Shiite School of Iraq and Support for Democracy: Textual Analysis for Statements of

Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani

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# ABSTRACT

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      With the continuing violence in Iraq, the newly born democratic experiment is in danger. The lack of trust between major ethnic and sectarian groups in Iraq has been the primary cause for the crisis. In order to initiate an effective national reconciliation, the Shiites' assurances that they have no aspirations of instituting Iranian-like Islamic rule must hold credible by their partners in the Iraqi government. It also is in the best interest of United States to utilize Sistani's influence to increase the chances that democracy will be successful in Iraq. It must be emphasized that for democracy to succeed in Iraq, Islam must have a parallel guarding, supportive, and non-interfering role. Democracy has a solid chance in Iraq because of the presence of three interrelated factors; Sistani's support for democracy, geostrategic environment in Iraq, and the American support for the Iraqi democracy.

Approved: _____

Patricia A. Weitsman

Professor of Political Science

# DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to

My parents and the members of my family

and

in memory of those Iraqis who lost their lives, seeking a better Iraq

and

the men and women in Iraq

who suffered a lot but still seek a good future for generations to come.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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# ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| **AMS** | Association of Muslim Scholars |
| **BPD** | Barrel Per Day |
| **CSO** | Civil Society Organization |
| **EU** | European Union |
| **GCIP** | General Council for Iraqi People |
| **IAF** | Iraqi Accord Front |
| **IC** | Iraqi Constitution |
| **ICP** | Iraqi Communist Party |
| **IDG** | Independent Democratic Gathering |
| **IFND** | Iraqi Front for National Dialogue |
| **IIP** | Iraqi Islamic Party |
| **IGKI** | Islamic Group of Kurdistan/Iraq |
| **INDC** | Iraqi National Dialogue Council |
| **INL** | Iraqi National List |
| **KA** | Kurdistan Alliance |
| **KDP** | Kurdistan Democratic Party |
| **KIU** | Kurdistan Islamic Union |
| **ME** | Middle East |
| **MENA** | Middle East and North Africa |
| **NCC** | National Congress Coalition |
| **NIF** | National Iraqi Front |

| | |
|---|---|
| **NFUFI** | National Front for the United Free Iraq |
| **NR** | National Reconciliation |
| **PM** | Prime Minister |
| **PUK** | Patriotic Union of Kurdistan |
| **SCIRI** | Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq |
| **SIIC** | Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council |
| **UIA** | United Iraqi Alliance |
| **UN** | United Nations |
| **UNSC** | United Nations Security Council |

**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

The toppling of Saddam's regime by the American invasion of 2003 has created a

crisis, which now threatens the very existence of Iraq as a country. The scope of the Iraqi

crisis has ramifications for the security of the entire Middle East (ME) region. At the

same time, the ongoing democratic experiment in Iraq has been the focus of regional and

global attention as it will have far-reaching consequences for the spread of democracy in

the ME. The likelihood of democracy's success in Iraq is relatively good. However, there

are several obstacles which threaten democracy's success in the country. One main

obstacle is the lack of trust between the various factions of Iraq which hinders the

initiation of a successful National Reconciliation (NR). Iraqi Sunnis do not trust the new

Shiite and Kurdish leaders of Iraq. Iraqi Kurds have similar doubts about Shiite

intentions. Sunnis and Kurds are weary that Iraqi Shiites might seek an Iranian model of

government. Kurds in the north are widely believed to be perpetually seeking their

independence.

On the other hand, American support for the Iraqi democratic experiment is

important. In addition to the significance of the American support for Iraqi democracy in

the field of security, an American investment of Sistani's support for democracy could

fade the doubts of Iraqi Sunnis away. Hesitation on the part of American decision makers

to trust Iraqi Shiites presents a barrier to providing the support that the democratic

experiment in Iraq requires. Sistani can achieve what the American politicians and troops

have failed to achieve since 2003; i.e., defeating terrorism and initiating a successful NR.

For this trust to develop, American decision makers need first to reach an inclusive

understanding of the Iraqi geostrategic environment and the potential that the Iraqi Shiite

School of Najaf, and its most prominent figure Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani, have in

the Iraqi arena. Sistani's influence in Iraq is of great significance and can lead to far-

reaching positive results if his support for peaceful collaborative power sharing in Iraq is

perceived to be authentic.

Iraq's geostrategic environment, on the other hand, makes it possible for these

groups to share power peacefully. Because of the restrictions imposed by this

environment on the different Iraqi groups, no particular group can act individually in the

new Iraq. Therefore, it is in the best interest of all Iraqi groups to decide the best style of

power sharing for the long run.

As an Iraqi Shiite Muslim who is emulating Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani, I am

motivated to study Sistani's role in the new Iraq. Realizing the danger of being biased

toward my own sect, I decided that academic research is the best way to reach a better

understanding of the interaction between Islam and politics in Iraq. My attention is also

drawn to this topic by observing a tendency to overlook Sistani's prominence by those

outside the Shiite realm, which contrasts sharply with the influence he enjoys among

Shiites. Because of his role in certain events that have taken place in Iraq, it has been

proven that Sistani's views cannot be ignored.  Non-Shiite Iraqi groups and American

decision makers tend not to interact with Sistani unless they have to. It is important to

ascertain Sistani's position with respect to democracy in Iraq. If he supports an Iranian-

like model of governance in Iraq, the Iraqi crisis will be much broader in scope. On the

other hand, the Iraqi crisis may end if Sistani supports an Iraqi democracy. Accordingly, Sistani's position ought to be identified and used to Iraq's advantage.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the capacity of Iraq to endorse democracy. Factors that shape the Iraqi capacity are the geostrategic environment of Iraq, the American support to the democratic experiment in Iraq, and Sistani's position regarding democracy. I argue that these three factors in conjunction with one another make democracy possible in Iraq. Indeed, interaction between these factors will be necessary for democracy to succeed.

A major barrier to Iraqi democracy is the mistrust of Sunnis and Kurds to Shiites in Iraq. Shiites need to convince Sunnis and Kurds their support for democracy is real. I argue that the Iraqi geostrategic environment together with U.S. support will increase the likelihood of convincing Sunnis and Kurds that Sistani's support for democracy is authentic.

Sistani's support for democracy in Iraq, if proved, can boost democracy. The Sistani factor, however, is conditioned by Iraq's geostrategic environment, and the American support. In other words, Sistani's support for democracy will not be effective without Iraq's geostrategic environment, and the American support, even if it is proved authentic. Sunnis, Kurds, and even Americans might not take Sistani's statements seriously because of their preconceived negative perceptions. The geostrategic Iraqi environment can help them change these negative conceptions and take Sistani's statements seriously. American support for Sistani can add another indication for the

Sunnis and Kurds that Sistani's support for democracy is authentic. If Iraqi Sunnis and

Kurds become convinced of Sistani's support for democracy, NR could be initiated.

I believe the kind of democracy that Sistani supports is not identical to Western-

style democracy. I also argue that Sistani supports the establishment of a civil state—

governed by democratically elected representatives— in which the Islamic identity of

Iraq is preserved. In this scenario, the political power of the state in Baghdad sits in

parallel with the religious authority of Najaf. By preserving the right to interfere in case

of necessity, Sistani calls for a social contract between the religious authority of Najaf

and the state in Baghdad. Najaf will not exercise pressure on Baghdad so long as the

latter meets the expectations of the Iraqi people. Unlike Jean-Jacque Rousseau's social

contract that is between the society and state, I argue Sistani's social contract is between

Sistani himself and the Iraqi state.

## 1.1. Background

There are a limited number of studies on the ideological perspectives of the Iraqi

Shiite School towards contemporary political issues such as the Iranian *welayat el faqeeh*

and Western-style democracy. So far, academic attention has primarily focused on the

Shiite religious school of Iran. Whereas Ayatollah Khomeini triggered an Islamic

revolution in Iran, which led to the establishment of the Islamic Republic, Shiites in Iraq

suffered from persistent isolation and repression at the hands of successive Iraqi regimes

from 1921 until the toppling of Saddam's regime in 2003.

In the new Iraq, skepticism blurs the vision of decision makers with regard to how

serious Sistani is about his support for democracy in the country. Iraqi Sunnis fear

scenario where an Iranian-like regime whose supreme Jurist, or *faqeeh*, is at the top of the

political hierarchy. They also are alarmed by the likelihood of witnessing a pro-Iranian

Shiite government in Iraq. In a clear indication of the deep Sunni mistrust, Adnan al-

Dulaimi, an Iraqi Sunni politician and leader of General Council for the Iraqi People

(GCIP), urges Arabs to support Iraqi Sunnis against the *Safavids*[1] and their followers[2].

The international community is supportive of a new Iraq, hoping that a successful

democracy in that country will open the door for democracy to spread in the whole

region. The U.S. support for the Iraqi government is expected to continue because

America needs to maintain stability in the whole ME region in order to protect its

interests. Since instability in Iraq threatens the whole region, it is essential to promote a

NR that will lead to stability in the country. However, this support has proved to be

expensive and, thus, is not endless. It is the interest, therefore, of the U.S. foreign policy

makers to understand and invest in the factors that make the democratic experiment in

Iraq a successful story that leads to a decent withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq.

Sistani's support for democracy in Iraq, if proven, is one main factor.

### 1.2. Significance of Study

The value of this study is to reveal the potential that democracy has in Iraq if

certain factors are interrelated and invested. Sistani's commitment to the democratic

experience in Iraq guarantees the support of most of Iraqi Shiites' to democracy. More

importantly, Sistani's followers in the ME can help spread democracy because he has "…

the highest rank among the mujtahids and scholars throughout the Islamic world,

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[1] In reference to the Iranian influence in Iraq
[2] In reference to the Iraqi Shiites

especially in the hawzas of Najaf Ashraf and Qum" (http://www.sistani.org). Besides, American decision makers can convince Iraqi Sunnis to take part in the NR if they decide to invest in Sistani's support for democracy.

Another reason that makes the current study significant is the need to control the tensions between Shiites and Sunnis in Iraq. Sistani's potential is of double effect. First, he can change the attitudes of Iraqi Sunnis and Kurds to cooperate in NR if they believe him[3]. Second, Sistani can contain most of the Iraqi Shiites' rage and urge them to accept Iraqi Sunnis in government as well as in society. However, waiting too long may weaken Sistani's influence on the Iraqi Shiites in case new unexpected events, like the terrorist attack on the Shiite Shrine of Samara in February 22, 2006, take place.

If NR succeeds in Iraq, the Iraqi government becomes united and, therefore, stronger. The focus of the Iraqi government will turn on security and other urgent issues. The American government, on the other hand, can introduce the Iraqi democratic experiment as a model to support its foreign policies in the ME. In contrast, failure to reach NR can lead to catastrophic consequences. It might cause a collapse of the government of Prime Minister (PM) Nouri Al-Maliki. That, in turn, might pull the country to civil war and put its very existence in jeopardy.

### 1.3. The Problem

Since 2003, mistrust between Iraqi groups has aggravated violence in the country. Sunni and Kurdish mistrust of Iraqi Shiite politicians and the Iraqi Shiite School hinders the initiation of effectual NR. It is important for Iraqi Sunnis and Kurds to trust the support that Iraqi Shiites demonstrate for democracy in Iraq in order to initiate further

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[3] Iraqi Sunnis and Kurds realize how influential Sistani's role in Iraqi society.

steps towards the NR. This trust is hard to achieve. One major reason behind Sunni and Kurdish mistrust can be translated into their fear of Sistani's future role in political decision-making. As religion's role in the new Iraq is guaranteed in the new constitution, Sunni and Kurdish fears became accusations against Shiites.

If Sistani's support for democracy implies his intention not to interfere in Iraqi politics, his image for democracy is not very different from the Western style of democracy. However, Sistani's democracy differs from Western democracy as each has a different context and therefore defines constituents of democracy differently. As a result, the meaning of democracy for an Iraqi citizen does not have the same exact meaning that an American citizen, for example, has. Democracy in Iraq is more context-based and affected by Iraqi realities. One major reality about the Iraqi environment is the supremacy of religion in Iraqi society. Therefore, Sistani's support for democracy in Iraq does not mean he accepts total separation of religion and state. The role of religion in the new Iraq is important to him as a religious leader.

### 1.4. Research Questions

The current study is to evaluate Iraq's capacity to endorse democracy. Taking into consideration the Iraqi geostrategic environment, and U.S. support, Sistani's support for democracy, if approved, can lead to an influential NR. A long-term supportive policy will help to stabilize the country and establish institutions necessary for the flourishing of democracy. There are three research questions explored in this study. They are as follows:

1) Does Sistani support democracy in Iraq? If so, what kind of democracy does Sistani support?

2) Can U.S. foreign policy affect the democratic experiment in Iraq? How?

3) What is the effect of Iraq's geostrategic environment on the country's ability to support democracy?

## 1.5. Operational Plan

This study uses a qualitative method to examine eight translated statements, *fatwas*, and answers to questions made by different groups. This qualitative method is textual analysis. Chosen texts are issued online at one of Sistani's major formal websites http://www.najaf.org. I seek to interpret Sistani's texts and reveal the patterns that result from my interpretations for the texts. These patterns will determine the nature of the messages that Sistani wanted to convey via his texts. Conclusions will be drawn from the analysis, and will be followed by suggestions.

## 1.6. Preliminary Outline of the Study

After the introduction, the three components that I would like to investigate in this study will be presented: the geostrategic environment in Iraq, U.S. foreign policy in the ME, and Sistani's support for democracy. The literature review will follow in the third chapter. The literature review discusses democracy, Islamic democracy, Shiism and democracy, the concept of *welayat el faqeeh*, and Sistani's position on *welayat el faqeeh*. Chapter Four will present the methodology of this study. Starting from this chapter, the third component that builds Iraq's capacity to endorse democracy, *Sistani's support for democracy*, will be studied. Reasons why a qualitative method was chosen to conduct this

research will be discussed. In addition, the criteria for choosing Sistani's statements will be illustrated. In addition, I will introduce Peer Debriefing technique in this chapter. Chapter Five will discuss the analysis for the texts and the derived patterns. Results of Peer Debriefing will be discussed. Finally, chapter Six discusses conclusions, major findings and suggestions of the study.

## 1.7. Expectations and Recommendations

I expect that the results will confirm the study hypothesis that Sistani's intentions to support a united democratic Iraq are authentic. If used correctly, such an affirmation helps to build the required trust between Shiite and Sunni blocs in Iraq. I also expect that the Iraqi environment and U.S. support can increase the chances for that to happen.

To Arab Sunnis, Sistani's long-term approval guarantees maintenance of Shiite-Sunni balance in the entire region. Reasons for Arab Sunnis to interfere in Iraqi internal affairs will therefore be eliminated. The need for such a trend in researching is necessary as rapid changes in Iraq might lead to an unexpected collapse of the current government. American foreign policy in the ME that advocates for democracy will receive a considerable boost if the Iraqi democratic experiment succeeds.

Probable beneficiaries of this study are Iraqi politicians, American decision makers, and academia. Although Sistani refused to meet officials from occupation forces, American foreign policy can still utilize Sistani's influence to strengthen democracy in Iraq. Additionally, the world of academia will benefit from the current study since a deeper understanding of internal Iraqi circumstances is needed in order to suggest good solutions for the current and future period.

## 1.8. Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Due to the complexity of the Iraqi crisis, there are a number of limitations to the current study. One key limitation is about Sistani himself. Sistani is seventy-eight years old. He has not yet appointed a successor. If he dies, the vast religious and financial power that he administers will be divided. While his financial and religious networks will turn to be administered by his relatives, his religious authority will move to other clerics. Nevertheless, it is difficult to reach the same level that Sistani is at now for most clerics. As a result, no cleric will be agreed-upon as the most knowledgeable if Sistani dies. The power that Sistani has will be allocated unless he announces a successor before he dies. As a result, the effect of this study might be time-limited. However, Sistani might succeed in turning his suggested social contract into a long-term contract between the *marja'iyya* of Najaf and the Iraqi state. If he succeeds, it will not be time-limited with his death.

Another limitation for the current study is the inability to conduct another qualitative research method that is as promising as textual analysis in terms of the expected findings and overall value; i.e. interviewing Sistani in person. Security and financial concerns limited my ability to choose the interviewing technique. In addition, Sistani's acceptance to be interviewed is not guaranteed.

The probability of misleading some Shiite emulators with false statements claimed to be issued by Sistani is another limitation to the current study. The purpose behind such behaviors is to use Sistani's influence to win political gains. This limitation is significant as part of Iraqi Sunnis and Kurds' mistrust for the Shiites are attributed to

the manipulations potential that Shiite religious parties can exercise. Some political groups can allege that Sistani supports them in time of elections to win. Although his office warned of such violations, the probability of that to happen exists. More importantly, absence of a clear understanding of Sistani's role in Iraqi society makes it more probable for Sunnis, Kurds, and even Americans and some Shiites to build wrong conceptions about Sistani.

Another challenge for the current study is the position of Kurds vis-à-vis Sistani. Kurds have been the Shiites' allies so far. Their alliance with Shiites might change if they reject the future role of Sistani and his social contract. I believe the probability for this scenario to happen is weak as historical tensions between Kurds and Arab Sunnis in Iraq will prevent Kurds from dissolving their alliance with the Shiites. In addition, the federalism that Kurdistan enjoys protects the Iraqi Kurds in a way that guarantees their rights in the new Iraq. Having their rights secured, Kurdish leaders in Iraq will not hesitate to support the Iraqi Shiites.

The pressure that regional centers of power might exercise forms another limitation to the study. Sunni Arab neighbors and Shiite Iran might increase their interference in Iraqi internal affairs if they think their interests inside Iraq are under threat. Besides, Iran might find Iraq an ideal field to settle its own disputes or a field to indirectly confront the United States. I think that levels of interference of neighbors in Iraq are lowering because Iraqi Sunnis began to turn against radicalism.

The attitude of the United States toward Sistani's Islamic democracy is a crucial factor that might be a serious limitation if unexpected events take place among the

Shiites, like an American military campaign against Iran. Sistani's reaction is not expected to be positive if United States decides to attack Iran.

Sistani's reluctance to communicate with media channels forms another limitation to the current study. Although Sistani's religious networks are very effective in reaching the very far of Shiites, they are not that effective in reaching ordinary Muslim people from other sects and ethnicities in- and outside Iraq. Those people can only be approached in traditional media channels, like TV stations and radio channels. The consequences of not approaching Iraqi people from other sects are valid. Iraqi Sunnis, for example, might support or join the insurgency if Iraqi Shiites do not approach them.

A final expected limitation to the current study is the probability of witnessing unexpected negative consequences if Sistani's role is not determined. Other sects might resist Sistani's acts if he miscalculates his positions. Besides, Sistani's influence might be used to accelerate the violence in Iraq. Although it is a weak probability, Sistani's assassination by Sunni militias, for example, will explode the violence in and outside Iraq and might destroy the unity of the country.

The delimitation for the current study is to measure the authenticity of Sistani's support for the current democratic experiment in Iraq. In order to do that, I attempt to reach the most comprehensive interpretation of eight of Sistani's statements. Therefore, the scope of the study does not cover the opinions of other Shiite clerics in Qum nor in Najaf. The attitudes of Iraqi Sunnis and America toward Sistani's support for democracy are not covered either.

**CHAPTER 2: IRAQI ENVIRONMENT AND U.S. FOREIGN POLICY**

In this chapter, geostrategic environment of Iraq and United States foreign policy in the ME will be discussed. These two factors make the likelihood of an Iraqi democracy stronger. They can also play a significant role in supporting Sistani. First, in the section, which is about the Iraqi geostrategic environment, I will discuss the three components that established the capacity that makes democracy possible in Iraq. They are geostrategic environment in Iraq, U.S. foreign policy in Iraq and the ME, and Sistani's support for democracy. In the Shiite Religious School of Iraq section, Shiism in the ME and in Iraq will be discussed. In the U.S. foreign policy in the ME section, the U.S. role in Iraq of today will be explained. The purpose of this chapter is to explain the different pillars that build the Iraqi environment and to build an understanding for the U.S. foreign policy in Iraq.

**2.1. Geostrategic Environment in Iraq**

Geostrategic environment of Iraq and the ME prove that democracy has a genuine opportunity to build in Iraq. Shiites form 55-65% of the total population in Iraq while Sunnis form about 30-40%. In terms of the ethnic divisions, Arabs comprise of about 75% of the Iraqi population, while Kurds form about 20% (Brancati, 2004, p. 8). Shiites and Kurds occupy the top of the government hierarchy via democratic elections for the first time in the modern history of Iraq. The results of the 2005 elections enraged Iraqi Sunnis and pushed some of their groups toward extremism. Despite that, most Iraqi Sunnis realize the dangers of adapting to the radical Islamic position because of the vast population gap between them and their competitors. If Iraqi Sunnis insist on accelerating

the violence against Shiites in mixed areas, ethnic cleansing on broader levels might

follow. In such a scenario, Iraqi Sunnis will be the first victims.

Sunnis in Iraq want to believe Shiites because they realize their options are not

many if they decide to oppose or abandon the new Iraqi government. However,

interference of Iran in Iraqi affairs makes Iraqi Sunnis skeptical about the intentions of

Iraqi Shiites. Iraqi Sunnis, nevertheless, realize that in order to keep unity in the country,

they need to co-exist with Iraqi Shiites. Besides, Iraqi Sunnis need to accept the new

political order in which they are no longer the ruling elites. Iraqi Shiites, on the other

hand, are reluctant to give more weight to Iraqi Sunnis as they fear return of Iraqi Sunnis

to power. Moreover, terrorist attacks that targeted Iraqi Shiites and their religious sites

resulted in counter-attacks. Sistani's ability to contain the Shiite anger is not unlimited.

To understand the Iraqi environment, certain facts need to be explained. First,

Iraqi population is composed of three main groups[4] that are concentrated in different

areas of Iraq. Second, the three groups interact with each other differently, which is the

result of history and their different interests. Third, Iraqi Shiites are majority with two

thirds of the population. Fourth, the Shiite School of Iraq is hierarchical in structure and

this hierarchy is wide and strong. A combination of these factors in Iraq allows a

permissive environment for democracy to flourish in the country. These facts create

obligations that Shiite, Sunni, and Kurdish decision makers in Iraq need to take into

consideration when they make their decisions.

The fact that the three Iraqi groups are concentrated in different areas in Iraq

opens the door for separatist aspirations that some has. At the same time, it makes

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[4] Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds.

pressure for those who call for unity of Iraq to make compromises for other groups in

order to keep the country united. On the other hand, the nature of alliances is not rigid in

Iraq. Although historical perspective significantly shapes the groups' preferences,

different interests for the three Iraqi groups make formulation of new alliances possible.

It also opens the door for peaceful and democratic competition between the different Iraqi

groups to form strong alliances. In addition, the two-third Shiite majority in Iraq

empower Shiites via democratic means. However, their power has limitations, as their

majority is not absolute. An alliance between Iraqi Sunnis and the Kurds can

considerably limit the Shiite influence in the new state. Another fact about the Iraqi

Shiites is the hierarchical structure of their Shiite School in Najaf. Although criticized, it

is the rare common ground for all Iraqi Shiite groups. Unlike Shiites of Iran and Lebanon,

Shiites of Iraq are not united in their political decision making processes. The Iraqi Shiite

School of Najaf is the establishment that exercises recognized influence over the different

Iraqi Shiite groups. The resulted consequences of all these facts make democracy

possible in Iraq. Together with Sistani's support for democracy and U.S. utilization of

Sistani's influence, Iraqi environment allows democracy to take root in Iraq.

### 2.1.1. Ethnic-Sectarian Tensions

The contemporary history of Iraq reveals the size and scope of injustice and

discrimination that were exercised against Shiites and Kurds. There was a strong

favoritism for the Sunni minority by the Ottomans and the British for long periods.

Allawi (2007, p. 206) attributed the British decision to choose the Sunni minority in Iraq

to be the ruling class to the British mistrust for the Shiites and their religious authority in

Najaf especially after their active participation in the 1920 Revolution. The Sunni tenacity in occupying the leading positions and their tendencies to curb non-Sunnis was a critical cause behind disintegration of the Iraqi society (p. 206). After the American invasion, sectarian and ethnic congestion in Iraq came to the surface. While Kurds indicated their inclination to independence via their famous petition calling for a referendum on independence that 1.7 million Iraqi Kurds signed (ABC News, 2004), Sunnis reject any proposal that might imply division of the country. Shiites, on the other hand, did not indicate obvious separation intentions, though many Shiite groups supported the idea of a federal Shiite south.

After 2003, criticism of Sunni Arabs for deterioration in Iraq was not only attributed to the U.S. invasion of Iraq. The Shiites of Iraq, together with the Kurds, succeeded to form a majority in the new Iraqi government for the first time. Arab Sunnis, therefore, began to target Iraqi Shiites. An explanation for targeting Iraqi Shiites is the Sunnis' aim to destroy Iraq's Shiite majority. Acts of a terrorist, like Al Zarqawi, represent the refusal of Arab Sunnis to see Iraqi Shiites seizure of power (Rubin, 2005).

Support of Al Zarqawi by formal Sunni Arab regimes was manifested in their silence towards his attacks and their sorrow for his death (Rubin, 2005). Support of religious Sunni organizations to the insurgency in Iraq and targeting Iraqi Shiites was obvious. Thirty-eight prominent Saudi religious figures openly signed a *fatwa* at which they called Muslims everywhere to fight "crusader [U.S.], Safavid [Iranian], and Rafidi [derogatory term for Shiite] scheme" (Blanchard, 2007, p. 5). Shiites, consequently, were legal targets for the new jihadists and for many religious circles in several Islamic

countries. Wahhabi and radical Salafi clerics held a harsh sectarian rhetoric "… accusing Shiite Muslims in Iraq and elsewhere of religious apostasy and political disloyalty worthy of punishment" (p. 5).

### 2.1.1.1. The Shiite Crescent

The Shiite Crescent is a Sunni allegation that a Shiite axis is in the formation in the ME. This Shiite Crescent is described as extending from Iran, into Iraq, then Syria, and to Lebanon (Hattar *et al*, 2005). Since the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, some Arab leaders claimed that this phenomenon is taking place. The possibility of the Shiite Crescent formation is weak (Taremi, 2005). Since 1979, Iran has been organizing, training, and financing Shiite groups in Iraq, Lebanon, and elsewhere to increase its influence in the region. However, the Shiite Crescent cannot be formed because Syria is a Sunni country with a regime that advocates for Arab nationality (2005). In other words, the Iranian – Syrian alliance is not ideological.

A different definition of the Shiite Crescent is given by Peter Galbraith (2006, p. 20). Galbraith describes the Shiite Crescent as the "… Shiite-populated crescent that extends from southern Iraq into Saudi Arabia's eastern province, into Kuwait, and to Bahrain" (2006, p. 20). Geopolitical significance of Galbraith's crescent is greater as it includes the richest oil fields in the world. In both crescents, political implications are of direct impacts on the whole region. Iraq remains the critical element in both crescents. Worries about the Shiite Crescent formation began when United States invaded Iraq and Shiites formed majority in new Iraqi government. Iraq is located at the center of both crescents and, therefore, links the two parts of the ordinary Shiite Crescent and

Galbraith's Shiite Crescent. Political gains of Iraqi Shiites after 2003 gave incentives for

Shiites in other countries to demand more rights. I believe, though, that determining the

future of Iraqi democratic experiment is an internal issue more than external. With the

exception of the United States' role in Iraq, none of the neighboring countries to Iraq can

determine its future if Iraqi groups succeed to initiate a successful NR.

### 2.1.2. The Different Iraqi Groups

One additional factor that creates the nature of the unique geopolitical

environment of Iraq is the existence of different Iraqi groups with different political

agendas. In addition to the Shiite, Sunni, and Kurdish groups, there are parties and

coalitions that are composed of centrist and minority Iraqi groups. A close look at the

political agendas of many of these parties and groups reveal variety of interests and the

high potential of clashes in political interests among these groups. Some of them,

including some Shiite groups, do not necessarily support Sistani's visions. Shiite groups

that disagree with Sistani's approach are either loyal to other religious clerics or rely on

the vast public support they receive from their supporters.

### 2.1.2.1. The Shiite Groups

The major Shiite coalition[5] is the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) that is composed of

the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC), the Islamic Dawa Party, Islamic Virtue Party,

and others. Another influential Shiite group is the Sadrist movement that is powerful in

Baghdad and the south. These Shiite groups vary in their stances from Sistani. Some

argue SIIC changed its name from Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq

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[5] Information about the Iraqi groups is taken from Peter Galbraith's *The End of Iraq*, Appendix 2, pp. 230-233.

(SCIRI) into its current name after 2003 in an indication to move away from Iranian

Shiite School to the Iraqi School (http://news.bbc.co.uk/). The Islamic Dawa Party, on the

other hand, is a major supporter of Sistani and the Najaf *Hawza*. Formed in the 1950s to

face the growing influence of the Iraqi Communist Party (Gleave, 2007, p. 63), the Dawa

Party was among the first Shiite political movements in Iraq. With regard to the Islamic

Virtue Party, its main influence is in Basra in the south. Although the leaders of this

Shiite party emulate Ayatollah Yaqubi, Sistani holds recognized influence over their

leadership (Rahimi, 2007, p. 19). The Sadrist movement is a fourth powerful Shiite group

that is active in post-Saddam Iraq. Headed by Muqtada al Sadre, the movement played

significant role in opposing the American invasion to Iraq. Political positions of this

group are not always supportive to Sistani's views. Rather, Muqtada's supporters

criticized the Najaf *Hawza* in several occasions as the Silent *Hawza* because of its non-

confrontational approach. However, Muqtada'a lack of seminary education weakens his

position among Shiites in Iraq. Muqtada benefited from his father[6]'s charisma to reach

the position he occupies today (Nasr, 2006, p. 137).

### 2.1.2.2. The Kurdish Groups

Main Kurdish parties, on the other hand, are two: Kurdistan Democratic Party

(KDP) that is led by Massoud Barzani, and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) that is led

by Jalal Talabani. These two parties adapt secular agendas. Both formed the Kurdistan

Alliance (KA) in the 2005 Elections that came after the UIA in the elections results and

therefore formed the second largest group inside the Iraqi Parliament. In addition to these

two secular Kurdish parties, there are two small Kurdish parties with Islamic agendas.

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[6] Ayatollah Muhammed Sadeq Al Sadre.

These are: Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), and Islamic Group of Kurdistan/Iraq (IGKI). Although these two Kurdish parties are not representatives for the major Kurdish stream, they reflect the existence of an Islamic tide in the Kurdish realm. The two secular Kurdish parties are major allies with the Shiite leaders in the UIA. Their alliance is based on shared interests. However, concerns of these two secular parties of Islam's role in future Iraq exists. Yet, their resistance is not expected to continue if federalism preserves Iraqi Kurdistan's autonomy from religious tides. PUK and KDP are expected to avoid any reason that might jeopardize their alliance with their strategic Shiite allies in order to protect their political gains in the new Iraq. Despite their religious agendas that oppose the Shiites' supremacy, the effect that the KIU and IGKI can play in the Iraqi political sphere is weak in Iraqi Kurdistan.

### 2.1.2.3. The Sunni Groups

The main Sunni groups are two: the Iraqi Accord Front (IAF), and the Iraqi Front for National Dialogue (IFND). The IAF is composed of the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), which is led by Tariq Al Hashimi; GCIP, which is led by Adnan Al Dulaimi, and Iraqi National Dialogue Council (INDC), which is led by Khalaf Al Ulayan. The IFND, on the other hand, is composed of the National Iraqi Front (NIF), which is led by Salih Al Mutlag; and the National Front for the United Free Iraq (NFUFI), which is led by Hassan Zeidan. In addition to these Sunni political entities, Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS) is another Sunni entity that refused the political experience in Iraq and praised insurgency in Iraq. Its leader, Harith Al Dhari, is known of his opposition to the Shiite leading role in the new Iraqi government. With the exception of the IIP, the behaviors of

the other Sunni Iraqi groups reflect varied levels of lack of trust in Iraqi Shiite politicians and the Najaf *Hawza*. Despite political interests might change attitudes of those Sunni parties, initiating trust between them and the Shiites is not an easy task.

### 2.1.2.4. The Centrist Groups[7]

There are two coalitions under this division. The first one is the Iraqi National List (INL), which is led by former Iraqi PM Ayad Allawi; and the National Congress Coalition (NCC), which is led by Ahmed Chalabi. The INL is a secular coalition that is composed of Allawi's own Iraqi National Accord Movement (INAM), the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), which is led by Hamid Majid Mousa; and the Independent Democratic Gathering (IDG), which is led by Adnan Pachachi.

The INL and NCC have different attitudes toward Sistani. While Chalabi recognizes Sistani's influence, Allawi seems less interested to deal with the Najaf factor. Chalabi seemed more pragmatic in his interaction with Najaf. Though he is a secular Shiite, he decided to join the UIA in the 2005 Elections. However, he decided to go independent when he noticed tendencies of the other UIA parties to emphasize the Islam factor. He, yet, kept good relations with Sistani in an indication for Chalabi's separation between Sistani and the Shiite parties. Ayad Allawi, on the other hand, showed no tolerance with the religious groups[8]. Therefore, I doubt Allawi will have a positive attitude toward the Sistani factor.

In general, most of the current Iraqi groups developed the tendency to make their decisions based on their interests. In other words, different Iraqi groups begin lately to

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[7] I used Galbraith's term to refer to these groups.
[8] Allawi permitted the military campaign against Muqtada's the *Mahdi Army* in Najaf.

realize they need to make compromises as much as possible to reach agreements with

others if they want to live in one country. As long as interests of others do not threaten

their interests, compromises can be made. It is still difficult, though, to make

compromises when it comes to ideological differences between Iraqi groups. Secular

Kurdish parties may decide to accept the Sistani factor if Kurdistan's privacy is not

affected. Sunni parties expressed different attitudes toward the Najaf *Hawza*[9]. While

Tariq Al Hashimi is an active member in the government[10] and an ally to the Shiites,

Adnan Al Dulaimi and Harith Al Dhari did express negative attitudes toward the Shiite

parties and Shiites in general. With the Sunnis, accepting the Sistani factor is more

challenging as a result of the acute sectarian tensions. The Shiite groups themselves

expressed different attitudes toward Sistani. Although Muqtada does not enjoy high

religious status, support he enjoys is strong. He, nevertheless, shows signs of his intention

to act according to the Najaf *Hawza* rules when he began pursuing his religious studies in

Najaf, as some sources refer. Abdul Aziz Al Hakim, Ibrahim Al Ja'afari, and Nouri Al

Maliki, on the other hand, have good and supportive attitudes toward Sistani. The clashes

of the interests among the Shiite groups, however, make it difficult for Iraqi Sunnis and

Kurds to believe the Shiites. It is also difficult for some Sunnis and Kurds to distinguish

between these parties and the Najaf *Hawza*. Some even go to blame Sistani not to control

these different Shiite political tides in Iraq. For many Iraqi Shiites, their conclusion is

different. Their ties with Sistani become stronger after observing the conflicts among the

Shiite groups to control over sources of revenue and enlarge their large public. These

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[9] "Religion, human rights, and gender are not among the exclusive powers of the federal government,"
which"enables Kurdistan to preserve its secular status" (Galbraith, 2006, p. 200).
[10] He is the Vice President in the new government.

behaviors of some parties gradually eliminate the hopes of the Iraqi Shiites to observe

one united Shiite front in Iraq and strengthen their belief that Sistani is the only trusted

authority that they should support. This very act of the Iraqi Shiites shaped Sistani's

religious power with a new dimension: political power. Sistani is, nevertheless,

convinced that this power needs to be used very wisely as a result of the nature of Iraq's

geostrategic environment.

### 2.1.3. Shiites versus Sunnis in Iraq

In terms of the sectarian division in the Iraqi society, Muslims in Iraq are divided

into Shiites and Sunnis. Shiites compose of around 55-65 percent of Iraqi society while

Sunnis form about 35-38 percent. Although most of Kurds are Sunnis, their priority is for

their nationality as Kurds (versus Arabs). Therefore, it is not accurate to talk about Shiites

and Sunnis without recognizing the Kurds as a third component in Iraq. The comparison

will be between Shiites and Sunnis, though, because Sunnis' fears are more from the

Shiites than from the Kurds. The Shiites' effect on the future of Iraq is more fatal than the

Kurds' as a result of neighboring Iran and the Shiite population percentage.

As a general observation, Shiites and Sunnis cannot be distinguished by shape.

However, certain factors, like accent and names, can lead to make possible conclusions

about the sectarian background of Iraqi individuals. Before 2003, there were no Shiite

tensions against Sunni Iraqis. Tensions were against the ruling Sunni elites who were

exercising harsh policies against the Shiite majority. Therefore the resistant Shiite

movements were launched against the "government", not the Sunni people. After 2003,

the struggle became between the sects themselves to a certain extent. What accelerated

the tensions between Shiites and Sunnis is the mostly foreign insurgency in Iraq that targeted Iraqi Shiites. For the Sunnis, they refused to lose their "inherited" merits as ruling elites. In addition, they feared Iranian influence in Iraq.

The successive Sunni governments in Iraq legitimized their rule by emphasizing the "Arabism". They claimed they are true Arabs and "questioned the Arab origins of the Shi'is and associated Iraqi Shi'ism with Persian culture and Iranian history" (Nakash, 2006, p. 72). With the neighboring Arab support, Sunni elites in Iraq repeated the same Sunni behavior in the ME toward the Shiites. Arab and Muslim rulers tend to ignore the Shiite issue as part of the unfinished business of Islam (Fuller and Francke, 1999, p. 10). To the Shiites, Shiism is "a religious faith and a way of life based on that faith" (p. 17). Although Shiite identity may bring Shiites across the world closer in their cause, nationality belonging different countries are not affected. Muslims across the world share the same principles, but are still loyal to their different countries. Therefore, Iraqi Sunni doubts in intentions of Iraqi Shiites stems from their doubts in the loyalty of Iraqi Shiites of whether they are loyal to Iraq or to the Shiite realm. These doubts are based on, I believe, Sunni misunderstanding of the Shiite ideology and accumulations of pessimistic historical heritage.

## 2.2. U.S. Foreign Policy in the ME

In this section, I would like to explain reasons why United States needs to continue supporting the Iraqi democratic experiment. These reasons are two: Interests of the United States in the ME, and the U.S. interests in Iraq. Interests of United States in the ME become a priority more than ever after discovery of oil in the newly formed Gulf

States. To the Americans, oil became a "national security priority" (El-Tahri, 2005). Ever since, the U.S. foreign policy has been to maintain pumping cheap oil in exchange of providing protection for fragile political regimes (2005). Spreading democracy in the ME has not been as serious as it became after 9/11 terrorist attacks on America. Nevertheless, no significant success was signaled in spreading democracy except when change was brought by military force.

### 2.2.1. Fundamentalism in the ME

One observation about ME societies prior to 9/11 terrorist attacks is that many of these societies turned to be more conservative. U.S. foreign policies in the ME affected the secular-fundamental balance in the region. After 9/11, America was shocked. American politicians realized that their policy in the ME failed. Radical Islam flourished "…in countries with corrupt governments allied with the United States – Like Saudi Arabia and Egypt" (Ladeen, 2002, p. 166). Americans realized they had not paid serious attention to the growing radicalism. American presidents, since Jimmy Carter, have declared war on terrorism. However, none of them took it seriously until after 9/11 (p. 81). At that time, they knew that radical anti-Western thinking had reached an advanced level after decades of accumulations in the ME.

### 2.2.2. American Invasion of Iraq and Consequences

American foreign policy makers thought that in order to win in the war on terror and avoid further terrorist attacks on American land, the causes of radical fundamentalism had to be eliminated. However, instead of spreading democracy peacefully, the U.S. decision makers stepped away from their normal foreign policy to

follow a more direct line represented by an invasion of Iraq. Claiming that Iraq was still a source of danger, the United States argued in favor of toppling Saddam's regime. In 2003, the United States invaded Iraq.

American foreign policy makers decided to abandon peaceful attempts for a while and bring democracy through direct invasion. They attempted to repeat their experiences in Germany, Japan, and India in Iraq. After all, democracy through invasion is one of the five major patterns for the countries that have been democratized in the last one hundred years (Fattah, 2006, p. 87).

Although the invasion led to the toppling of Saddam's dictatorial regime and the establishment of the first democratically elected government, there are internal and external consequences. The U.S.-led coalition forces entered Baghdad on April 9, 2003. The Iraqi government dramatically collapsed. The country entered a political vacuum. The U.S.'s poor planning for a post-war Iraq aggravated the situation and dragged the country into acute chaos, accompanied by high levels of violence[11].

Wide ME society segments see fighting American troops in Iraq as a religious duty. Internal opposition for the war in Iraq inside the United States made ME authoritarian leaders resist U.S. pressure to follow the Iraqi lead. Besides, toppling the Sunni regime in Iraq threatened the fragile Shiite – Sunni balance in the region. U.S. decision makers realized a military intervention in this volatile region costs too much. They also realized the need to stabilize Iraq and prove their efforts were successful. Therefore, American support for the democratic experience in Iraq is expected to

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[11] While they spent nine months of planning for that war, American decision makers spent 28 days only to plan for what follows the war, according to senior U.S. military officials (Brancati, 2004, p. 7).

continue. Within that line, unity and sovereignty of the country need to be guaranteed. After all, a democratic Iraq is the best method for America to spread democracy in the ME peacefully.

With regard to the American interests in Iraq, the Iraqi natural resources play a significant role that guarantees the continuity of American support for the Iraqi democratic experiment. Iraq is an oil producing country and its oil is a guarantee for continuity of U.S. support for the Iraqi government. Iraqi oil is important in today's energy crisis. With a production level that reached 3.5 million barrels per day (bpd) in the 1980s (Metz, 1988), Iraq's oil production dropped from 2 to 2.6 million bpd in the 1990s (Jervis, 2005). After the American invasion, Iraqi daily oil production dropped to 1.9 million bpd in September 2007 (OPEC, 2007, p. 24). The economic significance of Iraq was not harmed by the war. Experts estimate that Iraq has 112 billion barrels as oil reserves. However, many organizations argue that Iraq's oil reserves contain much more, between 200 and 300 billion barrels. That count makes Iraq the first in the world's list of oil reserves, if correct (Luft, 2003), which in turn strengthens the possibility of initiating a future Saudi-like deal between Americans and Iraqis; i.e. cheap oil in exchange for military protection.

With the increase of American fatalities in Iraq, the debate about the current and future U.S. policies in Iraq broke out (Rubin, 2005). Democrats were demanding to withdraw from Iraq while Republicans believed otherwise, arguing that a quick withdrawal will harm American credibility (2005). Interestingly, Rubin seems convinced that this growing debate was "… more related to Washington, DC than to Baghdad, Iraq"

(2005). With or without a scenario of an American military withdrawal from Iraq, the decision will have limited effect on the situation in Iraq because it is limited to the role of the military forces. The United States is not expected to abandon its interests in Iraq, especially with a "…staff (for U.S. Embassy in Baghdad) of 1,700 - roughly 1,000 Americans and 700 Iraqis," which is "… responsible for disbursing $18bn in U.S. aid to Iraq" (Greene, 2004). With the expectation that U.S.-Iraqi relations are going to be a priority for the U.S. decision makers, there will be no doubt that the United States will interfere again in Iraq militarily if its interests are threatened in that country.

## 2.3. Sistani's Support for Democracy

As the third and main component in Iraq's capacity that makes democracy more probable in Iraq, I will discuss Shiism in Iraq and Sistani's background. An explanation of the hierarchical structure in the Shiite society of Iraq will be explained too.

### *2.3.1. Shiite Religious School of Iraq*

Next to Al Madeena[12] in Saudi Arabia, Iraq is the birthplace of Shiism in the world. The burial places of the Shiite Imams who died in Iraq have become destinations for Shiite pilgrims from all over the world. Najaf and Karbala, in particular, became attractive for those who want to study ideology of the Shiite's main group: the *Ethnaiashariya*[13]. This trend began and strengthened after the decease of the four deputies that the twelfth and last Shiite Imam appointed to represent him during his occultation. The four deputies were well-known scholars in the Shiite world. After their death, Shiites entered the second stage of occultation during which the Hidden Imam

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[12] The Saudi city where Prophet Mohammed is buried.
[13] The twelvers, in reference to the Shiite twelve Imams.

appointed no scholars. Therefore, loyalty of Shiites was given to the most knowledgeable among the scholars. In the Shiite ideology, those scholars are representatives of the Hidden Imam until he appears again. As representatives, they exercise the religious duties on behalf of the Hidden Imam, but never equal him in his status.     In order to explain the roots behind Sistani's influence over the Shiite masses in Iraq and the world, it is necessary to study two major concepts that act as mechanisms that tie Shiite Muslims with their *Marja'iyya*, clerics, in Najaf.

### 2.3.1.1. Ijtihad

*Ijtihad* is the independent juristic reasoning of recognized Shiite scholars to discover legal opinions (p. 65). These juristic reasoning efforts of Shiite scholars are authoritative in nature because they are the only legal authorities agreed upon during the occultation of the twelfth Imam. For Shiite scholars to reach the level of *ijtihaad*, they need to go through certain mechanisms to gain the required license. In order to be licensed, a recognized *mujtahid* authorizes the scholar to do *ijtihad* (Halem, 1997, p. 104). Only after that can a Shiite scholar become eligible to indulge in juristic reasoning. It takes scholars a long time to be licensed depending on their knowledge and mental capabilities. In other words, Shiite scholars are not confined to a particular period to be licensed. Some scholars are licensed earlier than others because they prove proficiency in the different fields of study. *Mujtahids*, Shiite scholars who are licensed to do *ijtihaad,* are of reputable authority among Shiites; they are eligible to be emulated by Shiite people as sources of *taqleed*.

### 2.3.1.2. Taqleed

*Taqleed* is the duty of every Shiite Muslim to choose a *mujtahid* and emulate his

line of thinking and acting in religious affairs. The *mujtahid* is called *marji'a* or

*marja'iyyat al taqleed* in that case. Shiite males and females, therefore, are required to

choose their *marja'iyyia* in their adulthood. The obligatory nature of *taqleed* in Shiite

ideology gives authoritative power to Shiite *mujtahids.* Although that power is of

religious nature, it might exceed to other fields as well.

The ordinary Shiite Muslims are required to direct their questions to their *marji'a*

if they have religious queries in any field. Shiite Muslims are required by their ideology

to obey and implement the *fatwas* of their *marji'a*. If not, they break a crucial tie with the

*marja'iyya.* This action is close to a declaration of stepping outside the Shiite realm.

Worse, disobeying the *fatwas* of the *margi'a* is disrespectful for the Shiite Imams

themselves, because those scholars are originally doing their best to serve the people who

believe in and support the Hidden Imam.

### 2.3.1.3. Shiite School of Najaf in Iraq

Out of the many sacred sites in Iraq, Najaf became the center for the Shiite

religious authority because it is the burial place for the first Shiite Imam, *Ali bin Abi*

*Talib*. Shiite School of Najaf is regarded as the leading religious authority for most Shiite

Muslims in the world. The ideology of the Shiite mainstream, *ethnaiashareiyya,* states

that the Twelve Shiite Imams have *Imamate* and *Wilaya*. That meaning encompasses

spiritual, universal, political, and social authorities (Rizvi, 2006). Therefore, *Imamate* is a

"… devotion to Ali and his descendents as religious guides, sources of sacred power and the only authoritative interpreters of the Islamic message" (Gleave, 2007, p. 60). In other words, Ali combines the religio-jurist together with the political authorities in his hands. Although it is not unlimited, as is the case with their Imams, the Shiite scholars only have the religio-jurist authority during the occultation period. In the current absence of the Twelfth Imam, Shiite scholars are the religious authority that can address the religio-jurisprudent needs of the Shiite masses. Scholars work according to a vastly hierarchical system.

### 2.3.1.4. Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani

With about "80% of Shiite worshipers in the world follow[ing] Ayatollah Al Sistani" (Khalaji, 2006, p. 7), he is one of the most prominent Shiite scholars alive. He is regarded as the most knowledgeable Shiite scholar in the Iraqi Shiite school of Najaf. His followers are not confined to Iraq. Rather, they are distributed in different countries in the world.

Sistani was born in Mashhad, Iran, in 1930 in a family whose members were known for their knowledge and piety (http://www.najaf.org). At the age of twenty-one, he left Iran to settle in Najaf, Iraq (Allawi, 2007, p. 207).  At the age of thirty-one, Sistani had been certified as a *mujtahid* by Ayatollah al-Khoei, the highest-ranked *marjji'a* in the Shiite world at that time (http://www.sistani.org). Although there are other reputed ayatollahs in Najaf, Sistani's position at the top of the religious school of Najaf's hierarchy is undisputed (Allawi, 2007, p. 207). Shiite religious scholars outside Najaf "… did not seriously dispute al-Sistani's pre-eminence" (p. 207). One reason for that is al-

Khoei's appointment of Sistani as his successor (http://www.sistani.org). Another reason

for Sistani's leading position in Najaf is a network of seminaries that Rahimi (2007)

describes as a "vast, multimillion-dollar transnational network of seminaries, mosques,

and welfare-based organizations from India to Nigeria, from London to New York, and

from Qom to Najaf, arguably representing the most organized religious association in

post-Ba'athist Iraq" (p. 3-4). To be able to operate these organizations and networks, it is

clear Sistani has a great wealth. The most accurate estimates about his annual income are

between $500 million and $700 million while his worldwide assets exceed $3 billion

(Khalaji, 2006, p. 9).

Sistani's political views are vague. Two reasons can best explain why. First,

Saddam's dictatorial regime of Saddam left the Shiite School of Najaf with no other

option but to distance itself from politics, especially after the assassination of Ayatollah

Mohammed Baqir al-Sadr. Second, Najaf's position from *welayat el faqeeh* is different

from Qum's position.

Under Saddam's regime, Sistani's activities were confined to the religious and

social spheres. After the regime's assassination of Muqtada's father, Ayatollah

Mohammed Sadeq Al Sadr, Sistani decided to quit teaching. He rarely left his house even

to visit the near-by Shrine of Imam Ali (Rahimi, 2007, p. 5). Rumors said he was put

under house arrest.

After the American occupation of Iraq in 2003, the absence of a clear idea about

the Shiite School of Najaf and its supreme figure, Sistani, was not confined to the

Americans, the British, and the Arab Sunnis. Iraqi Sunnis and Kurds in the north of

Baghdad do not have a sufficient image of Sistani or ideology of Iraqi Shiites. Therefore,

the general mode for those who sought information was to read the available literature,

which is often written about Shiites of Iran, or rely to erroneous generalizations about

Shiites of Iraq. Misconceptions about the Iraqi school and Sistani led to doubts about him

and his positions, thinking that Sistani's ultimate goal in the political realm is similar to

Khomeini's in 1979.

With the media's attention turned to focus on him, Sistani's views began to be the

focus of many different groups. Sources of information were his office, agents, websites,

and organizations; he has never given an interview to the media (Khalaji, 2007, p. 12).

He rarely appears publically. This distance that he created has been an effective

mechanism. Khalaji explains:

> Creating haram, or a special distance, from architecture to social and
> human relations is an indication of the power order. A religious leader
> should not be publicized, especially by modern technology, because in that
> case he loses his religious pomp and spiritual glory (2007, p. 12).

In terms of his involvement in political life, the "state" was absent in his *fatwas*

and writings. After 2003, the "state" began to appear in his statements because there was

no more fear of the tyranny of the last regime (Visser, 2006, p. 9). Nevertheless, he found

himself facing the same authority that toppled Saddam's regime. Although he did not

order his followers to fight the American forces, he refused the occupation and did not

meet any of their representatives. Sistani also continued monitoring the political events in

Iraq. His opinion reached Iraqi politicians, knowing that they cannot ignore his views.

Sistani's influence stems from his ability to rally hundreds of thousands of devoted Shiite

followers, as he did in January 2004 when he demanded the replacement of the U.S.-suggested caucus system with direct elections (p. 17).

The weight that Sistani has in Iraq and the ME stems from the fact that he

> "maintains a tight grip on some of Iraq's most important democratic building blocks: numerous civic associations, tribal orders, and political parties in the southern regions of the country. Even among some of the Sadrists and the followers of Ayatollah Yaqubi of the Fadhilla party in Basra, Sistani holds a high level of authority" (Rahimi, 2007, p. 19).

### 2.3.1.5. Sistani versus Khomeini

In order to differentiate between the Iraqi Shiite School and the Iranian one, I will compare Sistani's ideas with Khomeini's. Although both scholars are from Iran, they belong to different Shiite schools. Khomeini studied in the Iranian Shiite School while Sistani is a student of the Iraqi Shiite School. While Sistani is traditional in his approach, Khomeini is regarded as "the first Islamic theologian to develop and put into practice his idea of an Islamic government in the modern world" (Rahnema, 1994, p. 64). Islam, to Khomeini, is the only guarantor of the *umma*'s independence and the *ulama* as the legal power that can stand in the face of the tyrant political power (Halm, 1997, p. 138-139). Sistani's current positions reflect views that are compatible with Khomeini's in this respect. In other words, Sistani's social contract implies the same meanings that Khomeini expressed. Yet, both scholars defined the role of the *ulama* in society differently. While Sistani does not support religious scholars' involvement in politics, Khomeini found the right of the religious scholar to rule as a privilege assigned to him by God (Khalaji, 2006, p. 15).

By entering the realm of politics, Khomeini attempted to implement his interpretation of Islam. In this line, he followed an approach that left no space for compromises, which was reflected in eight years of war with Iraq and bad relations with the superpowers at his time (Moin, 1994, p. 93-94). Sistani, on the other hand, left the political decision making to the politicians in Baghdad and maintained the right to shape political decisions with his visions. Sistani avoids direct involvement in politics because he believes there will be no just ruler until the end of the *Ghayba* and return of the Hidden Imam. Civil politicians can, therefore, perform political duties under observation of the religious scholars, according to Sistani.

**CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review covers one area that is significant to the current study of Islamic democracy. Islam and its relation to democracy are discussed. My focus is on the Shiite ideology and its stance from democracy. Special attention is given to the concept of *Welayat el faqeeh*, due to its significance in causing the mistrust condition for the Shiites of Iraq.

In the current study, I argue that Iraq's capacity to endorse democracy is potentially high. In addition to the encouraging geostrategic environment in Iraq and the U.S. support, Sistani's support for democracy in Iraq is the main issue. The U.S. support for the Iraqi state cannot guarantee a successful democracy in Iraq. On the other hand, the Iraqi environment that encourages democracy cannot solve vital issues of disagreement between the different groups. Both factors are important but not vital in determining the fate of Iraqi democracy. Role of religion in new Iraq is vital and needs to be solved in order for democracy to succeed in this country. Therefore, studying authenticity of Sistani's support for democracy is what can make democracy successful in Iraq. If Iraqi Sunnis and Kurds trust Sistani's intentions, NR can be achieved.

I argue that Sistani's democracy is not identical with the Western style of democracy. The difference is not crucial but important and needs to be understood. It resulted from a difference in defining the main democratic principles by both societies. Yet, Sistani's position from *welayat el faqeeh* is not a determining factor, as was the case with Khomeini in Iran in 1979. Even if he believes in this principle, Sistani will still not have the ability to implement *welayat el faqeeh*. Shiites constitute two-thirds of the

country. Democracy is possible in Iraq as Sistani does not declare a definite position in regard to *welayat el faqeeh*.

Sistani advocates for a democratic Iraq in which the state accepts a social contract. Rahimi (2007) argues that this social contract is the ideal form of political legitimacy between the rulers and the ruled (p. 9). I believe that Sistani supports a similar social contract between the political rulers of Iraq and him, as the head of the Shiite *marja'iyya* in Najaf. As a representative of most Shiites in Iraq and the world, he can be the guardian of their interests in this country. His demand is not for sharing political power; rather, it is to monitor the state's performance.

There are several reasons for the Iraqi Sunnis and Kurds not to suspect Sistani's ideas. They are within the scope of the other two factors: Iraq's geostrategic environment, and the role of the U.S. intervention in Iraq. An Iranian-like regime headed by Sistani, with his Iranian origins, is not expected to gain support in Iraq even from the most devoted of Iraqi Shiites. Nationality in Iraq is strong, even among the Shiites. In addition, Arab Sunnis can play an increasing role inside Iraq if Iraqi Sunnis reject Sistani's decisions. Iraqi Sunnis will not hesitate, in that scenario, to welcome and support Arab insurgency if their doubts about Iraqi Shiite's relation with Iran continue. What makes this scenario possible is the geography of Iraq. Most of Iraqi Sunnis dominate the northwestern part of the country. Thus, they can have their own base to resist Sistani's decisions. Therefore, Sistani is bound by the Iraqi complex environment in case he has other aspirations than those he declared. Although Sistani's influence is huge and recognizable, it is not unlimited.

According to Sistani's social contract, both religious and state authorities will not interfere in each other's spheres. In addition, Sistani should support the state, if needed, as long as the state does its duties in serving the Iraqi people. Sistani will only interfere when the *core* values and themes of Islam are threatened. In other words, it will be rare to observe Sistani using his influence. No interference is expected from Sistani if the state temporarily lagged behind in its performance because the democratic institutions will be responsible for monitoring and correcting the state's performance. However, Sistani is not expected to stay calm if the state continues in its failure in solving the problems and serving Iraqi people. He supports democracy thinking that it will block the way in front of authoritarian and personal interests. If this is the case, the state will succeed to meet the people's needs. If not, this means something is wrong in the application of democracy and, therefore, interference is required. By the Iraqi and American politicians, Sistani's support is valued. He can accelerate the process of NR. Nevertheless, he can also cause serious troubles to the political leaders if they choose to act independently without paying attention to his views.

### 3.1. Democracy

Started as a type of political regime that people of the Greek city-state of Athens chose in 508/507 BC (Dunn, 1992, p. 240), democracy spread out to be the dominating norm of political rule in the world of today. The definition of democracy varies as different factors affect its meaning formation at different times. A definition for democracy that includes its basic pillars is the one Lipset and Lakin introduce. Their

definition is the minimal that they can give to define democracy, in an obvious reference

to the vast scope of this phenomenon. Lipset and Lakin's definition of democracy is,

> An institutional arrangement in which all adult individuals have the power
> to vote, through free and fair competitive elections, for their chief
> executive and national legislature (2004, p. 19).

Debate continues about whether democracy is the perfect prescription for all

nations, or not. However, the fact that most of today's world political systems are

democracies proves current global preference for democracy. Fukuyama (p.3) believed

the spread of democracy is a sign for the triumph of Western liberalism and the failures

of all other alternatives. He went further to assert that this is humanity's ultimate

achievement that man has ever done or will do. This achievement, according to

Fukuyama, signals the end of history in terms of the intellectual productivity. Huntington,

on the other hand, asserts that democratization of the world took place in waves; the last

of which was in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991, p. 229). These

waves are triggered by outstanding events, like the Second World War and the collapse

of the Soviet Union. Huntington's argument implies that the triumph of democracy is

directly linked with the triumph of democratic super powers. However, a close look at

some regions in the world will reveal tendencies that resist spread of democracy. The ME

is one region. Despite the successive events in this region, no success was signaled in

most of the ME countries.

### 3.1.1. Democracy Barriers in Iraq

A number of arguments can introduce solid explanations for the failure of

democracy in Muslim ME societies. Despite the existence of many democratic principles

in many of the Holy Quran's verses, the existence of many different interpretations helped in complicating the situation toward democracy. In general, there are two major barriers for democracy to spread in Iraq. Mistrust among the different Iraqi groups and the role of religion in future Iraq. There is a package of other factors that threaten the future of democracy in Iraq. Violence, corruption, federalism, oil revenues, Kirkuk, and ethnic/sectarian militias in Iraq are some these factors in this package. Many of these factors, however, are subdivisions for the two major barriers. These factors are minor in significance if compared with the two-abovementioned barriers.

These two major barriers are interrelated in some aspects. Treatment for one of them must go through the other. Deciding the role of Islam in the new Iraq cannot be achieved without overcoming the mistrust crisis. If Iraqi groups trust each other, they can see in Sistani's new guardian position as a guarantee for the new democracy. On the other hand, accepting Sistani's proposals gives the Iraqi Shiite School of Najaf certain rights that they can exercise on the long term.

Sunni and Kurdish fears from Shiite Islam are faced with similar Shiite doubts about Sunnis and Kurds. While Shiites voted for Shiite groups in the 2005 elections, Sunnis voted for Sunni groups and Kurds voted for Kurdish groups. The only difference that makes the Shiite case more significant is the weight that Shiites have in Iraq. With about 65 percent of the Iraqi population, Shiites' ability to drag the country toward an Islamic form is strong, Iraqi Sunnis and Kurds think.

Mistrust of the Iraqi groups refers to the power sharing in the new state. Iraqi Sunnis claim they have the required educated cadres who can occupy the higher positions

in the state. Iraqi Shiites argue they are the majority in the new government. Therefore,

the Shiite representation in the government should be compatible with the elections

result. Iraqi Kurds, on the other hand, do not trust Shiite and Sunni intentions to deal with

them as partners in the government. They argue that both will segregate and thus fail to

treat the Kurds on an equal basis. Shiites and Sunnis in Iraq feel that Kurds are not

sincere in their national feelings. They think Kurds grudgingly accept to be part of Iraq

because they cannot declare Kurdistan an independent state. Shiites and Sunnis,

therefore, feel that Kurds try to gain as much as they can while waiting for the

opportunity to declare their independence from Iraq.

Role of religion in the new Iraq is the second barrier in the face of democracy.

Although Sistani believes Islam and democracy do not contradict with each other, Iraqi

Sunnis and Kurds fear Shiite intentions to create an Islamic state in Iraq. Islam, in this

context, is seen as a barrier to spread of democracy in Iraq. A closer look at the Sunni and

Kurdish positions reveal their fears are mainly from the influence that Shiite parties with

religious agendas have, not from Sistani. Some blame Sistani saying that he empowered

them when he endorsed them in the elections. However, objection about Sistani's role is

more connected with the struggle of power between the three groups than about the role

of Islam in Iraq. In other words, representation of Iraqi Sunnis in the government is

almost Islamic in nature. Islamic presence is less in Kurdish arena as the two main

Kurdish parties are secular in nature. Islam's role in new Iraq, therefore, exists. What is

left is to determine the role of the religious establishments, not the Islamic parties, in Iraq.

## 3.2. Islam and Democracy

Debate about the relation between religion and the state is evolving. While some countries succeeded to separate the two spheres, other countries failed, or refused to make the separation. Most of those countries that succeeded in separating religion and politics are democratic while most of the countries that failed are authoritarian in nature. That separation is seen as vital to the Western world. Immanuel Kant, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and other Western philosophers made it a priority to free the human mind from the chains of the Church (Fattah, 2006, p. 20).

Although the main principles of democracy do not contradict with Islamic laws, strict application of Islam's *Sharia* leads to violation of Western style of democracy in some of its aspects. What is a Holy law for Muslims might be a violation of law for non-Muslims. Despite that, some of these Muslim countries with strict application of *Sharia* describe themselves as democracies[14]. However, those Muslims who call for strict application of *Sharia* cannot claim they can apply the Western style of democracy at the same time. When they talk about democracy, their definition for this phenomenon differs. The closest definition of Western democracy in the ME is the one that modernists introduce. They call for a democratic government that is compatible with Islam (p. 6).

In terms of the relation of Islam and democracy, Islam might be thought of as one barrier to the spread of democracy in the Muslim world, and the ME in particular. Although cases of de facto separation between Islam and the state took place several times during the history of the ME, Islam could not be ignored in ME political decision

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[14] King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia said when he was a crown prince, "I believe that Saudi Arabia in a sense is a democracy as it is" (El-Tahri, 2005).

making. Islam's undetermined relation with the state is a main reason behind lack of democracy in the region. Lack of coherent theories in Political Islam enables authoritarian ME leaders to manipulate their people. They use Islam as a tool to convince their people not to demand more rights. Democracy, therefore, cannot spread as religion is used to justify the strict authoritarian rule. Although political and economic corruption reached high levels in the ME, no tendencies for change in these authoritarian regimes are observed. Ironically, the first successful stories about general elections in the history of the Arab nation are, Salameh Nematt says, those that took place "…in Iraq, under the auspices of the American occupation, and in Palestine, under the auspices of the Israeli occupation" (Fattah, 2006, p.1).

Islam, I argue, cannot be ignored in political decision-making. In other words, societies where religious values are melded with national values to produce a diversity of orientations are the least expected to ignore its religious backgrounds (Lybarger, 2007, p. 100). Effect of Islam is inherited in the identity of the Muslim societies. Therefore, any separation of Islam and political decision-making will have negative consequences. The option that several scholars stimulate in this respect is the potential of witnessing the birth of an Islamic democracy. Unlike traditional Islamists and secularists, modernist Islamists think that the type of state at Prophet Mohammed's era does not match with their Islamic democracy "… in its format and procedures, yet identical to it with respect to goals and framework" (Fattah, 2006, p. 9). While traditionalists insist on the possibility of establishing an Islamic state, like the one at the Prophet's era or close, secularists talk of the possibility of separating Islam and the state. Modernists, on the other hand, are in

between. They are more comprehensive for the contexts of their societies and at the same time the rapidly changing atmospheres around them. Modernists are more tolerant than the traditionalists in their positions with the non-Muslims, modern innovations, and ideas as long as they do not contradict with the core teachings of Islam (p. 17).

Compatibility of Islamic principles and those of democracy has been the subject of another debate in academic circles. Although the majority of Muslims support spread of democracy in their societies, the question of what and how much role Islam should have is crucial (Khan, 2006, p. xii-xiii). The field of political Islam needs more attention from Muslim scholars. John Esposito (Fattah, 2006) made the case when he said, "Muslim scholars need to create coherent theories and structures of Islamic democracy that are not reformations of Western perceptions in some Muslim idioms" (p. 133).

### *3.2.1. Islamic Countries and Democracy*

In order to clarify the scope of efforts to democratize the ME countries, experiences of Turkish democracy will briefly be explained. Turkey is Islamic in nature. It is ruled by a secular government. In its attempts to be accepted as a member in the European Union (EU), Turkey has been emphasizing its secular trend in governing. As a result, Turkish government strictly separates religion from politics. However, this secularism made the democratic experiment in Turkey lose one of its main dimensions: freedom of expression. While the vast majority of the Turks are Muslims, Turkish females are not allowed to wear the veil in government institutions. Although the Turkish Islamic parties are struggling with the secularists to cancel this law, secularists went far in pushing the society away from their way of life.

Although Turkey seems proud of its democratic history, signs of weakness and instability in the Turkish model of democracy exist. The Turkish military institution regards itself as the guardian of the secular values that were established in Turkey. As a result, the Turkish army repeatedly interfered in the political sphere to topple governments that it thought as Islamic, and therefore as threatening to the secular Turkish state.

When it is compared with the Iraqi democratic experiment, the Turkish model of democracy is different in one major point: separation of religion and the state. In Iraq, religion received recognized weight in the IC. While religion has still been an endless source of headache to the Turkish democracy, religion can be used to strengthen the democratic experience in Iraq, I believe. Excluding religion in the Turkish case was based on the assumption that Islam and democracy are contradictory in nature. Another factor behind the Turkish secularism is the intention to bring Turkey toward modernism by moving away from the ME toward the Western world. By strict secularism in all aspects of life, new leaders of Turkey thought they can modernize their country and bring democracy. To do so, religion was separated and nationalism was supported. Turkish Muslim parties had to change their policies to survive. Ethnic minorities in Turkey, like the Kurds, are not allowed to express their own identities, which again violated the freedom of expression principle. As a result, democratic experiment of Turkey is opposite to the democratic Iraqi experiment in its treatment to religion. While Turkey is still facing consequences of its secular trends, Iraq looks unsettled yet with the position of religion in the new state.

### 3.3. Shiite Islam and Democracy

Shiite scholars are thought to be more concerned with the relation of Islam and democracy (Nasr, 2004, p. 22). The two Shiite Schools in Najaf and Qum disagree with John Locke's argument (1689, p. 25) of considering the government and Church as separate institutions with separate functions. Although there is no defined and coherent philosophical perspective of Islam in politics, Shiite clerics can decide when to participate in political life (Khalaji, 2006, p.5).

One major criticism that Islamists have against democracy is the secular values that democracy help to spread in Muslim societies. Sayyed Abdul Majid al-Khoei, the Iraqi Shiite cleric who was murdered in Najaf in April 2003, responded to these worries saying, "if secularism means a precondition that excludes religion, this is unacceptable. But if secularism is without a precondition excluding religion, it will then mean pluralism… There is no objection to that" (Hunter, 2005, p. 94). Nevertheless, Sunni Muslims might have opinions that are different from those of Shiite Muslims.

### *3.3.1. Iraq and Democracy*

Although Islam is the religion of the majority, Iraq's division into Shiites and Sunnis makes tolerance of each other a necessity. Fundamental views for one Iraqi group cannot be applied in rest of Iraq as other groups will refuse them. On the other hand, living under a secular dictatorial regime since 1968 made Iraqi society more tolerant with non-Muslim views. Religion, however, continued to be an integral part of the society's life.

While religion cannot be ignored in Iraq, democracy represents a public demand for Iraqi people. A 2003 survey in Iraq demonstrated that 90 percent of Iraqi people prefer democracy over other forms of government; two-thirds want Islam to play a major role in governance; and 61 percent agreed that the government should be made up mainly of religious leaders (Fattah, 2006, p. 58).

The possibility of witnessing a democracy in Iraq that does not contradict with the philosophical stands of the Shiite ideology is questioned. The Shiite individuals owe their religious allegiances to their religious school and its figures. As a result, some might think Shiites do not have the free will to decide and make free choices, which is a major condition for the establishment of a democratic and powerful civil society. I believe that Shiites look at their loyalty to their clerics differently. To Shiites, their ties with their clerics are a source of strength and not the opposite. The relation between the Shiite cleric and his emulators focuses on the people's religious life. Besides, a Shiite society with strong ties reflects the collective nature of the society. To those Shiite followers, the ties that link them with their clerics and with each other are empowering them. Collectivity of the Shiite Muslims is represented in their unity on one set of beliefs and therefore one set of goals. The power that Shiite individuals have stems from their ties with the societies they belong to, as well as with the religious authorities that they emulate. Shiite Muslims attempt to prepare their societies to be up to the task of supporting their Hidden Imam when he re-appears.

Western democratic societies, on the other hand, reflect individual free will. The focus in Western societies is on the free will that is a prerequisite for every individual in

the society. Individual free will means the individual has the freedom to exercise all the rights that the state provides. As a result, individuality goes parallel with free will in Western societies. In the Iraqi society, the possibility of applying the Western style of democracy is not a possibility because definition of freedom in both contexts is not the same. The factor that creates the difference in the meaning of both democracies is the role of religion. While religion is seen as a strengthening tool in the Islamic context, it is an obstacle in the face of the free will in the secular Western context. Accordingly, democracy needs to be adjusted to realities of the Iraqi context if it is to be applied in that country.

### *3.3.2. Sistani and Democracy*

Literature that Sistani wrote before 2003 contains almost no reference to any mention for the state. Sistani's *fatwas* are not different from those of other Shiite clerics. He does not present a new theory in *Sharia*, like Khomeini. Therefore, some regarded Sistani as lagging behind when compared with Khomeini (Khalaji, 2006, p. 14). Khomeini stepped away from the traditional Shiite views and developed "…a new conception of *sharia* and its relation with the government" (p. 14).

Sistani, who is usually described as a quietist Shiite cleric, maintains the right to interfere in political life when needed. In other words, he remains distant from politics but "…during times of moral decadence, political corruption, serious injustice, or foreign occupation he can become more active in politics by offering advice, guidance, and even the promotion of sacred law in public life" (Rahimi, 2007, p. 9). When he believes that interference in political sphere is required, he will not hesitate to take action. Rather, it

will be his religious duty to guide people to do well and avoid doing bad. Therefore, the

"advice and guidance" he provides to the state to do the good and avoid the bad is

religiously legitimate as being a *maji'a* (Khalaji, 2006, p. 17). However, bringing the

state and its constitution totally under the Islamic umbrella does not represent what

Sistani has in mind. Sistani attempts to "accommodate Islamic law *along* with other legal

norms of various social and political significances in daily life" (Rahimi, 2007, p. 11). In

other words, Sistani's conception of Islamic Democracy is to have Islam as one main

source of legislation, along with other social and political sources.

Chances of democracy in Iraq are strong. Sistani's ideological stance in this issue,

together with the unique Iraqi context, makes it possible for democracy to emerge and

flourish. As every Shiite Muslim has to emulate a learned Shiite jurisprudent (Cole, 2003,

p. 545), Shiite hierarchy that links Shiite people with their religious authorities is stronger

than the Sunni one. Although the system of Shiite Religious School is flexible in terms of

becoming a member of the clerical establishment or in the emulation system (Khalaji,

2006, p. 2), the ties that it creates between the emulators and the cleric are strong.

Therefore, effects of the Shiite clerics' philosophical views on their emulators are

stronger than those in Sunni communities. Shiite followers maintain their identity as

devoted Shiite Muslims when they emulate their *marji'a*'s religious guidance.

### *3.3.3. Post-Sistani Period*

One major concern about Sistani's support for democracy is the question about

the attitudes of Sistani's successors in regard to democracy in Iraq if he dies. Kurdish,

Sunni, and American decision makers might accept Sistani's support for democracy, but

still hesitate to cooperate with him because Sistani's potential is temporary. In addition, the influence that Sistani's successors will enjoy matters too. I believe the influence that the Najaf *Hawza* exercises on Baghdad will be less after Sistani. Successor of Sistani needs time to enjoy the same support and status that Sistani enjoys. I argue it is a matter of time until Sistani's successor fills the vacuum that Sistani's death creates.

Shiites of Iraq "have seldom been a cohesive entity," which enabled Iraqi Sunnis to "exploit natural divisions among the Shi'a community to preclude the emergence of a unified Shi'a opposition" (Anderson and Stansfield, 2004, p. 117). However, the ties that link Shiites together are those of the *Hawza*, following the *taqleed* principle. Participation of Iraqi Shiites in political life is fluctuating as the Shiite religious authority is multipolar in nature (p. 122). In other words, Shiite masses tend to be revolutionary if they emulate a revolutionary *mujtahid* while they act patiently in times of crises if their *mujtahid* is a quietist. Although *Ijtihad* licensing is restricted to very few scholars (Halm, 1997, p. 119), those licensed scholars may differ in their approaches. Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir Al Hakim was, for example, revolutionary against the Iraqi Ba'ath Party in his approach. Nevertheless, the nature of authority succession in Shiite religious schools guarantees succession of same thinking approach. Therefore, Sistani's successor is greatly expected to bear the same ideas that Sistani holds. In today's *Hawza* of Najaf, there are three other prominent clerics in Najaf. They are Muhammed Sa'id Al Hakim, Muhammed Ishaq Fayyadh, and Bashir Al Najafi. Anyone of them may be Sistani's successor. The three of them advocate the same line that Sistani followed (Nakash, 2006, p. 7).

### *3.3.4. Welayat el Faqeeh*

One reason why Sunnis and Kurds in Iraq do not trust Shiite support for democracy is their fears of witnessing another Islamic republic in Iran. There is no possibility for that to happen as Iraqi Shiite School of Najaf disagrees with Iranian Shiite School of Qum about the principle upon which the Islamic republic was established in Iran: *Welayat el Faqeeh*[15].

Both Najaf and Qum schools agree on the principle of Prophet Mohammed's and the twelve Imams' *wilaya.* In other words, Prophet Mohammed and the Twelve Imams are the ultimate sources of religious, juristic, and political authority for the Shiite Muslims. Nevertheless, Najaf and Qum disagree in their views about the extent of jurist's political authority, or what is called the *wilayat el faqeeh*. While Shiite scholars in Iran believe that the *faqeeh* has the general right to rule, Iraqi scholars believed otherwise. It was Khomeini who took that bold step when he gave the jurist a general mandate right to rule (Arjomand, 1988, p. 194). In other words, the Shiite cleric combines religio-jurist authorities with the political authority in his hands in Iran. Khomeini's new theory in Shiite political Islam led to the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Clerics who opposed Khomeini's *welayat el faqeeh* were publically criticized, as was the case with Ayatollah Shariat Madari (p. 196). Shiite Iranians have not much choice. Practically, there was no other choice for them but to obey the clergymen as part of their *taqleed*. In other words, obedience to the *welayat el faqeeh* principle in Iran becomes a formal duty (p. 202).

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[15] The ruling of the Jurist.

The Shiite Religious School of Iraq, on the other hand, continued to follow the religio-legal authority without interference in the political realm. However, Shiite clerics of Iraq did not totally abandon politics. In fact, history proved that Shiite clerics of Najaf interfere in politics whenever they thought they could make what they consider a public good (Khalaji, 2006, p. 15). Although quietism is attributed to Najaf clerics as a main character, behaviors of its main figures might prove otherwise. Calling Shiites to revolt against the British in 1920 was one of these political decisions made by Najaf Shiites clerics. Ayatollah Muhsin Al Hakim's *fatwa* to ban participation in the Iraqi Communist Party in 1963 is another (Fuller & Francke, 1999, p. 29). It is noteworthy to mention in this regard that Sistani's style is not entirely different from his predecessors' in Najaf. Shiite clerics of Iraq tend to maintain their capability to exercise influence over Shiite masses while keeping their distance from politics. Although they believe the state is not their sphere, they should advise, and guide if necessary, political leaders.

Since Ba'ath Party reached power in Iraq, participation of Najaf clerics in politics became gradually less. In the last years before the fall of Saddam's regime in 2003, most of Najaf clerics totally avoided politics to the extent that Sistani's view of the Islamic society seemed "stateless" in his fatwas or writings (Khalaji, 2006, p. 15). To reach a more accurate description of the political behaviors of the Shiite School of Iraq, the Shiite principle of *taqiyya* should be introduced. When Shiites are in serious danger, they are allowed to avoid the causes of harm even if they have to hide their Shiite ideology or the part that will expose them to danger. Shiite clerics have developed this principle because of their continuing exposure to oppression from the Sunni rulers during their history.

Therefore, Shiite clerics of Najaf were only able to affect their societies when central authority was weak. Otherwise, Shiite clerics tend to maintain ties with their followers as strong as possible until political circumstances change. When these changes take place, they usually call for general reforms that do not go in accordance with the authoritarian rulers' interests. If performance of the rulers is good, interference of Najaf clerics is less expected. Quietism does not, consequently, best describe Najaf's political stance.

One main disagreement with the Iranian Shiite School is refusal to restrict the religio-juristic power in the hands of one supreme leader. According to the Shiite ideology, this power should be collective among Shiite scholars and is maintained via the *taqleed* principle. Nevertheless, this collective power might not represent what exists in the Shiite world. *Al a'alam*[16] is usually followed by majority of Shiite masses around the world. As a result, position of Najaf clerics might seem contradictory because Sistani is already the most knowledgeable scholar and the most followed by Shiites from all over the world. The main difference is that Sistani does not demand a political position, as was the case with Khomeini. Therefore, while it is possible for the Shiite cleric in Iraq to achieve supremacy in terms of the number of emulators, this supremacy is in the religio-juristic spheres only.

Iranians who emulate Sistani do not believe in *welayat el faqeeh* theoretically. Lebanese, however, who follow Ayatollah Khomaini and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, believe in *welayat el faqeeh.* The main trend of Iraqi school has been disagreement with *welayat el faqeeh.* Nevertheless, this disagreement is not absolute. A close look at the activities of Sistani reflects Najaf's general attitude regarding *welayat el faqeeh.*

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[16] The most knowledgable.

### *3.3.4.1. Sistani's Stance from Welayat el Faqeeh*

Sistani's exact position vis-à-vis *welayat el faqeeh* is not clear. Sistani avoided declaring a definite position on *welayat el faqeeh* (Khalaji, 2006, p. 11). Murteza Mohri, Sistani's representative in Kuwait, believes that the reason why Sistani avoided declaring a clear opinion about *welayat el faqeeh* is the sensitivity of his position. If he agrees on the right of the most knowledgeable scholar to rule the Islamic *umma*, it means Sistani himself has that right to be the supreme leader not only in Iraq, but in Iran as well. On the other hand, if he rejects the *welayat el faqeeh* principle, his rejection will be understood as an announcement of ideological war with the Iranian Shiite School. As the highest rank Shiite cleric in the world, Sistani's rejection of *welayat el faqeeh* means declaring the current Iranian regime as religiously illegitimate (p. 15-16).

Consequences of both positions are devastating. If Sistani supports *welayat el faqeeh*, Khamenai, the current Iranian supreme leader, will understand that he is in competition with Sistani over the position of the supreme leader. In addition, Sistani's acceptance will turn skepticism of Sunnis in Iraq into facts. They will think Sistani is driving Iraq to be part of Iran, or at least, Sistani is planning to turn Iraq into another Islamic Republic. On the other hand, if Sistani rejects *welayat el faqeeh*, a dangerous gap between Qum and Najaf will be created. Any other cleric's rejection might not cause that disagreement. Because of Sistani's high rank, his views are of vast significant effect.

Allawi (2007, p. 209-210) thinks that Sistani's position lies in between Shiite quietists and Shiite activists; between Khoei and Khomeini. On the other hand, Allawi believes that Sistani shares Khoei's quietist views about *welayat el faqeeh* because he

was Sistani's mentor. Khoei would not have referred to Sistani as the "most knowledgeable" if he knew that Sistani disagrees with him in such a crucial principle like *welayat el faqeeh* (p. 15).

In fact, Sistani made some notes from which his position from *welayat el faqeeh* can be derived. While Sistani agreed that the *faqeeh* has an authority on the Shiite masses in the religious sphere, he will not have this same authority over the Shiite masses in the other general affairs, including social order, unless he, *the faqeeh*, enjoys popularity and acceptance by the majority of the Shiite masses. While Sistani conditions interference in these "other general affairs" with popularity and acceptability by the majority of Shiites, Khomeini saw *welayat el faqeeh* as a privilege given to Shiite clerics (p. 15). In other words, Sistani thinks that he has the right to "affect" political decision making whenever he thinks this is necessary because he enjoys acceptability and popularity among Shiite masses. Khomeini, on the other hand, demanded a direct and an absolute political authority in the hands of the cleric. I think that Sistani will support a government at which he is granted the right to affect the decision making whenever he believes it is his religious duty to do so. He will only interfere when a serious damage to the Islamic character of the country is about to take place. While exercising this right, Sistani realizes the scope of authorities that he has. Therefore, his interference is not expected to threaten his authority over his Shiite followers.

This ideological difference of *welayat el faqeeh* between Najaf and Qum is crucial. It is not restricted to the scholars. Rather, effects of these differences influence political scenes in Iraq and Iran and Shiite masses in all over the world. Non-interference

of clergies in politics gives an opportunity for democracy in Iraq to prosper. Iraqi Shiite masses can communicate independently with their political choices if encouraged by an autonomous religious school.

**CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter discusses the methodology used in the current study, samples, and peer debriefing.

**4.1. Analyzing Third Component: Sistani's Support for Democracy**

An examination of the current literature reveals a lack of sufficient research in political Islam and vagueness about Islam's position from democracy. Negative consequences have resulted for the Islamic *umma* and its relation with the West. In order to develop a clearer understanding of the position of Shiite Muslims toward democracy in Iraq, I will analyze Sistani's statements. This study is a call for methods to develop an understanding of Shiite Political Islam in the Iraqi context. This study applies a qualitative research method, textual analysis, in order to identify whether Sistani's *fatwas* support a democratic government in Iraq.

Babbie (2004) defined qualitative research methods as "methods for examining social research data without converting them to a numerical format" p. 370). I chose a qualitative method for several reasons. A qualitative research is more suitable for "… addressing certain questions about culture, interpretation and power," (Linlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 14). As the purpose of research is to "discover answers to questions through the application of systematic procedures" (Berg, 2001, p. 6), there is no serious differences between qualitative and quantitative research for me as both comply with the purpose behind conducting research. A qualitative research can reveal the individual's interaction with his social setting. It can seek "answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhibit these settings" (Berg, 2001, p. 6) while

quantitative research can sometimes not help much in understanding of the logic that lies

behind those techniques (Babbie, 2004, p. 370). Berg (2001) believes that qualitative

researchers are more interested in "how humans arrange themselves and their settings and

how inhabitants of these settings make sense of their surroundings through symbols,

rituals, social structures, social roles, and so forth" (p. 6-7). As qualitative research

studies social structures and the relation of a society's inhabitants with their

surroundings, I found that a qualitative research is best to study Sistani's statements and

how Sunnis in Iraq perceive them.

Another reason for choosing a qualitative method in the current study is the

complexity of the Iraqi crisis and the several factors that are involved in the ongoing

struggle. It is not an easy task for the Iraqi Sunnis or American foreign policy makers to

believe everything that Sistani might say. Violence reached such levels that a Brookings

Institute report described what is going in Iraq as civil war (Bouillon & Malone &

Rosewell, 2007, p. 2). Trust, therefore, is difficult to initiate. Sistani's refusal to make

public appearances and/or public speeches makes Sunnis skeptical about his seriousness.

Iraqi Sunnis might think Sistani is not sincere in his calls as they observe continuity of

violence in Iraq. On the other hand, American decision makers are hesitant to utilize

Sistani's support although they had better realized the scope of his influence. Iraqi Sunnis

can comprehend the level of his influence if media paid enough attention. However,

convincing Iraqi Sunnis and American decision makers that Sistani supports democracy

is still a hard task.

By choosing a qualitative method to conduct this research, I also wanted to go beyond the simple interpretations that ordinary Iraqi people can reach. By conducting textual analysis, I wanted to detach as much as possible from my own biases as an Iraqi Shiite Muslim who emulates Sistani.

The qualitative research method used in the current research is textual analysis. I chose textual analysis as the research method for the current study because of the nature of the available data. Since the *fatwas*, statements, and answers Sistani made to questions addressed to him, are readily available for analysis, textual analysis appeared to be the most appropriate qualitative method. Interviewing would have been a promising alternative for textual analysis. Sistani's limited schedule, together with security issues, makes the possibility of interviewing Sistani very weak. On the other hand, the nature of the research questions requires me to go below the surface in search for the meaning of messages that will be analyzed. Textual analysis makes that possible (Buddenbaum & Novak, 2001, p.196). Although one purpose behind using textual in the current study is to search for the deeper meanings of Sistani's texts, no single interpretation can be claimed as the only accurate one (McKee, 2001, p. 142). The current study reflects the results of my effort to reach, or step closer to, an interpretation that is most inclusive for the Iraqi context with all its complexities.

I attempted to cover a wide range of Sistani's writings before selecting the texts for interpretation. Several sources were observed. The website of the Najaf School at http://www.najaf.org is generally recognized as the most reliable source from which texts can be cited. According to the best of my knowledge, Sistani's literature is best covered

by administrators of this site. Sistani's other website, http://www.sistani.org, is as reliable

as www.najaf.org. I, however, chose the latter because administrators of

http://www.najaf.org designated a whole section for Sistani's statements, *fatwas*, answers

for questions, and correspondence.

I chose eight texts after a thorough research that aimed at covering different

aspects of the topic. In addition, as Arabic language is my mother tongue, I compared the

eight chosen texts in English as well as in Arabic in order to ensure the authenticity and

credibility of the translation. Moreover, I attempted to reach more direct answers from

Sistani's office. Questions about Sistani's views on democracy, *welayat el faqeeh*, and

Islamic democracy were asked, via the "Questions section" on the website.

Administrators replied that the required information could be reached in the "Texts"

section in the website. Therefore, the eight sections were selected from the available

information in this section. I studied the selected texts extensively during the ample

period before conducting the analysis in order to ensure the most accurate interpretation

of the texts.

Sistani's eight texts can be found in the Appendices section at the end of the

study. They start with Appendix A and end with Appendix H. The detailed analysis of the

eight texts can be found in the Appendix I. The patterns that resulted from this analysis

can be found in Appendix J.

### 4.2. Sampling

The texts to be analyzed were authored by Sistani. They were issued by his office

in Najaf and carried his signature and seal. I obtained these translated texts via Sistani's

official website http://www.najaf.org, which is maintained by Sistani's official institution

*Imam Ali Foundation*. After careful review, eight texts were selected for analysis. Berg

(2001) emphasized that the process of choosing the data should be conducted carefully.

To him, criteria of selecting the texts are the explicit rules according to which analyzed

data are chosen (p. 240). The criteria for choosing Sistani's eight texts are diversity of the

themes covered by Sistani, the variety of targeted audiences, and the variety of the

"forms" of these texts.

Themes covered by these eight texts are diverse: from condemnation of the

terrorist attacks against Iraqi people, to the call for direct democratic elections and the

call for Iraqis to unite. When I chose the texts, I intended to find varied themes and avoid

repetition. On the other hand, the audiences that are targeted by Sistani in these eight

texts are diverse as well. In some of the texts, Sistani addressed the Iraqi people while in

others he aimed at the international media and the UN.

A third criterion I applied in choosing the texts is the forms of Sistani's texts.

Some of these texts are *fatwas*. Other texts are replies that Sistani made to questions that

his emulators and/or international media presented to him. Some other texts are

statements that Sistani made to comment on important public events.

### 4.3. Process of Analysis

I analyzed the texts from four perspectives. I created four sections that represent

four different perspectives to contain the different scopes of meanings that these eight

texts might offer. These sections are *Description from Text*, *Personal Meaning*, *Textual*

*Meaning*, and *Universal Meaning*. "Description from Text" represents the perspective of

Sistani himself. The descriptions are taken from his texts. "Personal Meaning" reflects

my own interpretation of Sistani's eight texts. My personal interpretation is affected by

my personal views and beliefs. It is also shaped by my own background. "Textual

Meaning" represents the interpretation that the text provides. "Universal Meaning," on

the other hand, reflects the universal interpretation of Sistani's texts. One crucial

advantage for providing these four sections is to clarify the different possible

interpretations for the same texts, which helps to expand my, as well as the reader's,

ability to extract the patterns for Sistani's texts.

One crucial point that I would like to point here is the scope of differences among

the four different perspectives. Looking at the same texts from four different perspectives

may present four interpretations that are clearly different from each other. However, the

differences between the four interpretations for the same texts might not be great. In other

words, I might not find many differences in my interpretations for Sistani's texts from the

four perspectives. If this scenario takes place, I interpret this as an indication of the

writer's consistency in the messages he creates. If, on the other hand, the gap between the

four interpretations for the same texts is wide, I interpret it as an indication of the writer's

inconsistency in the messages he sends. When the writer creates comprehensible

messages and avoids creating implicit messages that contrast with the apparent messages

in his texts, the difference between the four interpretations will be small and barely

observed.

After the analysis, I derived the patterns from Sistani's eight texts. There are

many ways of looking for patterns in a qualitative research method. Babbie (2004)

introduced John and Lyn Lofland' six ways of looking for patterns (p. 370-1). They are

frequencies, magnitude, structures, processes, causes, and consequences. In other words,

in order to extract the patterns, I need to search for how frequent a certain theme is in

Sistani's texts, for example. Out of these six ways, I will use frequencies[17], structures[18],

and consequences[19]. These patterns will represent Sistani's messages that he attempted to

convey.

Berg (2001) argued that in order to understand behaviors, "one must first

understand the definitions and meanings and the process by which they have been

created" (p. 9). Therefore, certain variables have to be created and measured against

Sistani's statements in order to authenticate his support for democracy. I derived these

variables from Najem's definition for democratization[20]. A comprehensive definition for

democratization is the one Najem (2003, p. 185) used when he presented David Potter's

definition for democratization that it is "a movement in a society from less accountable to

more accountable government, from less competitive (or non-existent) elections to freer

and fairer competitive elections, from severely restricted to better protected civil and

political rights, and from weak (or non-existent) autonomous associations in civil society

to more autonomous and more numerous associations". According to this definition,

democratization is defined in terms of the progress in four areas: accountability,

elections, civil and political rights, and autonomous associations (Najem, 2003, p. 185).

In other words, these four areas act as the variables that I will use to study Sistani's texts.

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[17] How often does Sistani's positive/negative attitude toward democracy occur?
[18] What are the different types of democracy that Sistani supports, if he supports any?
[19] How does Sistani's support for democracy affect the situation in Iraq and the American foreign policy?
[20] I used democratization instead of democracy because Iraq is not democratic yet; it is in the process to be democratic.

I will compare the four variables with the patterns that I will derive from my textual analysis. Observing these variables in Sistani's texts indicate Sistani's level of support for democracy. If all variables are compatible with his patterns, Sistani's support for democracy is high. Therefore, it will be possible to conclude if Sistani supports democracy in Iraq and if that support is positive. Moreover, existence of variables other than the ones derived from Najem's definition for democratization indicates that Sistani's image of democracy is not identical with the Western style of democracy.

### 4.4. Peer Debriefing

In order to establish "the credibility of (my) qualitative research," (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) I used Peer Debriefing. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 308) defined Peer Debriefing as "the process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind". Copper & Brandon & Lindberg (1997) argue that Peer Debriefing can be used either when the data is collected or at the final stages of the research (p. 5). The purpose of conducting Peer Debriefing is for the researcher to seek feedback. It is important, though, that the researcher must address questions of how feedback is to be given, to whom, and of what nature (p. 3). In addition, as I became more confident in my research in the final stages, I became more vulnerable to ethical and interpersonal dilemmas.

I was in need to examine the relation between me, as a researcher, and my data. One major reason why I was concerned about ethical and interpersonal dilemmas is my direct link with my research topic. In other words, I need to let the readers of my research

know who I am in order to help them to understand my interpretation for Sistani's eight

texts. In addition to the fact I am a citizen from Iraq, I am a Shiite Muslim. Besides, my

*taqleed* is for Sistani. In other words, I return to Sistani's *fatwas* if I face any religious

questions that I cannot find an answer for. Nonetheless, I do not consider myself biased

in my choice for the research topic, in my arguments, and during my interpretations. In

general, I questioned the logic in every *fatwa* that Sistani issues. In other words, my trust

for Sistani does not conceal my ability to conduct an academic research about him. On

the contrary, I found I am more able to understand the complexities of the Shiite

hierarchy as well as the Iraq context. In addition, my study in a U.S. atmosphere adds a

third important dimension of objectivity for my experience.

I chose three peer debriefers. There are three criteria I used to choose my peer

debriefers. They are Iraqi citizens. Second, they studied in the United States and still did

not return back to Iraq. Third, they are a Shiite female, a Sunni male, and a Kurdish male.

In other words, they represent the three main ethnic and sectarian groups in the country.

In addition, I tried to consider the gender issue. Information about my peer reviewers can

be found in Appendix K at the end of the research.

As my peer debriefers need to "know a great deal about both the substantive area

of the inquiry and the methodological issues," (Cooper *etal*, 1997, P. 9) I chose my peer

debriefers who studied in U.S. universities. Two of them are alumni while the third is still

studying. The three peer debriefers have done graduate programs. Firas (Sunni) did M.A.

in Public Health at Columbia University while Huda (Shiite) did M.A. in Translation at

University of Massachusetts – Amherst. Dilshad is doing M.A. in Public Relations at The

College of Saint Rose. By choosing every one from each of the three main components of the Iraqi society, I do not claim they are representatives for their groups. I, rather, argue they can best perform the Peer Debriefing because of their vast knowledge about the Iraqi crisis. They can also enrich the current research with their insights that are relevant to their ethnic/sectarian backgrounds.

I chose three peer debriefers because, I think, more than three participants will exceed the limits of the Peer Debriefing technique into another field like interviewing. I was conscious of the fact they must be "neither senior, not junior; they must be peers" (p. 9). I know Firas and Huda personally. I do not have previous acquaintance with Dilshad. A Kurdish friend of mine suggested him to me.

The three peer debriefers are in my same academic levels, but with different academic concentrations. They are familiar with the academic nature of researching. However, I emphasized to them not to pay any attention to my sectarian background when they participate. Another factor that I took into consideration is that the three of them came from Iraq to the United States of America. In other words, they are still in the United States. They are more able, I believe, to detach from their ethnic – sectarian biases consequently. In addition, they will probably consider the American factor, I think, because of their wide conceptions that they developed after they came to the United States. Iraqi people inside Iraq might think narrowly and exclude the American and regional influences in the Iraqi crisis because of the long-term isolation that was imposed on the country. In other words, Iraqi people inside Iraq might only think of regional and

international factors when they think of them negatively. It is not common to observe

internal Iraqi tendencies to utilize regional and international factors for their benefit.

## CHAPTER 5: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

In this chapter, results of the analysis will be presented and discussed. In addition, a discussion section will follow. The chapter will end up with a section about the Peer Debriefing results.

## 5.1. Results of the Textual Analysis

In order to conduct the textual analysis over Sistani's eight texts, I read the texts for several times at different periods. I began a process of deriving the main themes that Sistani emphasized in his texts. During the process, I avoided repetition of the themes. After finishing, I checked the results and repeated the process in order to reach the best possible analysis for the eight texts.

I distributed the themes that I derived into four sections. Each section represents a particular perspective of the textual meanings. In other words, every theme that I derived from Sistani's eight texts is distributed into four sections at which the same theme was looked at from a different angle. The first section is the one for the themes as described in the texts. It is entitled, "Description from the Text". In this section, the themes are expressed as described by Sistani himself in his texts. The second section is the personal meaning that I formulate for every theme that Sistani described in his texts. After I entered all the themes in the first section, I begin looking at every theme as described by Sistani. I write the meaning for every theme, as I personally perceive them. This second section is entitled "Personal meaning". The third section is the textual meaning. It is derived from every theme as described in the text. This section is entitled "Textual meaning". Difference between this section and the previous one is thin. While the

"Personal Meaning" section is about my personal interpretation of the themes as described in the text, the "Textual Meaning" section is for the meaning of every theme as understood as a text by the reader. It reflects what readers understand in general from reading the themes in the "Description from Text" section. The reader however needs to be detached from every personal effect when deriving the "Textual meaning". The fourth section is called "Universal Meaning". This section is to reflect the meaning of every theme as described in the text in relation to the surrounding atmosphere. The classification can be observed in Appendix I.

The whole process that has been described is called the coding process. To Babbie (2004), it is "the key process in the analysis of qualitative social research" (p. 376). Coding, as described, is to "classify or categorize the pieces of data" (p. 376).

### 5.1.1. Description from Text

The themes, or codes, that I categorized into the first of the four sections are twenty-one. They represent the messages that Sistani conveyed to Muslims as described in the eight texts. In general, he condemned the miserable conditions and atrocities that Iraqi people have been subjected to. While Sistani calls the Iraqi government to take on its responsibilities, he calls all political and religious Iraqi groups to engage in peaceful dialogue to resolve their disagreements and to cooperate with the government. Sistani calls for respecting minorities in Iraq. He also calls for unity and sovereignty for Iraq, which indicted his refusal of the occupation. In addition, he calls for a democratically elected government that represents all segments of the society. He accepts a role for the UN to play in new Iraq. At the same time, his position on Iraqi politics is clear: he avoids

participating in politics, but he will continue giving advice and guidance to Iraqi

politicians if they ask for it. He makes it clear that decision on important issues, like

Islam's role in the constitution and federalism, are for the elected members of the

government to make. The only direct position he demonstrates in regard to interference of

regional powers in the Iraqi affairs is when he called the outside religious authorities to

stop authorizing violence in Iraq.

### 5.1.2. Personal Meaning

In the "Personal Meaning" section, I interpreted these text descriptions according

to my personal views. Sistani's condemnation for the ongoing atrocities and miserable

conditions represented deep anger and sorrow. I observed painful feelings that are

reflected in Sistani's texts via the choice of the words. When he called Shiites to avoid

revenge against people and places holy for others, he was ordering them not to seek

revenge. Although the Samara explosions were horrible by all means, Sistani gives no

approval to his emulators to seek revenge. He, instead, called the Iraqi people of all sects

and ethnicities to face this terror with unity, believing this is the only way to end

violence. According to Sistani, unity can be achieved by peaceful dialogue. Sistani thinks

that Iraqi groups can solve all their disagreements by peaceful dialogue. It is noticeable

that Sistani in all of his statements was using the word "call". Despite his influential

position in Iraq, he does not want to make people feel he is addressing them from

position of authority.

Concerning the foreign forces in Iraq, Sistani recognizes them as an occupation. A

later statement reflected his refusal of foreign occupation when he indicated his

acceptance for those foreign forces if they work under the auspices of the UN in Iraq. While sovereignty of Iraq is a crucial issue to Sistani, he accepts a role for the international community to help Iraqi people. Sistani's acceptance of an international role in Iraq leads me to think of two further interpretations. First, an active role for the UN in Iraq leads to more transparency in the Iraqi political processes. Sistani knew, therefore, there is no place for changing his opinion later and dragging the country to an Islamic rule. Second, Sistani opens the doors for countries to help stabilize Iraq under the UN supervision. Sistani realizes cooperation in this respect can lead to establish long-term relations with these countries in many other different aspects of mutual interest.

With reference to his call for the outside religious authorities to stop authorizing violence in Iraq, Sistani clearly expressed his criticism and anger for the negative role these outside religious authorities played. By his direct reference for them, he wanted to expose their role in aggravating violence in Iraq. It is understood that Sistani's message is addressed to the Wahhabi sect in Saudi Arabia as the prominent Wahhabi clerics permitted targeting Americans and Iraqi Shiites. His criticism might be directed to other religious authorities in the region. Sistani did not name a particular religious authority but instead implied that Iraqis know their negative role in Iraq.

As to the internal Iraqi affairs, Sistani calls for sovereignty of Iraq, which will only be achieved when free and fair elections for the government take place in Iraq. Legitimacy of the government, to Sistani, stems from its representation for all segments of the Iraqi society. He emphasized the rights of minorities in that government. Opinions of the majority should be respected by the minority. The majority should also avoid

dominating the minorities. I believe this is a reference for the Sunnis in Iraq. Sunnis are the smallest among the three big groups in Iraq. They should respect opinions of the majority. At the same time, the Shiite majority should avoid dominating the scene.

In relation to the role of Islam and federalism, Sistani is confident that democratically elected representatives will reach decisions that reflect wishes of people who elected them. In other words, Sistani knew that religious Shiite and Sunni parties would have a good representation in the new government if democratic elections are conducted. In this case, there is no need for him to worry about preserving Islam's values in the constitution. Although he will take no position in the ongoing struggle, he will continue advising Iraqi politicians, if they address him.

Sistani made it clear that the newly elected Iraqi government has a responsibility to achieve. The government needs to act quickly and in a powerful manner to restore order. Politicians need to meet expectations of those who elected them. He also indicates that he will keep monitoring events in the Iraqi arena. Sistani's monitoring is a direct reminder for the government officials that their performance is not going unobserved. There is a religious authority that is parallel for their authority; although religious authority does not tend to exercise pressure for change, they will not hesitate if they need to.

### *5.1.3. Textual Meaning*

Textual meaning of Sistani's statements is slightly different from the personal meaning and description from texts. Sistani's condemnation of the violence in Iraq indicates his strong refusal for these events. His call for Iraqi Shiites not to revenge

indicates his orders for Shiites not to retaliate and attack Sunnis in Iraq. His call for all ethnic and sectarian Iraqi groups to unite is a direct call for all the groups, especially the three main groups, to unite as a way to face the violence. Sistani's recognition for foreign forces as occupation indicates his mistrust for them. He introduces the newly elected government as a substitute. The government has a responsibility toward Iraqi people to meet their expectations and leave no excuse for occupational forces to stay in Iraq.

Concerning Sistani's position from external factors, he shed the light on the negative role that outside religious authorities played in Iraq. He is also in favor of getting rid of all forms of occupation. He welcomed a positive role for the UN to play in Iraq. He, however, does not refuse giving a role for these forces in Iraq if they work under the supervision of the UN. As to Sistani's position from democracy, he is in favor of a democratic government in Iraq. This government should be sovereign and needs to represent all segments of the society. His support for democracy exceeds the government to include the civil society when he calls to activate the role of Iraqi civil society in the process of decision-making.

In relation to Sistani's image of the relation of Islam and democracy, the textual meaning that is derived from his statements is his belief that democracy itself will give Islam its significant role in the new Iraqi constitution (IC). Other critical decisions about the future of Iraq will be taken via democratic channels. As to his personal involvement in politics, the textual meaning of his statements in this regard indicate that Sistani cares for the suffering of Iraqi people, and does not care about power and politics. He is not a

politician. Nevertheless, he will help, advise, and guide people who address him,

including politicians.

### 5.1.4. Universal Meaning

The fourth section of my analysis is to indicate the universal meaning of Sistani's

main themes. His condemnation for the conditions in Iraq reflects a simple and an

effective message to the world: conditions in Iraq are terrible. He steps further to declare

his position: Sistani is in favor of dialogue, peace, and unity; he is against sectarian and

ethnic violence and against the occupation. Regarding his position toward the outside

religious authorities, he revealed this negative role in aggravating violence in Iraq. With

regard to his position from democracy, the universal meaning of the derived themes is

that he is in favor of a democratically elected government. Sistani's emphasis on

sovereignty in all aspects is more than a call. Sistani demands sovereignty for Iraq. As to

the role of Islam in democratic Iraq, the universal meaning is that Islam will have a

considerable role in the IC. Debate about federalism should be discussed and decided

democratically. About Sistani's position from occupation and the international

community, the universal meaning of these themes is that occupation should end while

the UN should have a more active role in Iraq.

Sistani approved the existence of different opinions with regard to several issues.

He asserted this is a natural phenomenon. The universal meaning of this theme is that

there are already signs of democratic features in new Iraq. Furthermore, Sistani

encouraged these signs as a religious leader, which signifies the no-contradiction nature

of democracy and Shiite Islam. In relation to his position from the new Iraqi government,

the universal meaning of his statements is direct: The Iraqi government is not doing its

best to restore order. Sistani realizes the meaning of his criticism for the government's

performance should not be misinterpreted. He made clarifications for his position: While

he distances himself from politics, Sistani carefully follows the developments on the Iraqi

scene. Another universal meaning for Sistani's future role in the Iraqi scene is that he is

available for help and advice for everyone, even politicians if they come to him seeking

advice.

### 5.2. Patterns of Sistani's Texts

The four sections of Sistani's themes slightly differ from each other. The

differences were the result of looking at the same themes but from different perspectives.

The purpose behind creating these sections is to measure the thematic scope that every

message can give. In other words, I looked at the different possible interpretation of every

theme that Sistani introduced. These different interpretations are labeled in four

categories, or sections, that represent the possible meanings that Sistani might intend to

convey to his readers. They are labeled in a way that helps to derive the patterns that were

emphasized in Sistani's statements. According to the analysis, seven common patterns

were observed in the selected samples. Complete details about the seven patterns can be

checked in Appendix J.

In the first pattern, Sistani condemns the miserable conditions in Iraq and criticizes

the performance of the government. Sistani repeatedly expressed his condemnation for

the current miserable conditions of Iraqi people and call it a critical stage that Iraqi

people must united to overcome. His criticism mainly addresses the security situation in

the country. Although the *marja'iyya* is extremely angry because of the terrorist attack on

the Samara Shiite Shrine, Sistani "calls upon the beloved faithful, during these trying

times, to be patient and exercise restraint and avoid any revenge action against innocent

people and places considered holy to others" (http://www.najaf.org). Sistani described

this stage as critical because it required the Iraqi people, Shiites in particular, to be patient

and restrain any revenge actions against others. He further asserted that Iraqi Sunnis were

not behind these attacks on the Samara shrine. Therefore, Shiites should avoid revenge

because the "other" Iraqis are "innocent" (http://www.najaf.org).

Sistani directly criticizes the ill performance of the Iraqi government. He reminds

the officials that they are responsible in front of the Iraqi people. Those new politicians

should realize they must fulfill the promises they made to the Iraqi people. Their actions

to restore order and stop violence should be swift and decisive, in a clear recognition

from Sistani of the level of violence that Iraq witnessed.

The second pattern is "Sistani plays a positive role among Shiites, Sunnis, and

Kurds in favor of unity, dialogue, and NR". The role that Sistani plays is most significant

among his Shiite followers in- and outside Iraq. However, he has a relative influence on

Sunni and Kurdish leaders as well. One reason behind this growing influence is Sistani's

language that he uses to address Iraqi people. This language is the same that people use

when they address people of higher rank and esteem. He does not talk to people as an

authority or even as a peer. His down-to-Earth attitude in addressing Iraqi people of

different ethnic and sectarian group is of great significance to slowly increase his credits

among Kurds and Sunnis. He, therefore, puts a practical definition of the task of

authorities in the new Iraq; religious and political authorities should "serve" Iraqi people. In addition, Sistani realizes those who do not know him well are ordinary Kurds and Sunnis in the north of Iraq. Therefore, he uses this simple and affectionate language to reach them.

Sistani's *appeal* to the "Iraqi citizens from different sects and ethnicities" (http://www.najaf.org) is to focus on three themes: unity, dialogue, and NR. Together, these themes can lead Iraqi people to stop bleeding, stand again, and rebuild. It is noticeable that Sistani always addresses all ethnic and sectarian groups in his statements. He refers to them as "Iraqi people" as an indication of his support to one united Iraq. Besides, the word "Iraq" is repeated several times in his statements. Adjectives that usually precede "Iraq" in his statements are united, peaceful, one, strong, and similar others.

The third pattern is Sistani's demand for a sovereign Iraq under a democratically elected government. This pattern is extremely significant to the current study. I repeatedly analyzed the texts to reach the most credible results in terms of credibility of this pattern. One of the first demands that Sistani made is to gain national sovereignty. This demand is a goal and cannot be overlooked. The other demand of Sistani is to build a democratically elected government. Sistani linked both of his demands together. In other words, a democratically elected government cannot be achieved without sovereignty because citizens in a free democratic society cannot stand living under occupation for a long time. Sistani's refusal for occupation is, therefore, indicated when he linked these two demands together.

The fourth pattern in this study is "while Sistani calls for peace, some outside religious authorities call for violence". Sistani reveals in one of his statements the negative role those "other" religious authorities "outside" the country play in aggravating violence in Iraq. Via media, Sistani intends to expose to the public the negative role these outside religious authorities played. First, they are outsiders, which refer again to the innocence of the "inside" religious authorities. Second, Sistani reveals involvement of these religious authorities in the violence is direct. He regards them responsible for the on-going violence because they "authorized" it. They used their religious authorities to order and/or encourage their followers to join insurgency in Iraq.

The fifth pattern I found is "Islam cannot be overlooked in the new Iraqi constitution". This pattern is of immense significance because it determines Sistani's image of the role of Islam in the new democratic Iraq. It also indicates that Islam can exist with democracy under the same umbrella, according to Sistani. In addition, Islam and democracy lead to each other. While many of democratic principles are supported by Islamic teachings and principles, a democratic government in a country with a Muslim majority maintains the Islamic character of its people. Sistani explains how democracy supports a visible role for Islam in his image for future Iraq, "As Islam is the religion of the majority of Iraqi people, values of Islam will be included in the constitution because members who draft it are elected by Iraqi people" (http://www.najaf.org). In other words, democratic means will ensure existence of Islamic values in the permanent constitution of the country because those who will write it are directly elected by the Iraqi people. Those representatives will, therefore, convey the wills of those who elected them. As the vast

majority of the Iraqi society is Islamic, elected representatives will write a constitution that does not contradict with Islam's core rules and teachings.

The sixth pattern in this study is "UN should have a more recognized role". This pattern is related to Sistani's demand for full sovereignty. Sistani does not support continuing occupation. He welcomes replacement of occupation forces with a more active role of the UN. He even approves giving a role for the foreign forces in Iraq to help the Iraqi government if they accept to work under the supervision of the UN. Sistani, however, did not specify which of the foreign forces that can stay and work under the UN supervision.

The seventh and last pattern in this study is "Sistani does not do politics, but he will not avoid advising Iraqi politicians if they address him". As a religious *marji'a*, Sistani needs to meet visitors from all over the world. Most of those visitors are his Shiite emulators. They regularly come in person to meet him for different reasons. As it is his duty as a *marji'a* to help Muslims from different sects, it is his duty to help Iraqi politicians when they address him with questions and work plans. It was also his duty as a *marji'a* to answer questions of political nature that many of his Iraqi emulators presented. As a supreme *marji'a*, he was also required to issue statements explaining the *marja'iyya*'s opinions with regard to the public events.

Sistani's attitude with Iraqi politicians is not as obvious as it might appear. Sistani will not occupy a political position and does not permit his emulators from the clerics to do so as well. Nevertheless, he knows and expects that Iraqi politicians will continue knocking at his door whenever they are about to make a decision on an important issue.

In other words, in order for Baghdad to avoid Najaf's objections, Baghdad needs to consult Najaf before making a decision in a serious matter.

## 5.3. Discussion

The implications of these results are several. In regard to the Samara explosions, Sistani makes a careful distinction for those who were behind them. He revealed their goals as well. They are outsiders who hate Iraqi people. They also want to ignite the sectarian violence between Shiite and Sunni Iraqis. Therefore, "Iraqi people" should realize the intentions of those "outsiders" and "unite" against them.

When Sistani addressed the Iraqi government, his address to the government officials was in the form of "wishing that our government officials will do their best to achieve the promises they made to the Iraqi people". There is no threatening in the language that Sistani used. However, Sistani used a particular tone. Najaf stands from now on as a parallel center of power next to Baghdad. The nature of this power of Najaf is different from the political power of Baghdad. Nevertheless, Najaf can exercise pressure on Baghdad because religious power can easily be transformed into political one. However, the other texts expressed Sistani's reluctance to be directly involved in political decision-making. Thus, the government officials should understand and correctly interpret this new language of Sistani. He is performing a new role: the unofficial guardian of the Iraqi people and their interests in front of the government and the entire international community. Not much activity is expected from him if the government does its best to serve the people.

In Sistani's statements, it is rare to read the words, Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds, Christians, and other minorities. Sistani avoids looking at Iraqi people as different ethnicities and sects in one fragile society. To him, they are the "Iraqi people". When he uses these ethnic/sectarian terms, his purpose is to emphasize the rights of the different Iraqi groups in the new Iraq. Christians, Sabians, and others are "non-Muslim citizens" for Sistani. Referring to them as citizens indicates Sistani's look at all Iraqi people as equal with Muslims in rights and obligations. They are "brothers in humanity and countrymen" for Muslim Iraqis (http://www.najaf.org).

Government cannot be legitimate until all segments of society and its political forces are represented, Sistani argues. Sistani's position is revolutionary. His image builds the bridge between Islam and democracy. A government cannot be legitimate until it becomes truly democratic. The significance of that statement is that it is made by the highest ranked Shiite religious cleric in the world. Being direct in his statement leaves no doubts about how serious he is. In order to eliminate skepticism about his position from democracy, Sistani defines democracy as "direct representation of all segments of the society". This representation can only be achieved by direct elections, and not by the U.S.-suggested caucus system. Another dimension in his definition for democracy is the equal treatment and fair communication between majority and minority in the society via peaceful dialogue. The minority should respect the opinions of the majority. Nonetheless, the majority should not try to "dominate and rule over the minority". "This is the basis that has to be observed in politics", Sistani comments (http://www.najaf.org). By stating that, Sistani indicates that Islamic teachings do not contradict democratic principles.

Islamic teachings, in fact, support democracy to the extent that it is "… the basis that has to be observed in politics", meaning that other forms of governments are not as good as democracy.

It is noticeable that Sistani used the term "advice and guidance" to describe the services he will provide to his visitors. It implies that the influence he has over Shiite politicians is much more than the one he has over Kurds and Sunnis. While Sistani "advises" Sunnis and Kurds, he "gives guidance" to the Shiite politicians.

Sistani's position from the UN indicates he may not object developing positive relations with the international community, including the United States and United Kingdom. He already expressed no objection for existence of foreign forces in Iraq if they are there to help Iraqi people to restore order and if they are supervised by the UN. Iraq is in need to rebuild in different fields. Need for funding and expertise in different fields is a major issue for policy makers in Iraq. Sistani's support for strengthening ties with the international community stems from the needs of Iraqi people. Therefore, expectations that Sistani will develop a negative position toward the United States after withdrawal of its forces from Iraq are weak. The reason behind Sistani's refusal to meet any representative from the occupation forces is his refusal for the occupation itself. When occupation ends, Sistani's views about the United States might change. Meanwhile, Sistani's acceptance for a democratic Iraq serves the U.S. foreign policy in this country. America can enormously invest Sistani's support for democracy in Iraq and ME as well.

### *5.3.1. Islam in IC and Sistani's New Role*

I believe Sistani uses his influence to ensure that Islam will have a significant role in the constitution. Sistani's demand for a role of Islam in a democratic Iraq reflects Sistani's main factor in his future image for Iraq: a democratic government that is responsible in front of its people with a powerful religious authority that has no interest in politics as long as Iraqi people enjoy their rights and Islam is not violated.

On the other hand, Sistani indicates that he will have no direct role in the writing process of the IC. Democratically elected representatives from all ethnic and sectarian groups, not the Shiite clerics, are responsible for writing the constitution. However, his assertion that Islam "cannot be overlooked" in the new Iraq implies two issues. First, he indicates that government laws, as stipulated in the IC, can be democratic and at the same time not against Islam. Khalaji (2006) thinks this demand of Sistani gives him and the future *marja'iyya* the "… legal right to influence the policymaking and legislative process" (P. 17). Second, Sistani's tone is demanding and not requesting. It might indicate a threat as well. Islam cannot be overlooked in the new constitution.

Islam's role in the constitution is a subject of debate among the Shiites, Kurds, and Sunnis. Kurds and Sunnis recognize the powerful *marja'iyya* in Najaf. They do not like to witness a state with an Islamic constitution that is protected by Sistani and his successors. They fear Sistani attempts to advance an Islamist state in Iraq via the constitution (Rahimi, 2007, p. 11). Article Two of the IC states that

> Islam is the official religion of the State and it is a fundamental source of legislation:
> A. No law that contradicts the established provisions of Islam may be established. B. No law that contradicts the principles of

democracy may be established. C. No law that contradicts the rights and basic freedoms stipulated in this constitution may be established. Second: This Constitution guarantees the Islamic identity of the majority of the Iraqi people and guarantees the full religious rights of all individuals to freedom of religious belief and practice such as Christians, Yazedis, and Mandi Sabeans (UNESCO).

In the IC, Islam has been recognized as a fundamental source of legislation. While no laws can contradict the established provisions of Islam, no laws can contradict principles of democracy. Sistani approved this constitution in October 2005 (Rahimi, 2007, p. 11). Some think that Article 2 in the IC is contradictory (p. 11). Sistani, however, thinks otherwise. He is thinking of the relation between Islam and democracy along the lines of a social contract between the Iraqi people, represented by their religious authority, and the state. He achieved his social contract with the government; the constitution gave Sistani and Najaf authorities the legal right to interfere in political decision making when necessary. However, this power is limited and should be used only when extremely needed. The pressure of the other Iraqi fractions, namely the Kurds and Sunnis, can hinder any tendencies of Najaf to walk towards an Islamic state. In other words, Sistani, and Najaf clerics in general, need to introduce convincing arguments every time they want to exercise this constitutional right. Although Kurds and Arab Sunnis are not allies, they can cooperate if they observe excessive religious tendencies from the Shiite majority.

The role of Islam in the new IC is best described by Peter Galbraith (2006, p. 199). He thinks that the IC's recognition of Islam as a main source of legislation superficially makes Iraq a relatively Islamic state. However, Islam is not *the* basic source

of legislation, as Islamists demanded, which signaled a triumph for the secularists (p. 199). Galbraith went further to describe Sistani's new role. The Federal Supreme Court of Iraq needs to review the constitutionality laws in order to ensure that no law that can contradict the established provisions of Islam may be established. For that to happen, the Constitution "… requires the Court to include on its bench experts in Islamic jurisprudence" (p. 199). Choosing those "experts" is expected to be mainly assigned to the Najaf *Hawza* in cooperation with the Sunni and Kurdish religious authorities.

I should emphasize that Sistani's image of the new Iraqi state is different than the Iranian model**.** The mechanism through which Sistani will exercise his role is not totally obvious. However, there are several signs that shape it. In order to understand this mechanism, I tend to refer to the factors that Sistani supports and those that he avoids. He does not advocate for the clerics to be the final arbitrators of the state affairs in Iraq (Nakash, 2006, p. 8-9). Clerics' role is to monitor politicians' performance. By not calling for a council of guardians as the one in Iran, Sistani "will in effect be recognizing the complex social reality of Iraq with its substantial Sunni and Kurdish minorities" (p. 9). He seems determined in avoiding the mistakes of the past that Shiites in Iraq and Iran committed.

Although he made it clear it is the task of the democratically elected representatives to decide in issues like federalism and role of Islam in new Iraq, Sistani realizes his support for federalism means giving federalism overwhelming weight. In the Shiite perspective, federalism permits creation of a Shiite entity under the Iraqi flag. It

also permits the new federal Iraqi entities to preserve their status and protect the laws, secular or Islamic, in the constitutions of the federal entities that are superior to those of the federal government (Galbraith, 2006, p. 200). In that case, religion can have a bigger role in the federal Shiite south in a way that does not affect the other parts of Iraq.

Without direct communication with Sistani, the United States foreign policy makers can strengthen tendencies of accepting democracy among the different Iraqi fractions if they focus on Sistani's support for democracy via media. If implemented, I expect positive results for two reasons. First, large segments of non-Shiite Iraqi people are not familiar with Sistani and his influence. Many Sunnis and Kurds heard about Sistani. However, they do not know more than the fact that he is a Shiite cleric. They might not differentiate between Sistani and leaders of Shiite parties. If U.S. and Iraqi media focused on Sistani and his support for democracy, change in attitudes is greatly expected. The media's focus on Sistani needs to be clearly designed and implemented over long periods to ensure the best results. The second reason why positive results are expected from a U.S.-Iraqi media focus on Sistani's democracy is the influence that is generated among Iraqi and Arab leaders. Iraqi Shiite, Sunni, and Kurdish leaders will understand that the American focus on Sistani reflects an American support for the democracy model he represents. Knowing how American decision makers are concerned of not creating an Iranian-like regime in Iraq, Iraqi leaders will conclude the United States foreign policy trusts Sistani's democracy model. Therefore, they will give more weight to Sistani's support for democracy and interact with his proposals. Sunni and Kurdish leaders will think that American support for Sistani's proposals eliminate their

fears and guarantees the no-Iranian model of government in future Iraq. The same

attitude is expected from Arab leaders. If America supports Sistani's democracy, Sistani

is not expected to be a continuation for Iran in Iraq. Therefore, Arab fears from

formulation of the Shiite Crescent will fade away. It is noteworthy to mention that

American support can take several forms other than the one via media.

Support of America for Sistani will have farther consequences in the ME region.

Sistani is the highest ranked Shiite *marji'a* in the world. His influence is not limited to

Iraq's Shiites. Shiites who regard him as their source of *taqleed* are distributed in most of

the ME countries and beyond. Success of Sistani's model of democracy in Iraq can

enhance other ME societies to follow the Iraqi track. Shiites who emulate Sistani in ME

societies can effectively spread the supportive spirit for democracy in their societies. On

the long run, change toward democracy in the ME can be achieved staring from the

society. Accordingly, support of Sistani's model of democracy can be very productive for

the United States if it is applied in its foreign policy.

### 5.4. Comparing Sistani's Patterns with Najem's Democratization

In order to understand Sistani's position from democracy, I will compare the

patterns that I distinguished in Sistani's statements with the definition that Najem

introduced for democratization. Democratization is defined as "a movement in a society

from less accountable to more accountable government, from less competitive (or non-

existent) elections to freer and fairer competitive elections, from severely restricted to

better protected civil and political rights, and from weak (or non-existent) autonomous

associations in civil society to more autonomous and more numerous associations" (2003,

p. 185). I chose the definition of democratization, instead of democracy, because Iraq is not a democracy yet. It is in the process of transition toward democracy. I also chose this definition for democratization because it is the most comprehensive definition, according to my knowledge, for democratization.

There are four variables in Najem's democratization. They are accountability, elections, civil and political rights, and autonomous associations. If Sistani's position from these four variables is positive, I will conclude that his support for democracy is authentic. Furthermore, if Sistani's image for democracy comply with the entire four variables and do not exceed them to other variables, I will conclude that Sistani's democracy is similar to the Western style of democracy. If there are other variables, I will conclude that Sistani's democracy is not identical with the Western democracy.

The accountability variable refers to the extent to which the government can be accountable in front of its society to make the movement toward democracy. Accountability of the government is usually achieved via political and economic reforms. An election, on the other hand, is a crucial indicator of democracy. Civil and political rights and autonomous associations are also important indicators of democracy.

With reference to the first pattern, *Sistani condemns the miserable conditions in Iraq and criticizes the performance of the government*, Sistani calls for the government to take up its responsibilities in front of the Iraqi people. It is a call for the government to make reforms on all levels to end up the miserable conditions that Iraqi people live at. Sistani's focus in this pattern is to restore order and security because they constitute the priority at the current time. After this stage, Sistani's statements will focus on political

and economic reforms. Sistani, therefore, calls the government to be accountable in front

of its people in all aspects. For this reason, I conclude this pattern is compatible with the

accountability variable[21].

The second pattern, *Sistani plays a positive role among Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds*

*in favor of unity, dialogue, and NR*; I found that this pattern is compatible with two

variables: Civil and Political Rights, and Autonomous Associations. In relation to the

compatibility of this pattern with the first variable, Sistani's calls for unity and dialogue

represent his wish to see a united Iraq where all Iraqis have their rights. With dialogue, all

disagreements can be solved and rights can be guaranteed. As to the compatibility of this

same pattern with the second variable, autonomous associations, Sistani's call for

dialogue is for all political and civil powers in the country. He believes that different

centers of power in Iraq can participate in a constructive dialogue that can lead to

concrete results in the way to NR. His call for an active civil society indicates that he

does not disagree with the principle of power sharing between the government and the

society. Sistani is also aware that if the civil society becomes an active because of this

power sharing, religious authority of Najaf might be less. In other words, the role of

Najaf might be transferred to the civil society organizations (CSO) in Iraq if they become

active enough to take on the responsibility of preserving the society's rights and

monitoring the government's performance.

Relating to the third pattern, *Sistani demands a sovereign Iraq under a*

*democratically elected government*; I found that this pattern is compatible with the

accountability and elections variables. Sistani believes that the government cannot be

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[21] Check Appendix L for details.

credible until it achieves its sovereignty and have a democratically elected government.
Credibility of the government is the government's ability to perform its duties as agreed
upon in its contract with the citizens of the country. In other words, the government is
credible when it proves its ability to achieve political and economic reforms. When the
government achieves that, it becomes accountable. On the other hand, Sistani was direct
with the other demand that he made: the government should be democratically elected. In
other words, direct and democratic elections should be the way for forming the
government.

The fourth pattern, *while Sistani calls for peace, some outside religious
authorities call for violence*, is also compatible with one variable: autonomous
associations. Sistani tends to temporarily perform the role of the autonomous association
in Iraq in facing one of the most dangerous threats to the Iraqi society. In fact, Sistani's
networks as well as the *hawza* itself are among the most powerful non-governmental
organizations in the country. In addition, by revealing the negative role of the outside
religious authorities in Iraq, Sistani is encouraging other Iraqi CSOs to be more active
and participate in the public affairs of the Iraqi scene.

The fifth pattern in Sistani's statements, *Islam cannot be overlooked in the new
IC*, is *not* compatible with any of the democratization variables. Religion is not a
condition for democratization occurrence. Some think of religion as contradictory with
democracy in Iraq. Sistani, however, disagrees. He thinks while Islam cannot be
overlooked in the new IC, a democratic government can be achieved in Iraq.

Regarding the sixth pattern, *UN should have a more recognized role*; it is compatible with one variable: autonomous associations. Sistani's call for a stronger presence of the UN in Iraq can result in more funding and support for civil society building. In addition, the UN itself can perform the role of an autonomous organization, although it is not Iraqi.

With reference to the seventh and last pattern, *Sistani does not do politics, but he will not avoid advising Iraqi politicians if they address him*, I found that it is compatible with one variable: autonomous association. Sistani himself acts as an autonomous association in some way. Although he does not involve in politics, his interest to serve Muslims require him to advice Iraqi politicians if they seek his advice. He acts in this manner as an autonomous authority that shares the power with the government but does not tend to frequently exercise it.

As a conclusion, all the patterns are compatible with the variables of democratization definition, except one. Some patterns are compatible with more than one variable. In other words, Sistani supports all the variables that lead to a successful democratization in the country. However, Sistani's model of democracy is not identical with the Western model of democracy. One factor is not compatible with any of the democratization variables. This pattern is *Islam cannot be overlooked in the new IC*. There is no Islam variable in the Western democratization process. Besides, Sistani's emphasis on this pattern is strong. He demands a role for Islam in the IC. Therefore, if Islam is overlooked in the new IC, the whole process of democratizing the country might be threatened.

In Sistani's image, it is possible to witness flourishing of democracy in an Islamic society. To him, Islamic and democratic institutions do not contradict each other. While both institutions can maintain their independence from each other, both can also cooperate with each other to serve the society.

### 5.4. Results of Peer Debriefing

Written results of the Peer Debriefers can be found in Appendices M, N, and O. Huda's answers were brief but significant. She summarized her opinions in four points. In all of her comments, I noticed she tried her best to act objectively in conveying her opinions. I realized that after I received her results. I asked her about her source of *taqleed*. She said she emulates Sistani. As an official translator[22], Huda' first remarks were about the kind of language that Sistani used. Huda's first observation is that she noticed the absence of any threatening tone in Sistani's language. She also noticed absence of sectarian and/or ethnic words in Sistani's language.

After these positive remarks, she criticized Najaf's *marja'iyya* for its interference in the government's work. Najaf's interference, according to Huda, encourages the already existing tendencies of Iraqi Shiites to regard Najaf itself as the legitimate government. She explained these tendencies were the result of the Islamic history. Prophet Mohammed held religious and political powers together in his hands. New Iraqi political leaders want to achieve political gains via using the influence of Najaf. To Huda, attitudes of those political leaders are manipulations. Najaf, on the other hand, should keep its distance from politics. She concludes that any future attempt to separate between religion and the state is not possible in Iraq. Huda's point is interesting in the sense that it

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[22] She works as a translator at her university.

sheds the light on an aspect that does not receive enough attention in the current study. This aspect is the role of political parties with religious agendas. Those parties, according to Huda, are of negative influence on the overall political process in Iraq. By adapting religious agendas, some Shiite and Sunni parties tend to gain support of devoted Muslims. Other parties attempt to gain blessings of Najaf *marja'iyya* to be able to win in the elections.

Some of Huda's comments reflect the common stereotyping in Iraq about Najaf's current role. Some Iraqi Shiites believe Najaf should not have participated in politics. Others blamed Najaf for not being active enough in the political sphere. Ignorance of some Shiites about Sistani's position from politics is mainly attributed to two factors: tendency to accept rumors and difficulty to change stereotyping. Although Sistani emphasized that the statements he issues must have his seal, many Iraqi Shiites believed some religious parties when they claimed they were endorsed by Sistani before the elections. As a result, some people developed misconceptions without trying to test them. Huda relied to her stored misconceptions about Sistani's role in the last elections. Therefore, she did not pay attention to Sistani's text at which he said he avoids politics. Either she did not believe him, or effect of stereotyping was stronger.

Huda's remarks made me think of including some Shiite groups in my target audience. In other words, Some Iraqi Shiites, not only Sunnis and/or Kurds, need to be informed about Sistani's real positions. Although she emulates him, she only pays attention to the religious part of her emulation. I excluded this idea as Huda is not representative for the Shiite sect. Although her remark made me realize she did not

comprehend some of Sistani's messages, her attitude reveals a tendency that many Iraqi people have: they tend to guess and listen to their own judgments, instead of approaching the sources of information. This kind of behavior is behind failure of Sistani's clear messages to reach its designated audiences.

Huda's last comment was a criticism for Sistani's reference for Muslim blood. To her, there is no Muslim, Christian, or Jewish blood. All have the same blood, which should be protected regardless of the religion. Again, Huda did not notice that Sistani was making a clear reference to the targeting of Shiite Muslims in Iraq. He also made it clear at the beginning of Appendix B that all Iraqis with all their ethnic and sectarian groups should be protected.

Firas Salim, on the other hand, made thorough comments on Sistani's eight texts. Firas seemed impressed with Sistani's comments. Sistani's calls are "very impressive, genuine, and deep touching talk from a religious leader". To Firas, it reflected Sistani's good intentions. However, Sistani's recommendations have been ignored. Iraq will be better now if Iraqi people listened to Sistani and followed his advices. Firas's comments reflect his positive personal image about Sistani. Firas "highly respect and admire this man's genuine fear for the lives of the people and unity of the country".

Interestingly, Firas points out that Iraqi people need to listen to Sistani in their minds to see what he says. He asserted Huda's accusations for the political parties as behind many of Iraq's troubles today. Firas thinks Sistani's good intentions are exploited by bad politicians of Baghdad. In that process, Sistani's exploitation by bad politicians is similar to exploitation of good Islam by dictators to justify their authoritarian regimes.

Firas is a careful reader. When he finds he has no background about a particular law that Sistani mentioned, he admits that and avoids giving an opinion about the whole statement.

In later comments, Firas seemed more pessimistic about the situation in Iraq. He does not have trust in the current government. Therefore, he disagrees with Sistani about sovereignty. He thinks that the country is still occupied although a democratically elected government rules Iraq today. Firas thinks that Sistani is ideal more than necessary. While Sistani thinks sovereignty cannot be achieved without a democratically elected government, Firas argues that this government asks the foreign forces to stay in Iraq. He also thinks that Iraq is not ready for elections. Elections that were done in Iraq, according to Firas, partitioned the country. "Corrupted" Shiites reached power because ordinary Shiites followed recommendations of "Najaf". Firas thinks long period needs to pass in order for democracy to be a good solution for the Iraqi case. Democracy was useless when applied in Iraq now because it brought the current government with its "inefficient" figures. In addition, Firas thinks that former PM Ayad Allawi did a better job than the current government. He also believes that the educated voted for Allawi. Firas believes that the general elections in Iraq activated the saying "Winner takes all".

While Firas agrees that Sistani's statements are of positive effect, he thinks that democracy in Iraq was harmful because it was applied very early. Democracy in Iraq, according to Firas, failed to end the occupation. It also failed to end miseries of Iraqi people. Like Huda, Firas believes that the Shiite parties won in the last elections mainly because they were endorsed by Sistani. Although Firas respects Sistani, I doubt he will

easily accept Sistani's new suggested role in Iraq. "After all, we are human and we will be biased in way or another" Firas commented. However, I think that Firas will agree if I suggest using Sistani's influence to bring Shiites and Sunnis closer.

Dilshad, on the other hand, expressed his views that can be described as pessimistic. Dilshad is not a committed Muslim. Interestingly, he attempts his best to give an unbiased set of observations as a Kurdish individual as well as an Iraqi citizen. Although he recognizes Sistani's influence, Dilshad is skeptical about Sistani's seriousness to benefit Iraqi people at large. Dilshad thinks that Sistani's impact is on certain issues; so far in the permanent constitution draft and the general elections. In general, Sistani's interference in politics is negative, according to Dilshad. If Sistani interferes anyways, he needs to do the task properly. In other words, Sistani needs to be more active in all fields and invests his influence to the utmost level. If not, Sistani "'d better mind his own business and regulate people's faith issues, not immersing in politics at all, since I don't like the idea of clergymen interfering in politics".

Dilshad thinks that Sistani's blaming for the performance of the Iraqi government was mainly attributed for the government's failure to protect the sacred Shiite sites. Although Sistani addresses Iraqi people in his statements, there is a "veiled" message from Sistani favoring his Shiites over others. To Dilshad "this is segregation and imposition of a certain group of elite upon a larger group of people". Dilshad cannot understand how Sistani gets this influence and power over Iraqi Shiites. He thinks that Sistani's interference in politics is sometimes the result of hidden pressures. That is why his interference in politics is not on regular basis. With all the influence Sistani exercises

over his Shiites, he cannot "do any magic formula to save the entire Iraq from what it has fallen in," Dilshad argues.

I think Dilshad's arguments reflect a traditional Kurdish viewpoint. As a non-committed Muslim, Dilshad's vision is of a particular significance as he can evaluate Sistani's potential without restrained by religion. Although Sistani's influence confuses him, he agrees that it can be invested to benefit all Iraqis. He is, however, against interference of religion in politics as he is skeptical about Sistani's seriousness in his support for democracy. Dilshad, nevertheless, complies with the realities in Iraq and accepts Sistani's interference. He, however, is sure that Sistani's interference will not make magic for the Iraqi crisis. In other words, Sistani's influence will lose much of its effect if it is not coined with other internal and external factors. Dilshad's accusation for Sistani's unfairness reflects the doubts that many Kurds possess toward the different political and religious Iraqi tides.

In general, the three peer debriefers expressed different levels of understanding for Sistani's eight texts. Although they disagreed in how much they appreciate for Sistani's role, the three peer debriefers agreed on certain issues. First, the three of them lack a sufficient understanding about Sistani's position, influence, and nature of that influence. Second, are skeptical about democracy likelihood in Iraq. Third, they prefer separation of religion and the state. Fourth, Sistani's influence cannot be overlooked. Fifth, external factors that can increase the democracy likelihood in Iraq are absent in the comments of the three debriefers. Sixth and last, the three of them are pessimistic in their visions about the future of the Iraqi democratic experiment.

Lack of sufficient knowledge of the three debriefers about Sistani's position and influence surprised me. In addition to their basic knowledge about Sistani's influence in Iraqi society and the role he played in certain occasions, their source of information is what they heard about Sistani and Najaf in their atmospheres, especially in the case of Dilshad and Firas.

Skepticism about democracy's likelihood in Iraq is natural in a country with such a bleak record of human rights violations. Kind of skepticism differs, though, from one peer debriefer to another. While Firas thinks democracy in Iraq needs time and collective efforts to support it, Dilshad thinks there is no democracy as long as segregation is the policy that politicians and religious leaders follow. Skepticism of both peer debriefers can fade away if reasons behind their worries are treated. in connection with Firas's remark, I do not think education is against religion. I do think, however, that education, as well as religion, can raise consciousness about choosing the right representatives in the time of elections. Firas' concerns are about manipulation of religion by certain groups with religious agendas. In that case, I cannot blame religion.

The three peer debriefers implicitly and/or explicitly preferred separation of religion and politics in Iraq. Based on their conceptions, some of the peer debriefers thought religion has a negative role on the democratic experiment in Iraq. With the exception of Dilshad, the other peer debriefers did not attribute the negative role to Sistani. Criticisms were all directed to the manipulations by "others" and the "pressure on Sistani".

Concerning Sistani's influence, the three debriefers indicated that Sistani's influence could not be overlooked. While Dilshad regarded Sistani's influence is negative on the Iraqi democratic experiment, Firas and Huda thought Sistani's influence is positive. Despite his negative perception of Sistani's influence, Dilshad realizes Sistani should fulfill his task in serving all Iraqi people without segregation to the end. More interestingly, Dilshad thinks that Sistani's influence is not unlimited. Other influences scope Sistani's impact. In other words, Sistani is not free to act without questioning.

I observed that my peer debriefers did not refer to the external factors that can increase the democracy likelihood in Iraq. Absence of external factors in my peer debriefers' comments disapproved my expectation that living in United States will enlarge my peer debriefers' scope. It was, therefore, not necessary to choose my peer debriefers from the Iraqis who are not in Iraq. I did not expect from my peer debriefers not to observe the American role, in particular, in supporting the Iraqi democratic experiment.

Pessimism of my peer debriefers is expected because of the long periods of tyranny during the last regimes. I do consider this pessimism as a negative factor that eventually affects the behavioral patterns of the different Iraqi groups when they consider their positions from the Iraqi democratic experiment.

# CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

This chapter is for the conclusions of this study. Summary of the study process

and major findings will be discussed. The chapter will conclude with suggestions.

## 6.1. Summary

Iraqi Sunnis and Kurds continue in their doubts about the intentions of the Iraqi

Shiites to transfer Iraq into another *welayat el faqeeh*. In addition, Iraqi Shiites, Sunnis,

and Kurds are comparatively aware of the components for Iraq's capacity to witness a

successful democracy. Meanwhile, they do not seem aware of the third component:

support that Sistani provides for democracy in Iraq. Besides, while U.S. foreign policy

continues in its struggle for the success of the democratic experiment in Iraq, no much

weight is given to the support of the highest religious authority for the major sect in the

Iraqi society. The United States seems avoiding to think of Sistani's support for

democracy in a behavior similar to that of the Iraqi Sunnis and Kurds while it is spending

billions of U.S. dollars to support its efforts in Iraq

The Iraqi Shiite School of Najaf disagrees with the Iranian Shiite School of Qum in

one ideological topic that is directly linked to the current study: *welayat el faqeeh*. Sistani

supports democracy that is not identical with the Western style of democracy. While

Sistani distances himself from politics, he maintains the right to exercise pressure on the

government if Islamic identity of the society is threatened. This exceptional right,

however, cannot be used frequently because of the nature of the Iraqi context. Sistani's

support for democracy implies his vision of the future politics in Iraq; two centers of

power, religious and political, that can be independent but interact when needed to serve the society.

The current study investigates the capacity of Iraq to endorse a successful democracy. In these lines, I diagnosed three components that create together Iraq's capacity: geostrategic environment of Iraq, the role of the U.S. intervention in Iraq, and Sistani's support for democracy. While the first and second components are proved positive for democracy endorsement, Authenticity of Sistani's support for democracy needs to be studied. I decided to use a qualitative method to measure Sistani's support for democracy. I used textual analysis for this purpose. The texts I chose were eight texts that Sistani issued since 2003 about different topics. I analyzed the texts and derived patterns from the texts. I then compared these patterns with the variables that I derived from a definition for democratization. I found that all the patterns are compatible with the democratization variables, except one pattern. This last pattern is about the role of Islam in the new IC. I performed Peer Debriefing in order to evaluate the credibility of my research process and to deal with ethical and interpersonal problems that might develop at the last stages of the study.

While democracy potential is strong in Iraq, religion will play a considerable role in new Iraq. In other words, in order for co-existence of democracy and religion in Iraq to become reality, democracy needs to be "filtered" by the Islamic Shiite lenses as well as the Iraqi context. The resulting scenario is a social contract between Baghdad politicians and Najaf clerics: Najaf clerics, in that scenario, support Baghdad government as long as the latter's performance meets the expectations of the Iraqi people. Islamic identity of the

country should not be violated. Realizing his limits, Sistani is not expected to demand an implementation of *sharia* in the new Iraq. Kurds and Sunnis will block such plans from Najaf. Therefore, Sistani will not jeopardize his religious status as a supreme authority by making demands that will be resisted.

More importantly, Sistani himself does not intend to achieve a more significant role for religion in today's Iraq. He realizes that Iraq of today is different than Iraq of the Rightly-Guided caliphs. Strict application of the *Sharia* rules has not been the form in Iraq since the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate. People of Iraq will disagree among themselves with regard to the application of strict religious rules. Sistani, therefore, wants to "accommodate Islamic law *along* with other legal norms of various social and political significances in daily life" (Rahimi, 2007, p. 11). As a conclusion, it is possible to eliminate skepticism of the Sunnis and Kurds in Iraq about Sistani's future intentions of the role of Islam in a democratic Iraq if more communication channels are opened with him.

## 6.2. Major Findings

This study discusses the three components that build Iraq's capacity to endorse democracy. While two components are proved positive, the third is considered for analysis: the authenticity of Sistani's support for democracy. The textual analysis of the eight excerpts from Sistani's writings confirms the high likelihood of Sistani's support for democracy. In addition, the research reveals the interconnectivity of the Sistani's support for democracy and the other two components. In other words, while geostrategic environment in Iraq permits democracy to flourish in Iraq, United States can play a more

significant role in boosting democracy in Iraq. They can support Sistani's proposals in a way that leaves no doubts with Iraqi Sunnis and Kurds about Sistani's intentions. A U.S. support for democracy means Americans are sure of Sistani's intentions to endorse and witness a successful democracy in Iraq.

Sistani's support for democracy does not contradict his support for a significant role of Islam in the new IC. Co-existence of democracy and Islam represents a critical issue Iraq might have to face anytime in the future. It also uncovers the vulnerability of the Iraqi democratic experience. In other words, the following period is a test for the Iraqi democracy.

The major finding in this study is my conclusion that Sistani's support for democracy in Iraq is authentic. Although Sistani's model of democracy is not identical with the Western model, the difference is not critical. In fact, Sistani's model of democracy will be an enormous development in Political Islam, if approved.

Another finding in the current study is about Sistani's view of the relation between religion and politics. Sistani does not call for separation of religion and politics. To him, they cannot be separated in societies where their members regard religion as an integral part of their life. However, Sistani is of the opinion to avoid the direct involvement in political life.

Themes, or codes, that are derived from Sistani's statements can form Sistani's image of the relation between Islam and politics in total. He clearly demonstrated his position from the different aspects of the Iraqi crisis, such as democracy, unity, sovereignty, Islam, elections, civil society, violence, government responsibilities and

performance, dialogue, federalism, occupation, minorities, majority, constitution, and others. I can tell political Islam was not absent in Sistani's thinking. Absence of political Islam in his literature can only be attributed to the severe treatment of the last regime to the Najaf *marja'iyya*. This comprehensive image of life at which Islam co-exists and interacts with democracy reflects the weight and high level that political Islam enjoys in Shiite thinking. Sistani has been issuing these statements since 2003, which is a comparatively short period when compared with the long time periods that other religious schools spent trying to contribute to political Islam.

Sistani's position is not different from the position of the Iraqi Shiite School as a whole. In other words, Sistani studied in Najaf. Therefore, his views represent the views of the Najaf School. If he dies, his successor will have similar views. Therefore, Sistani's death does not bring serious changes to the agreements that will be made now between Najaf and Baghdad.

Sistani's support for democracy is important for Iraqi politicians as well as for American foreign policy makers. For both, Sistani's support for democracy means the support of the majority of Shiites in Iraq for democracy. Since 2003, Iraqi Sunnis lived under hard conditions of life and suffered from tyranny of terrorist groups. They want to believe Shiites. This is explicit in the growing pressure that Sunni tribes are exercising over the Sunni politicians to cooperate with Shiites. As to the Kurds, they realize their chances of independence are weak. Therefore, they continued as a federal region inside Iraq. In this status, Kurds will not be affected by the laws issued by Baghdad. If no major impacts are expected from Sistani's model of democracy, they will not go against it and

jeopardize their alliance with the Shiites. Many of the Iraqi Shiites themselves lack sufficient information about Sistani's political views. Despite most of Iraq's Shiites emulate him, their attention is mainly for the religious side only in his literature. On the other hand, Shiites, Kurds, and Sunnis in Iraq need to differentiate between Sistani and the parties with Islamic agendas.

Since the UN is very likely to be in a position at which it can closely observe the democratic process in Iraq, Sistani's call for democracy must be authentic. Sistani will not support a more active role for the international community in Iraq if he does not really support democracy.

As to the politicians in the United States, this influence of Sistani is vital because United States foreign policy can invest Sistani's influence to strengthen democracy in Iraq. I observed that the role that the United States can play is very important in building trust between the Iraqi groups. The three components that build Iraq's capacity to endorse democracy, I noticed, are interrelated and can work together to push democracy forward. While the Iraqi environment creates the necessary conditions for every Iraqi group to accept democracy, Sistani´s support for democracy comes to build the bases for the long-term democracy. U.S. support for the Sistani factor comes to eliminate what is left of hesitation and mistrust between the Iraqi groups.

In addition, an opposition from the Shiites of Iraq can lead to catastrophic results on the foreign policy of the United States in Iraq and the whole ME region. American decision makers, on the other hand, cannot affect, or guide, Sistani's stances. If the United States tries to exercise pressure on Sistani to make a compromise about the role of

religion in the constitution, Sistani might refuse and make demands that are harder for the Americans to achieve; such as an immediate U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. The United States, however, can interact with Sistani's support for democracy and utilize it to increase the chances of success for the Iraqi democratic experiment.

## 6.3. Suggestions

Proving the authenticity of Sistani's support for democracy in the current study does not guarantee cooperation of Sunnis in Iraq with the Shiites. There need to be other means that can be used to utilize such studies to promote channels of communication between the Shiites and Sunnis and Kurds. In other words, for Sistani's support to be effective in eliminating Sunni doubts, Iraqi and U.S. media need to launch campaigns that focus on the issue. As a result, behavioral changes among Sunnis and Kurds toward cooperation are more expected.

The study recommends conducting more research that is specialized about the relation of Islam and democracy in the ME context. The tendency to focus on this relation should be encouraged. Academic research can diagnose factors that can play a significant role to promote democracy in many ME contexts. In addition to the expected positive effect on the Iraqi crisis, a better understanding of the opportunities of democracy flourishing in the ME contexts will lead to the development for mechanisms of action that will start making the positive change in these societies. Democracy flourishing in the ME lead to improving living conditions, which ultimately results in decreasing hatred levels in the ME for the West.

More studies about Political Islam, Shiite Islam, and Islam and democracy are needed. With the political developments that the ME region witnesses, regional disputes are expected to continue and become more severe. Many of the ME disputes are of religious nature. Therefore, it is imperative to seek a higher level of understanding about these fields in order to be able to search for solutions. Besides, the new dimensions that Sistani's proposals convey demonstrate another reason for the need for further studies in this field. Sistani's attitudes since 2003 until today reflects a deep "vision of a representative government and a strong parliament, put in power by free elections, could inspire revolutionary change in Iraq and the larger Arab world" (Nakash, 2006, p. 15).

Democracy in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) might not look easy to achieve, but it is not impossible as well. With the provision of certain internal and external factors, promotion of democracy is possible. It is true that the Iraqi experience with democracy and the U.S. efforts in this Muslim Arab country are watched carefully by the rulers of the MENA. What those rulers might not realize is that the ordinary people in their countries also watch the Iraqi experience perhaps with more attention. Regardless of what those rulers wish, democracy in Iraq will have far consequences on both the region and the Islamic world.

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http://www.najaf.org
http://www.sistani.org

## APPENDICES

**Appendix A**

English translation of the statement from the office of His Eminence Ayatullah Seestani (long may he live) regarding the anniversary of the tragic bombing of the two Askari Imams' holy shrines in Samarra.

In The Name of Allah The Merciful, The Compassionate

Once again evil hands returned to violate the sanctity of the Askari shrine in Samarra by targeting the remaining minarets of this holy site. This heinous crime just shows the extent of the perpetrators' hatred towards the household of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, and their relentless efforts to ignite the sectarian fire between the citizens of beloved Iraq.

The religious Marja'iyyah expresses its extreme anger and condemnation at this evil attack. It greatly regrets that the responsible authorities have not fulfilled their obligation in protecting this sacred Shrine and calls upon the beloved faithful, during these trying times, to be patient and exercise restraint and avoid any revenge action against innocent people and places considered holy to others.

We hope the government will take the initiative to implement its promise and take swift procedures to provide the required protection for the holy shrine and its reconstruction.

There is not power except the power of Allah The High and Mighty.

Seal of The Office of Ayatullah Seestani (long may he live) – Najaf
27 Jumada al-Awal 1428H

**Appendix B**

English translation of the Statement by His Eminence Sayyid Seestani (long may he live) on the events in Iraq

In The Name of Allah, The Compassionate, The Merciful
*And hold fast, all of you together, to the Rope of Allâh (i.e. this Qur'ân), and be not divided among yourselves, and remember Allâh's Favour on you, for you were enemies one to another but He joined your hearts together, so that, by His Grace, you became brethren (in Islâmic Faith), and you were on the brink of a pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus Allâh makes His Ayât (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.,) clear to you, that you may be guided.* True are the words of Allah the high and mighty (Al-Imran: 103)

With a heart griped in sorrow and pain I follow news of the atrocities and attacks the oppressed Iraqi people are being subjected to everyday; fear and forced displacement, kidnappings, murder and the parading of dead bodies, which words fail to express their ugliness and repulsiveness and the extent of their emptiness from all humane, religious and patriotic values.

Since the first days of the occupation I was eager for the Iraqis to surmount this critical stage in their history without falling into sectarian or ethnic strife. I was aware of the magnitude of the danger that threatens the unity of this nation and its national composition, [which is] a result of past accumulations and scheming foreigners who take advantage through their wicked institutions plus other [influencing] factors.

Through the cooperation and efforts made by good people and the patience of devout Muslims, it was possible to avoid descending into the abyss of sectarian discord for more than two years despite all the tragedies that the tens of thousands of innocent people were exposed to because of their religious identity.

However, the enemies did not lose hope. They implemented their schemes to divide this country by expanding the gulf of discord among its citizens. Regrettably some local people aided them, leading to the great disaster of the bombing of the holy shrine of the two Askari Imams (peace be on them) and thus the sightless violence that we are witnessing today all over the country, including Baghdad - destroying its people under different banners and false pretexts with no deterrent or prohibition.

Today, I reiterate my appeal to all Iraqi citizens from different sects and ethnicities who care about their country, to realize the extent of the danger that threatens the future of their country and to stand side by side in confronting this danger by discarding hatred and violence and replacing them with love and peaceful dialogue in order to solve all problems and disagreements.

I also implore all those with sound opinions and ideas, religious and political leaders, heads of clans and others who are loyal and truly concerned about the unity and the future of this country and its citizens, to do their utmost to halt this chain of bloodshed because if it were to continue, according to the enemies' wishes, it will inflict the most serious damage to the unity of this nation and hinder its hopes of freedom, stability and progress for a long time to come.

I will also remind those who permit the shedding Muslim blood and have no regard for innocent lives because of their sectarian inclinations, of the saying of the great Prophet (Allah's peace and blessing be on him) when he said in his farewell Haj pilgrimage: " No doubt your blood, your wealth, your wives are prohibited to one another like the prohibition of this day of this month in this country, no doubt those present will inform those who are absent".

Also of his saying (Allah's peace and blessing be on him): "He who bears witness that there is no God but Allah and that Mohammad is his Messenger, has his blood and wealth protected, unless in a just cause, and Allah will hold him accountable ".

Also of his saying (Allah's peace and blessing be on him): "He who assists in the slaying of a Muslim, even by one word, will meet Allah, The Glorified and The Majestic, on the day of judgment with the words 'No hope of Allah's mercy' written between his eyes".

I also address those who target unarmed civilians and peaceful citizens by the words of Abu Abd-illah Al-Hussain (peace and blessing be on him) on the day of Ashoura when he addressed those who speared the attack on his family [women/children] "If you have no religion and you do not fear the day of judgment then have a free will in your life and return to your roots, if you are Arabs as you claim then... there is no sin [liability] on women".

Why then do you target people like the old, the women and children even university students and industrial labourers and government office staff and others who have no role in all the current happenings? If you are not deterred by a religion that you claim you follow, then will not the human form you appear in deter you from this?

I say to those who cause injustice and harm to non-Muslim citizens like Christians, Sabians and others, have you not heard what the Commander of The Faithful (Amirul-Momineen) Ali (peace and blessing be on him) said when he learned of a non-Muslim woman who was confronted by men wanting to take her jewelry? He said (peace be on him): "If a Muslim dies of regret [for this action] I would not blame him, but rather agree with his comportment". Why do you then harm your brothers in humanity and your fellow countrymen?

Dear people of Iraq,

The way out of the impasse in Iraq under the present circumstances requires a resolution from all the different parties to respect the sanctity of Iraqi lives, whoever they may be, and to stop reciprocal acts of violence in all its forms so that car bomb scenes, random executions in the streets and forced displacement campaigns and other such atrocious sights may vanish forever – God willing – and to replace them by cooperation with the nationally elected government and scenes of constructive dialogue to resolve any crisis and outstanding disagreements on the basis of fairness, justice and equality of rights and duties between all the citizens of this country – away from power struggles and ethnic and sectarian domination. Hoping this will be a gateway for Iraqis to reclaim the complete sovereignty of their country and to pave the way for a better tomorrow when they can enjoy security, stability, development and progress with Allah, Almighty's support.

May Allah grant everyone success to that which He pleases.
Wassalamu alaikum warahmatullah wabarakatoh
Seal and Signature of
Ali Al Hussaini Al- Seestani
22 Jumada al-Thani 1427
18 July 2006

**Appendix C**

English translation + original Arabic text issued by the Office of H. E. Grand Ayatullah Seestani in Najaf in condemnation of the abhorrent attacks against Christian churches in Iraq.

In The Name of Allah The Merciful The Most Compassionate

As part of the cycle of criminal acts witnessed in beloved Iraq, targeting its unity, stability and independence, a number of Christian churches in Baghdad and Mosul were viciously attacked - leading to tens of innocent victims falling dead and wounded as well as the destruction of many public and private properties.

While we disapprove and condemn such abhorrent crimes and see the necessity to consolidate efforts and cooperation by everyone – government and people – in order to stop attacks against Iraqis and root out the attackers; we stress the need to respect the rights of Christians and other religious minorities. Among these rights are their right to live in their country, Iraq, in peace and security.

We ask Allah The Almighty, The Omnipotent, to protect all Iraqis from harm and misfortune and to bless this beloved country with security and stability, He is All Hearing and [He] Answers Prayers.
Office of Ayatullah Seestani – Najaf
15 Jumada al-Thani 1425
2 August 2004

**Appendix D**

English translation + original Arabic copy of the letter from the Office of H. E. Ayatullah Seestani in Najaf to H.E. Head of United Nations Security Council, regarding the new UN resolution on Iraq

H. E. Head of the United Nations Security Council,
Greetings,

We have been informed of the attempts to include the so called "administrative law for the transitional period" in the new UNSC Resolution on Iraq, with a view to making it appear internationally legitimate.
This "law" that has been drawn up by an un-elected council under occupation, and through its direct influence, would restrict the national assembly which is due to be elected early next year – to draw up the permanent Iraqi constitution.
This is against the laws and rejected by most Iraqi people. Therefore, any attempt to make this "law" appear legitimate by including it in the international resolution is considered as contrary to the desire of the Iraqi people and a forewarning to dangerous consequences.

Kindly convey the position of the Religious Marja'iyya in this regard to their Excellencies the honorable members of the Security Council.
Thank you

Seal of the Office of Ayatullah Seestani in Najaf
6 June 2004

**Appendix E**

The English translation of the response by the Office of H. E. Ayatullah Seestani in Najaf to an inquiry concerning the newly appointed government in Iraq.

The Office of H. E. Grand Ayatullah Seestani (long may he live)

Many people are asking about the position regarding the new Iraqi government which was formed yesterday with the efforts of the United Nations envoy Mr. Lakhdar al-Ibrahimi?
A group of Believers
2 June 2004
In The Name of The Almighty

His Eminence has repeatedly emphasized before upon the necessity of having an Iraqi sovereign government emanating from free and fair elections through general participation of the Iraqi people.

However, for many obvious reasons the election option was excluded - between delay and procrastination, objection and scare-mongering. Thus, time ran out and the deadline of 30 June approached when the Iraqis were supposed to regain sovereignty over their country. So, a new government was appointed lacking the legitimacy of elections as well as not properly representing all segments of Iraqi society and its political forces.

Nonetheless, it is hoped that this government will prove its efficiency and integrity and show resolve to carry out the mammoth task that rest on its shoulders as follows:
1- Obtain a clear resolution from the U.N. Security Council restoring sovereignty to the Iraqi people - a full and complete sovereignty in all its political, economic, and military and security forms and endeavor assiduously to erase all traces of the occupation.
2- Provide security in all sectors of the country and curb organized criminal activities and all other criminal acts.
3- Provide basic services to the citizens and alleviate the hardships they encounter in their daily lives.
4- Carefully prepare for general elections adhering to its set time at the beginning of next year so that a national council may be formed that is not bound by any of the laws issued under occupation and among these the so called administrative law for the transitional period.

The new government will not gain popular acceptance unless it proves through clear and practical steps that it diligently and honestly seeks to accomplish the aforementioned tasks. May Allah grant everyone success to achieve that which pleases and satisfies Him.

Seal of the Office of Ayatullah Seestani in Najaf
3 June 2004

**Appendix F**

English translation + Original Arabic text of the response from the Office of His Eminence Ayatullah Sayyid Seestani in Najaf to a couple of questions from Anthony Shadid of the Washington Post regarding the latest political developments in Iraq: What is Sayyid Seestani's opinion of the new plan for a political transition in Iraq? Does he bless the process?

In The Name of Allah, The Merciful, The Most Merciful

His Eminence the Sayyid (long may he live) has some reservations regarding the said plan.

Firstly, it is based on preparing the law of the Iraqi state, for the transitional period, through the Governing Council in conjunction with the occupying power - thus not providing it with legitimacy. For this (legitimacy) to be achieved it must be presented to representatives of the Iraqi people for approval.

Secondly, the mechanism in place to choose members of the Transitional Legislative Assembly does not guarantee the establishment of an assembly that truly represents the Iraqi people. Therefore this mechanism must be replaced with one that guarantees the aforesaid, which is "elections", so the Assembly will emanate from the desire of the Iraqi people and will represent them fairly without its legitimacy being tarnished in any way. Perhaps "elections" can be organized using rationing-cards and other supplements.

Seal of the Office of Sayyid Seestani - Najaf
3 Shawwal 1424
28 November 2003

**Appendix G**

English translation of the response by the Office of His Eminence Ayatullah Seestani in Najaf to questions from Washington Post:

1- Is there a substitute for a general election to write the constitution, for example small committees chosen by the Iraqi people who will in turn nominate a constitution drafting body?

2- Where does religion fit in the future Iraqi constitution?

3- What do you think about a federal system, is it appropriate for Iraq?

4- What do you feel about the forces working in Iraq to keep peace and security, like the Bulgarians and Polish forces?

5- What is your opinion about the transitional governing council?

6- Did you meet Sayyid Muqtada Al-Sadr last week - he mentioned in an interview with Al-Arabia news channel that he met you after the events in Karbala – and what went on at that meeting?

7- Are you worried about a Shia-Shia conflict in the future?

Response:

In The Name of Allah The Merciful, Most Merciful

1- There is no substitute for a general election to choose the constitution council members.

2- Islam is the religion of the majority of the Iraqi people it is obvious that hands elected by the Iraqi people to draft the constitution will include the values and noble teaching of Islam in the constitution.

3- The Iraqi peoples' representatives for the elected constitution drafting council will decide this.

4- If there is a need for them here then they should fall under UN supervision and not the occupying forces.

5- His Eminence has not mentioned anything about this council. The Iraqi people hope that the council will spare no effort in facilitating the affaires of the country during the transition period by providing security and stability and general services and to also pave the way for the election of a constitution council - deferring decisive decisions until the establishment of an elected government after the end of the occupation.

6- He visited the Offices of His Eminence and met with members of staff who emphasized the need to submit all unauthorized weapons to the relevant national forces in order to prevent future armed clashes.

7- If swift measures are not taken by the Iraqi national forces to withdraw all unauthorized weapons and consolidate the national forces responsible for providing peace and security then there may in future be dangerous problems unrelated to the Shia arena.

Seal of the Office of Ayatullah Seestani - Najaf
27 Sha'ban 1424
24 October 2003

**Appendix H**

English translation of the response by the Office of Ayatullah Seestani in Najaf Al-Ashraf to questions by Associated Press.

In The Name of Allah The Merciful, Most Merciful

Assalamu alaikum warahmatullah wabarakatoh
Your Eminence..
1- Is there anything that should be done to unify Shia ranks in Iraq, especially after recent events in the holy city of Karbala ?
2- You issued a fatwa some months ago urging an election of people to write the future Iraqi constitution. Do you not think voting on a constitution drafted by people chosen from various sectors and levels of society is legitimate enough?
3- Why is it that we do not hear more from you on issues that concern the Iraqi people and Iraq - especially during these critical times in the history of the country?
With many thanks
Hamza Hindawi
Correspondent for the (American)
Associated Press agency in Baghdad

Response:

In The Name of Allah The Merciful, Most Merciful

1- Differences of opinion and directions within the Shia arena are quite natural - just like any other arena - so there is no cause for concern. Normal dialogue between the parties in question is the ideal way to solve any disputes. Respect for the majority's opinion by the minority without the majority trying to dominate and rule over the minority is the basis that has to be observed in politics.
The armed clashes in Karbala between the residents and some armed factions emanated from the absence of an effective central authority and the widespread availability of weapons in the hands of undisciplined elements. His Eminence has previously stressed several months ago, in all his meetings with members of the Governing Council and other officials and ministers, the necessity for taking swift and decisive action to withdraw all unauthorized weapons form the people and to support the Iraqi police force with proper manpower and equipment so they can do their work that is protecting society from anything that may undermine its security. Regrettably, they have not taken - or they have not been permitted to take – essential measures in this regard until the situation has reached its present state. New problems may also arise if the initiative is not taken to implement the steps that have been emphasized by His Eminence.
Everyone has to know that His Eminence is not a party in any dispute that occurs here or there and that his paternal attention has been and will continue to encompass all Iraqis.
His Office in Najaf has asked Dr. Hussain Sharestani to spare no effort in solving the dispute that occurred in Karbala and to reach an accord among all the parties in question

to purge the elements of discord. Big efforts were made in this regard, culminating in an agreement between all parties to disarm from within the vicinity of the two holy shrines and other important places and to form a committee to implement these measures.

2- At present there is nobody that can actually choose the members of the constitution drafting council in a way that is acceptable to everyone, such that members of the council may fairly represent all sectors of Iraqi society. It is clear that personal, community and ethnic interests, as well as party politics and sectarian issues will in one way or another influence the selection process. Thus the established council would lack legitimacy and there will be no point then in voting [yes or no] on the drafted constitution. There is no substitute for a general election to choose the members of the constitution council.

3- Notwithstanding His Eminence's great concern and on going monitoring of the situation in Iraq on all fronts, he has been careful in not participating in politics thus making way for those politicians chosen by the people to undertake this task. His Eminence is just pleased to give advice and guidance to visiting people and members of the governing council meeting him as well as ministers or leaders of political parties and others. It is rather unfortunate some of the media are exploiting this stance from time to time to disseminate false news and circulate baseless rumors.

Seal of the Office of Ayatullah Seestani in Najaf

21 Sha'ban 1424

18 October 2003

**Appendix I**

| Description from text | Personal Meaning | Textual Meaning | Universal Meaning |
|---|---|---|---|
| Condemnation of all the atrocities and miserable conditions that Iraqi people have been subjected to | Condemning the atrocities and feel sad and pain about it | Refusing the violent conditions in Iraq | Conditions in Iraq are terrible |
| Call for the Shiites to be patient and avoid revenge against people and places considered holy to others | Ordering the Iraqi Shiites to calm down and take no revenge action | Call for the Iraqi Shiites not to retaliate and attack holy places for Sunnis | Sistani is in favor of dialogue, peace, and unity; and against sectarian and ethnic violence |
| Call for Iraqi people of different ethnic and sectarian groups to unite and discard hatred and violence | Call for unity and abandon ethnic and sectarian differences | Inviting Shiite, Sunni, and Kurdish groups to cooperate in order to overcome violence | |
| Call for peaceful dialogue to solve all problems and disagreements | Encouraging peaceful dialogue as the best and only way to reach solutions | Dialogue is the other way that is peaceful to solve problems | |
| Recognition of the foreign forces in Iraq as an occupation | Recognizing the foreign forces in Iraq as an occupation indicates refusal | Mistrust of foreign forces and emphasis on national sovereignty | Sistani is against the occupation |
| Call for outside religious authorities to stop authorizing violence in Iraq | Criticizing outside religious authorities for their negative role in aggravating violence in Iraq and demanding them to | Shedding the light on the negative role that outside religious authorities continued to play in aggravating | Sistani reveals the negative role of outside religious fundamentalists in aggravating violence in Iraq |

| | stop | violence in Iraq | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Call for political, religious, and community leaders to cooperate to reach solutions | Inviting all aspects of society to help the government in the reconciliation efforts | Activating the role of civil society in the process of decision making | |
| Necessity of having an Iraqi sovereign government emerging from free and fair elections through general participation of Iraqi people | Sovereignty of an Iraqi government will not be achieved unless free elections and general participation of Iraqi people are conducted | Sistani is in favor of a democratic government in Iraq | Sistani calls for having a democratically-elected government |
| A legitimate government is the one that represents all segments of Iraqi society and its political forces | Legitimacy for the government can be achieved until all segments of Iraqi society and its political forces | | |
| Respect for the majority's opinion by the minority without the majority trying to dominate and rule over the minority is the basis that has to be observed in politics | Equal treatment and fair communication between majority and minority via peaceful dialogue | | |
| Call for restoring a full and complete sovereignty in all its political, military, economic, and security forms | Emphasis on a full sovereignty in all its political, military, economic, and security forms | Call to get rid of the occupation in all forms | Sistani demands sovereignty for Iraq |
| As Islam is the religion of the majority of Iraqi people, values of | Members who drafted the IC included Islamic values to reflect the | Democracy gives Islam a big role in the IC | Islam will have a considerable role in the IC |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Islam will be included in the constitution because members who draft it are elected by Iraqi people | will of the majority of Iraqis who elected them | | |
| Iraqi people's representatives for the elected constitution drafting will decide if federalism is appropriate for Iraq | Democratically-elected representatives will decide about federalism; not Sistani | Federalism is an issue to be decided upon by Iraqi people's elected representatives | Debate about federalism will be discussed and solved democratically |
| If there is a need for the foreign forces working in Iraq, they should fall under the UN supervision and not the occupying forces | A call for an international role in Iraq as well as a call for restoring sovereignty by refusing foreign occupation | Foreign forces can work in Iraq if they fall under UN supervision | Occupation should come to an end while UN should have a bigger role in Iraq |
| Differences of opinion are quite natural | Opinion differences are normal, if not good | Differences of opinion is a democratic feature | There are already signs of democratic features in Iraq |
| The government should take swift and decisive action to restore order and protect citizens | It is urgent for the government to act quickly and influentially to restore order | Exercising pressure on the government to work harder to restore order | The Iraqi government is not doing its best to restore order |
| Sistani is not a party in any dispute | Sistani does not support any particular party in any dispute | Sistani is above partying and disputes. He cares for all Iraqi people | Sistani wants peace and unity for all Iraqis |
| Sistani's paternal attention encompasses all Iraqi people | Sistani cares for all Iraqi people, with no favoring for one group upon another | | |
| Sistani is | Sistani follows the | Sistani cares for the | While he distances |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| monitoring the situation in Iraq on all fronts, but not participating in politics | day-to-day situation in Iraq, with all its details and at the same time keeps distance from politics | suffering of Iraqi people, and does not care about politics and power | himself from politics, Sistani carefully follows the developments on the Iraqi scene |
| Sistani has been careful to avoid participating in politics and thus making way for those politicians chosen by the people to undertake their task | Sistani's avoidance to involve in Iraqi politics opens the door for, and encourages, politicians to fulfill that role | Sistani is not a politician | |
| Sistani is pleased to give advice and guidance to visiting people and members of the government | Sistani will continue to advice and guidance for those who address him | Sistani helps, advice, and guide people who address him, even politicians | Sistani helps and advices everyone, even politicians if they come to him seeking advice |

**Appendix J**

Analytic Memo (Patterns derived from Sistani's statements)

- Sistani condemns the miserable conditions in Iraq and criticizes the performance of the government.
- Sistani plays a positive role among Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds in favor of unity, dialogue, and NR.
- Sistani demands a sovereign Iraq under a democratically-elected government.
- While Sistani calls for peace, some outside religious authorities call for violence.
- Islam cannot be overlooked in the new IC.
- UN should have a more recognized role.
- Sistani does not do politics, but he will not avoid advising Iraqi politicians if they address him.

**Appendix K**

Peer Debriefers Personal Data:

| Name | Place of Birth | Ethnicity / Sect | Current Address | School |
|------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|--------|
| Firas Salim / Male | Baghdad - Iraq | Sunni Arab | New York – USA | Columbia University |
| Huda Yahiya / Female | Baghdad - Iraq | Shiite Arab | Massachusetts – USA | University of Massachusetts – Amherst |
| Dilshad Abubakir / Male | Sulaimaniyah (Kurdistan) - Iraq | Sunni Kurd | Albany – NY – USA | College of Saint Rose |

**Appendix L**

| Patterns | Accountability | Elections | Civil & Political Rights | Autonomous Associations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sistani condemns the miserable conditions in Iraq and criticizes the performance of the government | X | | | |
| Sistani plays a positive role among Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds in favor of unity, dialogue, and NR | | | X | X |
| Sistani demands a sovereign Iraq under a democratically-elected government | X | X | | |
| While Sistani calls for peace, some outside religious authorities call for violence | | | | X |
| Islam cannot be overlooked in the new IC | | | | |
| UN should have a more recognized role | | | | X |
| Sistani does not do politics, but he will not avoid advising Iraqi politicians if they address him | | | | X |

**Appendix M**

Written Results of First Peer Debriefer, Huda Yahiya


1- I did not notice any violent language or threatening material in all of them.

2- There is no sign of sectarian words (he didn't say Shia or Sunni). He always says citizens, Iraqis, etc.

3- I see a huge interference with the government's legitimacy. It is one of our biggest mistakes. I mean Iraqis always look for a legit government in the houses of Margaiyaa. I think the reason is that our prophet Mohammad (PBUH) was a religious leader as well as a political one. So, leaders who came after him tried to do the same and establish an effective religious influence and earn some legitimacy via the blessings of religious characters (who should have stayed out of politics). That is why any attempt to separate religion from politics will never succeed in our country.

4- In appendix B, I do not agree with using the words (Muslim blood) because there is no Muslim or Christian or Jewish blood. There is human being blood and it must be protected regardless.

**Appendix N**

Written Results of Second Peer Debriefer, Firas Salim[23]

1. This is a wise call to exercise self control and is very needed after such horrible acts. This shows the good intent of Al-Sistani to preserve people's lives; however, his recommendations have been ignored many of the times.

2. Very impressive, genuine, and deep touching talk from a religious leader. I do not only think, but I deeply believe that if Shiite & Sunnis followed his advices mentioned in this text, Iraq would not be in such a condition today. I highly respect and admire this man's genuine fear for the lives of the people and unity of the country. Hope people will listen to the voice of wisdom in their minds which matches what Al-Sistani is urging for, but unfortunately there are politicians and party leaders whose main interest is to divide the country and consolidate their benefits.From reading this statement, I started to think that the good intent and will of this man is being exploited by politicians in Baghdad for their own evil benefits. Just like the whole religion (Islam) is being exploited to justify horrible acts by terrorists and this unfortunately gave those who attack Islam the chance to generalize their critiques over the whole Islam and whole Muslims instead of limiting it to radicals.

3. I see this statement along with the previous ones as a call for peace and respect to human's rights and lives irrespective of their religious and/ or political opinion. This is a basic notion human interaction and should be the gold standard to follow.

4. I am not familiar with the law that was mentioned in the statement and therefore I do not understand the context the exact context of how this law would've prevented the national assembly from approving a national constitution. Sorry, but no comments because of limited knowledge in the mentioned law.

5. With all due respect to his opinion, but I believe that we were under occupation before June 2004 and we remained under occupation until this day, whether the government was elected or not. Talking about sovereignty through election to me is like a TV show that never touches the real life. In addition, we are seeing every day that it is the elected government which insists to keep the multinational forces. I am confused!! I thought that the elected government was going to call for sovereignty. As I said before, those politicians, whether elected or not, are concerned about their own benefit not the country's benefit.

6. Another statement to stress the importance of election in approving any legislative authority in the country. However, I believe that election should be administered after a period of civil stabilizations, education, improving health and then let the people give their informed judgment and place their vote. In Iraq, we have election to partition the country into the main three sectors: Shiite, Kurds and

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[23] Firas presented his opinion on Sistani's texts in the form of numbered comments.

Sunni. In other words, the Shiite vote for the corrupted Shiite because of the recommendation from Al Najaf …..the Kurds are voting for the kurds because of different reasons (mainly just because they are kurds) and the Sunni voted for the non-effective representation just because they are Sunnis. I believe the ones who practice the real democracy should vote for a person based on a political agenda and civil project that will serve the people. Democracy in the US and Europe did not come in a year or two…….it was the results of decades of gradual building process to educate people how to vote and why to give your vote to some politician and not to others. I am sorry for getting away from the topic which giving my opinion in the statement, but my frank opinion is that it is useless to count on democracy in the time being as it has proven to be the method that brought the inefficient figures to power. Although I hardly accept the concept of assigning a leader or government, but I believe that Allawi did much better job than the current government. I most of the educated people voted for Allawi in spite of his flaws.

7. I think that Al-Sistani has wisely addressed to all the questions, except from the first question. I disagree that the general election brought more peace to the situation. I used to think that it would as everybody, but now after the years of civil war under the eyes of the elected government, I believe that the general election followed the principle of the US election which is "Winner takes all"!!

8. I think that all the answers are legitimate ones. Comments of the second question: although I am against the application of general voting, but the answer for the second question was a very valid point to raise. It is really difficult to select a body that represents everyone without being influenced by ethnic / religious roots. After all we are human and we will be biased in way or another. Truly it is difficult to make unbiased decision or vote, but I genuinely believe that with more education and more experience people will appreciate the meaning of freedom and democracy and will be more capable of submitting a well informed and judged vote.

**Appendix O**

Written Results of Third Peer Debriefer, Dilshad Abubaker

I'd like to say that I have no belief in religions, though it shall not be construed that I'm totally an atheist. I do believe in God, say, to keep lively conscience, but I'm not a committed Muslim. Given these facts, my observations may include a two-fold viewpoint; one as a Kurdish individual, and other as an Iraqi young. I'll do my best to present my perceptions and observations based on an unbiased and fair academic perspective.

A thorough reading and perception of the whole statements, as translated by his office, has got me to conclude that Ayatullah Seestani always blames the Iraqi government and its forces depicting an "evil" image of them for basically not "fulfilling their obligation in protecting" the sacred premises of the Shiites. At some points, he slightly mentions other ethnic and religious sectarians of the Iraqi community.

As I may be wrong in this perception, I generally felt that there was a kind of veiled message or stimulus in his statements for the Shiites, where he seemingly favors them over others; to me this is segregation and imposition of a certain group of elite upon a larger group of people. If one believes in the basic freedoms and democratic principles, though I'm not sure if Seestani does, one should let it be for all. It sounds like he's interested in protecting only the scared religious premises rather than holding the same appreciation [and influence] to the civil casualties and destruction happening to the Iraqis on daily basis.

I'm really amazed by the huge efforts and influence he exerted over two big issues in Iraq, such as the permanent constitution draft and the general elections, while there were – and are still - more important things and issues that he could positively influence. I wonder where he'd been in the 1980s where many Iraqi individuals were suppressed, killed and executed, and suddenly he showed up in the Iraqi political arena after 2003. I don't understand where he gets those influence and power he exerts over the political and decision-making processes, while other Iraqi politicians and "state men," if you will, lack them.

While "calling upon the beloved faithful . . . to be patient and exercise restraint and avoid any revenge action against innocent people and places considered holy to others," as he was calming down the Shiites over the pains and grieves they suffered over the past years, I don't see he calls upon the same people to actively participate in the political process and eliminate the obstacles in reconstructing Iraq at all levels. I'd say he should be fully activating and stimulating everyone to love, to respect, to exert more efforts and energy, to reconstruct and to reconcile the entire Iraqi communities as long as he continues to influence the political and status quo in Iraq. If not, he'd better mind his own

business and regulate people's faith issues, not immersing in politics at all, since I don't like the idea of clergymen interfering in politics.

Whether he likes it or not, he'd be accountable for his historical influences he exerted upon the Iraqis since 2003. I believe that the Iraqi generations to come will not tolerate his interference in the political process, as he hasn't shown a positive impact on the Iraqis' lives so far. When one makes one's self a public figure and "official", one should consider the consequences of their actions and statements.

As for a public figure like Seestani, I doubt his seriousness in what he's doing to benefit the Iraqis at large, though he's shown a huge impact so far on certain issues, as I explained some above. However, I do believe that he interferes in politics and other issues as if he's pushed or under pressure as I've never seen him always active in this respect. I don't think he can do any "magic formula" to save the entire Iraq from what it has fallen in.

**GLOSSARY**

*A*

| | |
|---|---|
| Al a'alam | The most knowledgeable scholar among other scholars |
| Abbasid | The dynasty that ruled after the Umayyad dynasty in the Islamic history |
| Alawi, Ayad | First interim PM in Iraq after toppling of Saddam's regime in 2003 |
| Al Dhari, Harith | A Sunni Iraqi cleric who opposed American invasion of Iraq and praised insurgency. He is the leader of the AMS |
| Al Dulaimi, Adnan | A contemporary Iraqi Sunni political leader |
| Al Hakim, Abdul Aziz | An Iraqi Shiite theologian and politician and head of SIIC |
| Al Hakim, Muhammed Sa'id | One of the four prominent clerics in Najaf's *Hawza* |
| Al Hashimi, Tariq | A Sunni Iraqi politician and general secretary of the IIP. He is also the Vice President of Iraq in the government that was formed after the 2005 Elections |
| Al Ja'afari, Ibrahim | An Iraqi Shiite politician and head of the Islamic Dawa Party |
| Al-Khoei, Abdul Majid | A Shiite cleric and son of Ayatollah Abu el Qasim Al Khoei. He administered Al-Khoei Charitable Foundation in London. He was assassinated in Najaf in April 2003 |
| Al-Khoei, Abu el Qasim | The most influential Shiite scholar at his time, and predecessor of Ayatollah Al Sistani |
| Al Maliki, Nouri | The Iraqi PM of Iraq and a prominent leader in the Islamic Dawa Party |

| | |
|---|---|
| Al Mutlag, Salih | A Sunni Iraqi secular politician who leads the NIF |
| Al Najafi, Bashir | One of the four prominent clerics of Najaf's *Hawza* |
| Al Qaeda | An alliance of radical organizations that is behind several terrorist attacks in the world |
| Army, the Mahdi | A strong Iraqi Shiite militia that is formed by *Muqtada Al Sadre* after 2003 |
| Al-Sadr, Mohammed Baqir | Founder of Al-Da'wa Party in Iraq and uncle of Muqtada al Sadr. He opposed Saddam in the 1970s; was arrested, and executed with his sister in 1982 |
| Al Sadr, Muqtada | An influential Shiite political figure in Iraq and founder of Al Mahdi Army |
| Al Ulayan, Khalaf | A Sunni Iraqi politician and leader of the INDC |
| Al Zarqawi, Abu Musab | The Jordanian terrorist who led Al Qaeda activities in Iraq until his death in June 2006 by U.S. missiles |
| Ayatollah | A high ranking title given to Shiite clerics after becoming experts in Islamic studies |

**B**

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|---|---|
| Ba'ath Party | A secular nationalistic party that ruled in Syria and Iraq |
| Bachachi, Adnan | A secular Iraqi Sunni politician and head of the IDG |
| Barzani, Massoud | An Iraqi Kurdish politician and president of the Autonomous Kurdish Government in Iraqi Kurdistan. He founded the KDP |
| Bin Abi Talib, Ali | First Imam of the Shiites, cousin of Prophet Mohammed, husband of *Fatima*, and the fourth Caliphate of Muslims |

**C**

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|---|---|
| Caliph | A title of the head of the state in the Islamic umma |
| Caliphate | The name of the Islamic state. Several dynasties referred to their states as caliphates |

| | |
|---|---|
| Caucus System | A U.S.-suggested system that is introduced as a way of transferring political power to Iraqis. It means the allocation of political power to Iraqi political blocs without regard to demographic facts |
| Chalabi, Ahmed | A Shiite Iraqi politician and head of the NCC. He is secular |
| Crusades | Christian military campaigns launched under the name of religion to achieve several goals of which restoring Jerusalem and the Holy Land are only some |

**E**

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|---|---|
| Ethnaiashareya | Item means Twelvers, in Arab. It's the name of the Shiite mainstream. Schools of Najaf and Qum are the ideological centers for the *Ethnaiashariyya*. They are called so because their Imams are twelve |

**F**

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|---|---|
| Fadhilla Party | An influential Shiite political party, with religious nature, in the south of Iraq |
| Faqeeh | Religious scholar |
| Fatwa | A ruling on Islamic law issued by a recognized religious scholar |
| Fayyadh, Muhammed Ishaq | One of the four prominent clerics in Najaf's *Hawza* |
| Fundamentalism | Extremism in different aspects of life |

**G**

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|---|---|
| Governing Council | A provisional government that was established in 2003 until 2004 in Iraq. It included representatives from the different ethnic and sectarian Iraqi groups |

**H**

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|---|---|
| Haram | A description for everything that is forbidden in Islamic law |
| Hawza | Seminaries of traditional Shiite Islamic studies |
| Hidden Imam | The twelfth Imam for Shiites. His name is |

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|---|---|
|  | Mohammed Al Mahdi. He hid since 874 AD until today. He will emerge later to save mankind and spread justice, according to Shiites |
| Hussein, Imam | The third Shiite Imam; grandson of Prophet Mohammed; son of Ali bin Abi Talib and Fatima. He was killed in Karbala by Yazid's troops |

*I*

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|---|---|
| Ijtihad | Process of making Islamic law by religious jurists |
| Imam | Is the title of the leader of mankind in all aspects of life, according to Shiites |
| Imamate | The Religious authority of the Shiites' Imams |
| Iraqi List | A political party list in the Iraqi National Assembly. It is headed by Iyad Allawi |
| Islamic Democracy | Establishment of a democratic state in an Islamic country |

*J*

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|---|---|
| Jihad | Meaning "struggle", it is generally considered as one of Islam's important concepts |
| Jihad el Akbar | Its meaning is the bigger struggle. It refers to the internal struggle against instincts, like greed and lust, inside human beings. In Islam, this *Jihad* comes before the other kind, *Jihad el Asghar* (struggle against invaders to defend the religion) |

*K*

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|---|---|
| Karbala | A town to the south of Baghdad and place where Imam Hussein was killed and buried |
| Khamenei | The current supreme leader of the Iranian Revolution |
| Khomeini | An Iranian Shiite cleric who led the revolution |

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|---|---|
|  | against the Shah of Iran in 1979 and established the Islamic Republic in Iran |
| Kurdistan | An Iraqi region in the north. Its people are Kurds, the second largest group in Iraq after Shiites |

*M*

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|---|---|
| Marja'iyyia | A term refers to the highest ranking clerics in Najaf and Qumwho are folled by Shiites in the world |
| Marja'iyyat Al Taqleed or Marji'a | Meaning "source of following", this term is given to the grand ayatollahs who are able to make legal decisions and followed by devoted Shiites |
| Mashhad | A religious city in Iran and  burial place of the only Shiite Imam in Iran |
| Middle East, the | A region that is of historical, political, religious, and economic significance that spreads mostly in Western Asia and partly in North Africa |
| Modernists | A term used in this study to refer to Muslims who do not mind giving Islam a role in a democratic state |
| Mousa, Hamid Majid | An Iraqi politician and head of ICP |
| Mujtahid | An Islamic scholar who is able to interpret the sharia, reason, and issue laws. He is licensed to do Igtihad |

*N*

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|---|---|
| Najaf | The first religious Shiite center in the world. Ali bin Abi Talib, the first Shiite Imam, is buried there. It is also the center for Shiite clerics |
| National Reconciliation | A term refers in this study to the Iraqi government's attempts to lead the Iraqi groups to reconcile with each other |

*O*

| Ottomans | The Turkish empire that ruled for more than six centuries before it dissolved after its defeat in First World War |

*Q*

| Quietism | A trend that is attributed to Iraqi Shiite School of Najaf. It means keeping religion out of politics |
| Qum | An Iranian religious city that is the center of Shiite clerics in Iran |

*R*

| Rafidi | derogatory term for Shiites |
| Rightly-Guided Caliphs | The first four caliphs after Prophet Mohammed. They are close companions of the Prophet |

*S*

| Sadrists | Followers of Muqtada al-Sadr in Iraq |
| Safavid | the Turkic Sufi order which established Shi'ism among 16$^{th}$-century-Iran's mostly Sunni population |
| Salafi | A conservative Sunni Islamic school of thought |
| Samara | A town in north of Baghdad that was the capital during the Abbasid era for a while. Two Shiite Imams are buried there |
| Sayyed | A title that is used by Shiites to refer to Muslims who are descendents of Prophet Mohammed |
| Secularists | A term used to refer in this study to those Muslims who support separation of religion and state |
| Sharia | Islamic religious laws |
| Shariat Madari | A prominent Iranian Shiite cleric who opposed Khomeini's welayat el faqeeh |
| Shiite | The largest minority denomination of Islam |
| Shiite Crescent | A geopolitical term used to refer to the areas in the ME where Shiites are majority and form a shape like a crescent in the map. These areas are in Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | Iran, Syria, and Lebanon. A close look at the map reveals two Shiite Crescents in the ME |
| | Sistani | The highest ranking cleric in the Shiite world. He was born in Iran and lives now in Najaf, Iraq |
| | Sunni | The largest denomination of Islam |

**T**

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|---|---|---|
| | Talabani, Jalal | The Iraqi Kurdish politician who became President of Iraq on April 2006. He founded the PUK |
| | Taqiyya | A principle that Shiites exercise, when necessary. They believe it is religiously legitimate to avoid serious harm by avoiding causes of harm |
| | Taqleed | Worshipers' acceptance of Islamic ruling from recognized clerics in Islam |

**U**

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|---|---|---|
| | Umma | A term used to refer to whole the Islamic nation as a whole |
| | United Nation Security Council | The branch in the UN that is responsible of maintaining security and peace in the world |

**W**

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|---|---|---|
| | Wahhabi | A conservative Sunni movement in Saudi Arabia |
| | Welayat | An item used to refer to the political authority of the Shiite Imam |
| | Welayat El Faqeeh | A revolutionary ideological change in Islamic Shiite thinking that was first introduced by Ayatollah Khomeini. He stepped beyond religio-legal authorities that Shiite scholars exercise to demand political one |

**Y**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Yaqubi | An influential Iraqi Shiite cleric |

**Z**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Zeidan, Hassan | A secular Sunni Iraqi politician who leads the NFUFI |