

A Critical Analysis of the Onset of the Iraqi Civil War 2004: Perspectives of Inclusive and Exclusive Elite Bargains

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Being one of the bloodiest internal conflicts since 1945, the Iraqi civil war unleashed disastrous dynamics in Iraq and the Middle East, which set the course for the current chaos in Iraq and the rise of Islamic State. This dissertation analyses the civil war's onset in 2004 from the analytical perspective of inclusive and exclusive elite bargains. It hypothesizes that the exclusiveness of Iraq's elite bargains for a political settlement after Saddam Hussein's overthrow is the major cause of the civil war. A range of examined elite bargains from August 2002 until June 2004 illustrates the exclusiveness of the bargains. US officials based the post-Saddam political order on a small coalition of actors who had lived outside of Saddam-ruled Iraq for decades and had, therefore, no support base in the country. Kurdish actors are evidently the exception. At the same time, a number of influential key figures were excluded from the bargains and barred from any participation in the new political settlement of Iraq, leaving them without stakes in the stability of the country. This study finds out that excluded actors have indeed been at the core of the insurgent activities that led to the civil war. The bottom line of this dissertation is that the applied explanatory model, though it cannot explain Iraq's internal disorder in all its facets, provides an essential tool to analyze the civil war onset in 2004.

Keywords: Academic integrity, cheating, plagiarism, emerging democracies, academic dishonesty, Republic of Moldova

Introduction

Once referred to as the cradle of civilization, Iraq has been the source of regional instability and a hotbed for grief and terror for the last decades. In his 24 years of dictatorial rule, Saddam Hussein suppressed the Iraqi population and waged devastating wars. The patterns for the current chaos in Iraq were set a decade ago, when the country descended into civil war in the aftermath of the US-driven regime change in 2003.

This paper analyses the causal mechanisms that led to the civil war onset in Iraq in 2004. The study of civil war onsets provides four major streams of explanatory approaches: 1) The perspective that internal violent conflicts are a by-product of a country's ethnic diversity; 2) the perspective that poverty and poor economic performance lead to civil wars; 3) the idea that severe inequalities within a society cause violent uprisings; and 4) the explanation that flawed institutions and political processes are the source of internal violent conflicts (Huntington, 1996; Hegre et al., 2001; Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Stewart, 2000; Ozfidan, Burlbaw, & Kuo, 2016). This paper applies a research approach that comes from the fourth perspective and assumes that the causes of the civil war onset lie in the flawed political process during and after the regime change: the framework of inclusive and exclusive elite bargains.

Among the definitions of *civil war*, the concept presented by Fearon and Laitin (2003) is one of the most referred to. They establish three criteria that an internal violent conflict has to meet to be labelled as civil war: (1) Fighting between agents of the state and organized, non-state groups who seek either to take control of the government, to take power in a region, or to use violence to change government policies. (2) The conflict to kill at least 1,000 people over its course, with a yearly average of at least 100. (3) At least 100 people to be killed on both sides (including civilians attacked by rebels) (Fearon & Laitin 2003, p.76).

Following Burton and Higley, I define *elites* as people who are able to affect national political outcomes individually, regularly and seriously, e.g. through extensive networks and/or positions in powerful organizations (Burton and Higley, 1987, p. 296). Elites are polity members – regardless of whether they are institutionally included or not. *Elite bargains* shall be defined as the interaction among elites to forge a common understanding about the way of organising political power that balances and serves their interests and beliefs, in order to form and shape a political settlement (Whaites 2008, p. 4-5).

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The hypothesis is that the major cause for the civil war onset in 2004 has been the exclusiveness of the elite bargains for the post-Saddam political settlement. This hypothesis is based on the assumptions that the common understanding among elites on a particular way of political order determines the structures of a state, and that a political system comprises multiple contenders who seek to maximise their access to executive power. According to this hypothesis, excluded elites are accountable for the prevalence of internal violence in Iraq.

Internal violence in Iraq began in summer 2003, primarily as an urban guerrilla struggle by former officials of Saddam's security services who were trying to drive out the Coalition Forces and regain power (Fearon 2007). In late summer 2003, the insurgent groups started to diversify and militant Islamist groups, like the processor of al-Qaida in Iraq, gained ground through attention-drawing attacks. The insurgent activities mainly focused on Baghdad and the central Iraqi governorates. However, in spring 2004 militias in the south joined the fight against US military and Iraqi security forces. By June 2004, the death toll had taken on an enormous scale: 862 killed US soldiers (Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, 2015b), 60 killed UK soldiers (ibid.), 350 killed Iraqi security officials (O'Hanlon and de Albuquerque, 2004), 1826 civilians killed verifiably as a direct result of acts of war (ibid.), 9.857 total civilian casualties (Iraq Body Count, 2015). Thus, when in June 2004 the occupying authorities handed over full sovereignty to an Iraqi body, Iraq as a sovereign state has met all three criteria to be in the middle of a civil war.

Looking closer into the elite bargains, it becomes clear that they indeed proceeded indeed highly exclusive manner. From the first meeting on, the core participants of the bargains were representatives of the Kurdish parties and exiled groups, who had no support base in Iraq. Although there have been a few ostensibly inclusive meetings, the participating delegations were pre-selected by the exiled figures who excluded potential rivals, bounding these bargains' inclusiveness. Furthermore, several powerful and legitimate Iraqi leaders were systematically ignored, excluded or even completely barred from participating in the future political order of the country, depriving them of any stakes in a stable Iraq. Indeed, this study finds out that the excluded elites, such as Izzat al-Douri or Muqtada al-Sadr, were major purveyors of violence in the aftermath of the regime change, though not the only ones.

The bottom line of this paper is that although the model of inclusive and exclusive bargains cannot explain the full range of violent disorder in Iraq, it provides a most helpful tool for analyzing the onset of the civil war. The results endorse the hypothesis that the exclusiveness of the elite bargains for the post-Saddam political settlement is a major cause for the descent of Iraq into a civil war. However, it is essential to underline the multidimensionality of the causes for the onset of the Iraqi civil war in 2004.

Literature Review

The issue of civil wars, why they start and how to end them, has been a highly recurrent topic of research for academics for a long time. In the following section, I will review four theoretical streams that gained acceptance within the literature on civil war onsets.

Ethnic diversity

An often-reoccurring approach by scholars is to explain the onset of civil war in diverse societies by linking political violence to ethnic or religious diversity and claiming that the cause of violence is to seek in the revelation of hatred between different groups (Aydin, 2013; Aydin & Lafer, 2015; Faltis, 2014; Lafer, 2014). It is possible to distinguish between primordialist and modernist lines of argument. While primordialists argue that the nature of ethnic (optionally also religious, sectarian, civilizational) differences make political instability likely (Huntington, 1996; Kaya & Aydin, 2013; Moynihan, 1993), modernist scholars stress that the logic of modern nation states lead to the politicization of ethnic identities and rise of ethnic nationalism causing inevitably societal conflicts in mixed societies (Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983). The interpretation of civil war as the inevitable result of animosities among communities has been particularly popular among politicians during the Balkan Wars and Rwandan genocide in the first half of the 1990s (Brown, 1996, p. 12). However, cross-national quantitative studies find no correlation between ethnic diversity (both ethnic fractionalization and polarization) and civil wars (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004).

This approach was also deployed to explain the violent conflict in Iraq in the aftermath of the regime change. Former US diplomats Gelb and Galbraith argue that Iraq is divided into three distinct ethno-sectarian communities – Shias, Sunnis and Kurds – who are mutually hostile and locked in an artificial state for over 80 years (Gelb, 2003; Galbraith, 2006). According to their analysis, the civil war was unavoidable and simply a by-product of Iraq's ethno-sectarian tensions. Thus, sustainable peace is only possible by dividing Iraq into three homogenous states. However, Toby Dodge criticises this approach as a 'static caricature that does great damage to a complex historical reality' (Dodge, 2005a, p.

45). He underlines that over two third of the Iraqis backed a unified Iraq with a central government and gives furthermore the example of Shi'ite Iraqis fighting on the side of Saddam Hussein against Shi'ite Iran between 1980 and 1988 (*ibid.*, p. 46). Thus, the explanation of the civil war as an inevitable by-product of ethnic diversity in Iraq is not satisfactory.

Poverty and poor economic performance

A further popular approach to explain the onset of civil wars is the search for economic causes. There are strong empirical evidences showing that low-income levels and higher civil war risks are significantly correlated (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). According to Fearon and Laitin, \$1.000 less in a country's per capita income corresponds to 41% greater annual odds of civil war onset (Fearon & Laitin, 2003, p. 83). The dynamics behind go bidirectional. Collier and Hoeffler interpret that low per capita income and low growth rates are equivalent to low opportunity costs for fighters, which reduces the costs of a rebellion (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004, p. 588). Fearon and Laitin argue that a low GDP per capita is a proxy for a state's financial situation and thus its capabilities to counter an insurgency (Fearon & Laitin, 2003, p. 80). However, this approach is unsatisfactory in explaining the civil war onset in Iraq, either. Although Iraq had fiercely suffered from the UN-imposed sanctions during the 1990s, it still had a GDP per capita of \$1.373 in 2004 and was performing better than 73 other countries (World Bank, 2015a).

Inequalities

Trying to understand the links between inequality and violent conflict is an age-old concern of academics. It has been a fierce debate not only among scholars but also among politicians whether the unequal distribution of wealth and resources does lead to violent rebellion by disadvantaged groups or not. The argument comes in two versions: vertical inequalities and horizontal inequalities (Stewart, 2000). Vertical inequalities correspond to the distribution of wealth and income across all individuals of a society, measured through Gini coefficients. Nafziger and Auvinen argue that vertical inequalities contribute to civil war, whereas Fearon and Laitin as well as Collier and Hoeffler conclude the opposite (Nafziger & Auvinen, 2002; Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). The links between vertical inequalities and civil wars remain ambiguous. There has been no attempt in the literature to explain the Iraqi civil war through the perspective of vertical inequalities so far, arguably due to lacking data. There are no Gini coefficients available for Iraq before 2007 (World Bank, 2015b). Horizontal inequalities relate to severe political, economic and/or social inequalities among identity cleavages (ethnicity, religion, and race) that may become powerful mobilizing agents (Stewart, 2000, p. 256). The concept of the exclusion of cultural groups and group grievances as a cause of violent conflicts is an important contribution to the literature on civil wars. Although it resembles my approach of inclusive/exclusive elite bargains, it remains overly focused on the mass level, while neglecting the elite level. Furthermore, I will argue that the issue in Iraq was not the exclusion of distinct communities per se but rather the exclusion of powerful and legitimate figures.

Political institutions and processes

A forth stream in the literature focuses on the state's institutions as a cause of internal violent conflicts, where three lines of argument are empirically endorsed. Firstly, a wide range of studies found out that while full democracies and full autocracies are resistant, hybrid regime types (anocracies) like semi-democracies are prone to civil wars (Hegre et al., 2001; Elbadawi & Sambanis, 2002; Hegre & Sambanis, 2006; Dixon, 2009). The underlying logic is that full democracies through political oppositions and full autocracies through suppression avoid violent uprisings. Anocratic institutions enable neither of it – making them prone to civil wars. Secondly, among the non-democratic regime types, personalist regimes defined as states whose chief executive rules through a patronage network loyal to the leader rather than through a party (single party regimes) or the military (military regimes), are particularly prone to civil war, because the patterns of authority are arbitrary and not institutionally underpinned (Geddes, 2003, p. 77). Thirdly, regime change makes states particularly susceptible for internal violence, since their base of legitimacy and thus mobilizing patterns within the society change (Hegre et al., 2001, p. 34; Dixon, 2009, p. 719). Political change deconsolidates and weakens institutions, which makes them unable to absorb the new mobilization dynamics. The above-cited quantitative studies provide strong empirical evidence for the correlation of anocracies, personalist regimes and regime change with civil wars. However, these studies remain vague in explaining causal mechanisms and therefore remain weak in analyzing single cases.

Iraq in the aftermath of the US-invasion indeed fits into the environment of weakened institutions. It was a country that was neither a full democracy nor a full autocracy but an anocracy,

that previously had a regime based on personalist rule, and that was experiencing regime change. Thus, a range of the academic literature on the onset of the Iraqi civil war comes from this perspective. Buchta argues that, due to the devastating effects of the UN sanctions and Saddam Hussein's rule based on patronage networks, Iraq's institutions were too weak to stand the enforced regime change and collapsed (Buchta, 2015, p. 110-138). Similarly, Dodge asserts that the legacy of three wars, harsh sanctions and arbitrary rule weakened the Iraqi state so much that it collapsed after the US invasion and subsequent lootings (Dodge, 2013, p. 36-40). Both also identify fatal blunders in the US' neo-liberal post-invasion strategies (Dodge, 2010). Although Dodge annotates the exclusiveness of the post-Saddam political order as a violence triggering factor, he neither conceptualizes nor operationalizes the notion of inclusive/exclusive elite bargains as an analytical tool (Dodge, 2013, p. 41). Notwithstanding this, a large part of the literature on post-invasion Iraq has a narrative and anecdotal character and lack analytic depth. Diamond spots the post-invasion security vacuum as a cause; Bensahel as well as Isikoff and Corn blame the flawed pre-invasion planning process for the insurgency; Pfiffner blames the de-Ba'athification and dismantlement of the army (Diamond, 2004; Bensahel, 2006; Isikoff and Corn, 2006; Pfiffner, 2010). Though being valuable contributions, they do not have an analytical frame.

Analytical approach of this paper

I will argue that to understand the civil war onset in Iraq, one needs a different analyzing approach towards the pre-war period. I assume that the Iraqi civil war was neither inevitable nor the result of prolonged structural weaknesses. As I will hypothesize, it was the result of political failures in a critical moment of Iraqi history, namely after the fall of the Saddam Hussein. According to my argument, the cause of the civil war onset lies in the exclusive nature of the genesis of the post-Saddam political settlement.

My analytical point of departure consists of three assumptions:

1. Elites behave according to the rational choice theory, which states that actors want to maximize their outcome after a cost-benefit calculation. I assume that polity members try to maximize their share of (state) power (Simon, 1955).
2. Charles Tilly's model of polity and political process, according to which a political system comprises a government and multiple contenders seeking to maximize their access to executive power (Tilly, 1978).
3. Alan Whites concept of political settlements determining the structures of a state. Whites explains that state-formation and political settlements, defined as "the forging of a common understanding, usually among elites, that their interests or beliefs are served by a particular way of organizing political power," are shaped by elite interaction (Whites, 2008, p. 4-5).

Based on the elucidated assumptions and definitions, I hypothesize:

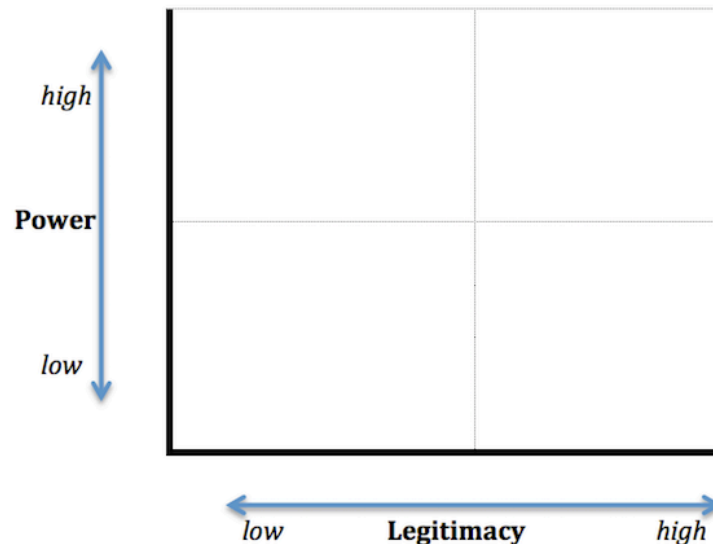
H1: The major cause of the civil war onset in Iraq in 2004 (*dependent variable*) is the exclusiveness of the elite bargains for the post-Saddam political settlement (*independent variable*).

I will operationalize inclusive and exclusive elite bargains as the extent of participation of contending elites in the bargaining process and the distribution of positions of executive power among them. For this purpose, I will look into 26 meetings and regulations in the time period between August 2002 and June 2004. On 9 August 2002 the leaders of six major Iraqi Kurdish and exiled opposition groups were invited to the White House in Washington to talk about the aftermath of the coming regime change with US officials, including Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Colin Powell and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld (BBC News, 2002a; The Telegraph, 2002). On 28 June 2004, the United States officially ended the occupation of Iraq and transferred sovereignty to an Iraqi body, the Interim Iraqi Government, with Ayad Allawi as its interim Prime Minister (Cordesman and Davies, 2008, p. xxvi). I have chosen these 26 events on the basis of a comprehensive research in the academic literature, media and WikiLeaks files from the US Embassy in Baghdad. They constitute an appropriate portrayal of the elite bargains and the making of a new political settlement for the aftermath of the regime change.² In examining these 26 acts of elite bargain, I will test my hypotheses and evaluate to what extent the framework of inclusive and exclusive elite bargains are helpful to understand the civil war onset in Iraq.

² Three of the selected 26 events date from before the beginning of the US invasion into Iraq. However, they are cornerstones of the elite bargains regarding the political settlement in the aftermath of regime change. The selection is not exhaustive.

However, before looking into the bargains, it is important to identify the relevant actors in Iraq in the period of the regime change and to assess whether these actors were people capable of affecting Iraqi national political outcomes individually, regularly and seriously.

Figure 4: Framework for elite mapping³



Power is ‘the probability that one actor within a social relationship would be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance’ (Weber, 1997, p. 152). It can be based on coercive means (such as militias), financial means or backing from foreign powers (like USA, Iran, Saudi Arabia). Legitimacy is the generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions’ (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Legitimacy here is not a moral appraisal on my part but a category to assess the socially constructed value that is attributed to an actor by Iraqis, discernable by the actors’ support base and constituency. Both power and legitimacy are fluent rather than steady categories. Power can generate legitimacy and vice versa.

State of affairs in post-Saddam Iraq Socio-political map of Iraq

Iraq, being at the major population fault lines of the Middle East, has a diverse mix of ethnic and religious groups. In 2003, Iraq’s 25.2 million population consisted of around 75 per cent (%) Arabs (55% Shi’ite, 20% Sunni), 20-22% Kurds (mostly Sunni) as well as 3-5% Turkmen, Christian and other minorities. Approximately 77% of the Iraqis were living in urban areas with around 4.7 million people living in the capital city Baghdad, 2.4 million in Arbil and 1.1 million in Mosul (Nations Encyclopedia, 2015).

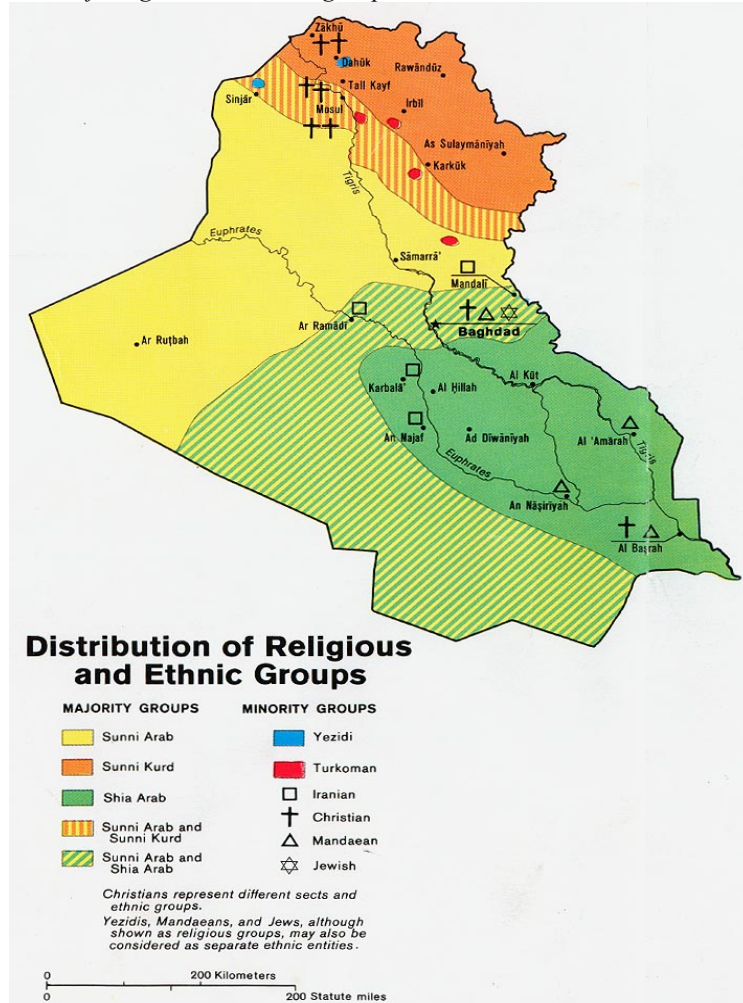
Sunni Arabs mainly populate the central and western part of Iraq. They had formed Iraq’s political and military elite ever since the Ottoman rule – a pattern, which maintained over British mandate, monarchy as well as republic and continued until the overthrow of the Saddam regime in 2003 (Ottaway and Yaphe, 2003, p. 2). Sunnis built the base of the regime’s support. Shi’ite Arabs dominate Baghdad and the southern regions of Iraq. Although they form the majority of the country, Shias were ousted from political life for the most time (ibid.). Some of the most holy shrines of Shi’ite Islam are located in Iraq, mainly in Najaf and Karbala, thus these cities have significant importance beyond Iraqi borders – especially for Iran. Although Shias in Iraq and Iran share a common faith, Shi’ite Iraqis remained loyal to the Saddam’s Iraq during the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988) (ibid.). Until the outbreak of the sectarian civil war in Iraq, most Shi’ites saw themselves primarily as Arabs rather than Shias. Having strong nationalistic traits, Shias were also attracted by early Ba’athist ideology (Dodge, 2005 a, p. 46). The Kurds mainly inhabited the northern provinces of Iraq. Having been the community suffering the most under the Saddam regime, they have had strong autonomy aspirations, which they

³ Own illustration, following Mendelow (1981) and Mitchell et al. (1997).

achieved after the end of the second Gulf War 1991 (Dodge, 2005a, p. 50). The Iraqi Kurds have been a strategic ally for the USA during and ever since the Gulf War.

Although the ethno-sectarian population distribution showed tendencies (see figure 5), Iraq did not divide into distinct sectarian parts (Ottaway and Yaphe, 2003, p. 2; Dodge, 2012, p. 136). Many Iraqis clans have both Sunni and Shi'ites branches, including Saddam Hussein's own (Ottaway and Yaphe, 2003, p. 2).

Figure 5: *Distribution of religious and ethnic groups*



http://images.nationmaster.com/images/motw/middle_east_and_asia/iraq_ethnic_1978.jpg

Iraqi political actors

The downfall of Saddam's regime unleashed a wide range of Iraqi political actors both from exile and from within Iraq, including parties representing ethnic, sectarian or tribal interests as well as those with a nationwide claim.

Among the Shias

Regarding the Shias, three competing leadership groups were traditionally setting the patterns for their political opinion and mobilization: the clerics based in Najaf and Karbala, the urban middle class intellectuals and the mercantile class (Jabar, 2003, p. 37). All agreed on commitment to Iraqi nationalism and a unified Iraqi state, however, they were divided by arguments concerning the state-religion relationship (Dodge, 2005 a, p. 48).

The most senior and influential Iraqi Shi'ite cleric was *Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani* (Otterman, 2004). Having been rather apolitical under the Ba'ath regime, Sistani criticized US occupation and called for immediate democratic elections and Iraqi sovereignty after the downfall of

Saddam. However, he restrained himself from taking a regular stand on and getting directly involved into politics (ibid.).

Another cleric, *Muqtada al-Sadr* was a figure of rising popularity in post-Saddam Iraq. Inheriting an extensive charitable network from his father, he made his mark with a radical, anti-establishment rhetoric first against Saddam and then the US occupation, merging Islamism with nationalism (Bruno, 2008). Sadr enjoyed the popular support of the poor Shias as well as young clerics (Raphaeli, 2004). A strong militia, the Mahdi Army, gave Sadr additional leverage (Beehner, 2006).

The two most important political parties competing for Shi'ite votes in the aftermath of regime change were SCIRI and Dawa Party. *SCIRI (Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq)* was formed in 1982 in Tehran by exiled Shias with the assistance of the Iranian regime to unite Iraqi Shias against Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war (Dodge, 2005 a, p. 50). Similar to Muqtada al-Sadr, SCIRI controlled an own powerful militia with thousands of fighters trained by the Iranian government – the Badr Brigades (Beehner, 2006).

Established in 1957, the *Dawa Party* gained popularity amongst religious Shias in the 1960s when socialist and other secular movements were dominating Iraqi political discourse (Otterman, 2005). As a Shi'ite Islamist party, Dawa actively supported the Iranian Revolution in 1979, and thus was brutally smashed by Saddam Hussein. Disappearing from Iraq's political scene, it went into exile in Iran. In 2003, the most popular figure of the party was Ibrahim al-Jaafari who returned from his exile in London and got involved in politics (ibid.).

A further actor among the Shias was *Abdel Karim al-Muhammadawi*. He is a member of an important tribe from the southern marshlands and led a guerrilla-resistance movement against Saddam Hussein for 17 years (BBC News, 2003). He was one of the leading figures of Iraqi Hezbollah, a party with strong ties to Iran.

In addition, Shi'ite figures were leading two further exiled opposition groups: the Iraqi National Accord (INA) by *Ayad Allawi* and Iraqi National Congress (INC) by *Ahmad Chalabi*. However, they had a rather secular stance and tried to address all Iraqis instead of pursuing Shi'ite Islamism. Ayad Allawi had strong ties to the CIA and MI6, provided intelligence and received US funding (Otterman, 2003). Ahmad Chalabi's political activities were strongly backed by the United States, particularly by the Republicans (The Guardian, 2003; Otterman, 2003). Although Allawi and Chalabi claimed to have the support of thousands of disillusioned Iraqis inside Iraq, they had no constituency and could hardly rally any popular support. A series of interviews carried out by Toby Dodge in Baghdad in May 2003 revealed anger and indifference towards returned exiles, especially Allawi and Chalabi who had not lived in Iraq for several decades (Dodge, 2005 a, p. 31).

Among the Sunnis

In its 35 years of rule, the Ba'ath Party put emphasis on preventing the salience of any rival for collective organization in Sunni communities, co-opting or destroying potential figures (Jabar, 2000). Especially during the 1990s when state performance was declining, Saddam used networks of patronage including tribal leaders and sheiks to consolidate power (Baram, 1997). Despite the destruction of the Ba'ath Party after Saddam's overthrow, a range of Ba'athist figures remained influential and powerful due to personal networks and the administrative and military capabilities they obtained in years of governance (Dodge, 2005 a, p. 53). Especially in areas, which disproportionately benefited from the Ba'ath regime, such as the governorates Anbar and Diyala, people were well disposed towards Ba'athist, who could easily organize in decentralized cellular structures (ICG, 2003, p. 6). One of the most influential former Ba'athist seniors in the aftermath of the regime change was certainly *Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri*, the former vice president of the Iraq (CIA, 2007).

In general, Islam and Iraqi nationalism proved to be the strongest organisational and political forces (ICG, 2003, p. 2). The emergence of the *Muslim Scholars Association (MSA)* as perhaps the largest and most influential Sunni organization after Saddam's downfall illustrated this (Fink and Leibowitz, 2006). Claiming to represent up to 6.000 Sunni mosques, which was 80% of the national total, it was a nationwide organization with scholars of all viewpoints – traditionalists, modernists, Sufis, Salafis (Meijer, 2005, p. 94). The MSA was harshly condemning the US occupation policies. Secretary general of the MSA was Harith al-Dhari, a lecturer in Islamic Law at the University of Baghdad. The *Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP)* was founded in 1960 as an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. However, it was banned in 1961 and continued its activities partly underground and partly from exile in London. Its secretary general in 2003 was Mohsen Abdel Hamid, a professor for Islamic Law at the University of Baghdad (Glenewinkel, 2005).

Perhaps the most radical and militant actor in Iraq in 2003 was *Jama'at al Tawhid wal Jihad (JTJ)*, the predecessor of Al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI). Established in 1999 by the Jordanian jihadist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the JTJ was initially a rather marginal group. Hence, it is arguable whether to count

Zarqawi and JTJ into the elites (Zelin, 2014, p. 1-2). Although JTJ had a small constituency, its brutality and intransigency made it to one of the most known and powerful actors in post-Saddam Iraq (Steinberg, 2006, p. 11-13). Zarqawi became Iraq's most wanted man by the USA.

An example for the significance of tribes in Iraqi society is *Ghazi al-Yawer*. He is a US educated nephew of the head of the Mosul-based Sunni Shammar tribe, which is one of the most influential transnational Arab tribes with over two million members solely in Iraq (Hassan, 2006, p. 6). Ghazi al-Yawer had spent two decades in Saudi Arabia as vice-president of a telecommunications company. Being deeply rooted and well known among Arab tribes, he had a strong support base when he returned after Saddam's fall (Daragahi, 2004).

A rather secular Sunni was *Adnan Pachachi*, a former Iraqi diplomat who also served as foreign minister in the pre-Ba'ath Party time. In 1971, he moved to Abu Dhabi and lived in exile until 2003. Although he had no support base in Iraq, the US government backed him as a Sunni elder statesman to win Sunni loyalty (The Guardian, 2003).

A further Sunni figure was Sharif Ali bin al-Hussein, leader of the Constitutional Monarchy Movement (CMM) and a descendent of the Hashemite monarchs who ruled Iraq until the 1958 revolution. Having fled Iraq in 1958 at the age of two, Hussein spent his whole life in exile in London and had no support base in his homeland (ibid.).

Among the Kurds

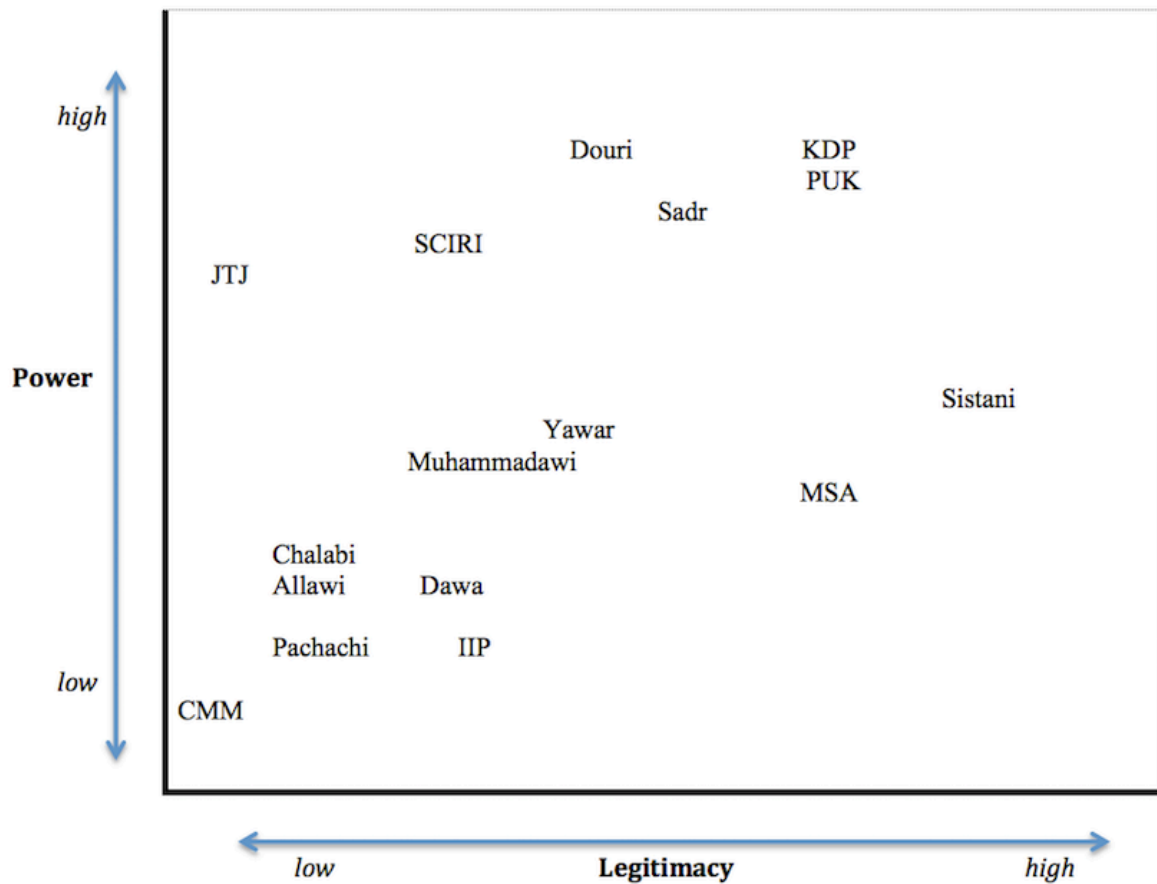
The state of the Kurds in the immediate aftermath of Saddam's overthrow was neither comparable to the Shias' nor to the Sunnis' situation. Having obtained autonomy after the Gulf War in 1991, Kurds already had a decade of experience in democratic rule without Saddam. In the first democratic elections in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1992, Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) both secured around 50% of the votes. Refusing to rule together, both parties rather focused consolidating their regional power basis, which led to two competing administrations. The tensions triggered a violent conflict between both parties in the mid-1990s, which could only be settled in 1998 under the pressure of the Clinton administration. The ideological orientation of both KDP and PUK is by and large similarly secular; they rather distinguish in terms of their constituency (Kolcak, 2015). After Saddam's fall, both parties pursued identical interests in Baghdad. Both have argued for an ethnically based federalism to ensure and expand Kurdish autonomy (Kaya, Aydin, & Aktepe, 2013).

The *KDP* is ruled by *Masoud Barzani*, who is a member of an influential Kurdish clan. Its constituency is in the northwestern part of Iraqi Kurdistan and it represents the more traditional and tribal elements of Kurdish society. The leader of the *PUK*, *Jalal Talabani*, is a figure who is engaged with Kurdish politics since the 1950s. The *PUK* is based in the southeastern part of Iraqi Kurdistan and is close to urban elements of Kurdish society. Both leaders have strong links to both their constituencies as well as the United States. Together, they control a 50,000-men paramilitary, the Peshmerga Forces, which gives the Kurdish parties an additional leverage in their bargaining position.

After having identified 16 relevant political actors, I will pin them down in the power-legitimacy-matrix to be able to differentiate amongst them.⁴

⁴This list of 16 actors is not exhaustive. It includes actors that were referred to as the most important figures, by the literature.

Figure 6: Political actors in Iraq, mapped according to their power and legitimacy⁵



Elite bargains in Iraq

When US policy towards Iraq and Saddam Hussein changed from containment towards regime change, military planning began for what would become *Operation Iraqi Freedom*. Reportedly, this was on 27 November 2001, so two and a half months after the 9/11 attacks and 16 months before the US-led operation began (Bensahel, 2006, p. 454). By August 2002, the general outlines of the war plan to topple the Ba’athist regime was agreed upon, however, the civilian planning on humanitarian and reconstruction issues begun only then (ibid., p. 455). An interagency working group was commissioned and US officials started to talk to Iraqi actors on plans about the post-Saddam period. Only by 20 January 2003, so just two months before the invasion, the authority was institutionalized, ancillary to the Department of Defense: the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) (ibid., p. 458). The short preparation time for the reconstruction plans was due to two key assumptions that were made by US officials. First, based on the experiences of the US-led military operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995) and Kosovo (1999), it was assumed that the Iraqi population would greet the United States as liberators, not as occupiers. Second, they assumed that the Iraqi government would continue to function after Saddam and his closest advisors were removed from power (ibid., p. 456-458). No plans were made for alternative scenarios. The bargains with Iraqi figures for a post-Saddam political settlement began in August 2002.

In June 2014, the US-led coalition officially ended the occupation of Iraq and transferred sovereignty to the Interim Iraqi Government consisting of 37 officials in total. Chief administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority Paul Bremer left Iraq (Cordesman and Davies, 2008, p. xxvi). Nine of the twelve top posts were given to formerly exiled politicians. Ghazi al-Yawar was given presidency with Ibrahim al-Jaafari (Dawa Party) and Rowsch Shaways (KDP) as Deputy Presidents. Ayad Allawi became Prime Minister, the most powerful post. His deputy was Berham Salih (PUK). Ministerial posts were divided among the leading parties of the IGC (Dodge, 2012, p. 141).

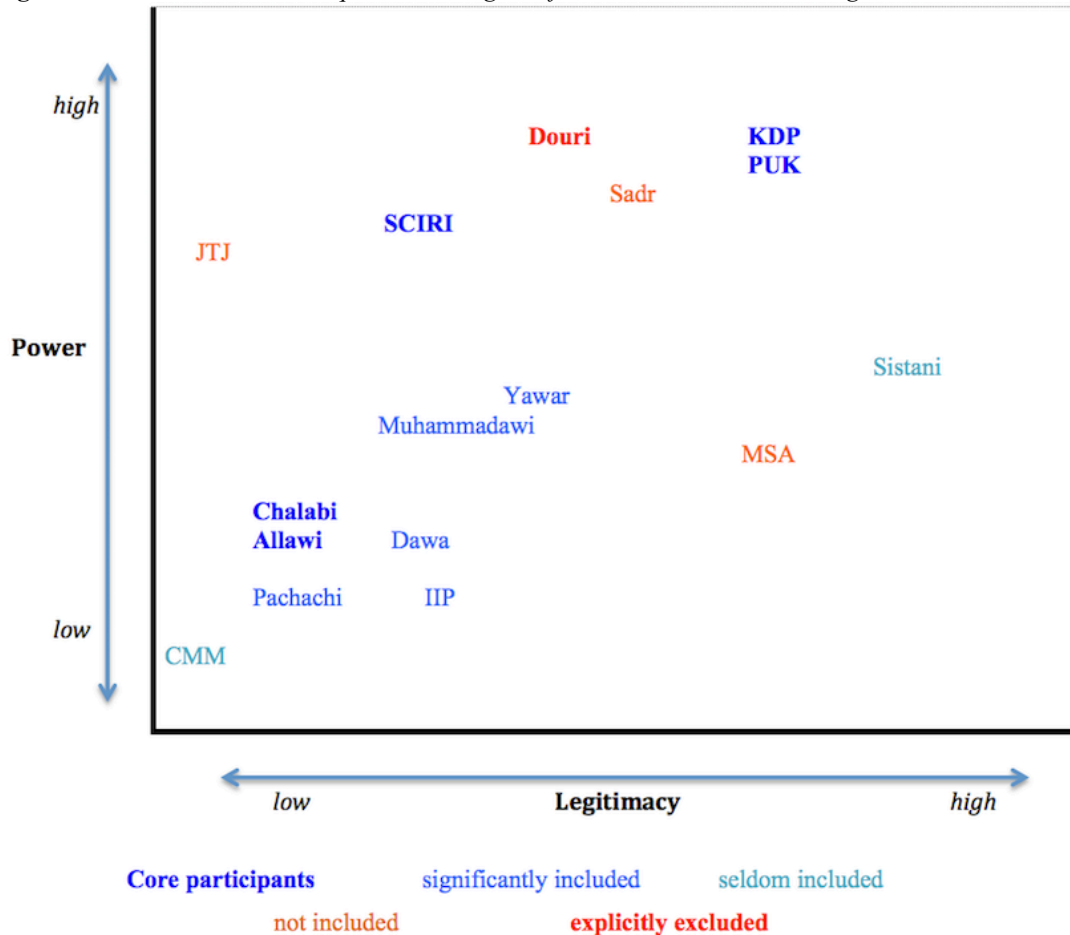
⁵Own illustration, and own mapping based on studied literature.

Patterns of inclusion and exclusion

A view to the matrix with the political actors and their extent of inclusion allows striking conclusions. Five groups of political actors can be detected:

- Core participants of the elite bargains,
- Significantly included actors,
- Seldom-included actors,
- Not included actors, and
- Explicitly excluded actors.

Figure 7: Political actors in Iraq and their degree of inclusion into the elite bargains⁶



Core participants

Five political actors crystallize as the core participants of the bargains for a post-Saddam political settlement: the two Kurdish parties KDP and PUK, as well as the three exiled opposition groups SCIRI (represented by Abdul Aziz al-Hakim), INA (Ayad Allawi) and INC (Ahmad Chalabi), with both INC and INA being effectively one-man-organizations rather than actual group.

Significantly included actors

The group of significantly included actors consist also of five groups and persons, respectively: Dawa Party, Iraqi Islamic Party, Adnan Pachachi, Ghazi al-Yawar (leading figure from the Shammar tribe) and Abdel Karim al-Muhammadawi (leading figure of Southern Marsh Arabs). The IIP was given the role to deliver a genuine Sunni Arab constituency, which was the support base of the Saddam regime. However, IIP fell short of these expectations (Dodge, 2013, p. 43). Both the Dawa Party and Adnan Pachachi were included around the beginning of the invasion, at the Nasiriyah meeting. With the inclusion of Dawa Party, the representation of the Shia vote was diversified. And Pachachi's

⁶Own illustration.

inclusion followed the model of Germany and Konrad Adenauer; as a liberal Sunni democrat and former Foreign Minister, he was supposed to embrace all communities as an elder statesman.⁷ Together with the five actors from the core group, Dawa Party and Pachachi built the so-called 'Group of Seven' and constituted the foundation of the new political settlement. Both Muhammadawi and Yawar, for their part, were held in relatively high esteem and had therefore some constituency due to their tribal affiliation. Although they were not as included as the G7, Yawar, Muhammadawi and IIP were members of the IGC. They can be seen as some kind of a mantle, supplementing the G7 with constituency.

Seldom-included actors

Furthermore, Sharif al-Hussein (CMM) was also present at the very first meeting and the conference thereafter. However, since he adamantly tried to convince US officials of a constitutional monarchy as a political system, he became marginalized. He was a very low figure, anyway.

In contrast to Sharif al-Hussein, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani had as the highest Shi'ite cleric probably the strongest support base in Iraq. Unlike the ayatollahs in Iran, he rejected the involvement of clerics in political life and rarely commented on daily politics. However, when he did, he pushed for a fast delegation of sovereignty to an elected Iraqi body. Hundreds of thousands followed his fatwas and he could mobilize tens of thousands of people to the streets.

Excluded actors

Bremer and other coalition officials also excluded the Muslim Scholar's Association, similar to Sistani. Like Sistani, the MSA refused to cooperate with occupying forces, at first. However, with its legitimacy among the Sunni population, the MSA could have had a vital role in solving the question of Arab Sunni participation in Iraq's new political order. In ignoring the MSA, Bremer marginalized a significant part of the (Arab) Sunni population's concerns.

A further completely excluded actor was Muqtada al-Sadr. Due to the Sadr family's prestigious stance within the Shi'ite clergy, the young Sadr's popularity quickly rose and he established himself as the alternative model to the Sistani-style apolitical cleric. With the strong militia Mahdi Army under his control Sadr has been at the center of the Shi'ite uprising against the CPA, particularly in the first half of 2004.

Rather easily comprehensible is the exclusion of the Jama'at al Tawhid wal Jihad (JTJ) from the elite bargains in the aftermath of Saddam's fall. Created by the Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, JTJ's (which later became AQI) plan was to destroy any possible political order and create chaos by provoking a sectarian civil war in Iraq (US Department of State Archive, 2009).

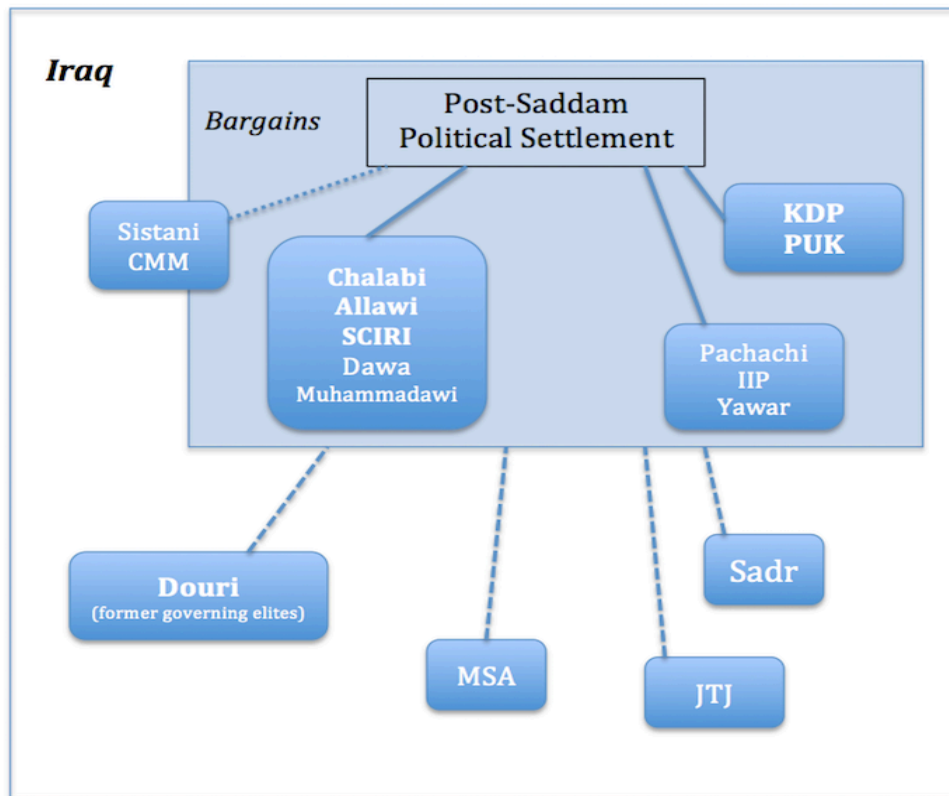
Explicitly barred from participation

The group, which was not only excluded but also explicitly barred from participating in the new political order of Iraq, were the former governing elites. CPA orders 1 and 2 prohibited former officials and members of the Ba'ath Party any future employment in the public sector. Representatively labelled as Izzat al-Douri, this group was composed of a diverse mix of actors, who possessed both the remnants of late Ba'athist rule's powerful patronage network and the expertise on how to wage war and run a state with scarce resources. Excluding the former governing elites completely, and not only Saddam's closest fellows, opened Pandora's box.

It is striking, that seven out of the ten most included actors were exiled groups or persons. Except the Kurdish parties, the actors on whom the new political order was supposed to be based on – the G7 – were low profile figures without a considerable base of support within Iraq. Whilst at the same time, a range of those actors who possessed supporters and were indeed able to affect national political outcomes were either ignored or explicitly excluded from Iraq's future. Therefore it can be concluded that from the first meeting in Washington on, the elite bargains were held exclusive, throughout. The selection of attendees for those meeting which were supposedly inclusive were not only biased by expats but also dominated by them.

⁷ Konrad Adenauer was the first chancellor of West Germany after 1945. Being a popular politician in the pre-Nazi period, he was suspended from all offices and imprisoned for several years during the Nazi-time. In 1949, he became chancellor at the age of 73 and implemented strict pro-Western, market-based democratic policies.

Figure 8: Tilly's polity model with included and excluded elites in Iraq⁸



Character of the insurgency

Having identified and classified the main actors and analyzed the inclusiveness of the elite bargains, I will now look into the rebel and insurgent groups. In civil wars, politically and militarily organized groups violently challenge those groups, which claim the sovereign rule. My hypothesis expects that excluded groups, since their regular way to maximize their share of executive power is blocked and since they have the capability to affect political outcomes, will go for the irregular, violent path to maximize their share of state power and hereby trigger a civil war. According to my hypothesis, Sadr, MSA, JTJ as well as Douri and former Ba'athist elites should have been at the center of the insurgency.

Dominant groups

The insurgent activities in Iraq began in early summer, 2003, and experienced several evolutions over the time (Dodge, 2005a; Steinberg, 2006; Cordesman, 2006; Ferguson, 2008).

The initial phase

Initially, the insurgency was reactive, uncoordinated and targeted solely the occupying troops through hit-and-run attacks (Hoffman, 2004, p. 16). This can be seen as a reaction to the occupation of a highly nationalist and militarized society with a high degree of private gun ownership. However, the insurgents increased the frequency and skills of their attacks and targeted more and more Iraqis who were serving the nascent state institutions. Capitalizing the weaponry and ammunition of the dissolved army, the attacks were showing signs of greater professionalism by July 2003 and waged an effective guerrilla-style war. From August 2003 on, when the devastating car bomb attacks on the Jordanian embassy and the UN headquarter occurred, IEDs became a major instrument of the insurgency with almost daily car bomb attacks, at times in 2004. The insurgency still remained highly localized, however, by October 2003, it had a greater geographical spread and the different groups showed traits of increasing coordination. Remnants of the Ba'ath Party, operating from underground, started to coordinate and transform the independent, reactive cells into offensive insurgency groups. Documents found by US forces when they captured Saddam Hussein in December 2003 showed that several senior

⁸ Own illustration.

members of the old Ba'athist security services were in regular contact with local resistant groups using their personal networks (Dodge, 2005a, p. 16). Their idea was that continuing chaos would further delegitimize the US occupation and their Iraqi allies and thus increase the pressure on the USA to end the occupation. The resulting political vacuum was supposed to be re-filled by them again.

The dominating actors in the first phase of the insurgency were former Ba'athists around Izzat al-Douri and other rather nationalists, who labelled themselves as Army of Muhammad (AM) (Steinberg, 2006, p.7). Towards the beginning of 2004, the dynamics within the insurgency changed by what the AM dwindled in importance and was outflanked by more radical groups. The insurgent groups diversified and got Islamist traits with three streams emerging: 1) Nationalist-Islamist (Sunni) groups; 2) Neo-Salafi Islamist (Sunni) groups; 3) Shi'ite Islamist groups (Steinberg, 2006; Cordesman, 2006).

Nationalist-Islamists

The insurgency was clearly Sunni dominated. An overwhelming majority of the insurgent groups were Sunni, and up to 90% of the captured and detained fighters were Sunnis (Cordesman, 2006, p. 14). Both of the Sunni Islamist streams differ in their composition and strategy but it is difficult to draw a clear-cut line between them.⁹

The Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI) and the Battalions of the 1920 Revolution were the dominant groups within the Nationalist-Islamist stream. The IAI was reportedly the largest insurgent group in Iraq and emerged from the AM (Steinberg, 2006, p. 8-10). Like the AM, it consisted mostly of former officials from the security services; however, different to AM it had Islamist rhetoric, using for example the term *jihad* against the occupiers instead of *resistance*. Their activities consisted of guerrilla-warfare including attacks on US military and Iraqi security forces as well as assassinations of Iraqi officials. Their professional track was testifying the fighters' military capabilities. Like AIA, the Battalions of the 1920 Revolution consisted mainly of former officials of the old security services and waged a guerrilla-style war. However, it was the only larger group without an Islamic reference in its name, but it was a nationalist one. Reportedly, it had strong ties to the Muslim Scholars Association, some of whose scholars morally justified insurgent attacks on coalition forces and their Iraqi aides (ibid., p. 10).

Neo-Salafi Islamists

One of the reasons why the (secular) nationalist character of the insurgency adopted Islamist ideology was that Neo-Salafi groups such as Jama'at al Tawhid wal Jihad (JTJ) came into the fore, as the insurgency progressed.¹⁰ The JTJ focused its activities on car/suicide bomb attacks targeting mostly Iraqi civilians (Steinberg, 2006, p. 11-13). A wide range of devastating attacks, for example on the UN as well as International Committee of the Red Cross headquarters in Baghdad, was well covered by the media gave the JTJ and its leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi a dubious fame. Coalition forces declared Zarqawi to the most-wanted man in Iraq (Knickmeyer and Finer, 2006). In addition to attacks on international officials, JTJ targeted Shi'ite leaders as well as normal Shi'ite civilians. In late August 2003, Zarqawi claimed responsibility for a car bomb attack in front of the Imam Ali Mosque in Najaf – the third holiest site for Shias – in which Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, the spiritual of SCIRI and brother of SCIRI leader Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, and 95 civilians died. End of 2004, Zarqawi merged JTJ and large parts of Ansar al-Sunna into Al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI) (Steinberg, 2006, p. 11). JTJ's (and later AQI's) indiscriminate use of violence against Iraqi civilians, particularly Shias, became a major point of issue between the Sunni insurgent groups, causing clashes between both. Provoking a sectarian violence was a major goal of the Zarqawi-led group (Dodge, 2005a; Steinberg, 2006; Cordesman, 2006; Ferguson, 2008).

Shi'ite Islamists

Although the insurgent groups were mostly Sunni, Shi'ite groups also engaged in armed conflict with US military and Iraqi security forces. Muqtada al-Sadr had successfully rallied nationalist and radical Islamist trends amongst the Shi'ite population by using a fierce anti-American rhetoric. Furthermore, his militia controlled a Shia-populated 2-million people district of northeastern Baghdad – Sadr City – causing regular clashes between the Mahdi Army and US and Iraqi forces. The violence escalated when on 28 March 2004 Paul Bremer ordered to close Sadr's newspaper *Al Hawza* and arrested one of Sadr's top lieutenants, Mustafa al-Yaqubi, a week later (CFR, 2004). In a statement on April 4, Muqtada al-Sadr declared that it was necessary to reply to the occupying force in an

⁹ It is not possible to determine the clear affiliations of insurgent fighters since some regularly changed groups, the groups often changed names and did not have codified forms of memberships.

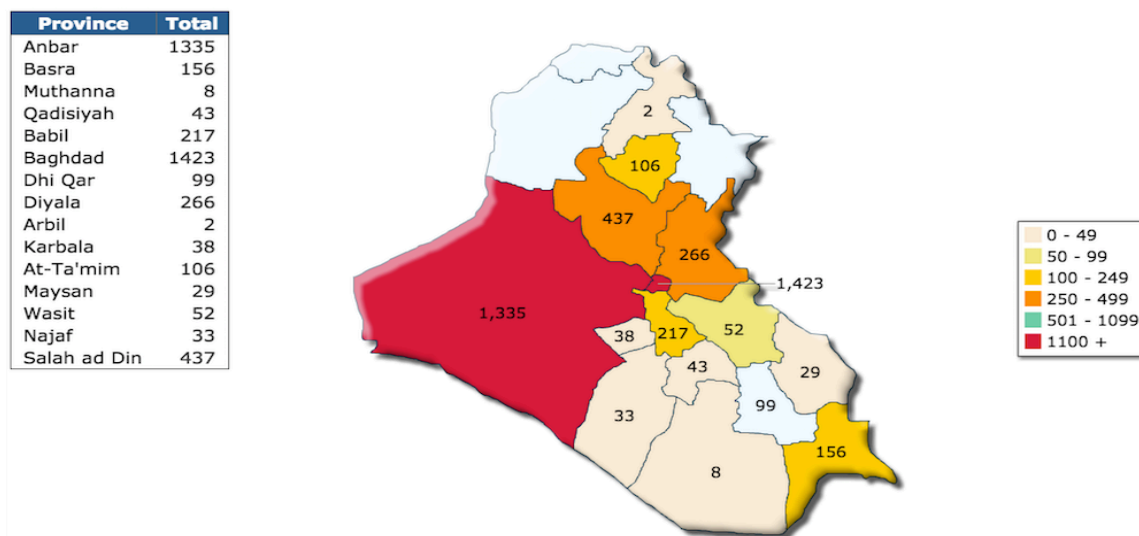
¹⁰ Sometimes labelled as radical/extremist Islamist, Jihadist.

understandable language and called his followers to ‘terrorize the enemy’ (ibid.). Popular uprisings and Mahdi Army offensives began in Najaf, Kufa, Kut and Baghdad’s Sadr City and persisted for several weeks with a wide range of casualties. Smaller local armed groups also attacked coalition forces in the slipstream of the Mahdi Army.

Geographic distribution

Although Sadr’s militia and some other Shi’ite groups actively contributed to insurgent activities, the insurgency remained rather a Sunni instead of a nationwide phenomenon. In the Kurdish-dominated northern regions and the Shia dominated Southern regions, insurgent groups could – relatively speaking – not take hold (Steinberg, 2006, p. 22). The most secure provinces were those controlled by PUK and KDP. The insurgent attacks mainly befell Baghdad as well as the centre and northwest of Iraq, the provinces Anbar, Salahuddin, Babil and Diyala and were particularly concentrated on the ‘Sunni triangle’ between Ramadi in the West, Baghdad in the East and Tikrit in the North (Steinberg, 2006, p. 21-22; ICG, 2003, p.9).

Figure 9: Coalition forces’ casualties by province (Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, 2015a)



Insurgent groups did not attempt to control larger areas. Fallujah was arguably an exception (Steinberg, 2006, p. 22). On 31 March 2004, insurgents in Fallujah killed four contractors from the US private military company Blackwater, burned their bodies and hung the corpses over a bridge after dragging them through the streets (Dodge, 2013, p. 57). At that, US troops besieged Fallujah in April but the military campaign was unsuccessful and US officials announced a one-sided truce. The insurgents controlled Fallujah until a second military campaign in November, which was successful. Fallujah is located in the Anbar province, which is geographically the largest governorate but is home to only 2% of the Iraqi population. It emerged to be the arguably most important retreat area for the insurgents. Together with Diyala and Salahuddin, they had by and large benefited most from the Saddam regime (ICG, 2003, p. 9). Saddam’s tribe, which made up most senior officials under his regime, stemmed from Tikrit in Salahuddin.

Another city, which had long provided the largest number of senior military officials and businessmen, is Mosul, Iraq’s third largest city. Although there was a wide range of Ba’ath Party loyalists, Mosul did not overindulge in violence and was only occasionally hit by insurgent activities. According to interviews conducted by the ICG with leading figures from Mosul, the inclusion of the Mosul-based Shammar tribe into the political process in the aftermath of the regime change had moderating effects (ibid., p. 10).

Discussion

Having portrayed the major insurgent groups and the geographic mapping of insurgent activities, I will now critically discuss to what extent the exclusiveness of the elite bargains can explain the onset of the insurgency and the subsequent civil war in Iraq. There is no doubt that, in social sciences, mono causal attempts to explain incidents are doomed to fail. In this case as well, it is therefore judicious to be critical towards the approach and elaborate its strengths and weaknesses. My

hypothesis that the major cause of the civil war onset in 2004 is the exclusiveness of the elite bargains for the post-Saddam political settlement can trigger points of criticism.

Firstly, the increase in violence in the aftermath of the US-led invasion can be seen as the consequence of the flawed pre-intervention planning and its wrong assumption instead of the exclusiveness of the elite bargains, particularly the lack of a sufficient number of troops to secure law and order during the occupation. The consequent US failure to prevent violent lootings after Saddam's overthrow caused indeed the emergence of criminal gangs without a specific political agenda who bullied their neighborhoods, especially in Baghdad, Basra and Mosul (Dodge, 2005a, p. 15). That caused the violent reaction of the people who got together to establish local civil defense corps. This approach does not directly take into account the role of criminal gangs and local self-protection units and the resulting security dilemma in the emergence of violence during the occupation.

Secondly, the existence of a plethora of small, independent and local insurgent cells without a clear leadership argues against the organization of the insurgency by excluded leaders through their networks. Thus, one can bring forward the argument that the insurgency in its entire amount was not the initiative of excluded elites but the reaction of militarized and nationalistic society to a foreign occupation. History shows, that the Arab world has little tolerance and a tradition of violent opposition to outside occupation, particularly by non-Muslims (Metz, 2003, p. 28). The long and bloody wars against the French in Algeria 1954-62, the British in Iraq 1920 and Palestinian resistance in West Bank and Gaza against Israel are examples.

Thirdly, the insurgent activities of radical neo-Salafi groups such as Ansar al-Sunna, JIJ and later AQI cannot be sufficiently explained by the existence of excluded elites. The groups led by Zarqawi perpetrated a range of devastating and indiscriminate bomb attacks on Shi'ite civilians. The consequent equally indiscriminate counterattacks of Shi'ite militias on Sunni civilians particularly in mixed neighborhoods of Baghdad caused a vicious circle of sectarian violence. Zarqawi was a Jordanian national, hence he could not be included into the elite bargains, anyway. Furthermore, this model assumed that figures act according to the rational choice model and resort to violence only because they see it as the utility maximizing alternative to being excluded from executive power. It is doubtful whether Zarqawi would have ceased his activities if he was offered inclusion into the elite bargains. Also, the question whether only the activities of JIJ would have been enough to trigger sectarian dynamics needs to be stated at this point as well. Contrary to the primordialist explanatory approach, the here-applied analytical model can hardly explain the variable of zealous actors such as Zarqawi.

Apart from that, this approach does not consider the neighboring countries' (Iran, Syria, Turkey and Saudi Arabia) roles in causing and exacerbating the internal violence in Iraq.

Acknowledging the points of criticism, the approach of inclusive/exclusive elite bargains provides some convincing counterarguments. Surely, the flaws in the planning as well as the existence of criminal gangs and independent cells played a significant role in the onset of the Iraqi civil war. Nevertheless, I argue that these points are closely linked with the exclusiveness of the elite bargains. Firstly, the assumptions of the pre-interventions plans were made on the one-sided intelligence given by exiled figures such as Chalabi and Allawi. If the bargains had been more inclusive, then the US official would have received better intelligence to base their plans on. Secondly, the emergence of the criminal gangs was due to the lawlessness and the security vacuum in the aftermath of the invasion. The prolonged security vacuum and the definite state collapse were the result of the decisions not to include any former Ba'ath Party member and security official into the new order. However, this approach remains weak in addressing the question, to what extent the Iraqi state collapsed due to Saddam's legacy and to what extent the collapse was the result of the two CPA orders.

Yet, the massive pool of armed and alienated Iraqis, out of which the small and independent cells recruited from, came into being after both CPA orders, which was partly due to the one-sided lobbying of exiled figures. Having said that, the question of whether Iraq would have descended into civil war, if – *ceteris paribus* – CPA Orders 1 and 2 only penalized the around 50 senior Saddam officials without targeting a total of around 600.000 officials, remains open.

Regarding the activities of militant Neo-Salafi groups, it must be borne in mind that they did not exist under Saddam-controlled Iraq. Thus, include that the Zarqawi-led groups only jumped on the bandwagon of the chaos resulting from the exclusive elite bargains.

Furthermore, the dominating insurgent groups – Islamic Army in Iraq (consisting of former security service officials), the Battalions of the 1920 Revolution (tied to the MSA) and Sadr's Mahdi Army – have in common that they all were excluded from the elite bargains on the post-Saddam political settlement. The geographic mapping of the insurgent activities also points at the exclusiveness of the bargains as a significant cause. The included Kurdish actors KDP and PUK held power and legitimacy in their constituency. Thus, the Kurdish controlled governorates were not affected by

insurgent activities and stayed secure. Among the Shias, some powerful actors were included (i.e. SCIRI), other not (Sadr), and still others were occasionally included indirectly (Sistani). Thus, in general the Shi'ite regions did not join the fight against the US and new Iraqi forces, with some pockets of exception. The included Sunni actors had a rather low profile. The powerful and legitimate ones amongst the Sunnis were excluded. Thus, the insurgent activities focused on the Sunni dominated governorates. A confirming point is the impact of the inclusion of Ghazi al-Yawar from the Mosul-based Shammar tribe. Although Mosul was a city, which had brought out a wide range of senior Ba'athist, it did not overindulge in violence and was only occasionally hit by insurgent activities (ICG, 2003, p. 10).

Lastly, two further events show the clear links between the character of the elite bargains and the occurrence of violence. In late 2004, after renewed clashes between US forces and the Mahdi Army, the Iraqi government started a negotiation process with Muqtada al-Sadr. Its result was that Sadr ceased his revolt and joined the political process. The second incident was the shift in the Counter-Insurgency strategy of USA in 2007, called 'Surge' or 'Sahwa/Awakening' (Dodge, 2013, p. 88-101). The onset of the civil war in 2004 had unleashed wide scale sectarian violence, which gathered momentum over 2005 and escalated in 2006. While Neo-Salafi groups were becoming dominant, Nationalist-Islamist groups were losing ground. This coincided with the willingness of the USA to negotiate with key insurgent and tribal leaders over 'local security bargains' (Dodge, 2013, p. 96). In June 2007, the US signed agreements with 779 local insurgent and tribal leaders. As its result, over 90.000 armed men came on the US military's payroll, stopped the revolt against the coalition forces and started to fight against al-Qaida-linked groups (Benraad, 2011, p. 123). The fighters of the Sahwa, 80% of whom were Sunni, were promised an employment in the local security services. The result of the new, clearly more inclusive approach was a radical reduction of the civilian death toll from over 3.000 in January 2007 to less than 900 in January 2008 and less than 400 in January 2009 (Iraq Body Count, 2015).

Therefore, the bottom line is that although the approach of inclusive and exclusive bargains cannot explain the full range of violent disorder in Iraq after Saddam's overthrow, it provides an essential explanation tool for the civil war onset in 2004. The results of this thesis endorse the initial hypothesis that the exclusiveness of the elite bargains for the post-Saddam political settlement is a major cause of the civil war onset in Iraq in 2004. As a last point, I consider it important to underline multidimensionality of the causes of the civil war in Iraq, which is a result of a complex intertwining of several causes. However, without claiming absoluteness, I am convinced that this explanatory model is most helpful to analyse the onset of the Iraqi civil war in 2004.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the causes of the onset of the Iraqi civil war in 2004 from the analytical perspective of inclusive and exclusive elite bargains. I argued that the reviewed literature on civil war onsets in general and on the Iraqi civil war onset in particular have not paid sufficient attention to the analytical concept of exclusiveness of elite bargains as a reason for violent internal conflicts. I have tested the hypothesis that the exclusiveness of the elite bargains for a post-Saddam political settlement was a major cause of the civil war onset in 2004.

The study shows that five different groups can be detected. The first group of core bargain participants include five actors: the Kurdish parties PUK and KDP; the Shi'ite exiled oppositional group SCIRI; and the two secular Shi'ite exiled opposition figures Ayad Allawi and Ahmad Chalabi. These five actors were the key partners of the USA from the beginning of the post-invasion planning until the official end of the occupation. They also determined the scope of the degree of inclusiveness of the elite interactions. The second group of regularly included actors consist of the exiled Shi'ite Dawa Party and the exiled secular Sunni Adnan Pachachi. Together with the core group, they constituted the *Group of Seven* – the actors who built the cornerstones of the post-regime change political settlement. The Sunni IIP, and the tribesmen al-Yawar and al-Muhammadawi completed the second group. The two seldom-included figures in the third group are the monarchist Sharif al-Hussein and Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. A fourth group, including the Sunni Association of Muslim Scholars, the Shia Muqtada al-Sadr and the militant Sunni Islamist JTI, was completely excluded from the political process. Furthermore, the former Ba'athist governing elites – the fifth group – were explicitly barred from any participation in the new political settlement.

The results illustrate that there was a narrow coalition of elites consisting almost entirely of actors who lived outside of Saddam-controlled Iraq for decades: the Kurdish parties with a strong constituency in the North and exiled figures who had almost no support base in Iraq.

From the first meeting on, the bargaining parties were almost exclusively from this narrow coalition. Although there have been a few ostensibly inclusive meetings, the participating delegations were pre-selected by this narrow coalition who excluded potential rivals, bounding these bargains'

inclusiveness. Therefore, a range of key elites were excluded and barred from any participation at governmental power leaving them without any stakes in the stability of the nascent political settlement. Indeed, as expected by the hypothesis, this study finds out that excluded groups made up the core of the insurgent groups, not the only ones, though. To put it in a nutshell, the results of this dissertation endorse that the model of inclusive and exclusive bargains provides almost helpful tool for analyzing the onset of the Iraqi civil war.

To correctly understand the causal mechanisms that led to the Iraqi civil war is of uttermost importance. Not only has it been one of the bloodiest civil wars since 1945 but the current chaos in Iraq and the rise of *Daesh* are also a direct consequence of the dynamics unleashed in 2003/04. Understanding these dynamics is key for stabilizing the country. Iraq's stability has regional and global relevance due to four reasons. Firstly, with currently 32 million inhabitants including Kurds, Sunnis and Shias, Iraq has a powerful demography at the fault lines of its wider region. Continued ethno-sectarian violence can have devastating transnational consequences, such as the current refugee flows. Secondly, Iraq shares borders with the most important countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the NATO-member Turkey vesting geopolitical importance in it. Thirdly, due to its oil reserves – some of the largest in the world – Iraq is only of global economic relevance. Fourthly, arguably the greatest contemporary chaos profiteer in Iraq is IS. Prolonged instability might consolidate IS' rule in Iraq (and Syria) with unforeseeable consequences.

The Iraqi civil war onset and the framework of inclusive and exclusive elite bargains provide interesting research questions for both the field of civil wars as well as the field of regime change and transformations. Particularly the application of this analytical framework for further (comparative) case studies and large-N studies should be recommended. Furthermore, the lack of success in transforming Iraq despite immense military fatalities and financial resources needs to be strictly analyzed to assess the realistic scope and limits of external interventions in other countries in order to initiate sustainable political and economic change.

Contribution

This paper is a shorter version of a Master thesis at the War Studies Department of King's College London graded with a Distinction.

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