and authority, as the old regime had been adept at doing, but went away disappointed at the lack of formal powers and resources provided through the coalition.

Instead of the weak and temporary institutions created by the coalition, the factions were single-minded in their efforts to tap the most enduring source of power in the country—that which is drawn from the barrel of a gun. Armed militias became an essential element of any serious Shiite political faction in the autumn of 2003. Militias operated as stand-alone units or, better yet, lodged their members in the government security forces where they could be paid and their armament subsidized by the central government. The August 29 bombing in Najaf provided a premise for Shiite groups to demand the right to field citizen's security groups, and the precedent was set. Throughout the deep south, card-carrying membership of a political party became equated with the right to carry a weapon for self-defense. Such militias provided the kind of policing that Iraqis had expected the coalition to reestablish after the fall of the regime, including use

16. See Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (hereafter RFE/RL) Iraq report, *Inside Iraq* 7, no. 4 (January 30, 2004).

17. Authors' interviews with coalition intelligence and military officials (London, 2006).

18. Most of the information in this paragraph is drawn from interviews with British military and intelligence officials and Iraqi citizens from the deep south. For background on the return of émigrés, see Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, pp. 236–237, 261.

19. A key point made throughout Etherington, *Revolt on the Tigris*. See Kathleen Ridolfo, "Militiamen Push Their Version of Islam in the Absence of Rule of Law," RFE/RFL Iraq report, *Inside Iraq* 8, no. 11 (March 28, 2005).

20. Anthony Cordesman, *Iraq: Sanctions and Beyond* (Washington: CSIS, 1997), p. 19.

21. Etherington, *Revolt on the Tigris*, p. 83.

of informer networks; control of demonstrations and journalists; arbitrary arrest and torture of suspects; and imposition of vehicle checkpoints, house searches, and curfews.²² Instead of acting as auxiliaries to the coalition—providing tip-offs and citizen's arrests—the militias had replaced the coalition as the primary provider of security, albeit one that displayed neither the former regime's decisive strength nor the coalition's adherence to due process.

The confidence and swagger of militia-backed factions contrasted strongly with the diminutive profile of the secular liberal groups that were originally the coalition's preferred partners. Increasingly, such independents were forced to join religious parties to benefit from their protection and avoid their displeasure.

According to some British officials, a “moment” existed in the early summer of 2003 when the deep south might have taken a different path. According to this view, a cadre of socialist and nationalist politicians, lecturers, engineers, intellectuals, and middle-class professionals could still imagine the development of a serious secular alternative to the Islamists. Perhaps this moment was a figment of the imagination, or perhaps it was simply too fleeting to be grasped. Regardless, the moment passed and was never to come again. Reflecting on a meeting of such moderates in Basra, one reporter noted: “These were Britain's friends in Basra, but they could hardly contain their bitterness. One human rights campaigner said: ‘The British handed the city to the Islamist groups as a gift.’”²³

22. Stewart, *Occupational Hazards*, pp. 87, 273–274.

23. Jonathan Steele, “Basra Intellectuals United by Fear of Rise in Religious Intolerance,” *The Guardian* (Manchester), February 1, 2005.

The Uprising

BY EARLY 2004, the various strands of the Sadrist movement represented just one of the Islamist parties expanding their influence across southern Iraq, yet the organization suffered from especially bad relations with the coalition. One reason for the enmity reserved for the Sadrists within coalition headquarters in the Green Zone was the harsh criticism Sadrist preachers had leveled at the coalition since April 2003. Taking its cue from Sadr II's example, the Sadr movement proved adept at organizing crowd action, and its agitators were responsible for fomenting numerous demonstrations throughout the deep south. As Ahmed Hashim noted, "the Shia were prepared to challenge the authority and legitimacy of the Coalition if the gap between its promises and its achievements was too great. And the Shia political leader best prepared or able to undertake the challenge was none other than Moqtada al-Sadr."¹ The Sadrist movement also sought to undermine fledgling coalition institutions by establishing its own shadow government in Sadr City, making this area a virtual "no-go" zone for coalition and Iraqi government forces, and establishing alternative councils in the provinces and municipalities.

Although many Islamist parties were engaging in agitation and power-mongering, the Sadrists' activities on the violent edge of Iraqi politics marked them out as a special case in the eyes of the CPA headquarters in Baghdad. The murder of the American-backed Ayatollah Abdul Majid al-Khoei on April 11, 2003, was the beginning. Repeated Sadrist attempts to unseat the traditional *hawza*, viewed by the U.S. government as a force for good, were further confirmation. Violent clashes in and around Sadr City in October 2003 that left two American soldiers dead sealed the special status of the Sadrist movement. As 2004 began, the coalition was already considering action against Sadrist clerics for their part in the murder of Khoei and their

role in the deaths of the U.S. soldiers. Many indicators pointed to the growing aggressiveness of local Sadrist leaders across the south, including two key incidents in March 2004. In the first, Sadrist forces launched a well-orchestrated attack on a gypsy village at Qawliya, razing it to the ground and dispersing its residents with mortar fire and an armed assault. The second incident took place in the deep south, albeit at the very fringe of the British-commanded area. In Dhi Qar, Sadrist forces followed a long preparatory period of intimidation against the police forces and Italian troops by forcing a district council to resign at gunpoint, threatening to kill all council members if they sought to return to their posts, burning down internet cafés and other non-*sharia* institutions, and looting factories. The town thereafter became a Sadrist base for attacking coalition patrols and undertaking kidnapping and carjacking activities.²

Patterns of the Uprising

The long-awaited major clash between Sadrists and the coalition began to unfold on March 28, 2004, when the OMS newsletter *al-Hawza* was shut down, and intensified on April 3 when cleric Mustafa al-Yaqubi, a senior aide to Muqtada, was arrested for his alleged part in the assassination of Khoei. In a month packed with religious significance for Iraq's Shiites, and coinciding with coalition attempts to pacify Falluja, the timing of the showdown with Sadr could not have been less opportune. On April 4, Sadr issued a call to all Jaish al-Mahdi units to gather their arms and seize local control across the south. In scenes reminiscent of the 1991 uprisings, Iraqi security forces either stood aside or joined in with the uprising for as long as fortune seemed to favor the rebels. As in previous uprisings, the initial days of the rebellion witnessed a collective venting of discontent across a broad range of

1. Ahmed Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 252.
2. Rory Stewart, *Occupational Hazards: My Time Governing in Iraq* (London: Picador, 2006), pp. 324–325.

locations. Pan-Shiite and cross-sectarian Iraqi solidarity drew a surprising range of Islamist actors into anti-coalition activities. By and large, most Iraqis remained nonaligned and looked on.

The patterns of the uprising reflected the political climate in Shiite Iraq and the strengths and weaknesses of the Sadrist trend. As with previous uprisings in 1991 and 1999, the action became centered on Najaf and Karbala. Also mirroring previous uprisings, the Jaish al-Mahdi held the initiative for only a very short time, lasting between April 4 and 7. From this point onward, the bulk of Sadrist forces in Najaf and Karbala were militarily contained and whittled away over a period of months, with a sharp resurgence in fighting in Najaf during the late summer that was more akin to a “last stand” than an uprising.³ In broad terms, a range of anti-Sadrist elements among Shiite stakeholders and other Islamist parties provided the coalition with sufficient reassurance for the U.S. military to engage the Jaish al-Mahdi in sustained combat operations.

Although the April 2004 uprising was initiated by the centralized leadership of the OMS in response to attacks on its organs and membership, the uprising and the months of intermittent fighting afterward highlighted the fractious nature of the Sadrist movement. The extremely rapid geographic spread of the April uprising was due to the many months of preparation for such a showdown and fairly tight communications links between the OMS and the various local chapters of the Jaish al-Mahdi. From this moment onward, however, centralized control of the Jaish al-Mahdi quickly degraded. Until the uprising, Sadr had adopted, in Juan Cole’s words, a “rejectionist but non-violent” stance toward the U.S. presence, and this stance had been mirrored in the coalition decision not to take action on the arrest warrant outstanding on him.⁴ Despite this

modus vivendi, he had often been drawn into clashes by his followers and was sometimes required to back them, as in April 2004. Sadr did not seek a long confrontation with coalition military power and entered into back-channel negotiations over a truce as early as April 11, 2004. At this point, the centralized leadership’s inability to stop an uprising became clear: the Jaish al-Mahdi did not answer to centralized command. In a sign of desperation, Sadr secretly requested Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani to issue a statement to demobilize the Jaish al-Mahdi, but the “quietist” preacher refused for fear of being held responsible for any subsequent postuprising arrest of Sadr.⁵

Much was learned about the true nature of the Jaish al-Mahdi during the uprising. Local leaders were often implacably anticoalition because of coalition actions against their extensive criminal activities, in addition to any nationalist and religious convictions. The militia’s young, dispossessed followers were little better: the Jaish al-Mahdi regularly looted in the old Iraqi tradition, and its young foot soldiers were often intoxicated on prescription medication and hashish distributed by militia leaders. Alongside such inducements, young recruits were drawn by monetary bonuses for successful attacks.⁶ Local leaders chose to engage with Iranian intelligence on a case-by-case basis, often accepting invitations to train in Iran issued by Ayatollah Kadhim Hussein Haeri, Sadr II’s official successor and Muqtada’s increasingly estranged mentor in Iran.⁷ To Muqtada and the OMS, many headstrong elements of the Jaish al-Mahdi had never been a reliable political tool and were fast becoming an uncontrollable liability.

The Uprising in Maysan and Basra

Because of the highly decentralized nature of the Sadrist movement, the key to understanding its character

3. Mark Etherington, *Revolt on the Tigris* (London: Hurst and Company, 2005), 171–172; Richard Holmes, *Dusty Warriors* (London: Harper Press, 2006), p. 10.

4. Juan Cole, “The United States and Shi’ite Religious Factions in Post-Ba’thist Iraq,” *Middle East Journal* 57, no. 4 (Autumn 2003), p. 559.

5. Most of the information in this paragraph is drawn from author interviews with British military and intelligence officials and Iraqi citizens from the deep south (London, 2006).

6. Holmes, *Dusty Warriors*, pp. 10, 255.

7. Most of the information in this paragraph is drawn from author interviews with British military and intelligence officials and Iraqi citizens from the deep south (London, 2006).

is to focus on its local as opposed to national activities. The uprising's great successes largely occurred outside the deep south, and the differing levels of local support for Sadr within the deep south were clearly visible in the difference between the pattern of the uprising in Maysan compared with that in Basra. The province of Maysan lived up to its reputation as an unruly bastion of local power brokers. The April uprising attracted strong support among Maysan residents, in part because of the strong Sadrism presence in the province, but also because of the region's history of militancy. In 1991, Maysan had quickly and violently thrown off the Baath yoke, and pockets of resistance continued in the province long after the uprising had died out elsewhere in Iraq.⁸ In 2003, the city had likewise self-liberated with much loss of life among Baathists, and Maysan again saw major instability in April 2004. Not until the beginning of May were British forces ready to begin a long-awaited reassertion of control in Amara. British arrest operations led Sadrism forces to retaliate against exposed British positions. Operation Waterloo saw British forces raid the OMS offices in Amara and remove eight truckloads of heavy weaponry, causing a brief cessation of Sadrism attacks.⁹

Although Operation Waterloo pleased the Islamist opponents of local Sadrists (SCIRI and other Islamist groups and tribal collectives grouped as the Maysan Islamist Front during this period), the antioccupation effort would ultimately grow rather than shrink in the province during the summer. The provincial governor, Riyadh Mahood, and his brother, the tribal power broker Abu Hatim, had been gradually undercut by the coalition and the more politically savvy Islamist parties such as SCIRI since late 2003. Though relatively secular and initially pro-coalition, Abu Hatim's tribal confederation had many complaints regarding the coalition's insistence on establishing democratic local governance, resulting in Abu Hatim's resignation from the Iraqi Governing Council in April and local clashes

between the coalition and tribesmen. On the evening of May 14, 2004, the British forces undertook a deadly counterambush on a group of tribesmen affiliated with Abu Hatim in an operation code-named Danny Boy. Twenty Iraqis were killed, sending shock waves through the tribes and drawing Abu Hatim into the anticoalition camp. Abu Hatim's first act of overt resistance was to spread rumors that British forces mutilated the corpses of the dead, and the political situation in the province spiraled downward. The governor was personally involved in the killing of the SCIRI-affiliated provincial police chief at a hospital where tribesmen wounded during Danny Boy were convalescing, and the provincial government dissolved into feuding blocs.¹⁰ In Maysan, as elsewhere in the deep south, politicking and feuding did not stop just because an antioccupation uprising had commenced.

The situation in Basra from April onward differed considerably, reflecting the more complex political environment in the city. The April uprising was an abject failure in Basra, where Jaish al-Mahdi membership was considerable but still represented a small minority of the population. The local OMS chief, Sheikh Abdul-Satar al-Bahadli, exhibited little ability to command or control Jaish al-Mahdi forces in the city. The high point of Bahadli's tenure in charge of Sadrism militiamen in Basra came on April 5, 2004, when he was seen waving a sword from the roof of the provincial governor's palace. The Sadrists were quickly pressured out of the building and were immediately beset by infighting. Throughout May and June, the OMS office in Basra issued a stream of contradictory statements about the need to rise up or cease fighting in accordance with temporary truces. After two days of fighting in the city beginning May 9, the Basra provincial council quickly managed to pressure Sadr into an attempt to quiet Sadrism forces in Basra, which coincided with the migration of Jaish al-Mahdi fighters to the central battlefields of Najaf and Karbala. On June

8. Najib al-Salihi, *Al-Zilzal* (the earthquake) (London: Al-Rafid Distribution and Publishing, 1998), p. 123.

9. Holmes, *Dusty Warriors*, p. 221.

10. Stewart, *Occupational Hazards*; Colin Freeman, "Iraqi Lord of the Marshes Ordered Killing of Police Chief," *Telegraph* (London), June 6, 2004; Holmes, *Dusty Warriors*, pp. 242–244, 251.

20, Bahadli was removed from his position on corruption charges by the OMS leadership, but Sadr never managed to establish control over the remaining hardcore Sadrist militants in Basra.¹¹

After a quiet period following the June 28, 2004, transition of power to the Iraqi Interim Government, the Sadrist uprising intensified in July and August 2004. In the deep south, both Maysan and Basra saw more-intense fighting than ever before. In Maysan, the fighting was fierce but short-lived. British forces fought to keep a beleaguered outpost supplied in a test of strength with the Jaish al-Mahdi. On August 10–11, British forces engaged in Operation Hammersmith, which saw two columns of heavily armored forces probe Jaish al-Mahdi strongpoints in Amara to locate militia positions for U.S. airpower above the battlefield. In over a hundred engagements during a twenty-four-hour period, the military power of the Jaish al-Mahdi in Maysan was decisively broken for the rest of the summer.¹²

In Basra, the influx of Shiite fighters from neighboring provinces, including Maysan, saw a rise in Sadrist violence. Jaish al-Mahdi fighters seized the former Baath Party headquarters and undertook operations against British bases and patrols. In comparison with the April uprisings, Sadrist forces were now much more experienced, resulting in an increase in so-called quality attacks, involving roadside bombs and mortar or rocket attacks. Sadrists also threatened to cut oil exports, attacking Southern Oil Company offices and menacing pipelines, partly to lever political influence and partly to directly tap oil revenues at the source. In accordance with provincial government wishes to avoid widespread destruction such as befell Najaf, British forces ceded key areas of the city to the Sadrists throughout August. The limited British forces available instead sought to throw a “ring of steel” around the perimeter of the city to

prevent any further influx of fighters and guarded key economic and political infrastructure. From early September, British forces began nibbling away at Sadrist enclaves, using similar tactics to those employed during the initial capture of Basra in April 2003. The effort culminated in the September 17 raid on the OMS offices in Basra, where fifteen tons of weaponry and ammunition were recovered, causing an almost immediate cessation of resistance from the Jaish al-Mahdi.¹³

Coalition Security Policy

By September 2004, much of the initial military defeat and embarrassment inflicted on the coalition had been reversed. The Sadr movement had lost many fighters, and its violence had alienated key segments of Iraqi society, such as the mercantile middle classes and the traditional clergy. With the upcoming elections in January 2005, a measure of stability would bolster the coalition’s political process. The British response to the April uprising and its protracted aftershocks was measured according to local conditions and typically represented the best of bad options. In Maysan, the British were expected to act like “the biggest tribe in the province” and judiciously applied military power was used with great lethality. Although this strategy created new feuds or exacerbated existing ones, focusing such feuds on foreigners was perhaps better than focusing on other Iraqis who would have to coexist for the foreseeable future. In the more politically sophisticated environment of metropolitan Basra, the British approach was far more cautious and integrated with the provincial council.¹⁴

Although restraint in Basra did have the benefit of minimizing civilian deaths, it also led to accusations from Basrawis and international media that the coalition allowed the militia to demonstrate increased terrain domination and undercut the city’s judicial and

11. Most of the information in this paragraph is drawn from author interviews with British military and intelligence officials and Iraqi citizens from the deep south (London, 2006).
12. Holmes, *Dusty Warriors*, pp. 261, 283–284, 288, 290. Also see Stephen Grey, “British Act as Bait in War with Mahdi,” *Sunday Times* (London), October 27, 2004.
13. Holmes, *Dusty Warriors*, pp. 182, 297, 301.
14. Holmes, *Dusty Warriors*, p. 180; Andrew Garfield, *Succeeding in Phase IV: British Perspectives on the U.S. Effort to Stabilize and Reconstruct Iraq* (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2006), pp. 83–84.

law enforcement systems for a number of weeks.¹⁵ In contrast to coalition security policy, the Baath government’s suppression of the 1991 uprising witnessed massive use of conventional firepower against civilian areas, the immediate internment of much of the adult male population, and the execution of a proportion of it, followed by years of informer-led arrests and suppression of Shiite religious freedoms.¹⁶ Iraqis expected decisive action and were surprised at the lack of a major crackdown in the summer, allowing a resurgence of Sadrist violence in August. Even so, Iraqis reacted positively whenever decisive force could be applied in a judicious manner.

Along with judicious restraint, the coalition forces also sometimes demonstrated a lack of commitment to the new Iraqi institutions the coalition had created. For example, British forces allowed looters to destroy the Maysan governor’s and provincial council’s offices in the summer of 2004. CPA governate coordinator

Rory Stewart concluded that the occupiers were in an unenviable position: “The authoritarian response [the Iraqis] wanted—as instinctive to them as an old colonial administrator—was not instinctive to us. Certain measures were difficult for us even to contemplate. How many unarmed people were we prepared to kill to defend a ministry building?” Stewart’s account of the conversation between the provincial governor Riyadh Mahoud and coalition officials is telling. When the governor asks why British forces allowed the mob to enter:

One of us replied, “Governor, maybe it is better that a little computer equipment gets stolen than more people get killed.”

And [the governor] said: “What are you talking about? Would you let the mob go stampeding into your office and loot your computer equipment?”

We had no answer. Of course we would have shot anyone who tried to break into our compound.¹⁷

15. Holmes, *Dusty Warriors*, p.180.

16. al-Salihi, *Al-Zilzal*, pp. 107–108, 122; also see *Human Rights Watch World Report 1992*, “Endless Torment: The 1991 Uprising in Iraq and Its Aftermath” (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1992).

17. Stewart, *Occupational Hazards*, p. 295.

Between the Elections

THE SADRIST UPRISING overshadowed the June 28, 2004, transition of power from the CPA to the Iraqi Interim Government, a caretaker executive charged with preparing elections in January 2005. Iraqis could now look forward to the formal contest of elections as well as the rough and tumble of informal local politics. While the followers of Muqtada al-Sadr fought their pitched battles with the coalition and saw their local offices and newspapers shut down, SCIRI had been busily consolidating power across the south. Combining its clout in Baghdad politics with tight organizational discipline in its provincial chapters, SCIRI had seized control of many governorships and police forces, including those in Basra, where the moderate governor, Judge Wael Abdel-Latif, was replaced by a SCIRI-affiliated Islamist. The Islamist takeover of the south deepened during this period as liberal progressives, rural sheikhs, and women disappeared from provincial and municipal councils as soon as the coalition no longer had a say in their composition.¹

The new roster of British forces rotating into Iraq in November 2004 as part of Operation Telic 6 was unable to recognize the changing nature of the political landscape, nor was politics their focus in the new posttransition era. The cessation of CPA authority left the military largely independent of coalition political guidance once again and also meant that the British military was freed to undertake operations in its own distinctive way again. As a House of Commons report noted: “When the civilian framework—i.e. the CPA—came to an impromptu end, the military had to take responsibility for a range of policy areas which it had not been sufficiently involved in previously.”² Whereas the CPA governate coordinators had used their civil-military teams to intervene in local politics,

the rotating Basra and Maysan battle groups stepped back from involvement in Iraqi factional politics in the autumn of 2004 and instead focused on a range of necessary missions concerned with their own force rotation, logistical sustainment, force protection, and reconstruction support.³ For the incoming brigade, one of its key missions was preparing to secure elections in January 2005.

Electoral Politics in Basra

The national elections in January 2005 were fated to shed little light on the politics of southern Iraq because of the gathering of the key Shiite political parties under the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) list. SCIRI, the various branches of Dawa, and a range of native political groupings adherent to Sadr II used the UIA umbrella to put off a truly democratic plebiscite concerning the popularity of individual Shiite factions. The UIA message was a simple appeal to Shiite identity, its political campaign was well-organized and exploited the name of Grand Ayatollah Sistani, and its success was thus assured. In effect, the elections and subsequent division of ministerial portfolios was a stage-managed poll that concealed a broadly egalitarian negotiated settlement between the main Shiite factions.

A far better gauge of the internal balance of power was the provincial elections also undertaken on January 31, 2005, which elected forty-one-member provincial councils in each of Iraq’s eighteen provinces and a fifty-one-member council in Baghdad. The Shiite factions did not run on a unified slate and the results thus gave some indication of the political appeal, or at least the organizational, military, and financial clout of the parties (see table, next page). In broad terms, SCIRI fared strongest, winning a majority of seats in eight

1. Rory Stewart, *Occupational Hazards: My Time Governing in Iraq* (London: Picador, 2006), p. 422; George Packer, “Testing Ground: In the Shiite South, Islamists and Secularists Struggle over Iraq’s Future,” *New Yorker*, February 28, 2005.
2. See House of Commons uncorrected transcript of oral evidence to be published as HC 1241-I, minutes of evidence taken before the Defense Committee, “UK Operations in Iraq,” June 20, 2006. Available online (www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmdfence/uc1241-i/uc124102.htm).
3. It should also be remembered that the handover period saw the deployment of the MND(SE) reserve—the Black Watch battle group—to the Sunni triangle in support of U.S. forces.

Provincial Election Results, January 2005

BASRA 41 SEATS

Al-Ittilaf al-Basra al-Islamiyya (Coalition of Islamic Basra, dominated by SCIRI) 20

Fadhila (independent former Sadrists) 13

Tajammu Iraq al-Mustaqbal (Association for Iraq of the Future, linked to the Bahr al-Ulum family) 2

Harakat al-Dawa (Dawa breakaway faction) 3

Wifaq (Allawi’s secularists) 3

MAYSAN 41 SEATS

Al-Muntada al-Fikr al-Islami (pro-Sadrist group) 15

SCIRI coalition 6

Dawa Tanzim al-Iraq faction 5

Fadhila 4

Al-Majlis al-Siyasi al-Shii (Shiite group associated with Ahmed Chalabi) 1

Harakat al-Dawa 1

Other secular lists 5

Other Islamist lists 4

Source: Information supplied by the editor of the Iraq website <http://historiae.org>.

provinces, including key central constituencies, such as Baghdad, Najaf, and Karbala.

Basra’s council was the most finely balanced of the Shiite governates, with SCIRI taking just under half the seats but losing control to a coalition of all the remaining councilors. In February 2005, a secret ballot gave the Basra governorship to Muhammad al-Waeli, a Basrawi politician of the Fadhila party. Waeli demonstrated that against a backdrop of stalled central governance, a tremendous amount of power had become concentrated at the provincial level, where politics were considerably more fluid and violent than at the national level. Despite

many SCIRI-led plots to unseat him, Waeli has demonstrated the ability to assemble almost any conceivable combination of politicians to protect his position by deftly dispensing political and economic favors.

Waeli’s patronage was partly drawn from his ability to mobilize muscle and dispense security jobs, either through Fadhila’s control of the locally staffed Oil Protection Force or by “stuffing” other elements of the security forces through high-level appointments made by the provincial security committee and thus embedding allies who would appoint their own supporters to subordinate positions. Also, Waeli controlled local ministry spending and contract awards, and he turned a blind eye to the massive diversion of crude oil and refined oil products either to lucrative external markets or for internal resale. Almost every aspect of Basra’s economy thus became interconnected with oil smuggling.

At the same time, Waeli exploited the central government’s extremely poor record of dispensing budgetary allocations to Basra: no funding reached the Basra government in 2005, and only about 10 percent of allocated revenues arrived in 2006. For Iraq’s second-largest city and the province that produces the overwhelming majority of Iraq’s wealth, lack of government funding became a major source of discontent. Waeli’s systematic use of oil smuggling can be viewed as a move to develop an independent alternative to government funding. As central government hostility grew—stoked by SCIRI—Waeli’s backers in the Southern Oil Company and the General Union of Oil Employees pressured the governor into taking a tough line with foreign oil companies and drafting legislation intended to limit foreign involvement in the oil sector. Waeli also cut off the supply of electricity from Basra to Baghdad, allowing Basra to enjoy seventeen hours of electricity per day as opposed to Baghdad’s eleven. Even before formal discussions about devolution began in earnest, politicians in the deep south were beginning to break away from the center.

Splintering of the Sadrist Movement

The rise of powerful local politicians was accompanied by a second key development in the politics of the south. In 2005, Sadr’s followers became involved in the

political process, resulting in a splintering of the Sadrist trend. Newspaper reportage concerning a split in the Jaish al-Mahdi in 2006 might suggest that the Sadrist trend functioned as a unified bloc in 2004–2005, whereas, in fact, between late 2004 and early 2005 the Sadrist trend lost what little coherence it had attained up to that point.⁴ In the aftermath of the uprising, the autumn months of 2004 saw the OMS take stock. The uprising had resulted in the closure and destruction of many OMS offices and the deaths of hundreds of members. The Jaish al-Mahdi was thereafter recognized by coalition forces as the main threat to MND(SE) forces and viewed as a terrorist movement. Although coalition forces agreed not to act retrospectively on arrest warrants and the truce largely held throughout late 2004, the road of violence had been a bruising experience for the Sadrist trend.

In the first year after Saddam's fall, the Sadrist trend displayed a duality that would now serve as a fault line dividing moderate and hardline elements of the organization. The Jaish al-Mahdi had built a reputation for establishing vigilante *sharia* courts; levying local taxes; controlling fuel distribution; and attacking coalition forces, internet cafés, music shops, and barbers. At the same time, however, the OMS could point to a strong record of lobbying for infrastructure improvements, distributing fuel and emergency supplies to the needy, maintaining order, and protecting festivals and shrines. During 2005, some adherents to Sadr II's preaching moved further toward one or the other end of this spectrum, straining the cohesion of the OMS.

A number of Sadrists already occupied the moderate end of the spectrum, notably the Fadhila party, which had functioned as a political affiliate of the OMS and a channel for communications with the coalition since 2003. In late 2004, many politicians in the OMS were heading in the same direction. The maturation of the OMS had resulted in "clear lines of communication, a more structured hierarchy and a sprawling social ser-

vices network."⁵ Sheikh Ali Smeism and three other senior OMS officials formed a political committee in late 2004 under the tutelage of veteran politician Ahmed Chalabi. Although Sadr personally boycotted the January 2005 elections, the committee succeeded in preventing a broader Sadrist boycott of elections. Voter turnout in Sadrist strongholds such as Sadr City and Maysan topped 90 percent.

The movement secured a number of key positions through its strong showings in provincial elections and its negotiation of a major share of UIA seats. Sadrist lists gained a majority of seats in Wasit and Maysan and minority shares in a range of other governates. Sadrists secured twenty-three seats in the national parliament. Although the Sadrist trend proved too disunited to influence the choice of prime minister, the OMS did gain control of the health and transportation ministries. Those positions granted the Sadrist movement unprecedented ability to dispense money, health care, and jobs, filling in one of the key weaknesses of the formerly resource-poor network of clerics.

Despite these advantageous developments, elements of the Sadrist trend expressed deep unease about involvement in the political process both before and after the January 2005 elections. In particular, hardliners opposed the movement's engagement with the coalition as a partner in governance and OMS's involvement in the foreign-backed democratic transition. OMS hardliner Sheikh Muhammad Fartusi noted: "These people in the new assembly who you call Sadrists, they are not legitimate Sadrists. Sheikh Ali Smeism's brother might be number five on the Shia list, but he is not a member of this movement."⁶ In a continuation of the trend witnessed during the summer of 2004, many elements of the Jaish al-Mahdi continued to wage war on the coalition.

In hiding since being targeted by a coalition arrest warrant in October 2003 related to the killing of three U.S. soldiers in Karbala, Sheikh Mahmoud Hassani al-

4. A good example of reporting on the "new" splits in the OMS is Ahmed Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 265. For an excellent example of earlier writing on the phenomenon in 2005, see Bartle Bull, "Iraq's Rebel Democrats," *Prospect*, May 19, 2005.

5. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, p. 265.

6. Bull, "Iraq's Rebel Democrats."

Sarkhi was foremost among those Sadrists to break with Muqtada and stay largely outside the political process. A student of Sadr II, Sarkhi considered himself superior to Muqtada al-Sadr and a bona fide object of emulation in his own right. Like Sadr II, Sarkhi is intensely xenophobic and focused on Shiite mysticism. His bases of strength are Karbala, Nasariya, and Basra. Along with other older clerics of the Sadrist trend, Sarkhi acted with ever-increasing autonomy throughout 2005. This difference is particularly clear concerning the Sunni Arabs; Sarkhi issued *fatwas* against revenge killings of Sunnis, in stark contrast to Muqtada. In July, Sarkhi's followers besieged the Iranian consulate in Baghdad to protest Iranian influence. Since then, Sarkhi's followers have clashed with SCIRI Badr Organization militiamen in Karbala, where SCIRI has sought to prevent Sarkhi from developing a lucrative hold over the coffers built up by key mosques.

Iraq's Security Forces: Built to Last?

Against the background of increasingly dynamic and violent factional politics, the development of nonpartisan local security forces would prove an insurmountable challenge. Unfavorable political conditions were exacerbated by the short-term focus of coalition policy. Development of a strong Iraqi Police Service was not considered in prewar planning, and the British military were shocked to find that Iraq's police forces were a hollow shell incapable of rapidly assuming "police primacy" in internal security. MND(SE) had been intensely focused on security sector reform from the beginning of Operation Telic 2 in summer 2003 and the announcement of the June 2004 transition led to a rapid acceleration of the development of the Iraqi Police Service. The failure of Iraqi security forces in the 2004 uprising further increased the impetus for qualitative as well as quantitative improvement.

In practice, however, MND(SE) mirrored coalition policy elsewhere in Iraq by focusing on boosting

the raw numbers of recruits. The House of Commons review of postconflict operations concluded that little had changed between May and December 2004, when MND(SE) told British government investigators that it continued to "churn out the numbers" in an effort to meet targets.⁷ Local political leaders embedded in the provincial and municipal councils were only too glad to oblige, stuffing the security forces with recruits. Providing jobs allowed militia leaders to demonstrate largesse to their followers and simultaneously use federal revenues to pay them. In no time at all, security forces were "0% trained, 0% equipped, 165% manned, and 100% paid."⁸ Other expedient measures included what one British general termed the "pragmatic use of militias." Despite the June 2004 CPA directive outlawing militias, both the local government and MND(SE) continued to pay stipends to key tribes north of Basra in barely concealed protection rackets.⁹

The near-term focus of coalition actions was indicative of more than the press of political imperatives. Myopic policies highlighted the belief from Whitehall down to the British headquarters in Basra that British forces would soon be leaving Iraq. Historically, British counterinsurgency policy had succeeded in many places precisely because British forces operated alongside capable local allies. As Rod Thornton noted:

Wherever one looks in terms of the Army's counterinsurgency experience—from Cyprus to Malaya and from Palestine to the Naga Hills—there would be an extant police force and public administrations run by fellow-countrymen. There would be people who knew how to run the countries and how best to deal with the indigenous populations. Intelligence would be available, there would be a high degree of cultural awareness, and there would be many people who spoke the local languages. In essence, all the Army had to do was to use its military muscle in aid of a civil power who would know how to target such muscle.¹⁰

7. See House of Commons Uncorrected Transcript, "UK Operations in Iraq," June 20, 2006. Available online (www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmdfence/uc1241-i/uc124102.htm).

8. Sabrina Tavernise and Qais Mizher, "Oil, Politics and Bloodshed Corrupt an Iraqi City," *New York Times*, June 13, 2006.

9. Steven Vincent, "On Again, Off Again: A Power Problem in Basra," *National Review*, August 2, 2005.

10. Quoted in House of Commons Uncorrected Transcript, "UK Operations in Iraq," June 20, 2006. Available online (www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmdfence/uc1241-i/uc124102.htm).

Police forces were judged particularly important in such roles, and the British have historically gauged their withdrawal prospects according to the capacity of a nation's police force (rather than the military) to assert "police primacy" over internal security. Of course, Britain was willing to undertake this kind of patient institution-building in its colonial

dependencies precisely because it wanted to be assured that it would not have to return to fight insurgencies again. In Iraq, the dynamic was very different: to some in Whitehall, Britain needed to justify its departure only with short-term successes and could thereafter look to others to develop long-term solutions to southern Iraq's problems.

The Descent

THE ONGOING WEAKNESS of Iraqi security forces became increasingly apparent in the early months of 2005 as Basra witnessed unprecedented levels of political violence and crime. Criminal factions, both in Basra and the tribal areas north of the city, undertook high levels of carjacking, kidnapping, and oil smuggling. The January elections were marred by violent intimidation beforehand and equally brutal recriminations afterward. Basra's politically neutral police chief Hassan al-Sade stated that he trusted no more than a quarter of his officers and that another 50 percent owed their primary loyalty to militias. Using militiamen serving in the security forces, Sadrist factions and SCIRI affiliates such as Badr and Thar Allah accelerated their intimidation of local university professors, trade unionists, and other secular figures. Most Iraqis were forced under the protective umbrella of enforced party membership, and those who attempted to make a stand were intimidated and sometimes killed.

Against this background of rising violence, a single incident came to encapsulate the declining sense of public security and political liberty in Basra. On March 15, 2005, a group of Sadrist militiamen gathered to observe a picnic held in Andalus park by the students of the Basra University engineering college. Jaish al-Mahdi militiamen had established a firm hold over the half of the campus in which the Engineering College is located, and local Sadrist clerics had warned the event organizers to cancel the picnic. In full view of police forces deployed to monitor the event, Sadrist militiamen attacked a young female student with clubs, publicly shamed her by ripping off her clothing, and videotaped the action to use as propaganda. Two male students were shot as they attempted to intervene, and the girl later committed suicide. Outcry among the student population resulted in rare public demonstrations against the growth in influence of Islamist parties but was soon quieted by Jaish al-Mahdi threats to

bomb any further demonstrations. Despite their deep political differences, the Islamist parties constituting the provincial council closed ranks and no formal punishment of the militiamen followed.

When the new rotation of British forces entered Iraq in April 2005 under Telic 6, they were faced by a sobering reality. Although elections had passed off flawlessly, the deep south was arguably growing less stable and less pluralistic by the day. The picnic incident was fresh in the minds of British commanders as the 12 Mechanised Brigade deployed, prompting a senior British officer in Basra to remark in a newspaper article: "For far too long now, we have been struggling to contain the situation with a brigade-sized force which is farcically small for the task it has been given. We've done some bloody good things but the truth is that we've also turned a blind eye to an awful lot of iffy behavior from the militias—assassinations, graft, vote-fixing and so on."¹

MND(SE) also faced an increasingly hostile force protection environment in the early summer of 2005. The arrival of a new British battle group in Maysan disrupted the modus vivendi that had existed between coalition forces and Sadrist militias since the end of the April 2004 uprising. This relationship might have been heading for a breakdown in any case as more hardline factions associated with Mahmoud Hassani undertook increasing numbers of antioccupation attacks throughout the spring. Cordon and search operations were launched in Amara and a range of police stations hardened to improve the local police force's ability to resist pressure from Sadrist militias. Now, with the summer heat rising, the scene was set for a major confrontation.

On May 30 and 31, British patrols in Maysan were attacked by sophisticated roadside bombs that bore the hallmarks of imported technology and expertise. The devices used explosively formed projectile (EFP) and passive infrared trigger technology and were disguised

1. Tom Regan, "Britain Will Scrap and Replace Police Force in Basra," *Christian Science Monitor*, September 26, 2005.

as rocks with an outer layer of molded and finished insulation foam. Such munitions had been extensively deployed by Hizballah in Lebanon throughout the 1990s, and strong prima facie evidence suggests that a combination of Iranian and Lebanese Hizballah operatives introduced EFPs to Iraq's Shiite militias. The introduction of EFPs coincided with the Sadrist uprisings in May 2004, although they would only be used in large numbers in 2005. Diehard elements of the Jaish al-Mahdi that continued their war against the coalition were the key recipients. Such militias decided whether to accept Iranian assistance on a case-by-case, and sometimes month-to-month, basis. Iranian support often arrived in the form of commodities—money, hashish, and prescription medications—that could be used to recruit young, poor foot soldiers. Some militia-men trained in Iran after being invited to the Islamic Republic by the Iran-based Ayatollah Kadhim Husseini Haeri, Muqtada al-Sadr's rival for the leadership of Iraqi Shiites loyal to the memory of Muqtada's father, Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr.

Strong prima facie and circumstantial evidence exists that Iranian-based support included the facilitation of collaboration between Hizballah bomb-makers and Iraqi Shiite militants. Such collaboration has been widely alleged by all manner of observers, including U.S. and British military officials. In August 2006, Brig. James Dutton, commander of British forces in Basra, told reporters that the “technology certainly, and probably the equipment, is coming through Iran.” Likewise an unnamed British government official told reporters the same month: “We think it has come from Lebanese Hezbollah via Iran. It is not Hezbollah that woke up one day and said let's give this to the Iraqis. It is the Iranians who decided to do it.”²

U.S. commanders have gone even further. U.S. Maj. Gen. Richard Zahner, deputy chief of staff for intelligence at Multinational Forces Iraq, gave an exceptionally detailed press conference on September 27, 2006,³ in which he laid

out the case against Iran. According to Zahner, “rogue elements” of the Sadrist militias and the SCIRI Badr Organization had become influenced by Iran. Zahner noted that Iranian control over such organizations was fleeting and tied to material inducements, saying: “Nobody in this country stays bought. You're rented.” Zahner noted that individual militias had “become Iranian-supported and are in the process of being transformed into an Iranian surrogate.” Zahner went on to identify transfer of EFP matériel as a key Iranian inducement to militias. He noted: “[W]hen you talk about devices such as EFP, which is almost uniquely Iranian; in fact, the fingerprint of copper plate [liner] being formed in a machine shop. I mean, the pattern is so identical that, you know, we can easily identify it right there.” Zahner added that military grade C-4 explosives used in EFPs were marked with the same batch number as explosives seized on the *Abu Hassan*, a Egyptian-owned, Lebanese-flagged fishing boat captured by Israeli naval forces off Haifa in 2003. Zahner concluded by saying:

Take [the batch number] and go to the Israelis or go to the open archives from our small fishing vessel that was shipping a bloc of military weapons to Hizballah and compare the labels on the military C-4 in that and tell me if they're not identical. Then go down to Basra and take a look at all the C-4 blocs that the 10th [Iraqi] Division and the UK have picked up in both caches around and across the border and take a look at the military weapons stockpile. You will see the same red label for each and every one of those.

Arabic-language CD-ROMs and videos concerning EFP fabrication that were captured on the *Abu Hassan* also turned up in Iraq from 2004 onward. When considered together with the fact that complete and well-machined EFP turned up in Iraq with no signs of trial-and-error development, a strong case exists that Iraqi militias have had access to foreign expertise rather than undertaken indigenous development.⁴

2. Michael Knights, “EFP Spread across Iraq Tied to Iran-Hizballah Axis,” *Jane's Intelligence Review* (February 2007).

3. Available online (<http://london.usembassy.gov/iran108.html>).

4. Knights, “EFP Spread across Iraq Tied to Iran-Hizballah Axis.” Also see “Iranian Government behind Shipping Weapons to Iraq,” American Forces Press Service, September 28, 2006.

These increasingly deadly roadside bombings migrated south to antioccupation forces in Basra and north to Sadrist forces in Baghdad. The British response in Maysan was swift, resulting in a June 12 raid against bombmaking facilities in Majar al-Kabir called Operation Trojan. The Sadrist governor of Maysan and the SCIRI-affiliated police chief both suspended cooperation with the coalition. The British experience in Maysan exactly foreshadowed a far longer and intense coalition standoff with the local political parties that began in the autumn of 2005.⁵

Transition had placed Iraqi politics off limits for the British military, but the security sector reform mission left the coalition with an ongoing remit to monitor and ensure the reliability of the security forces. By mid-2005 British officers in Basra saw clearly that the security forces, and particularly the police, were increasingly part of the problem rather than the solution. A new provincial police chief, Hassan al-Sade, had been imposed on the Basra governate by outgoing prime minister Ayad Allawi in December 2004 to serve as an independent force who might stand above factional politics. Sade moved quickly to highlight corruption in the police service, developing confidential hotlines and earning the enmity of the Islamist factions.

By the summer of 2005, one particular institution—nicknamed the Jameat after the district it was based in—had long been identified as a symbolic center of corruption in the Basra police force. The Jameat comprised a range of police intelligence departments collocated at a single facility in west Basra, including the Police Intelligence Unit, the Internal Affairs Directorate, and the Major Crimes Unit. These agencies had been “churned out” along with other police departments during the first year of British stewardship in southern Iraq. At the time, the British identified the need for forensics, surveillance, and undercover operations as a critical requirement in reconstituting the

police force.⁶ The officers that formed the new police intelligence units came from a wide array of local factions, including Badr, Fadhila, Thar Allah, and the Sadrist trend.

Despite the Jameat’s identification as a center of corruption by the summer of 2004, with “police mafia” undertaking vigilante actions against Sunni Arabs and running their own unofficial prisons, local Shiite factions had found developing militia-run departments more acceptable than recycling tried and tested former intelligence operatives from the Saddam era. When transition had occurred, British entreaties to cull the Jameat threatened deeply entrenched factional interests; the many factional and sectarian murders committed by the Jameat went unpunished. As a result, in the words of a British diplomat, the Jameat “managed to exert a disproportionate influence and a policy of intimidation against the rest of the Iraqi police service and against the ordinary people of Basra.”⁷

The eventual confrontation between British forces and the Jameat finally came not because of the Jameat’s murderous activities against Iraqi civilians but because of their detention of two British servicemen in September 2005. Force protection rather than protection of the civilian population was the driver. On September 18, the Basra City Battle Group arrested two prominent Sadrist clerics in connection with roadside bombings against British forces. A day later, two British intelligence-gathering personnel were detained by Sadrist militiamen and handed over to the “police mafia” at the Jameat facility. After the Jameat officers refused a Ministry of Interior order to release the prisoners, British troops moved in strength against both the Jameat facility and an adjacent house and liberated the British personnel. The rescue attempt resulted in clashes with hundreds of Sadrist militiamen, resulting in the deaths of four Iraqis, the firebombing of thirteen British armored vehicles, and the wounding of numerous

5. Stephen Farrel, “British Seek Way out of Provinces Tribal Maze,” *London Times*, June 4, 2005; Michael Schwartz, “The Taming of Sadr City,” *Asia Times*, January 12, 2005.

6. See House of Commons uncorrected transcript of oral evidence to be published as HC 1241-I, minutes of evidence taken before the Defense Committee, “UK Operations in Iraq,” June 20, 2006. Available online (www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmsselect/cmdfence/uc1241-i/uc124102.htm).

7. Richard Opiel, “Basra Militias Put Their Firepower above the Law,” *New York Times*, October 9, 2005.

British soldiers. A wave of further arrests continued throughout the autumn of 2005 into early 2006, with British forces targeting a range of SCIRI, Sadrist, and Thar Allah militia cells within the local police forces and municipal organs.⁸

Not for the first time, the British military suffered the collective displeasure of the local factions. This time, however, it had done more than simply offend one side or the other of a tribal squabble or even take on a single segment of the Shiite community, such as the Sadrist trend. The action against the Jameat, other militia-run death squads, and the broader criminal community in Basra had simultaneously threatened key interests across the political spectrum. In the knife's-edge world of coalition politics in Basra—where the governor is only ever a few votes away from deselection—the British were fated to face serious political opposition to any move against the status quo.⁹ From September 2005 onward, Governor Waeli arranged rallies against the British presence, which he branded as a “destabilizing presence,” and even traveled to Baghdad to lobby on the Jameat's behalf at the Ministry of Interior. The provincial council suspended cooperation with the British from October 2005 to May 2006, and the Fadhila-run Oil Protection Force harassed foreign contractors.¹⁰ Once again, the Islamist parties closed ranks, choosing to serve their internal balance of power rather than the public interest.

Alongside political isolation, British forces suffered increasing physical isolation from the autumn of 2005 onward. Compared with an average of six roadside bombings per month in Basra since 2003, twenty-two such incidents occurred in March 2006. This trend saw British forces move from broadly spread patrols using single Land Rovers to a smaller number of four-vehicle convoys capable of covering less ground. The deployment of EFP roadside bombs by Sadrist elements and other militias and criminal factions fighting the British increased in frequency and effectiveness following the

summer of 2005, further reducing MND(SE) capability to engage in “hearts and minds” work in local communities. When a new British brigade entered Iraq until the Telic 8 rotation in May 2006, it suffered forty-one attacks and seven deaths in its first two weeks in-country. By September 2006, British forces needed to deploy a convoy of Warrior armored vehicles to ferry police trainers to a single police station and deliver a consignment of toys to a nearby hospital. Many nonessential ground movements were replaced altogether by helicopter movement and aerial resupply. With British forces spending increasing amounts of time at their bases, militiamen also upped their mortar and rocket attacks on MND(SE) bases, exploiting the reduction of preemptive patrols by British forces.

Unchecked Violence

Although the December 15, 2005, elections were a technical success, their result was preordained because of the prenegotiated distribution of seats within the UIA bloc and predictable national voting patterns, which largely mirrored ethnic identity. Because the elections did not include provincial polls, their effect on local politics was limited to a single factor, which was the reduction of the Fadhila party's influence in Baghdad. National voting results made Fadhila's fifteen seats less important to the UIA bloc. The party's bad relations with SCIRI after its intense competition over Basra province in 2005 also contributed to its loss of influence. At the close of the prolonged government formation process in May 2006, Fadhila had lost its key ministerial portfolio in the Ministry of Oil and was thus forced to concentrate fully on maintaining its pole position in the Basra provincial council and the Southern Oil Company as its remaining major power bases. This status completed the conditions for a much more intense struggle for local ascendancy.

Intra-Shiite factional fighting was the fastest-growing form of violence in the deep south of Iraq in 2006,

8. Sabrina Tavernise and Qais Mizher, “Oil, Politics and Bloodshed Corrupt an Iraqi City,” *New York Times*, June 13, 2006.

9. For instance, although Thar Allah is small fry in national politics and a marginal force even locally, the precarious political balance in Basra has given it real political clout. With Thar Allah's leader Youssif al-Mussawi serving as the deputy governor of Basra, any British action against the movement was bound to draw a strong reaction.

10. Tavernise and Mizher, “Oil, Politics and Bloodshed.”

and it took on a different and thoroughly local complexion in each of the key provinces, Maysan and Basra. In keeping with Maysan's "wild west" reputation, factional violence involved open feuding between the parallel police forces created by the SCIRI and the Sadrist trend, with tribal factions supporting one side or the other. The two factions had sparred intermittently since 2004, resulting in open clashes in August 2005 and October 2006. In the latter clash, Sadrist militiamen launched a mini-uprising in Amara, while Badr militiamen took Sadrist hostages and beheaded a relative of the Jaish al-Mahdi commander in Maysan.

In Basra, the conflict between SCIRI and Sadrist forces emerged as a less overt struggle of assassinations and political maneuvering more in keeping with Basra's vibrant political culture. The two key political factions—SCIRI and Fadhlila—maneuvered predominantly in the political realm, only occasionally using their paramilitary forces embedded in the various security forces to land direct blows. Multiple assassination attempts against the governor were tried, although these were often the work of the roughneck tribes north of Basra who accused the governor of sponsoring the killing of a number of their tribal sheikhs in 2006. Alongside politics, Basra witnessed increasing levels of mafia-style killings related to

control of extremely lucrative oil-smuggling rackets, which increasingly involved all of the key political factions operating in Basra. With literally billions of dollars worth of oil bypassing the national oil export system into the domestic and external black markets, Basra had become financially indispensable to Iraq's Shiite militias.

The net result of extreme factionalism and endemic militia penetration of the security forces was rising homicide rates and the death of moderate political culture in Basra. The homicide rate in Basra spiked in the summer of 2006.¹¹ The two communities most at risk remained the Sunni Arabs and Basra's secular intelligentsia. The Sunni Arabs, consistently targeted in de-Baathification attacks since 2003, have been particularly hard hit since the February 22, 2006, bombing of the al-Askariya shrine in Samarra. Shiite moderates have also suffered. Progressive moderates or secularists, such as university professors, trade unionists, communists, human rights campaigners, and intellectuals, were either forced to accept the protection of the Islamist parties or to leave public life. Independents could not enter the political space or even venture an opinion, as a Basra university professor noted when he told a journalist: "I cannot talk with you. I haven't joined a party and no militia is protecting me."¹²

11. Steven Vincent, "Switched Off in Basra," *New York Times*, July 31, 2005; Tavernise and Mizher, "Oil, Politics and Bloodshed."

12. Tavernise and Mizher, "Oil, Politics and Bloodshed."

Forecasts and Lessons

BRITISH FORCES gradually lowered their profile in Maysan province throughout the first half of 2006, finally withdrawing from Camp Abu Naji to Basra in August 2006 and leaving only a small battle group on the remote Iran-Iraq border. In traditional Iraqi style, Camp Abu Naji was looted down to the ground as soon as British forces left, despite the presence of an Iraqi army garrison. On September 21, 2006, the British military handed over Dhi Qar, the third of four provinces in the MND(SE) area, to Iraqi control, leaving only Basra under joint coalition and Iraqi stewardship. The British government hopes to be able to draw down its forces in Basra from about 7,200 to a long-term commitment of 3,200 troops by the middle of 2007 if certain security goals can be met within that timeframe.

The gravity of the situation in Basra has been granted greater recognition than ever before under the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, which declared a state of emergency in the province on May 31, 2006, and has maintained it ever since. The premier noted in his visit to the city:

We will not let Basra keep bleeding with the existence of these gangs. Security is first, security is second, and security is third. Security forces should not be subjected to harassment or pressure from political forces. These things must be absolutely impermissible. The security officer, the soldier and the policeman must not be afraid or confused because of political interference.¹

The task of restoring security in Basra continues to be complicated by the central government's standoff with the provincial governor. A special Basra Emergency Security Committee established by the prime minister on May 15 struggled to replace the provincial security committee, and a compromise solution will instead see Governor Waeli head a security committee selected by

the prime minister from SCIRI, Fadhila, and the Sadrist trend politicians. On Waeli's insistence, the security committee has not enjoyed jurisdiction outside the city, leaving the oil fields and rural badlands north of Basra in the hands of the Fadhila-run Oil Protection Force and the tribes the force is drawn from.

The thrust of coalition policy in Basra since late 2005 has been to reform the police service. Ronny Flanagan, chief constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, was charged with assessing the state of Basra's police forces in late 2005 and developing a plan of action for the rehabilitation of the service in 2006. The process was hampered by the withdrawal of cooperation by the Basra provincial council until May 2006, retarding Basra's participation in the so-called "Year of the Police" in Iraq. The aim of the overarching Operation Corrode, launched in May 2006, is to focus on Basra's police service. The first step in this process was launched on September 29, 2006, in the form of Operation Sinbad. This joint Iraqi-British effort saw the launch of a six-month multiphased effort to rehabilitate the police services, which later broadened into a general campaign to regain control of Basra. Sinbad is a reconstruction-led operation, closely coupled with police reform (assessment and training), often undertaken alongside detention operations. Every attempt has been made to allow the Basra Emergency Security Committee to strongly shape the operation through a Provincial Joint Coordination Center. Under the plan, each of Basra's eighteen districts would sequentially be subjected to a two- to three-day "pulse"—a cordon and search by Iraqi and British forces aimed at reducing militia presence and arms caches and making tangible improvements to the local standard of living through "quick impact" reconstruction and community projects. After each pulse a further twenty-eight days of increased patrolling and continuing reconstruction then takes place in the area, including embedding

1. Dan Murphy, "Vying for Power, Militias Roil Basra," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 2, 2006. Available online (www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/iraq/sectarian/2006/0602vying.htm).

Royal Military Police transition teams in police stations to individually assess personnel to determine which officers should be removed.

By all accounts, Sinbad has scored successes in the eighteen local areas and has allowed the Basra Emergency Security Committee to increase central-government authority over security policy in the city. Much more will need to be done to ensure that the improvements stick after British forces are drawn down in 2007. The Basra Emergency Security Committee relies on the state of emergency to maintain unified command over local policy, but Prime Minister al-Maliki could come under pressure from the Sadrist trend—his key parliamentary backers—to cancel the emergency powers of the committee. Inside Basra, British forces are paying for their successes. Key bases, such as the Shatt al-Arab Hotel and Basra Palace, have been intensely targeted by mortars and small arms, and both will be shut down between January and March 2007. The Shaibah Logistics Base and Basra airport—the “green zone of the south”—attract ever-increasing amounts of fire. British forces can patrol only in heavily armored Warrior vehicles as they move between zones of control, suffering increasing numbers of high-quality attacks using EFP and normal roadside bombs, rocket-propelled grenades, and sniper fire. Outside the city, no improvement has occurred in security, with many illegal checkpoints making road travel extremely hazardous and with the Oil Protection Force and local tribes bitterly feuding among themselves and with each other.

The Outlook for 2007

Operation Sinbad is an important step forward but represents the initial step in a long journey and may struggle to achieve its goals in an atmosphere of spiraling physical insecurity. As British forces withdrew from Maysan in late summer 2006, local factions escalated their internecine wars to new levels. On October 18, 2006, a Badr provincial police chief was killed by a roadside bomb while traveling between Basra and

Maysan provinces; indications were strong that this was a sophisticated assassination by Sadrist forces. In retaliation, his family kidnapped the teenage brother of the Jaish al-Mahdi commander in Amara and beheaded the hostage when the Sadrists failed to hand over the police chief’s killers. Similar violence is coming to Basra; on October 30, Shiite militants pulled seventeen Sunni police recruits off a bus near a British-run police training center and executed them. Following a spate of advanced roadside bombings, the British consulate in Basra was relocated to the airport at the end of October, undermining the confidence-building purpose of Operation Sinbad.

In the coming year, the drawdown of British forces in the deep south will likely be accompanied by an upsurge of factional violence as the long-delayed fight for local supremacy begins in earnest. Although formal autonomy—either for a small southern confederation or a nine-province Shiite state—is unlikely to gain traction in the near term, real power will continue to devolve to the provincial, municipal, and neighborhood levels. The political parties, and particularly Muqtada al-Sadr’s organization, will struggle to control a fragmenting range of local militias, most of which have become thoroughly intertwined with criminal enterprises. Such militias and their attached politicians will compete violently at the local level, but they will also periodically close ranks whenever foreign or national interlopers seek to reestablish some degree of control over the deep south or restore a modicum of personal security to the populace. In essence, the deep south has become a “kleptocracy” where well-armed political-criminal mafiosi have locked both the central government and the people out of power. As journalist Steve Negus wrote in August 2006: “The region’s political parties have done almost nothing for the common good. Those with street credibility and a militia now have the power. . . . A year ago, people were clamoring for greater autonomy from Baghdad. Some people in this anarchic port city are now calling for the central government to save them from their elected leaders.”²

2. Steve Negus, “Stabilising Force Urgently Needed to End Atmosphere of Intimidation,” *Financial Times*, August 10, 2006.

If and when delayed provincial elections are held, their fairness will be heavily curtailed by four years of militia control and the obliteration of secular liberal opposition.

Such an outcome contrasts sharply with Britain's hopes for the deep south. In January 2003, Britain's vision for postwar Iraq was "a stable, united and law-abiding state within its present borders, cooperating with the international community, no longer posing a threat to its neighbors or to international security, abiding by all its international obligations and providing effective representative government to its own people."³ By February 2006, the British Ministry of Defense announced less lofty conditions for withdrawal, comprising:

- A manageable level of threat from insurgents;
- The ability of Iraqis security forces to deal with the terrorist threat;
- An effective local government; and
- Coalition confidence in its own ability to provide backup for local forces.⁴

Even these goals are far from being achieved, and civilian police primacy in internal policing—a key indicator of progress—remains a distant prospect. Iraqi army primacy is the near-term goal, but even it is challenged by the presence of powerful and assertive militias.

Instead of a stable, united, law-abiding region with a representative government and police primacy, the deep south is unstable, factionalized, lawless, ruled as a kleptocracy, and subject to militia primacy. Brig. James Everard, commander of British forces in MND(SE) until November 2006, noted darkly: "Freedom of speech,

freedom of expression: it just hasn't quite worked out the way it was planned. They're just not prepared to debate. They tend to do things at the end of a gun." The senior British intelligence officer in Basra concurred, stating, "There are no moderate leaders here. We will not be leaving behind a Westernized democracy—and there will be a certain amount of killing once we go."⁵ In the light of growing factional score-settling, the latter may soon appear to be an understatement.

Lessons for Future Operations

The failings of national-level coalition policy in Iraq are increasingly well documented, and some of those failings were major contributors to the failure of coalition policy in the deep south. Blanket de-Baathification and the rapid buildup of unreliable militia-penetrated security forces occurred across Iraq, as did overbureaucratization, political indecision, and civil-military disconnects. Beyond these broader coalition failures, the British-led administration of the deep south has been criticized for what is seen as willful neglect and the abandonment of the deep south to the Islamist militias. Britain is accused of demonstrating "indecent haste" in seeking the earliest possible military withdrawal and drawing down its presence far too quickly in May 2003. To speed up withdrawal, British administrators are accused of handing off power to militia elements and afterward turning a blind eye to the wholesale intimidation and murder practiced by Islamist militias to preserve a permissive environment for its troops.⁶ Reidar Visser, an expert on Basra, summarized the charge:

Shortly after the onset of the occupation of Iraq in 2003, there was much fanfare about Britain's "soft" approach to the policing of Basra, with a "hearts and minds" focus... Quite soon, however, it became clear that British soldiers gradually gave in to the advance

3. See U.K. Ministry of Defense, *Operations in Iraq: First Reflections* (London: Director General Corporate Communication, 2003), chapter 7. Available online (www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2003/iraq2003operations_ukmod_july03.pdf).

4. Quoted in Kathleen Ridolfi, "Iraq: Britain Faces Predicament in Al-Basrah," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 17, 2006. Available online (www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/02/6aad3d24-fb7d-4db7-af76-0d1cb368a793.html).

5. Both quoted in Olive Poole, "Mobs Cheer British Deaths as Basra Slips out of Control," *Telegraph* (London), August 5, 2006.

6. Andrew Garfield, *Succeeding in Phase IV: British Perspectives on the U.S. Effort to Stabilize and Reconstruct Iraq* (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2006), p. 76.

of militia rule and were themselves less and less in evidence on the streets of Basra. This in turn created a situation where critics claim that the sole remaining objective of the British forces in Iraq is to hold out and maintain a physical presence somewhere within the borders of the governorates in the south formally left under their control, while at the same time minimizing their own casualties. Thereby, they also left everyone in the south who was not affiliated with a militia disadvantaged and exposed in the political process—not least those vulnerable elements of Basra's population who refused to abide by neo-fundamentalist Islamic conformity.⁷

Though the population of the deep south undoubtedly became more exposed to increasing levels of intimidation by the Islamist militias during the period of British rule, characterizing this situation as a deliberate British policy is unfair. It may be truer to say that important elements of Britain's government—its military leadership and portions of the diplomatic and aid communities—initially did not welcome the mission of regime removal in Iraq and that they hoped for disengagement at the earliest practicable moment, and the same might be said for the soldiers, diplomats, and spies of all other coalition countries, including the United States.⁸ The six-monthly rotation of new brigades into Iraq resulted in a constant churn of senior military commanders in country, some of whom were invariably better suited to the requirements of governing southern Iraq than others. In fairness, British forces consistently undertook superhuman efforts to restore Iraq's infrastructure, and the various brigade groups rotating through Iraq mounted periodic attempts to crack down on militia intimidation and criminality. From September 2005 onward, the British military arguably sought to reverse the deterioration it had witnessed in Basra by making a

more systematic and risk-prone attempt to reform Iraqi security forces in the city.

Whether this effort will be too little, too late, or whether something can still be achieved with a smaller number of British troops maintained in country for a prolonged period of time remains to be seen. The development of a longer, slower process of security sector reform is perhaps the only good policy option left to the coalition in the deep south of Iraq. As noted previously, Britain's proud record of counterinsurgencies and postconflict stabilization has typically relied on strong partnerships with local security forces. The British House of Commons Select Committee on Defense has identified the "short-termism and indecision" of security sector reform as the key failing of the British effort in Iraq. The British government view is now decidedly long term, as one British government witness to the Select Committee noted:

From a British point of view, we would like to see the militias either disbanded or integrated as appropriate into the security forces, but this now has to be an Iraqi decision. In practical terms, I suspect it is something you can not just do overnight. I think it is a question of persuasion and developing mature political institutions and mature security institutions which make the need for militias redundant.⁹

To make such a policy work, Britain may need to adjust the frequency and the method used to rotate its forces through Iraq to ensure greater continuity, improved ability to counter factional penetration, and stronger trust relationships with local police and military forces. By November 2006, ten sets of British forces had rotated through Iraq, with each autumn and spring witnessing an almost complete cycle of personnel.¹⁰

7. Reidar Visser, "Britain in Basra: Past Experiences and Current Challenges," July 11, 2006, paper presented to the Global Gulf conference, University of Exeter, July 4–6, 2006, and originally titled "Melting Pot of the Gulf? Cosmopolitanism and Its Limits in the Experience of Basra's British Community, 1890–1940"; published with some additional reflections on multiculturalism in contemporary Basra and the current British role in the city. Available online (www.historiae.org).
8. Andrew Garfield, *Succeeding in Phase IV*, p. 33, correctly noted: "The British generally have lower ambitions than the Americans and would normally avoid seeking more lofty and problematic societal change. Britain does not have that choice in Iraq and is still trying to adapt to the goal of 'regime change.' It is involved in a transformational operation that it would probably have preferred to avoid; one that many [British officials] did not believe could succeed, at least not in the form that the United States desired."
9. See House of Commons uncorrected transcript of oral evidence to be published as HC 1241-I, minutes of evidence taken before the Defense Committee, "UK Operations in Iraq," June 20, 2006. Available online (www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmdfence/uc1241-i/uc124102.htm).
10. Rory Stewart, *Occupational Hazards: My Time Governing in Iraq* (London: Picador, 2006), p. 274. Also see Garfield, *Succeeding in Phase IV*, pp. 54, 103.

Longer tours plus phased and overlapping rotation of forces should be important features of the future coalition presence. Although longer tours will not win the approval of those overstretched servicemen and women called upon to fight, one longer tour arguably may be infinitely preferable to repeated shorter tours of open-ended conflicts. A robust diplomatic presence will also be important to confidence-building, suggesting that a defensible and sustainable British consulate should be redeveloped with unbroken long-term presence in mind to avoid the need for further confidence-sapping withdrawals.

Another key lesson of the British experience is the vital importance of rapid stabilization of the postconflict environment. The downward slide of the deep south arguably began during the initial four-day period of looting and self-liberation that took place across the region in early April 2004. The British were not present in sufficient numbers, nor were they geographically positioned or legally prepared to quickly establish law and order. The cautious British approach to liberating Basra and the unwillingness to use authoritarian measures to restore law and order are eminently understandable from a British military perspective but must now be seen as contributing factors in the initial devastating loss of control in the south. Militias became legitimized by the loss of personal security felt by Iraqis, and the monopoly of violent means became diffused among scores of factions.

Speed and assertiveness were lacking in other key areas also, reflecting both a lack of preplanning and a hiatus in execution of large-scale postconflict reconstruction and political processes. As Richard Holmes noted, “had the Coalition been ready to exploit the brief honeymoon period that following its victory with the rapid rebuilding of the battered infrastructure and the nourishment of soft security, then the slide towards disorder might have been checked.”¹¹ Successful postconflict stabilization requires occupying forces to be entirely clear about their mission. They should quickly act with the same care, the same confidence, and the

some commitment as they would if they were stabilizing their own country.

The overarching cause of policy failure in southern Iraq might be traced to an initial misapprehension of the nature of the population in southern Iraq. One image of the population of the deep south was that of a passive long-suffering community, leading to the expectation that it would remain patient and largely passive in the postwar period. In fact, deep factional and theological divisions were boiling beneath the surface, and the key political factions—native and émigré—were far more proactive than the coalition in the critical first weeks and months of the occupation. A second image of the local population was that of a relatively benign community that lacked military capability or anticoalition intent. Once again, the reality was very different; the Shiites quickly and heavily armed themselves and engaged in high levels of violence against their coreligionists, the Sunni Arabs, and increasingly the coalition. The south included a range of very violent and methodical political and criminal factions from the very earliest days of the occupation, and these factions did not hesitate to strike out at coalition forces whenever such forces threatened their interests or even disappointed their expectations.

In the prewar period, the coalition could not see the population of the deep south clearly because it viewed them through the aperture of the émigré opposition groups. Now, as occupiers, the coalition remains susceptible to muddled visions, particularly concerning the role of outside powers in Iraq’s future. Important though such actors are, the coalition cannot look to the neighbors to solve Iraq’s problems. Iraq could be on the moon, and Iraqis would still kill each other. Overestimation of the foreign influence in Iraq is evident in consideration of Iranian influence in Iraq’s Shiite community. If this study of the Iraqi deep south has illustrated any point, it should be that the Shiites are fighting their own civil war, with local factions fighting for local reasons. Outsiders meddle, but they are peripheral to the main conflict between

11. Richard Holmes, *Dusty Warriors* (London: Harper Press, 2006), p. 105.

the factions. Although Tehran may have advantages over the coalition in the former's struggle to influence Iraqis—longer engagement with Iraq's Shiites and greater insight into the local culture—the Iranians, like all foreigners, swim in the same confusing sea of local factions. For them, as for anyone else, influence can only be rented—never bought.

A key lesson to emerge from the deep south is therefore that local power brokers among Iraq's Shiites are determined to be masters of their own destiny. In 2007, the Shiite factions will accelerate their violent bargaining and probably begin to find a new *modus vivendi*, a natural balance that may be more durable than foreign-imposed constructs. To outsiders prior to April 2003, Baath rule appeared to have kept Iraqis in an unnatural state where life was nasty, brutish, and sometimes short. Instead, the postwar record suggests that perhaps Saddam's Baath Party was the ultimate expression of a deeply violent society—the rule rather than the exception. Trying to keep the peace between Iraq's factions was perhaps overambitious, particularly once the best opportunity for true coalition control passed in the

summer of 2003, and certainly when scant resources were allocated to simultaneously fight a counterinsurgency and undertake reconstruction, each on an unprecedented scale. Now the coalition's key challenge should be to ensure that skeletal government and security organs remain on which Iraqis can build when the factional and sectarian violence burns itself out. For now, Iraq has swallowed up the coalition effort. Mark Etherington foresaw this possibility when he wrote of the deep south:

There was no all-embracing society to speak of, but rather a series of camps and cliques—miniature societies—each with its own place. Most were quick to denounce the others and compromise was rare. Each clique was self-sufficient because it was built around a source or sources of power. Like ancient city states they traded with one another, made alliances and broke them, declared wars and negotiated peace; and occasionally one vanished because the strength sustaining it had waned. When power was fed into this ancient system, this great flotilla would tremble as it absorbed new realities—and then steadily re-align itself as it had done for centuries.¹²

12. Mark Etherington, *Revolt on the Tigris* (London: Hurst and Company, 2005), p. 84.

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Executive Committee

President

Howard P. Berkowitz

Chairman

Fred S. Lafer

Chairman Emeritus

Michael Stein

Founding President

Barbi Weinberg

Senior Vice Presidents

Bernard Leventhal

James Schreiber

Vice Presidents

Charles Adler

Benjamin Breslauer

Walter P. Stern

Secretary

Richard S. Abramson

Treasurer

Martin J. Gross

Committee Members

Richard Borow

Maurice Deane, *emeritus*

Gerald Friedman

Roger Hertog

Peter Lowy

Daniel Mintz

Fred Schwartz

Dimitri Sogoloff

Merryl Tisch

Gary Wexler

Next Generation Leadership Council

Jeffrey Abrams

Tony Beyer

David Eigen

Adam Herz

Daniel Mintz, *co-chairman*

Dimitri Sogoloff, *co-chairman*

Jonathan Torop

Board of Advisors

Warren Christopher

Lawrence S. Eagleburger

Alexander Haig

Max M. Kampelman

Samuel W. Lewis

Edward Luttwak

Michael Mandelbaum

Robert C. McFarlane

Martin Peretz

Richard Perle

James Roche

George P. Shultz

Paul Wolfowitz*

R. James Woolsey

Mortimer Zuckerman

In Memoriam

Jeane Kirkpatrick

Eugene V. Rostow

*resigned upon entry to government service, 2001

