

2005 presidential election mobilized and gave voice to those Iranians who feel most drawn to the Shia revival and resent the Sunni backlash against it most keenly. The throngs who voted for Ahmadinejad come from humble religious backgrounds. Regardless of what they feel about politics, they are deeply attached to the core values and piety of Shiism, which is in turn tightly bound with the shrine cities of Iraq, and they are offended by the tenor and ferocity of sectarian violence.

The conservative leaders who have risen to the top in Iran share these feelings, and their language of power echoes the mood on the street. Still, Iran's leaders also understand that Iran can achieve great-power status only if it can reduce Sunni resistance to Shia revival. For this reason they have taken a page from Khomeini's strategy of focusing attention on the United States and Israel to divert attention from the sectarian divide.

Chapter 9

THE BATTLE FOR THE
MIDDLE EAST

Salt is an ancient Jordanian town, a short twenty minutes' drive north of Amman. Salt was a trading center, once the most important settlement between the Jordan River and the desert lands to the east. In the Ottoman period, it was the capital of the Balqa region, which covered roughly the same territory as modern Jordan. It is a picturesque little town, with narrow streets and charming houses that have tall arched windows in the style of the late Ottoman period. During its heyday, Salt was a cosmopolitan, tolerant place where Muslims and Christians lived together in peace.

This town of many churches showed a different face in March 2005. During that month there was a much-publicized wake for a native son of Salt, Raed Mansour al-Banna, who had died on February 28 hundreds of miles to the south, in the Iraqi city of Hilla, some sixty miles south of Baghdad. Raed was the suicide

bomber who killed 125 Shias and wounded another 150 in one of the worst suicide bombings in postwar Iraq. His bomb had killed new recruits who were lined up waiting to join the Iraqi security forces. The government building that Raed targeted was next to an open-air market, so his bomb killed many women and children as well. Even by the standards of the gruesome violence that various "irreconcilables" were using to stop progress in post-Saddam Iraq, the massacre in Hilla was a brutal and shocking act of terror.

Salt, however, seemed to feel proud of its son. Many of the town's young men had done much as Raed had, going over the border during the previous two years in order to gather behind their countryman, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, as their *amir* (commander) and fight for him against Americans and Shias.¹ Raed's family held a three-day wake for him. Those who attended "celebrated" what they called his "martyrdom," as Jordanian newspapers reported. The Shias whom Raed had murdered drew no sympathy at the wake. For Raed to have been a martyr, those Shias by definition must have been infidels whose murder was justified. The tale of Hilla and Salt is emblematic of how Iraq has been changing the hearts and minds of some Sunnis in the region, and of the divide that now separates Shias and Sunnis, and of the bloodletting that will define the boundaries between the two.

The celebration in Salt brought retribution in Baghdad. Enraged by reports of the wake, a Shia mob attacked the Jordanian embassy on March 20. Iraq and Jordan exchanged strong words and withdrew their respective diplomats. Jordan, which had been Iraq's gateway to the world during the years of wars and sanctions, was now estranged from its neighbor. Sectarian tensions were driving old allies apart, replacing the filial bonds of Arab identity and long-standing ties of commerce with deep suspicions. For Iraq's Shias, Jordan was the country of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and the haven for

Ba'hist exiles. For many in Jordan, Iraq was fast becoming a Shia country friendlier to Iran than to its Arab neighbors. Iraq would, however, be only a beginning.

The extremist narrative that combines anti-Shiism and anti-Americanism is especially resonant in the Arab countries surrounding Iraq, where the war and its violence have had the greatest impact. The ties that bind Iraq with its neighbors are old and deep, involving religion, ethnicity, ideology, and tribal affiliation. These ties also relate Sunni extremism in Iraq to developments elsewhere in the Middle East.

Al-Anbar and the Euphrates Valley, where the Sunni insurgency has based its war on America and the Shia, have close ties of trade, blood, and creed with Jordan, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. Some forty miles west of Baghdad astride the highway to Amman, in the Iraqi province of al-Anbar, Fallujah was once the crossroads of caravans going west from Baghdad to Salt and Amman and north from Riyadh and Nejd in today's Saudi Arabia to Mosul, Aleppo, and Damascus in Syria. Fallujans have been tied to Jordanians, Syrians, and Saudis by tribe, family, and marriage.² These relationships predate the post-World War I map of the Middle East. Fallujah was the first important stop for caravans moving north from Nejd, the seat of power in Saudi Arabia and the home of Wahhabism, and caravans from Nejd brought Wahhabi ideas to Fallujah, which were strengthened by tribal, commercial, and marital relations between Fallujans and Nejdīs. These ties make the fate of Fallujah, and more broadly that of the Sunnis, so near and dear to Saudis.

Now this city of some 350,000 inhabitants has come to symbolize the Sunni resistance to U.S. occupation throughout the so-called Sunni Triangle. Until U.S. troops occupied Fallujah in November 2004, the city had served as the hotbed of the insurgency. But its tradition of Islamic resistance to occupation stretches back to before

Iraq existed. Not only did the insurgency focus on Fallujah, but Fallujah's legacy propped up the insurgency. Called "the city of minarets" for its more than two hundred mosques, Fallujah has long been an important center of Sunni Islam and its politics in Iraq. In 1920 a local leader named Sheikh al-Dhari rebelled against the British forces.³ Then as now, Fallujah was subdued by force, and after much bloodshed. Sheikh al-Dhari's grandson, Sheikh Harith al-Dhari, is the secretary-general of the Association of Muslim Clerics and the imam of Umm al-Qora mosque, one of the most important in Baghdad, with ties to the insurgency.

It was during the decade of sanctions, as central power weakened, that the fundamentalism and Salafism associated with the insurgency grew roots in Iraq. The works of the Iraqi exile thinker Muhammad Ahmad al-Rashid on jihad and the Islamic state, which were smuggled from Egypt, gained a following, but more important, the tentacles of fundamentalist and Salafist trends popular elsewhere in the region began to penetrate the country.

The Muslim Brotherhood, with its strong presence in Jordan and Syria and affiliation with the Wahhabi establishment in Saudi Arabia, established itself in the Sunni regions of western Iraq that border on Jordan and Syria, and is today entrenched in the Iraqi Islamic Party. Firebrand preachers such as the Egyptian Hamid Kashk and the Syrian Mahmoud Qoul Aghassi (also known as Abu Qaqaa) were popular with Iraqi Sunnis even before the war, and copies of their sermons became ubiquitous in Sunni towns afterward. Throughout the decade of anti-Saddam sanctions, Jordanian mosques remained concerned with the plight of ordinary Iraqis and raised funds that were disbursed through mosque networks in Iraq.⁴ Also active in Iraq were Islamic activists such as Laith Shubailath of Jordan and extremist Salafist activists—some with close ties to al-Qaeda—such as Muhammad al-Maqdisi, who is a friend and by some accounts one

of Zarqawi's mentors. Before the war toppled the Saddam regime, extremists from everywhere would come to the Jordanian-Iraqi border towns to buy weapons smuggled out of Iraq.⁵ Trade in weapons created ties that straddled boundaries and gave extremists contacts and allies inside Iraq, and in turn made it possible for the growing insurgency in that country to spread across the region.

Extremist activists had an incentive to move into Iraq. They were losing ground to the more moderate main body of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan and were often hounded by Jordanian or Syrian security forces. Their activism over the decade leading to the Iraq war not only introduced fundamentalist thinking in al-Anbar but also created organizational links that would facilitate the insurgency after the war. In fact, Zarqawi's emergence as a force so soon after the war reveals the extent of involvement of Jordanian Salafis in Iraq. Extremist ties between Jordan and Iraq ran in both directions. The flight of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi exiles and refugees to Jordan and Syria has only expanded the opportunity for building extremist networks that cut across national boundaries. The extremism that was exported to Iraq before and during the war, strengthened and radicalized, spread back into Jordan. The same ties also made developments in Iraq directly relevant to Islamic activism in Syria and Saudi Arabia.

Shias in Lebanon, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia have all watched developments in Iraq with great interest. They all embraced Sistani's pragmatic approach to politics and were quick to echo his call for "one man, one vote." They all looked to gain from following in the footsteps of Iraqi Shias in adopting democracy to turn the tables on the Sunnis. Amal and Hezbollah leaders and preachers praised Sistani, hinting that once again Lebanon would look to Najaf rather than Qom for religious direction.

Hezbollah's endorsement of Sistani was less a spiritual matter

than one of political self-interest. Hezbollah's leaders were noticeably cool toward Sistani's call for clerics to withdraw from politics but saw benefit in the symbolism of his leadership. Their initial reaction to developments in Iraq was quickly to adopt Sistani's political formula as their mantra. "One man, one vote" in Lebanon would mean that the Shia, who make up more than two fifths of the population, would dominate government. In the months after the January 2005 elections in Iraq, Hezbollah's television station, *al-Manar*, continually referred to the "one man, one vote" formula. Hezbollah's endorsement of Sistani and its power play in Lebanon raised the ire of the Sunnis, who had until then stood in awe of the party for its anti-Israeli posture but who saw Iraqi Shias as American stooges and expected Hezbollah to support the Sunni insurgency in Iraq. Hezbollah, however, saw benefits in touting the Iraqi example. When the United States called for Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon and democracy in that country, Hezbollah became more aggressive in its rhetoric, anticipating that just as Sistani had used Washington's call for democracy to force Bremer to concede on the "one man, one vote" formula, in Lebanon too Washington's enthusiasm for democracy would only pave the way for the Shias' rise to power, at the cost of Christians and Sunnis.

In February 2005, after Lebanon's Sunni ex-premier Rafiq Hariri was murdered by the blast of a huge road mine in Beirut, hundreds of thousands of mostly Christian and Sunni demonstrators took peacefully to the streets to denounce Syria's domination of Lebanon. Amal and Hezbollah joined hands to reply with a larger pro-Syrian crowd of their own. The issue of the day was Syrian presence in Lebanon, but the underlying message of these counterdemonstrations was to flaunt Shia power. Not to be outdone, the anti-Syrian crowds grew even larger. The demonstrations served as a prelude to elections in June 2005, in which the alliance of Amal and Hezbollah

swept the Shia vote in the south to become a notable voice in the parliament. The Shias had demonstrated their power, but it was clear that it would not be easy to use that power to change the country. A new census (the last one had been in 1932) and changes in Lebanon's electoral map were unlikely to happen painlessly. So after the June elections Hezbollah had to work within the existing system and hope that as democracy gained momentum, political reform would follow. Given the Sunni anger at developments in Iraq, it was prudent for Hezbollah to downplay its approval of Shia empowerment there. Sunni approval of Hezbollah's politics was a great asset that the organization did not want to give up without the palpable promise of greater power in Lebanon. For now Hezbollah distanced itself from sectarian tensions in Iraq, joined the anti-Syrian government, and emphasized Lebanese nationalism (*al-wataniya*) rather than calling for Shia empowerment. That would have to wait for another day.

In doing all this, Hezbollah was following the Iraq model. Shias in Iraq had distanced themselves from Arab nationalism, instead defining themselves as Iraqi and Shia. But without the Sunni domination promoted by Saddam and his brand of Arab nationalism, Iraqi nationalism in a Shia-majority country would become the vehicle for Shia identity. Lebanese nationalism was once promoted by the country's Christian minority, but like the Iraqi Shias, Hezbollah has embraced Lebanese nationalism as defined by Shias, as a mix of Lebanese and Islamic and Arab identities. After resisting Israel, the Shias viewed themselves as defenders of Lebanon. Their Lebanon would continue to support Arab causes—fighting Israel, defending Palestinians, and resisting the occupation of Iraq—but the country's politics and nationalism would not be defined by those causes. In fact, other transnational ties, especially those to Shias beyond the Arab world, would also feature prominently in this new conception of national identity. Shia revival therefore did not

mean pan-Shiism or a unitary Shia language of power, but anchoring Shia interests in national identities. In time, "Iraqi-ness" and "Bahraini-ness" and even "Lebanese-ness"—given the Shias' favorable numbers there—may come to mean forms of "Shia-ness" just as Iranian nationalism has long been entwined with Shia identity. For the time being, new conceptions of nationalism, divorced from the Sunni-dominated Arab identity of old, are a convenient way of breaking apart the old order. In time they may transcend sectarian identities as well.

Bahraini Shias reacted somewhat differently from their cousins in Iraq and Lebanon. They constitute more than 70 percent of their tiny island country's population of 700,000 and consider themselves to be the salt of the earth ruled by a minority of Sunni settlers who invaded from Qatar in the eighteenth century.⁶ Since Bahrain gained its independence in 1970, Shias have been heavily involved in every coup attempt, street agitation, uprising, and reform movement in the Persian Gulf emirate. Trouble began in earnest in 1994 as the poor and politically marginalized Bahraini Shias protested their lack of jobs and rights. The government reacted brutally, jailing and exiling political and religious leaders and perpetuating the cycle of violence and repression.⁷

In 1999 the country's new ruler, Sheikh Hamad Bin Isa al-Khalifa, decided to open up the political system. This happened at a time of Shia agitation that led to the imprisonment of the Shia leader, Sheikh Abdul-Amir al-Jamri. Eager to consolidate his rule in the face of unrest, the emir called for elections to give the country's population a voice in governance. What he had in mind was not democracy but a parliament of notables that would allow him to control the population by coopting their leaders—"a cooptation of the effendis," as Bahrainis called it dismissively. Many Bahrainis boycotted the 2002 elections, especially the restless Shia youth and

those Shia activists who were enamored of the Iranian revolution and followed religious parties such as the al-Wifaq (the Accord) movement and the Front for Islamic Revolution in Bahrain (Al-Jibha al-Islamiya li'l-Tahrir al-Bahrayn).⁸ These voices instead called for a complete opening of the political system. Unhappy with limited access to power and the growing prominence of the Wahhabi brand of Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood among Sunnis, the more radical elements in al-Wifaq and the Front began to agitate. The boycott allowed the minority Sunnis to take twenty-seven of the forty seats in the parliament, which only aggravated the situation.

Thus when the second Gulf war came, Bahrain was already restless. The Shia youth, jobless and resentful, looked like the youth of Sadr City. What they lacked was a Bahraini Muqtada al-Sadr. Pictures of Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei and Lebanon's Ayatollah Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah adorned shops and homes. When a local newspaper printed an unflattering cartoon of Ayatollah Khamenei in July 2005, large crowds marched in the capital, Manama, chanting, "*Labeik Khamenei*" (we are responding to your call, Khamenei).⁹ Bahraini young people were not keen to follow the leadership of their traditional elders, and less keen to heed their call for calmness and patience. Revolutionary fervor began to give place to democratic hope after Sistani began to clamor for "one person, one vote" and the Shia won the January 30 Iraq elections. As a measure of how closely Bahrainis now followed Iraq, in May 2004 large crowds protested the fighting between U.S. troops and the Mahdi Army in Najaf and Karbala. The mass of Bahraini Shias took the example of Iraq to heart and began to demand real democracy, which would mean a transfer of power to Shias and not just a "House of Lords" to legitimate the Sunni monarchy. In March and June 2005, thousands poured into the streets to ask for full-fledged democracy. They wanted what their numbers warranted, that is, to

rule Bahrain just as their cosectarians were now ruling Iraq. Bahrain's sectarian troubles will bear directly on Shia-Sunni relations in the UAE, Kuwait, and, most important, Saudi Arabia, whose Eastern Province sits a stone's throw from the causeway that links Bahrain to the Arabian mainland.

Saudi Shias, unlike their Lebanese and Bahraini coreligionists, are only a minority of 10 to 15 percent, or some two million. Although some live in Mecca, Medina, and even Riyadh, the majority are concentrated in the oases of al-Hasa and Qatif in the oil-rich Eastern Province. Saudi Shias have for years faced religious and economic discrimination, especially after Khomeini locked horns with the Saudi monarchy. They were seen as an Iranian fifth column, and as the drumbeats of Sunni extremism grew louder in the 1990s were increasingly denounced as "Islamic heretics." They were accused of sabotage, most notably for bombing oil pipelines in 1988, which led to the execution of a number of them. Worse yet, the Saudi government responded to Khomeini's threat and militancy among some of its Shia citizens with a collective punishment of the community, restricting their freedoms and marginalizing them economically. Wahhabi ulama were given the green light to sanction violence against the Shia. Several fatwas by the country's leading cleric, Abdul-Aziz ibn Baz, denounced the Shias as apostates, and one by Abdul-Rahman al-Jibrin, a member of the Higher Council of Ulama, even sanctioned the killing of Shias—a call that was reiterated in Wahhabi religious literature as late as 2002.¹⁰

Unlike Iraq and Lebanon, Saudi Arabia has nothing resembling a Shia elite of any kind. There have been no Shia cabinet ministers. Shias are kept out of critical jobs in the armed forces and the security services. Only a few years ago, the Saudi monarchy made great stir of its decision to add two Shia members (the first ever) to the handpicked 120-member Majlis, which functions as the kingdom's

royal council or parliament. Shias got two more members (for a total of four) when the council was expanded to 150 in 2005. There are no Shia mayors or police chiefs, and not one of the three hundred Shia girls' schools in the Eastern Province has a Shia principal. The government restricted the names that Shias could use for their children to discourage them from showing their identity. Meanwhile, Saudi textbooks, criticized for their anti-Semitism, are equally hostile to Shiism, characterizing the faith as a form of heresy and worse than Christianity and Judaism. Wahhabi teachers tell classrooms full of Shia schoolchildren that they are heretics.

In the town of Dammam, a quarter of whose 600,000 residents are Shia, Ashoura is banned, and so is the distinctly Shia call to prayer. There is no Shia cemetery, and there is only one mosque for the town's 150,000 Shias. Shia citizens of Qatif, a city of 900,000, have fared better in recent years. There they are the majority, and since the Iraq war they have been allowed to build new mosques and a seminary and to observe Ashoura in a limited fashion.

Saudi Shias' political leaders have mostly studied in Najaf. Until the 1940s Qatif housed a few seminaries and a small center of religious learning, nicknamed "Little Najaf." Unable to express their faith, let alone teach it, Saudi seminarians went to Iraq. In the 1970s, many prominent Shia leaders, such as Sheikh Hasan al-Saffar, left for Kuwait, where they organized the Islamic Reform Movement (al-Haraka al-Islahiya al-Islamiya) to demand religious and political freedoms. Al-Saffar, who is today the most prominent Saudi Shia leader, returned to Qatif in 1977 to lead the call for reform. The Iranian revolution soon followed, and the Saudi Shia demands for greater rights were swept into Khomeini's broader call for revolution and an end to the Saudi regime. Mass protests erupted in the kingdom in 1979 as Shias defied the government ban on celebrating Ashoura.¹¹ The Saudi National Guard suppressed the protests, and

many activists, including al-Saffar, took refuge in Iran, where they transformed the Shia Reform Movement into the Organization for Islamic Revolution in the Arabian Peninsula (Munazammat al-Thawra al-Islamiya fi'l-Jazira al-Arabiya).¹² By the late 1980s it was evident that a Shia revolution on the Arabian Peninsula was a pipedream. Shia leaders backed away from uncompromising demands to ask for religious and political freedoms. In 1993 King Fahd responded positively to these entreaties by meeting some of al-Saffar's followers. Eager to end active Shia resistance to the Saudi regime, Fahd promised to improve the lot of the Shia, ordered the elimination of derogatory references in textbooks and other forms of explicit discrimination, and allowed many exiles to return.¹³

Continued tensions between Tehran and Riyadh were, however, instrumental in the turn to militancy among some Saudi Shias, who in 1987 formed the Saudi Hezbollah. The group was fingered for the bombing of the American military housing compound in al-Khobar, which killed 19 and wounded 350. The group remained small and did not attract much public support. On the eve of the Iraq war, relations between Shias and the Saudi state remained icy. Shias had for the most part abandoned revolutionary posturing, but discrimination continued, and as Saudi society witnessed an increase in extremism, Shias began to feel more pressure.

Saudi Arabia's Shias reacted to the fall of Saddam's Sunni dictatorship enthusiastically. Almost immediately they demanded rights from the monarchy: to be recognized as citizens of Saudi Arabia and also to be Shia—to call their mosques what they are and to celebrate Ashoura. They asked the House of Saud to formally declare Shiism to be a part of Islam and put an end to Wahhabi attacks on their faith as heresy. They did not seek to separate from the kingdom but asked for a seat at the table. In effect, they asked for what Afghan Shias got in the new post-Taliban constitution in that country.

Soon after the fall of Baghdad, eager to shield Saudi Arabia from the aftershocks of Shia revival in Iraq, Crown Prince Abdullah adopted a conciliatory posture toward Saudi Shias. He met with a delegation of Shia leaders, which presented him with a petition for equal rights signed by 450 Shia men and women, entitled "Partners in the Nation." The crown prince called for a better understanding between Sunnis and Shias and invited prominent Shias to a few sessions of the "national dialogue," a public forum where Saudis are allowed to discuss ways to combat religious extremism. This gesture of good will was followed by a relaxation of restrictions over Shias in Qatif, but not much else changed.

Yet the Shias of Saudi Arabia were not ready to be fobbed off in this way. Looking to the Iraqi model, they adopted the demand for democracy and political reform. Shia voters turned out for the limited local elections of February 2005, which coincided with Ashoura. In some areas Shias pushed the voter turnout up to 45 percent, far higher than the average 20 percent, which led worried Sunnis to urge their coreligionists by text-message and e-mail to show up at the ballot box to deny Shias victory at the polls.¹⁴ Given the developments in Iraq, both Ashoura and the election found added significance: "We are voting here to show we exist," said a Shia electrical engineer near the end of a queue of 250 people waiting outside a converted primary school in the eastern city of Dammam.¹⁵

During the campaign period, Hasan al-Saffar, who had returned from fifteen years of exile, had urged Shia participation in the voting. He openly compared Saudi Arabia and Iraq, implying that democracy would be good for the Shia in both lands, and that just as Iraqi Shias had risked so much to cast their vote, so should their Saudi cousins. Muhammad Mahfouz, the editor of a Shia magazine in Qatif, put it this way: "What is happening today in Iraq raised the political ambitions of the Shi'ites that democracy and public partic-

ipation are instruments capable of defusing internal disputes, so Shiites can attain their rights and aspirations."¹⁶ The response of Wahhabi clerics to such talk was similar to the one aired by Sunni insurgents in Iraq: Elections will empower Shias and their heresy. Better not to have elections than to empower Shias. The Saudi clerics did not actually highlight this point with bombs, but the underlying sentiment was that of Sunni hegemonism.

In Qatif, Shias won city council seats that enable them to discuss openly the problems that they see facing the community. Given the legacy of relations between Wahhabis and Shias, which have only worsened owing to growing Salafi activism in the kingdom, the potential for sectarian conflict in Saudi Arabia is daunting. It was with Saudi Arabia in mind that in May 2005 Ayatollah Sistani strongly criticized the Yemeni government for its suppression of a rebellion by Zaydis (an offshoot of Shiism) in northwest Yemen.¹⁷ This was a clear warning to the Saudi regime regarding the treatment of its Shia minority and an indication that transnational Shia ties and the Najaf establishment will challenge Sunni regimes, demanding greater rights for local Shia populations.

After he became king, in 2005, Abdullah took steps to defuse tensions. He relaxed some of the restrictions on the Shia. The government allowed the publication of forty works on Shia family law, including some by Hasan al-Saffar. Shias of Medina were allowed to build a larger place of worship to commemorate Imam Husayn (which will also cater to Shia pilgrims). Clashes between Saudi police and Iranian pilgrims who insist on chanting the names of imams during religious occasions in Mecca and Medina also declined.¹⁸ Shias welcomed these improvements, but there is much more to done for them to experience equality and freedom in Saudi Arabia.

What Iran's revolution had failed to do, the Shia revival in post-Saddam Iraq was set to achieve. The challenge that the Shia revival poses to the Sunni Arab domination of the Middle East and to the Sunni conception of political identity and authority is not substantially different from the threat that Khomeini posed. Iran's revolution also sought to break the hegemonic control of the Sunni Arab establishment. The only difference is that last time around the Shias were the more radical and anti-American force, and now the reverse seems to be true.

The same constellation of regional forces that resisted Khomeini's challenge will probably resist this one. Although the context and ideologies at play are different now, the national interests at stake are the same. The battle lines in Iraq today are essentially the same as the ones during the Iran-Iraq war; they have merely moved some two hundred miles to the west. They will likely rest on the line—more or less running through Baghdad, among other places—that separates the predominantly Shia from the predominantly Sunni regions of Iraq.

Iran's strategy in this conflict is the same as it was in the 1980s: to focus attention on anti-American and anti-Israeli issues, appropriate popular Islamic and Arab slogans, and avoid discussion of sectarian differences. This strategy worked for Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Sadrists, inspired by Hezbollah, tried to implement it in Iraq as well. The Saudi and Jordanian strategy too will be the same as it was in the 1980s: to contain Iran by focusing on sectarian issues and rallying the Sunnis. Hence, while Iran complains about the U.S. and British "occupation" of Iraq, the Jordanian and Saudi monarchies lament sectarianism, the Shia revival, and growing Iranian influence in Iraq. During a visit to the United States in September 2005, a frustrated

and uncharacteristically blunt Prince Saud al-Faysal, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister and the son of King Faysal, told his American audience that the potential for disintegration of Iraq was real and that that would "bring other countries in the region into the conflict."¹⁹ Leaving little doubt as to who Saudi Arabia considered to be its greatest rival in that conflict, he chided the United States, saying that "we [Saudi Arabia and the U.S.] fought a war together to keep Iran out of Iraq after Iraq was driven out of Kuwait. Now we are handing the whole country over to Iran without reason."²⁰ The prince's refrain would soon become the mantra for leaders from Lebanon to Bahrain: warning of growing Iranian influence to gain international support for resisting Shia empowerment.

By seeking to rouse sectarian conflict, Sunni extremists are filling more or less the same role that the alliance between Iraq's Sunni-led Ba'athist regime, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Kuwait performed during the Iran-Iraq war, which was to prevent Shia Iran from becoming a regional power. In this sense, the violent Sunni extremists are also serving the national interests of those countries. Although ruling regimes in Riyadh, Amman, and Kuwait stand opposed to Sunni extremism and support the U.S.-led war on terror, their interests in Iraq are aligned with the insurgency and its goal of wrecking a new, Shia-led Iraqi state.

As the scope of the sectarian conflict in Iraq expands, the contours of the regional coalitions with stakes in the conflict will become clearer. As was the case during the Iran-Iraq war, the sectarian struggle in Iraq will metamorphose into a broader struggle for power between the Sunni Arab establishment of old and the emerging Shia power, and between Saudi Arabia and Iran as the natural heavyweights on each side. The extremist character of the insurgency for now has obfuscated the cold reality of this conflict. By the

same token, the Shia-Sunni rivalry will also complicate the larger global battle against Sunni extremism.

The war in Iraq came at a time when Sunni extremism was on the rise in the Muslim world. The decade preceding the war had witnessed the growing influence of Wahhabi and Salafi trends in Sunni extremist circles and a turn to jihadi activism and violence after the events of 9/11. The Iraq war provided a new arena for this militancy to express itself. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi went to Iraq with the specific purpose of confronting the United States and providing al-Qaeda's global war against America with a new venue.²¹ In Iraq's sectarian divide, Zarqawi and his extremist followers saw an opportunity. A Shia-Sunni civil war would destroy America's project in Iraq far more quickly and thoroughly than al-Qaeda's terrorism could by itself. Sectarian conflict could also make Iraq's conflict a regional one, providing al-Qaeda with a larger base of support and recruitment. Anti-Shia prejudice could be used to augment anti-Americanism, solidify Sunni public opinion, and expand the scope of al-Qaeda's influence to an extent not possible with anti-Americanism alone. After all, America's confrontation with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan never mobilized Arabs on the street. Sectarianism held that promise.

The specter of violence in Iraq feeding Sunni extremism and al-Qaeda's terrorism elsewhere became more real in October 2004, when Zarqawi and his group, Society of Unity of God and Jihad (Jamaat al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad), pledged allegiance (*bay'a*) to Osama bin Laden, who in turn appointed Zarqawi as his deputy. Zarqawi's operation then adopted the new name of al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia (Tanzim al-Qaeda wa'l-Jihad fi Balad al-Rafidayn). The endorsement of insurgency in Iraq by al-Qaeda also coincided with rise of al-Qaeda cells in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, and even Iran.

Iran pointed the finger at Iraq's Sunni insurgents in May 2005, when a spate of bombings killed ten people in two Iranian cities shortly before Iran's presidential election. In July 2005, a theretofore unknown group calling itself God's Soldiers of the Sunni Mujahedeen posted a video of the beheading of an Iranian security official.²² The group is said to be a Salafi outfit, consisting of Sunnis from southeastern Iran with potential ties to insurgents in Iraq. It has been leading a miniature insurgency in Iran's southeastern Baluch region, causing fear that sectarian violence in Iraq is spreading into Iran and that Zarqawi and his allies in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere are intent on targeting Iran directly.²³

In the months after receiving his bin Laden endorsement, Zarqawi continued to grow in strength. His military capabilities became more sophisticated, as he was able to tap into new sources of financial support and consult with Ba'athists and former Iraqi military officers to improve his arsenal. His followers' presence on the ground was increasingly that of a guerrilla army capable of establishing control over territories and towns across the Euphrates Valley. This made it easier for the United States to target his forces directly in places such as Tal Afar in the fall of 2005. Still, territorial control pointed to the growing breadth of Zarqawi's network. His improved capability also enabled him to operate outside Iraq, relying on a broader network of support, recruits, and resources both to sustain his efforts in the insurgency and to strike elsewhere, most notably in an unsuccessful attack on two U.S. warships in the port of Aqaba in Jordan in August 2005 and the bombing of three hotels in Amman in November 2005. The ultimate impact of Zarqawi's network will depend on the extent to which sectarianism resonates with the broader cross-section of Sunnis in the region and shapes their political attitudes.

In extremist Sunni circles, the Shia revival in Iraq is seen as a

calamity, a monumental reversal in the fortunes of Islam. It is also further evidence of sinister U.S. intentions toward Islam after the events of September 11—the grand conspiracy to weaken and subjugate the faith. This has served as a new call to arms, expanding the scope of the confrontation with the United States Sectarian feelings now constitute an important dimension of the reaction in the Arab world and beyond to developments in Iraq, especially among the burgeoning extremist Sunni forces, which are growing in prominence. To extremists, Washington has snatched Iraq from the hands of “true” Islam and delivered it to “heretical” Shias. In fact, the weakening of the traditional bastions of Sunni Arab power, the regimes in Cairo, Amman, and Riyadh, owing to their failure to prevent this “calamity,” has made the extremist voice more prominent. The conflict that mattered to the mobilization of extremists and support for them on the Arab and Pakistani streets was not the one Washington was focusing on—it was not the battle of liberty against oppression but rather the age-old battle of the two halves of Islam, Shias and Sunnis. This was the conflict that Iraq has rekindled and this is the conflict that will shape the future.

The fallout from Iraq is perhaps most readily evident in Saudi Arabia, a country that has a restless Shia minority and an ongoing Salafist insurgency with ideological and organizational ties to al-Qaeda and the insurgency in Iraq. Young Saudi men have gone to fight and die in Iraq by the thousands. According to one estimate, of the roughly 1200 foreign fighters captured in Syria between summer 2003 and summer 2005, fully 85 percent were Saudis.²⁴ It is not clear who financed their recruitment, training, and travel from Saudi Arabia to Syria and on to Iraq. It is clear, however, that Wahhabi and Salafi clerics and activists in the kingdom encouraged them to join the anti-Shia, anti-American jihad in Iraq. The sermons that call the youth to jihad in Iraq reek of anti-Americanism, but just

as important, if not more so, they echo the old Wahhabi hatred of the Shia. War on America is now war on Shiism, and war on Shiism is war on America.

Wahhabi fatwas continue to declare Shiism a heresy, but also portray Shiism as a "fifth column for the enemies of true Islam . . . The danger of the Shi'ite heretics to the region . . . is not less than the danger of the Jews and Christians."²⁵ The war in Iraq has been viewed as the proof of "the strength of the bond between America and the Shi'ite heretics."²⁶ The well-known Saudi Salafist cleric Saffar al-Hawali boycotted the national dialogue convened by Crown Prince Abdullah in 2003 to protest Shia participation in it.²⁷ Another Saudi cleric, Abu Abdullah Ahmad al-Imran, described an important objective of the Zarqawi group as attacking the "symbol of heresy of the sons of al-Alqami"—the same Abbasid-era Shia vizier whom Saddam had invoked in order to suggest that the Shia had betrayed Iraq and Islam in the spring of 2003, just as they allegedly had centuries earlier, when the Mongols had swept down on Baghdad.²⁸

On March 2, 2004, when a series of bombs in Baghdad and Karbala killed some 143 Shias who were commemorating Ashoura, a Kuwaiti Wahhabi cleric used his website to condemn this cherished Shia holy day as "the biggest display of idolatry" and accused Shias of forming an "axis of evil linking Washington, Tel Aviv, and the Shia holy city of Najaf" to grab Persian Gulf oil and disenfranchise Sunnis.²⁹ These sentiments were echoed by the Saudi Wahhabi cleric Nasir al-Umar, who accused Iraqi Shias of close ties to the United States and argued that both were enemies of Muslims everywhere.³⁰ The language of Wahhabi ulama in Saudi Arabia echoes the anti-Shia vitriol of the Taliban in Afghanistan and extremist Sunni forces in Pakistan.

The extremists' commitment to the Sunni cause in Iraq will at

some point prove dangerous to the Saudi regime. The current scale of al-Qaeda activism in the kingdom pales before what the full wrath of Wahhabism—filled with fear and rage by the Shia revival in Iraq, and possibly facing Shia demands for rights inside the kingdom—might unleash.

That Saudi Arabia's close ally, the United States, is viewed as complicit in the Shia revival further undermines the House of Saud. The Saudi monarchy's Islamic image has already been tarnished by events in Iraq. Since Riyadh can no longer claim to be sustaining Sunni dominance across the region, it witnessed a decline in its religious legitimacy within the kingdom as well as elsewhere. Al-Qaeda and the Iraqi resistance—jihadis who despise the House of Saud—are now trumpeting this decline. It is difficult for the Saudi monarchy to claim to be the defender of the Sunni prerogative to power in the region without directly supporting the insurgency in Iraq. The Shia revival in Iraq, perhaps more than democracy and prosperity there, may well lead to regime change in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the region.

The ripple effects of all this will touch Jordan as well. King Abdullah was correct to worry about a Shia crescent extending from Beirut to Tehran. Yet what should worry Amman is less the Shia power that such a crescent would represent and more the Sunni backlash that it will generate. Sunni extremism has been drawing strength from Iraq. What happened in Salt in March 2005 is emblematic of the mood in Jordan, where 95 percent of the population is Sunni.

Jordan is in many regards already deeply involved in the insurgency and the sectarian conflict in Iraq. The insurgency is at its core an alliance of Zarqawi's followers and Iraqi Ba'thists. Significantly, its power structure is replicated in Jordan, where extremist Sunni activists and Ba'thists meet, conspire, and organ-

ize support for the insurgency in Iraq.³¹ This de facto base is critical both to the insurgency's operations in Iraq and to its spread across the Middle East. It is through Jordan that the two most intense insurgencies in the region, those in Iraq and in the Palestinian territories, could converge.

Iraq is radicalizing Jordan's fundamentalist debates, infusing them with anti-Shia attitudes. Jordanians sympathize with Iraqi Sunnis and support the cause of the insurgents. Saddam Hussein is popular with Jordan's large Palestinian population, who fondly remember his SCUD missile attack on Tel Aviv in 1990. All this poses a challenge to the Jordanian monarchy. Zarqawi and the Jordanian youth of cities like Zarqa and Salt, who are for now busy with the insurgency in Iraq, nurse a hostility toward the Hashemite dynasty in Amman very much like that which Osama bin Laden and his ilk harbor toward House of Saud. Just as the war in Afghanistan produced an al-Qaeda insurgency in Saudi Arabia, the war in Iraq may produce a similar extremist opposition to the monarchy in Jordan. Jordan has long been vulnerable to the radicalization of Palestinian politics in the West Bank; now it is vulnerable to the radicalization of Sunni politics in al-Anbar.

The deep divide between the Alawi regime in Syria and its largely Sunni population remains. Developments in Iraq have both fueled Sunni anger and raised Sunni expectations of empowerment. The Syrian regime will be threatened by both the example of a minority regime's having fallen just next door and the radicalization of that country's Sunnis.

Although by 2005 an American invasion of Syria no longer appeared likely, still Washington proved eager to reduce Damascus' regional influence. Following the murder of Rafiq Hariri in February 2005, Washington lost no time in supporting the popular anti-Syrian movement in Lebanon that led to Syria's withdrawal of

its troops. The U.S. goal was not only to foster democracy in Lebanon but to weaken and possibly topple the Syrian regime by humiliating it.

Syria reacted to the American pressure by maintaining an ambivalent attitude toward the insurgency in Iraq. Although the Asad regime's interest obviously did not lie in the success of Sunni extremist movements at home or in a neighboring land, a too-quick or too-easy American success in Iraq would not benefit Damascus either. Much like Iran, therefore, Syria followed a sort of "controlled chaos" policy toward the situation in Iraq, doing some things at U.S. insistence to help suppress the insurgency (such as arresting some militants) but also quietly looking the other way or even giving some covert support to the insurgency in hopes of keeping the United States pinned down across the border.³² None of these calibrations, however, obviated the Asad regime's potential vulnerability to the "blowback effect" that could come from growing Sunni extremism in Iraq.

In Lebanon, the opening of the political system and the prospects for democracy hinge on intersectarian harmony. Amal has joined Hezbollah in creating a Shia front that has participated in elections and now joined the government. Yet as Lebanon moves in the direction of democracy, it will have to confront the question of distributing power among its various communities in accord with their numbers. This will be more difficult to manage in an environment of heightened sectarian tensions in the region as a whole. Sunni extremism emanating from Iraq, which has been making headway in Lebanon, will make it more difficult for the country to conduct a new census and undertake constitutional reforms. It will become more difficult for Hezbollah to rise above the bloody legacy of Lebanon's sectarian divisions and to overcome resistance from Sunni and Christian populations in order to accom-

plish a peaceful transfer of power to the more numerous Shias. Iraq's sectarian pains are reminiscent of Lebanon's past but may also be a window on its future.

It is clear today that America cannot take comfort in an imagined future for the Middle East, and cannot force the realization of that future. Such an approach guided the path to war in Iraq and has proven to be unworkable. The lesson of Iraq is that trying to force a future of its liking will hasten the advent of those outcomes that the United States most wishes to avoid. Through occupation of Iraq, America has actually made the case for radical Islam—that ours is a war on Islam—encouraging anti-Americanism and fueling extremism and terrorism. The reality that will shape the future of the Middle East is not the debates over democracy or globalization that the Iraq war was supposed to have jump-started but the conflicts between Shias and Sunnis that it precipitated. In time we will come to see this as a central legacy of the Iraq war.

The task before America is now to take stock of the reality of the region after Iraq and to build its relations with the Middle East with that reality in mind. The first fact that confronts the United States is that the most salient threat from extremist interpretations of Islam now wears Sunni garb. It is Sunni militancy—al-Qaeda, Wahhabi and Salafi activists, and the network of Muslim Brotherhood organizations throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe—that poses the greatest threat to U.S. interests. Religious and political ideology among Sunnis in the Middle East, unlike among Shias, is moving in the wrong direction, toward militancy and violence. If the Shias are emerging from their dark years of ideological posturing, revolution, and extremism, the Sunnis seem to be entering theirs, or at least passing into a darker phase.

A grassroots outpouring of sympathy for the victims of September 11 occurred on the streets in only two places in the Muslim world, both within days of the collapse of the twin towers and both among the Shia. The first was in Iran, where tens of thousands snubbed their government to go into the streets of Tehran and hold a candlelight vigil in solidarity with victims of the attacks. The second was in Karachi, where a local party that is closely associated with the city's Shia³³ broke with the public mood in Pakistan to gather thousands to denounce terrorism.³⁴ What followed September 11 in Afghanistan and Iraq has only strengthened these feelings. The Shia in Afghanistan, between 20 and 25 percent of the population, were brutalized by the Taliban. The constitution adopted in that country in 2003 has broken with tradition to allow a Shia to become president and to recognize Shia law. The Shia have come out from the margins to join the government and take their place in public life. The violent face of Sunni militancy in Iraq underscores the divergent paths that Sunni and Shia politics are taking.

The Shia revival constitutes the most powerful resistance and challenge to Sunni extremism and jihadi activism within the region. Shia revival is an anti-Wahhabi and anti-extremist force. Its objectives are served by change in the regional balance of power and democracy. In turn, democracy will unleash the full extent of the Shia challenge to Sunni extremism. Democracy will bring to power Shia majorities and give greater voice to Shia minorities, whose ideology and politics diverge from the extremist bent of Sunni radicalism.

The war in Iraq may take many directions. The country may split up or hold together; it may sink into civil war, or its competing communities may hammer out a power-sharing formula to make it work. Stability will require compromise among Shias, Sunnis, and Kurds, but it will still place Sunnis at the bottom of a power structure that they once ruled. This will not douse the flames of Sunni

extremism that Iraq has stoked across the Middle East. The United States cannot decide what direction sectarian conflict will take. It will instead have to prepare for the unintended consequences of the Iraq war. A second explosion of Islamic extremism will come out of the Iraqi insurgency, whose force and tenacity will be entwined with the Shia-Sunni power balance across the Middle East, and which will seek to use sectarian conflicts to expand the scope of its jihad across the region.

There will also be new forces to contend with—the new Shia voices, separate from the old Arab order with which Washington is so familiar. When the dust settles, the center of gravity will no longer lie with the Arab Sunni countries but will be held by Shia ones. That center of gravity will move eastward, away from Egypt and the Levant to Iran, Iraq, and the Persian Gulf. The United States does not know the Shia well. That will have to change, if for no better reason than that the Shia live on top of some the richest oil fields in the region. It is in America's interest to take Shias and the Shia revival seriously. It will not be easy for the United States to balance the demands of Sunnis with those of Shias, or to hold the hands of the Sunni establishment as it contends with the Shia challenge and the Sunni backlash to it. It is a process that must begin with an understanding of the nature of the conflict and the future that it will shape.

Sectarian identities in the Middle East stretch back a millennium. They matter to society and politics, but the conflicts that they animate are due to the lopsided distribution of resources and power that have benefited one sect at the cost of the other. Over time the Shia-Sunni conflict can be brought under control only if the distribution of power and resources reflects the demographic realities of the region. Dictatorships have done a poor job of building such an order. They have used force to impose the will of the minority over

that of the majority, which is a problem in the Middle East well beyond the borders of Iraq—but that is not a lasting formula nor one that will survive political openness. Nor will the messy processes of democratization and globalization immediately solve these problems: they will have winners and losers as well, and ignite new conflicts. As is the case with all disputes involving religion or ethnicity, loyalties die hard, but they are less likely to command bloodshed if they are divorced from social, economic, and political injustices.

The Middle East is bound to go through—indeed, is now going through—a period of violence as the old order gives place to a new one and Shias and Sunnis adjust to the new realities. In time, however, the region will arrive at a new status quo. Most Shias and Sunnis will look for ways to reach a state of peace, to live together and share political goals and aspirations. Democracy will be far more efficient than dictatorship at attaining that inclusive goal. Future stability must be based not on the hegemony of one sect over another but rather on an inclusive vision of Islam and the Arab world that will recognize the identity and beliefs of both Shias and Sunnis and distribute wealth and power in accordance to numbers.

Those forces that are most dangerous to Western interests and to the peace of the region are likely to thrive during this transition. It is in the interests of Shias, Sunnis, and the West to minimize the pains of transition and hasten its end. This means contending with the reality of sectarian rivalries and understanding what motivates them and how they play out socially and politically. As in all wars of religion and conflicts over identity, in the end, peace, like war, is a function first and foremost of recognizing the fact of differences, and only then going beyond them in the pursuit of common goals. It is not possible to tell how the sectarian struggle in Iraq will turn out, or when and where the next battle between Shias and Sunnis

will be joined, or how many sectarian battles the Middle East must endure and for how long. What is clear is that the future for the Middle East will not be brighter than the past so long as the shadow of sectarian conflict hangs over it. This is the conflict that will shape the future.

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NOTES

INTRODUCTION

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