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Dedication:

This work is dedicated to the memory of Shahid Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr and his Sister, Shahidah Amina bint al-Huda who were both executed in the name of God's religion.

Chapter One: Sadr is Executed

On April 8, 1980, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr was executed. His execution aroused no criticism from the West against the Iraqi regime, however, because Sadr had openly supported the Ayatullah Khomeini's regime in Iran and because the West was distracted by the turbulence in Iran that followed the revolution. Governments both in the West and in the region were concerned that the Iranian revolution would be "exported," and they set about eliminating that threat. When Ayatullah Khomeini called upon Muslims in Iraq to follow the example of the Iranian people and rise up against the corrupt secular Ba'thist socialist regime, they interpreted it as the first step in the spread of Islamic radicalism that would eventually lead to the destabilisation of the whole region.

Sadr's support of the Khomeini crusade against the Ba'thists was considered a threat to the Iraqi regime and dealt with swiftly. Thousands were arrested, and hundreds were executed without trial. Sadr as the head of a movement that had gained popular support from the success of the Iranian revolution, emerged as an anti-governmental leader and a catalyst for anti-Ba'thist activity, and was regarded by his followers as the "future Khomeini" of Iraq.[1] The Ba'thist regime decided that he had to be eliminated if the regime was to survive. Sadr's execution, hence, was the act of an authoritarian regime fighting for its survival.

What made political Islam such a grave danger to the regimes in the area was not simply its popular appeal, but also the grassroots organizations that embraced its principles and political slogans. In almost all Middle East countries Islamic political groups had, since the turn of the century, been bent on achieving their principal goal of establishing a state based on the principles and teachings of Islam, and these very organizations had paved the way for the victory of the revolution in Iran,[2] Khomeini also found in them both the means and the political muscle to export Islamic revolutionary ideas to the rest of the Middle East.

Some of these organizations, including the Islamic Da'wa Party which Sadr founded, had existed in Iraq before the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Ba'thist regime in Iraq. Sadr was also the mastermind behind a program that aimed to establish an Islamic state not only in Iraq, but throughout the Islamic world. The role Sadr played in the Shi'a community in Iraq at large and his effort to counter the political acquiescence of the religious establishment and to confront the political oppression there made him the Shi'a leader in that country. A detailed account of the events that led to the rise and fall of Sadr is therefore useful for placing Sadr in the context of Iraqi politics in general and of the Islamic movement in particular.

Chapter Two: The Rise of Sadr

In 1958, a military coup d'etat began a period of great turmoil in Iraq that changed its political system and social fabric. The kingdom that had been engineered by British occupation forces in 1921, was replaced by a "republic" under the rule of a military junta; the royal family and the ruling class were executed. The head of the military junta, General Qasim, who had led the revolt gained popular support unprecedented in modern Iraqi history, in part because of his policy of dissociating Iraq from Britain, which included withdrawing from the CENTO alliance known as the "Baghdad Pact" and closing British military bases in the country.[3]

The Communist Party

With the coup in place, a variety of political groups sought a place in the new regime, and in the process created anarchy. Some, of which the Communist Party was the best organized, were given a voice in the new regime. To increase his power base in the country, Qasim used the Communists to eliminate his colleagues in the ruling junta who were loyal to the Arab nationalist movements. In the bloody street fighting that followed, especially in the northern cities of Mosul and Kirkuk where the nationalist officers attempted a military coup against Qasim, the Communists emerged as the major political force. [4]

The Shi'ia religious establishment, acquiescent since its last revolt against the British in 1920, found itself challenged by atheist political forces who, if left unchecked, might wipe Islam from the lives of the people,[5] for the nation seemed to be welcoming the secularism and antireligious sentiments of the new regime and to accept Communist propaganda, which denounced the religious establishment as reactionary and religion as an obstacle to modernization and the progress of the people. The Communist forces then began to penetrate the religious establishment itself in the holy cities of Najaf, Karbala, and Kadhimiyah, even recruiting members of religious families, but the religious leadership (marja'iyya) under the Grand Mujtahid Muhsin al-Hakim took steps to overcome these challenges.

Chapter Three: al-Hawza al-'ilmiyya (Religious Academy)

The Shi'a religious establishment in the al-Hawza al-'ilmiyya (religious academy) was divided between traditional scholars who advocated indifference or aloofness from politics and activists who advocated involvement. The latter organized themselves into the Jama'at al-'Ulama' in Najaf [(6)] to counter antireligious trends in society. Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr was at that time a young scholar and was not considered an official member of the Jama'at al-'Ulama' which was made up mainly of elders and well-known mujtahids.[(7)] He was able, however, to exert influence on the group through his father-in-law Shaykh Murtaza Al Yasiyn, who was acting president of the group, and through his older brother, Ismail al-Sadr, a mujtahid who held a senior position in the Jama'at. [(8)]

According to Talib al-Rifa'i, the Jama'at al-'Ulama' had as its immediate objective countering the Communist challenge to Islam. In their manoeuvring, they were realistic enough to appease the popular Qasim; in their public leaflets and announcements, they supported him while attacking the Communists. As a reward, the Qasim regime gave them access to the government-controlled radio. The weekly public statements of the Jama'at al-'Ulama' were written by Sadr and delivered by Hadi al-Hakim. [(9)]

Al-Hakim's Fatwa Identifying Communism With Atheism

This appeasement did not last long. Conflict between the religious leadership and Qasim erupted when Ayatullah Muhsin al-Hakim issued a fatwa that identified Communism with atheism and forbade Muslims from joining the Communist Party or helping its cause. The fatwa embarrassed the Qasim government and forced General Qasim to abandon the Iraqi Communist Party. Qasim made several requests to visit Ayatullah Hakim, but the latter refused to meet with him until he had abrogated the civil-liberties' law, which violated the Islamic codes of inheritance.[(10)]

For two years during the appeasement period the Jama'at al-'Ulama' had been given permission to publish a monthly journal al-Awa' (the Lights), whose objective was to counter the intense secular and antireligious propaganda that had followed the 1958 revolution. According to Talib al-Rifa'i, Muhsin al-Hakim had suggested it, but since it was not acceptable for a marja' to sponsor a political publication, the Jama'at al-'Ulama' was asked to assume the task.[(11)] Sadr wrote its editorials, which he used to outline the basic political program of the Islamic movement,[(12)] and in the process discovered that he had a talent for writing persuasively.

Falsafatuna (Our Philosophy; 1959) and Iqtisaduna (Our Economics; 1961)

During the same period, Sadr published his first philosophical study, Falsafatuna (Our Philosophy; 1959),[(13)] a critique of communism, the materialist school of thought, and dialectic materialism, in which Sadr argued, that communism had too many flaws and shortcomings to be considered the final truth for mankind. It could not be the answer to society's problems because its basic assumptions were false, Sadr

contended. His second work, Iqtisaduna (Our Economics; 1961), criticized the economic theories of communism and capitalism and introduced an Islamic theory of political economy in an effort to counter the argument by secularists and communists that Islam lacked solutions to the problems of man in modern time. Sadr's major task in Iqtisaduna was to show that Islam was concerned with man's economic welfare. In fact his major intellectual achievement was his formulation of an Islamic economic doctrine based on Islamic law; he was the first to do so.

Sadr and his colleagues also confronted the secular forces on a third front through the establishment of the Da'wa Party. According to Talib al-Rifa'i, it was founded by Mahdi al-Hakim, al-Rifa'i and another, unknown, person. Al-Rifa'i later introduced Sadr to the party leadership, and Sadr eventually became its head,[14] playing an important role in setting party structure and doctrine,[15] and later its supreme jurisconsult (faqih al-hizb). Even the name of the party, Da'wa ("Call"), was said to be Sadr's idea.[16] The aim of the Da'wa was to organize dedicated Muslim believers with the goal of seizing power and establishing an Islamic state. To achieve that goal it would indoctrinate revolutionaries, fight the corrupt regime, and establish an Islamic state; then it would go on to implement Islamic laws and export the Islamic revolution to the rest of the world.[17] This grand plan was said to be Sadr's idea. The first stage had to be clandestine to secure the party against a crackdown, so the party was organized in a hierarchical multi-branch cell structure. Its activities were not to be limited to Iraq only, but were to go on in other Shi'a communities around the world. To that end, branches were secretly formed in the Gulf states and in Lebanon; attempts to form them in Iran were unsuccessful.

Chapter Four: Back to Hawza

By 1960, Sadr was one of the leading mujtahids in the religious school of Najaf with a distinguished reputation in jurisprudence (fiqh and usul al-fiqh). His seniors in the Hawza therefore advised him to give up his political role in the Da'wa party and on the Awa', which were detrimental to his leadership in the Hawza and prepare himself for becoming the future grand marja' of the Shi'i (the hawza would not accept an active mujtahid for the position of grand marja' , at least not a member of a political party).[18] The marja' is usually selected from among the leading mujtahid in the fiqh and usul al-fiqh, and the candidate has to prove his capacity in these areas by using the Socratic method in his teaching and by publishing his legal opinions. Since being appointed depended on the approval of the teachers and mujtahids in the Hawza, the prospect of Sadr's becoming the grand marja' of all Shi'as was in jeopardy so long as he continued to be politically active. Although pressure on Sadr to give up his political activities seemed to come mainly from the former marja' Muhsin al-Hakim, many factions in the Hawza were critical of Sadr's activism. Led by Hussein al-Safi,[19] a public campaign was launched against Sadr depicting his activities as harmful to the survival of the Hawza.[20] A group in the Jama'at, influenced by the propaganda against Sadr, began to show their dissatisfaction with him as well. [21] Sadr's editorials in al-Awa' also raised a disturbing question: they were subtitled Risalatuna (Our Message), but the enemies of Sadr questioned whether they represented the views of the Jama'at at all. Finally, in 1961 Muhsin al-Hakim, through his son Mahdi, persuaded Sadr to give up his post as faqih of the Da'wa party and as editor of Awa'. [22]

Mujtama'una (Our Society)

After his resignation Sadr confined himself to the traditional way of life of the Hawza, avoiding activities that might jeopardize his marja' status. He even delayed the publication of his long awaited book, Mujtama'una (Our Society) because, according to some sources, the time was not ripe for it. [23] According to members of the Da'wa party, however, Sadr kept in touch with the party through one of his pupils.[24] As for the Awa', Fadlullah notes that Sadr encouraged him to write its editorials. [25]

Planned Establishment of Western-style Universities

Sadr's passion for reform was now directed toward the hawza itself. First it was necessary to modernize its curriculum: for the past century and a half, Najaf's hawza had emphasized only fiqh and usul al-fiqh because that was what Najaf was noted for; other Islamic studies were considered minor or unimportant, and the hawza's teachers paid little attention to them. Sadr was also uneasy over the irregular attendance of the students and their neglect of their studies. He felt that students must complete their courses with distinction before they could claim to be religious scholars ('alim) [26] and proposed a new textbook on the grounds that the old ones were not written for students. A textbook, according to Sadr, must take into consideration the student's ability to comprehend the subject only gradually from its basic concepts to its most recent development. Sadr's plan embraced not only the use of textbooks of the sort used in modern academic institutions, but the

establishment of Western-style universities that would hold the student responsible for completing certain courses and passing regular examinations.

Usul al-Din College in Baghdad

To implement his reforms, Sadr helped establish the Usul al-Din College in Baghdad in 1964 and set up its curriculum. [27] He later wrote three textbooks on the Qur'an, the usul al-fiqh, and Islamic economics for first and second year college students. [28] However, his efforts to carry out his reforms in the Hawza itself faced stubborn resistance from both students and its antiquated establishment.

Chapter Five: Golden Era For Modern Shi'a Politics

The years 1964-1968 were a "golden era" for modern Shi'i politics, first because the Ba'thist-Arif regime felt indebted to the Shi'a religious establishment for its help in discrediting and ousting Qasim's regime and second because the new regime gained legitimacy from the Shi'a leaders who supported their crackdown on Communist forces in the country (ironically, most of those prosecuted were also Shi'as). The relative freedom the Shi'a enjoyed during that period resulted from the continuous struggle between the Ba'thists and Arif, between the Arab nationalists and the Communists, and among the Ba'thists themselves. The regime was so preoccupied with this internal fighting that it turned a blind eye to Shi'a political activities, though later, it ousted Shi'as from the few governmental posts they had gained under Qasim.

Free from government interference, the Da'wa party increased its membership in the universities and among the intelligentsia. According to Da'wa sources, more than 1,500 copies of the Da'wa official, but underground, journal, the awt al-Da'wa, were distributed to members and supporters in the University of Baghdad alone. Students showed their commitment in a march known as the mawakb al-talaba (students' procession) in Karbala at the annual commemoration of the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn. Al-Hakim expanded his influence by increasing enrolment in the Hawza in Najaf and by developing plans to establish a Western-style Shica academy in Kufa, where a college education would become available to Shi'a youths who would someday be influential in political affairs. He also established new religious centres and libraries in several Iraqi cities directed by missionaries known as wukala' (representatives). The religious scholars of Baghdad and Kadhimiyah organized an association, similar to the Jama'at al-Ulama' in Najaf, known as the Hay'at Jama'at al-Ulama' fi Baghdad wa al-Kadhimiyah. [29]

Chapter Six: Confrontation with the Ba'th Party

The Ba'th Party's rise to power on July 17, 1968, started a new phase in the conflict between Shi'a leaders, Muhsin al-Hakim and Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, and the central government in Baghdad. The regime faced two leaders, who both had charisma and political clout, al-Hakim through his symbolic leadership of the Shi'a worldwide, and Sadr through his influence over the Da'wa. The stability of the new regime depended on withstanding them. Its first step toward limiting the Shi'a's power was to curtail their religious activities, which included the closing of the Jawadayn elementary and high schools and the Usul al-Din college in Baghdad, confiscating the land and funds set aside for building Kufa University, shutting down the Risalat al-Islam, the only religious journal the government allowed to be published at that time, prohibiting the mawakb al-talaba in Karbala, expelling hundreds of non-Iraqi students from the hawza in Najaf, and issuing a law requiring Iraqis attending the hawza to join the armed forces.

The Shi'a leaders appeared to be disorganized and the Ba'th regime to catch them by surprise. Unaware of the Ba'thist's plan to eliminate the political structure of the Shi'a community, its leaders met to figure out some peaceful means for dealing with the government and decided on a public protest. The Hay'at al-Ulama' suggested that Muhsin al-Hakim visit Baghdad to mobilize Shi'a support against the government. [30] Al-Hakim took up residence in Kadhimiyah to receive supporters; Sadr went to Lebanon to organize protest from abroad and use the office of the Shi'a supreme council headed by his cousin Musa al-Sadr to campaign against the Iraqi government. Telegrams were sent by Musa al-Sadr to the heads of the Islamic states and Islamic groups calling attention to the Ba'thist's government harassment of the religious leadership in Najaf. The result of these efforts was disappointing. Only Nasser of Egypt, Faisal of Saudi Arabia, Iriyani of North Yemen, and the Jama'at-i Islami of Abu al-A'la Mawdudi in Pakistan gave any moral support, and no one acted.

On his return to Iraq, Sadr, with the cooperation of the Jama'at of Najaf and the Hay'at of Baghdad and Kadhimiyah, held a public meeting at the Imam Ali shrine in Najaf to support al-Hakim and condemn the Ba'thist government action. The statement, which was delivered to the audience by Mahdi al-Hakim, had been drafted by Sadr. [31] The next step to be taken against the government, according to Murtada al-Askari, was to organize a mass demonstration in Baghdad in support of al-Hakim. [32] However, before the plan was carried out the Ba'thist government announced that Mahdi al-Hakim was plotting to overthrow the government in a military coup with the help of some generals and Shi'a businessmen who had links to Iran and the West (by which they meant the United States and Israel).[33] This accusation put the Shi'a leaders on the defensive and diluted their support. Mahdi al-Hakim was smuggled out of the country; al-Askari went to Lebanon; and Muhsin al-Hakim retreated to Najaf where he died a few months later. His successor Ayatullah Khoei, the mentor of Sadr, refrained from taking any action against the Ba'thist government.[34]

After Muhsin al-Hakim died, the Ba'th government intensified its efforts to reduce the influence of the Hawza in Najaf by expelling its non-Iraqi

students (the majority of students were foreigners) and monitoring the Iraqi students there. That threw the whole Hawza into chaos. To keep non-Iraqi students in the country so they could help resist the government, Sadr convinced Ayatullah Khoei to issue an order (hukm) to students to stay in Najaf and continue their studies.[35] Unwilling to antagonize the new Shi'a marja' , Ayatullah Khoei, who was considered to be above politics, the Ba'th government postponed implementing its deportation policy. The Ba'thist regime then started to crack down on the Da'wa party. Many suspected members of the party were rounded up in 1972 and sentenced to one to five years in prison. [36] Sahib Dakhiyl, known as Abu 'Isam, died under torture in 1973. He was the organizer of the student procession held in Karbala [37] and was also believed to have been the head of the Da'wa party's Baghdad branch.[38] A year later, about seventy-five Da'wa party members, some of them religious scholars, were detained by the security forces, and five, all of whom were believed to be leaders of the Da'wa party, were sentenced to death by the revolutionary court.[39] Sentencing these people, three of them ulama', brought a public outcry and condemnation from the religious establishment, including Khoei, Khomeini, and Sadr.[40] In order to avoid a precedent for executing religious scholars of the Hawza, Sadr issued a fatwa forbidding students or scholars of the Hawza to join any political party. Later that year, Sadr himself was detained by security forces and taken from Najaf to Baghdad for interrogation, but was soon released. [41]

In the post-Hakim era, Sadr was recognized in the Hawza as a marja' and the heir-apparent of Grand marja' Ayatullah Khoei. [42] However, he was aware that the marja'iyya, the Shi'as' only true source of political leadership, lacked adequate institutional underpinning, even though it was a thousand years old. In particular, it lacked the means of enforcing decisions on the rank and file of 'ulama'. Additionally, the marja' traditionally made policies and arrived at decisions using an inner circle of close associates and family members to gather information, issue statements, and distribute religious funds. There was no formal procedure for making decisions or planning long-term strategy, and that often resulted in confusion that weakened the relationship between the marja'iyya and the people.

To enhance the power of the marja'iyya, Sadr sought, as he put it, to transform what he called the "subjective marja'iyya" into an "objective marja'iyya." The marja' , according to Sadr, must conduct his affairs and guide his people using an organized structure. To conduct the affairs of the ummah, the marja' should set up committees to manage educational affairs in the hawza, to support Islamic studies, research, and writing on essential subjects, to look after the affairs of the 'ulama' who represent the marja' in other cities, to support the Islamic movement, and, finally, to administer financial affairs.

However, at that time Sadr was not ready to form the institutional structure of the "objective marja'iyya" because he was not the supreme marja' , the symbolic authority for all Shi'as, a position that would give him the financial and the religious power to carry out changes. The publication of his al-Fatawa al-Wadiha, a book on religious laws, was intended in a way

to announce his marja'iyya, and prepare himself and contenders in Najaf and Qum in the traditional manner to succeed Ayatullah Khoei, the grand marja' . Sadr also had a political motive behind his early indirect announcement of interest in the marja'iyya. He thought it would protect him from government prosecution.

Ayatullah Khomeini Not Executed by Shah of Iran

Once he was a marja', Sadr believed, the government would spare his life regardless of his political stand, because regimes in Iraq and Iran did not execute leading jurists. A case in point was the Shah's decision not to execute Ayatullah Khomeini after the maraji' in Qum issued a statement proclaiming that Khomeini as one of them. Instead the Shah expelled Khomeini from Iran.

In announcing his marja'iyya, Sadr somehow thought he was gaining political immunity. At the publication of Sadr's al-Fatawa al-Wadiha, members of Da'wa party and Sadr's admirers, mostly students and intellectuals, started referring to him as their marja' and leader.

Chapter Seven: Ashurra Commemorations Banned

In early 1977, the Ba'th regime took the boldest step yet to curb the Shi'a when it banned the annual ceremonies commemorating Imam Husayn's martyrdom. The regime had tried but failed to prohibit them since 1970, especially in Najaf and in Karbala. That year, the Ba'th leadership was determined to use any means necessary to stop the traditional procession from Najaf to Karbala, an event that generates considerable religious fervour. Tens of thousands of Shi'a from all over Iraq participate in the pilgrimage, which usually takes four days to cover about fifty miles. The procession was seen by the regime as hindering their policy of secularism and as providing the religious authorities with popular support.

Banning the procession in 1977 provoked riots in Najaf. Organizers distributed leaflets that called on people to participate in defiance of the authorities to protect their religious rights. (43) The public hearings organized by the Ba'th Party and the governor of Najaf did not ease the tension but rather precipitated chaos. (44) An estimated thirty thousand people began their procession holding banners printed with verses from the Qur'an, such as "The power of God is above theirs" and "Victory shall come from God." (45)

Faced with this defiance, the regime first met with the leaders of the procession(46) and sought the help of Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, who informed the Shi'a that the regime was willing to lift the ban on the procession if the rioters would stop chanting anti-government slogans. However, anti-Ba'thist sentiments ran so high by then that compromise was impossible. The government on its part mobilized a military brigade with tanks, helicopters, and fighter jets to block the way to the city of Karbala. (47) Hundreds of demonstrators were able to get into the city, however, because many officers and soldiers were sympathetic to the cause and were unwilling to obey the government orders to fire on people chanting religious slogans. (48) The government then mobilized the Ba'th Party security and police to suppress the procession in the streets of Karbala and to detain as many people as they could. Hundreds were imprisoned, and many were injured.

The government then formed a special revolutionary court (makamat al-thawra) headed by three high-ranking Ba'th Party leaders to try the defendants. (49) Seven people were sentenced to death and fifteen, including Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, to life imprisonment. The incident also caused a split within the Ba'th leadership itself. Some high-ranking members of the party judged the action unduly harsh and seemed hesitant to take strong action. An extremist group led by the Bakr-Saddam factions won by expelling the moderate group, including the members of the Special Revolutionary Court, from their government and party positions.

The regime suspected Sadr of having had a part in the demonstration. It had been well organized, which suggested that the Da'wa Party was behind it. Al-Hakim, the head of the group who negotiated on behalf of the regime with the rioters, was a disciple and personal representative of Sadr. His failure to gain concessions from the rioters whose links were with the Da'wa, the main Sadr organization, was one of the signs that made the

regime suspect that Sadr led a behind-the-scenes conspiracy. The regime's security forces detained Sadr and sent him to Baghdad for questioning, but released him when the people demanded it in order not to instigate another riot by the Hawza.

Chapter Eight: Encounters with the Ba'th Party: The Final Episode

The leaders of the Ba'th regime thought that their measures in 1977 had put an end to religious opposition for years to come, but the revolution in Iran in 1978 rekindled efforts against the Shah and a revolution led by religious leaders in Najaf was in the making. The Shi'a capital was again at centre stage; though this time the effort was not directed toward the Ba'th, it was still troublesome to the Iraqi regime. Ayatullah Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian uprising, had been living in Najaf for the past fourteen years. He took advantage of Ba'th enmity toward the Shah to launch a campaign against him in Iran. He was given access to Iraqi radio to beam his messages, and this also made it possible for him to be approached by his political collaborators. However, such favours (which in any case were severed after the Saddam-Shah Algiers agreement in 1975 that ended the hostility between the two regimes) did not elicit any pro-Ba'th sentiment from Khomeini. He had witnessed the Ba'th's oppressive measures toward the Hawza of Najaf and toward Shi'a leaders.

The revolution in Iran seemed to demonstrate that an oppressive regime run by a well entrenched security apparatus and supported by the Western intelligence could in fact be challenged and defeated, and that Islamic ideology was capable of leading the masses to establish the dreamed-of Islamic state. It showed that blood sacrificed during revolution can encourage other devotees of Islam's cause. The oppressive measures of the regime could be turned into the means for achieving victory. The revolution in Iran presented an appealing political scenario for Muslim revolutionaries to follow; the Iraqi Shi'a were the first to emulate it.

Sadr made several calculated but discreet political moves that would not antagonize the Iraqi regime but would show his commitment to and support for the revolution in Iran.[50] He first sent a long statement to the Iranian people while Khomeini was in Paris, declaring his support and praising the uprising. [51] Then after Khomeini returned to Iran, Sadr sent Mahmood al-Hashimi, one of his closest disciples, to Iran as his representative. [52] Both actions were considered by the Iraqi regime as clear violations of the government's "wait and see" policy. [53]

Furthermore, Sadr, contrary to the Ba'th government policy of instigating and supporting the uprising of the Arab population in Iran, had asked the Arabs to support the Islamic state that eventually would fulfil their political and ethnic rights. In one of his messages to the Iranian people, Sadr called on the Arabs in Iran to obey the leaders of the revolution because the Islamic republic represented the state founded by the Prophet where people of different nationalities and ethnic background could live in tranquillity. [54]

Sadr then published six essays that concerning the foundation of the Islamic state which were later collected under the title al-Islam Yaqwud al-Hayat (Islam governs life). One of them dealt with the religious basis for forming an Islamic government. In this treatise he outlined the structure of an Islamic state, the functions of each of its branches of government, the responsibilities of the marja' in the state, and the legitimacy of his absolute authority according to Shi'a Islam. The treatise seems to have had a major

impact on the authors of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. One can find many of Sadr's ideas and views on the structure of an Islamic state in the final draft of that document. The other five essays dealt with the principles of the Islamic state and the structure of its economy, using ideas similar to those Sadr presented in his works twenty years earlier, proof that he had conformed to his early ijtihad.

Sadr Issues Fatwa Against The Ba'th Party

Sadr's boldest step against the regime was issuing a fatwa prohibiting Muslims from joining the Ba'th party or its affiliated organizations, a step so dangerous that even some of Sadr's representatives in various Iraqi cities hesitated to publish because they feared for their own safety and for Sadr's survival. To make its contents known, Sadr resorted to means such as encouraging his students to ask him questions during his regular sermons in the Hawza regarding participation in the Ba'th party. After that people expected a severe step to be taken against Sadr, but relations between Sadr and the regime remained under control. Instead, the last straw was added by Iran.

Ayatullah Khomeini, relying on his sources in Najaf, broadcast a message to Sadr calling on him to stay in the Hawza and not to leave Iraq despite government harassment. (55) Although Sadr was facing detainment or possibly execution, he was not in any case planning to leave Iraq. (56) Khomeini's message and Sadr's response, (57) which were heard by millions in Iraq, set off a wave of public demonstrations in several Iraqi cities in support of Sadr and in praise of Khomeini. Najaf was the most turbulent; there delegations from all over Iraq came to hold demonstrations and to be received by Sadr. Sadr told his followers to call the demonstrations off; since they represented the core of his support, Sadr did not want them exposed to the regime and needed to secure their protection from future government crackdowns. (58) He told one of the Da'wa's members that "the regime's quiescence for the moment reveals a great hidden danger; thus we should use precautions and prudence in our action." (59)

Chapter Nine: Sadr Detained- Bint Al-Huda Gives Fiery Speech

Then the government, as Sadr anticipated, began to crackdown: Sadr's representatives and hundreds of Da'wa members were rounded up and imprisoned or executed. Then Sadr himself was detained and taken to Baghdad. His sister, Amina al-Sadr, known as Bint al-Huda, went to the holy shrine of Imam Ali ('a) and gave a fiery speech urging people to demonstrate against the government and to protect their leader. As the news of his arrest spread, riots broke out in Baghdad, Basra, Diyala, Samawa, Kuwt, Diwaniyya, Karbala, and other cities. The bazaar in Najaf closed down; angry crowds clashed with the police. The whole city seemed under siege as the government increased its security efforts. The spread of violence in the country forced the regime to free Sadr the next day.

The detention of Sadr gave the Ba'th regime a clear idea of the extent of his support. His opposition to the regime had made him a national leader and a galvaniser of popular opinion, and his presence had become a threat to the survival of the regime. The Ba'thists therefore determined to cut him off from his allies, his 'ulama' and the rank and file of the Da'wa party. Muslim activists were arrested en masse, tortured, and executed, and the mosques the 'ulama' served were shut down. Even some prominent 'ulama' who usually cooperated with the regime and supported its policy were detained. The policy of the Ba'thist regime was not to spare any effective Shi'a religious forces in the country. Government documents show that the Revolutionary Court passed at least 258 death sentences out of twenty-two trials. [60]

Chapter Ten: Sadr Interrogated

Sadr himself was placed under house arrest, which the regime tried to extract concessions from him. During his interrogation of Sadr in August 1979, Fadil al-Barak, the head of the security agency, demanded that he make a public statement denouncing the Iranian Revolution and supporting the Iraqi policy toward Iran. When Sadr refused the regime softened its language, and a new mediator, Shaykh Isa al-Khaqani, was sent to ask Sadr to fulfil only one of five conditions to spare his life: withdraw his support of Ayatullah Khomeini and of the Iranian regime; or issue a statement supporting one of the government's policies such as the nationalization of foreign oil companies and national autonomy for the Kurds; or issue a fatwa forbidding association with the Da'wa party; or revoke the fatwa that prohibited joining the Ba'th party; or be interviewed by an Iraqi or other Arab newspaper that was affiliated with the Iraqi regime. By then Sadr, according to his personal secretary al-Nu'mani, had concluded that his days were numbered any way, and he decided to reject all government demands in anticipation of his martyrdom. He told al-Khaqani, the Ba'th regime's mediator:

"The only thing I have sought in my life is to make the establishment of an Islamic government on earth possible. Since it has been formed in Iran under the leadership of Imam [Khomeini] it makes no difference to me whether I am alive or dead because the dream I wanted to attain and the hope I wanted to achieve have come true, thanks to God." (61)

When the Islamic fundamentalist groups, the Da'wa party and Islamic Action Organization headed by al-Shirazi and the Mudarisi brothers, (62) saw the regime harassing their leader, they took up arms against the Ba'th officials. They attacked the Ba'th party ideologue Tariq Aziz (then the foreign minister) in Mustansiriyya University. Aziz was supposed to deliver a speech to the Ba'th party members among the university's student body stating the regime's policy towards Iran. Muslim activists threw a bomb at Aziz, injuring him and killing his bodyguards. At the public funeral for the guards another bomb was thrown at the funeral procession, killing several people. (63) The regime faced for the first time resistance that was undermining its support among the Shi'a. Saddam Hussein, by then the new president of the republic, during a hospital visit to those who has been injured at Mustansiriyya, called for revenge against the perpetrators. The regime's old tactic of labelling the Muslim armed struggle as the work of Iranian elements in the country was no longer convincing because Muslim anti-government activities continued to flourish even after more than 130,000 Iraqis of Iranian origin had been deported to Iran. Moreover, Sadr, the symbol of the Islamic movement, belonged to a well-known Iraqi family. What the Ba'th regime needed was to liquidate the Islamic movement altogether. On March 31, 1980, the Revolutionary Command Council passed a law sentencing all past and present members of the Da'wa party or its affiliated organizations, or people working for its goals, to death. That law eliminated any possibility of sparing Sadr's life.

Sadr had in any case left no room for retreat. While he was under house arrest, he smuggled three messages to his associates calling on the Iraqi

people to resist the regime in any way possible. (64) In these messages, he spoke as their leader in their name, and he demanded from the government political and religious rights for all people, Shi'as and Sunnis, Arab and Kurds. He even appealed to the members of the Ba'th party, whose leader he accused of violating the principles of the party itself. He challenged the Ba'th leadership to allow the people for only one week to express their hostility to the regime. In one of these messages, Sadr issued an ultimatum: topple the regime and establish an Islamic government in its place:

"It is incumbent on every Muslim in Iraq and every Iraqi outside Iraq to do whatever he can, even if it cost him his life, to keep the jihad and struggle to remove this nightmare from the land of beloved Iraq, to liberate themselves from this inhuman gang, and to establish a righteous, unique, and honourable rule based on Islam". (65)

Security Forces Come For them Both

The security forces came for Sadr and his sister on April 5, 1980, and detained them in the headquarters of the National Security Agency in Baghdad. Three days later, his body was brought back to his uncle Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr in Najaf for secret burial. The whereabouts of Bint al-Huda, his sister, were never disclosed by the regime, but it is widely believed that she too was executed. (66) Two weeks later, Ayatullah Khomeini announced the execution of Sadr and his sister and called on the Iraqi people and the armed forces to overthrow the Ba'th regime.

Conclusion

Sadr's involvement in politics in his early life was fortuitous and not, in my view, the result of an overall plan on his part. Here I differ with the conventional wisdom of the revolutionary Islamists who claim the opposite. Sadr, as a young student and scholar of jurisprudence, was dedicated entirely to his religious studies; he took no part in political affairs after the 1958 coup in Iraq. His involvement in politics was a result of the encouragement of his colleague and friend, Talib al-Rifa'i, who introduced him to the founders of the Da'wa party. (67) They in turn saw in him the means to legitimise their political activities within the non-political Hawza of Najaf, because of his reputation there. However, once he became engaged in the activities of the party, he was regarded as its faqih, a position entailing supervision of all its activities. His intellectual attainments, admired by the insecure religious establishment of that time, especially after the publication of his work, Falsafatuna, made him the party's ideologue. Later, he became the religious leader of the Islamic movement that spread out of Najaf to a large part of the Muslim world.

His sudden resignation from the party did nothing to reduce his influence. In fact it was in part intended to open the way to the leadership of the Shi'a community, i.e., the marja'iyya. Activist Muslim jurists and the Islamic movement were hoping that Sadr's elevation as supreme marja' would help spread their mission and politicise Shi'a everywhere. It seemed to them only a matter of time before Sadr would assume the marja'iyya, since he was indisputably a resourceful jurist of the Hawza and "the jewel of the religious schools," according to Khomeini. It was possible, many thought, that the political acquiescence of the marja'iyya could be ended.

Sadr Was Dragged into Public Opposition

In his final two years, Sadr was dragged into public opposition to the regime by the Iranian leadership and by those in Iraq, especially in the Da'wa party and among Sadr's close associates who influenced by the Iranian revolution. He did not believe the time was ripe; "the objective conditions," to use his terminology, were not in place. According to al-Nu'mani, Sadr was not pleased when the Da'wa organized a public procession to show their allegiance to him, because it would expose its members and supporters to government persecution. If Sadr had felt that conditions had reached a revolutionary stage, he would not have anticipated the regime's repression. However, the Iranian leaders went ahead with their public campaign; in their Arabic broadcasts to the Iraqi people, they asked them to follow Sadr and topple the Ba'th regime. (68)

They encouraged Islamic political organizations in Iraq to organize demonstrations and protests similar to those used by the Iranian revolution in which people shouted slogans claiming the spiritual leadership of Sadr. This put Sadr in an awkward position: to support the masses who were calling for his leadership he would betray his own convictions. As a religious jurist, he was constrained to side with those people who needed his guidance and demanded his leadership against tyranny. He was probably never consulted by the leaders in Iran or of the Islamic movement in Iraq.

Evidently, he simply heard the messages of Ayatullah Khomeini and other Iranian leaders urging him to revolt against the government on the radio. Some of the earliest public protests and demonstrations in his support by the Islamic organizations were also spontaneous, started by enthusiastic supporters galvanized by the spectacular success of the revolution in Iran. (69)

Later the Da'wa party welcomed these demonstrations, and put pressure on the marja's in Najaf (Khoei and Sadr) to initiate a movement like Ayatullah Khomeini's in Iraq. (70) The leaders of the party concluded that conditions were ripe to start the revolution against the Ba'thist regime. The Iranian experience showed them that if public demonstrations were large enough the regime could not crush the multitude of protesters. Their mistakes were overestimating the revolutionary frame of mind of the masses in Iraq and assuming that the Ba'th regime would react to public protest like the Shah had. For those miscalculations Sadr and his followers paid a deadly price.

References

1. Islamic Da'wa party, Istishhad al-Imam Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr min Mandhur Hadhari, (n.p, 1981), pp. 36-37.

2. These groups included Fedaian Islam founded by Nawab Safavi in the late 1940s and later headed by Sadiq Khilkhili, the head of the revolutionary courts in 1979-80; Mujahidiyn Khalq, a Socialist Islamic organization supported by the late Ayatullah Talaqani; and Nahzat Azadi, a liberal-Islamic group, founded by Mahdi Bazargan, the first prime minister of the revolution appointed by Ayatullah Khomeini.

3. For a full account of Qasim's regime, see Uriel Dann, Iraq under Qassem (New York: Praeger, 1969).

4. On the influence and the atrocities of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), see U. Zaher, "The Oppression," in CARDRI (Committee Against Repression and for Democratic Rights in Iraq), ed., Saddam's Iraq, Revolution or Reaction?, (London: Zed, 1986), pp. 148-50.

5. Hassan Shubar, "Dawr Hizb al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya fi al-Taghyir wa-Halat al-Istirkha' al-Sabiqa," al-Jihad, 363 (October 24, 1988), 8.

6. According to Talib al-Rifa'i, a colleague of Sadr and a well-known jurist activist in the 1950s and 1960s, Jamat al-Ulama' consisted of ten mujtahids: Murtada Al Yasiyyn, Abbas al-Rumaythi, Isma'il al-Sadr, Muhammad Tahir Shaykh Radi, Muhammad Jawad Shaykh Radi, Muhammad Taqi Bahr al-Ulum, Musa Bahr al-Ulum, Muhammad Reda al-Mudhaffar, Husayn al-Hamadani, and Muhammad Baqir Shakhs.

7. Interview with Mohammad Baqir al-Hakam, al-Jihad 5 (Summer, 1980), 7-9.

8. Muhammad Husayn Fadlullah, "Taqdim, preface to Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, Resalatuna (Beirut: al-Dar al-Islamiyya, 1981), p. 16.

9. An interview with one of the leading figures in the Jamacat al-Ulama' and the Da'wa party, in January 1, 1990; he requested anonymity and will be referred to here as A.H.F.

10. Interview with Talib al-Rifa'i.

11. However, al-Awa', according to Talib al-Rifa'i, was later to become the voice of the Islamic Da'wa party; it published party doctrine in editorials and articles.

12. Fadlullah, "Taqdim," p.17.

13. Talib al-Rifa'i told me that Sadr did not have the money to buy books on Western philosophy, but a friend, an Arab nationalist and an owner of a bookstore, generously let him borrow them.

14. However, according to A.H.F, the al-Siwaki brothers, Hadi and Mahdi, who were members of the Tahrir party, proposed forming a political party to Murtada al-Askari, who in turn contacted Sadr to set up the party's structure and write its doctrine. According to A.H.F, Mahdi al-Hakim and Talib al-Rifaci were among the first to be contacted and to join.

15. Al-Asadi, "izb al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya," ariq al-aq, August, 1980, p. 46.

16. Sadr, according to the Da'wa party, wrote four articles in the official journal of the party, awt al-Da'wa, explaining the name, the structure, the goals, and the nature of the political struggle to build up the party. The articles published in Da'wa party publication no. 13, Min Fikr al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya: al-Shahid al Rabi', al-Imam al-Sadr (n.d, n.p.)

17. Al-Asadi, "izb al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya," p. 48.

18. According to al-Rifa'i, Sadr decided to resign from the party at Samarra, where the shrines of Imams al-cAskariyyn are located, after randomly selecting a verse from the Qur'an and using it as a basis for his decision.

19. Hussein al-Safi was the head of the Ba'th party in Najaf, which cooperated with the Islamic forces to counter the communist surge. Jamacat al-cUlama' used Muhammad Reda Sheikh Radi as a link between them and al-Safi's nationalist and Ba'thist forces, and was well aware of Sadr's activities. When the Bacthists came to power in 1963, al-Safi was appointed governor of Diwaniyya, a principality near Najaf. He later retired from politics, and emigrated to Morocco in the 1970s to become a businessmen. Saddam invited him to Iraq in 1985, and later executed him.

20. For a full account of the situation, see Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim's interview in al-Jihad 14 (Jamadi al-Thani 1401). Al-Hakim referred to a letter explaining the whole episode that Sadr sent to him when the latter was in Lebanon.

21. Ibid.

22. Fadlullah, “Taqdim,” p. 17.

23. A famous saying of Sadr, “Mujtamacuna la yatahaml Mujtamacuna” (Our society cannot bear Our Society).

24. Interview with A.H.F., Jan 1, 1990.

25. Conversation with Muhammad H. Fadlullah in St. Louis, December, 1982; also see his “Taqdim,” p. 17.

26. Fadil al-Nuri, al-Shahid al-Sadr Fada’iluhu wa-Shama’iluhu, (Qum: Mahmuwwd al-Hashimi Office, 1984), p. 93.

27. The Sadr book in Usul is al-Macalim al-Jadida fi Usul al-Fiqh See Fadil al-Nuri, al-Shahid al-Sadr, p. 64; and S. D. al-Qubanchi, al-Jihad al-Siyasi, p. 79.

28. Ibid.

29. The association headed by Hadi al-Hakim and Murtada al-Askari. In the late 1960s, Mahdi al-Hakim, became the best and most outspoken member of the association. See “Interview with al-Askari,” Liwa’ al-Sadr, Jamadi al-Thani 7, 1409, p. 6.

30. The meeting was held in al-Karada al-Sharqiyya, a suburb of Baghdad, attended by sixty religious scholars from Baghdad and Kadhimiyah; see al-Shahada, Jamadi al-Thani 2, 1409.

31. Liwa’ al-Sadr, Shaban 29, 1409.

32. Murtada al-Askari, “Jidhuwwr wa-Khalfiyat al-Taharuk al-Islami fi Muwajahat al-Ba’th al-cAflaqi,” Liwa’ al-Sadr, Muharam 22, 1409, p. 10.

33. Ibid.

34. The Ba’thist government tried to influence the selection of the Supreme Mujtahid of the Shia through a campaign on behalf of Shaykh Ali Kashif al-Ghita’ who publicly endorsed the regime. However, Sadr and Muhsin al-Hakim’s eldest son Yusuf put their weight behind Khoei. On the selection of Ayatullah Khoei, see also Fouad Ajami, The Vanished Imam, Musa al-Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 194.

35. Qubanchi, al-Jihad al-Siyasi, p. 74.

36. Da’wa Party, Lamaat min masirat hizb al-Da’wa al-Islamiyya, (n.p., n.d.), p. 25.

37. Salih al-Adib, “Mawakb al-Talaba,” al-Jihad, Feb 29, 1988, p. 12.

38. Sahib Dakhiyyl, editor of the Da’wa party’s underground journal, Sawt al-Da’wa, was detained on Sept. 28, 1971, and later executed; al-Jihad, Jan. 3, 1983.

39. The five sentenced to death were Shaykh Arif al-Basri, Iz al-Din al-Qubanchi, Imad al-Tabrizi, Hussein Chalukhan, and Nuri Tucma. See Islamic Da’wa party, Shuhada’ Baghdad (Tehran: Islamic Da’wa party publication, 1982).

40. On the reaction of Ayatullah Khumeini to the execution of five “martyrs,” see al-Jihad, Rabiy al-Awwal 1404, p. 44.

41. Qubanchi is the only one to mention that Sadr was detained by the government in 1971, but was not imprisoned because of his poor health; he was, however, tied to his hospital bed (see al-Jihad al-Siyasi, p. 53).

42. Another maraji in Najaf was Ruhallah Khumeini; there were others in Qum such as Gulpaygani, Shariycat-Madari (d. 1985), Marcashi-Najafi (d. 1989); and in Mashhad Abdullah Shirazi (d. 1986).

43. For detailed accounts of the uprising, see Racad al-Musawi, Intifaat afr al-Islamiyya fi Iraq, 2nd ed. (Qum: Amiyr al-Mu’miniyyn, 1983) pp. 66-68.

44. Ibid., pp. 71-73.

45. Ibid., pp. 68-69.

46. Ibid., pp. 95-99.

47. Ibid., p. 101

48. Ibid., pp. 102-103.

49. The three members of the court were Izat Mustafa, Minister of Health, Hasan Ali, and Falayh Jasim, all members of the regional command of the Ba’th party.

50. In a letter to his former pupils and disciples in Iran, Sadr expressed his admiration for Khomeini, and demanded they support him. Sadr said that Khomeini’s marja’ iyya had achieved the goals of the “objective marja’ iyya,” which he has theorized years ago. For the text of the letter, see al-Ha’iri, Mabaith ilm al-usul (Qum: n.p., 1988) pp. 145-46.

51. The message was not publicized because Sadr's disciple living in Iran thought such a statement would endanger Sadr's life. For the full text of the message, see al-Ha'iri, Mabaith, pp. 142-45.

52. Ibid, p. 114.

53. Because of the 1975 agreement between Iraq and Iran, the Ba'th government supported the Shah. Saddam, then the vice president, had declared in one of the party meetings in Basra, al-Shah baqi, baqi, baqi ("The Shah will survive, will survive, will survive").

54. For the text, see Ha'iri, Mabaith, p. 147.

55. For texts of Khomeini's message to Sadr, see Ibid., pp. 117-18. Khomeini insulted Sadr by addressing him as ujjat al-Islam wa-al-Muslimiyn, a title used for a low-ranking alim; Sadr was then a marja' of well-known reputation and usually addressed as ayatullah al-uma (grand Ayatullah). Only after Sadr's death did Khumeini start referring to him as Ayatullah Sadr.

56. Conversation with Sayyid M. H. Fadlullah in 1982.

57. For the text of Sadr's reply to Khomeini, see al-Ha'iri Mabaith, p. 123.

58. Al-Nu'mani quoted in al-Ha'iri, Mabaith, p. 119.

59. al-Jihad, May 2, 1983.

60. Al-Jihad, May 2, 1983.

61. Al-Nu'mani as quoted in al-Ha'iri, Mabaith, pp. 162-63.

62. Munaamat al-Amal al-Islami (Islamic Task Organization) is a splinter group of the Da'wa party. Their leader, Muhammad Mahdi al-Shirazi, was one of the first group, according to Mahdi al-Hakim, to join the Da'wa party. In the early 1970s he and his brother Hasan (assassinated in Lebanon in 1980) formed their own organization, al-'Amal al-Islami as a result of disagreement with Da'wa over an issue of leadership of the party and political tactics. When al-Shirazi announced his marja' iyya in 1970, Muhammad Taqi al-Mudrisi and Hadi al-Mudrisi headed al-'Amal, while Shirazi assumed the role of spiritual leader of the organization.

63. Chibli Mallat, "Religious Militancy in Contemporary Iraq: Muhammad Baqer as-Sadr and the Sunni-Shia Paradigm," Third World Quarterly, April, 1988, p. 728.

64. According to Da'wa party members, these recorded messages were supposed to be published and distributed to people inside and outside Iraq, but they were censored by his associates fearing the regime's reprisal on Sadr's life and were not made public until after his death.

65. For the full text of Sadr's three messages to the Iraqi people in Arabic; see al-Ha'iri, Mabaith, pp. 147-153; for an English translation see Abu Ali, A Glimpse of the Life of The Martyred Imam: Muhammad Baqer al-Sadr and His Last Three Messages (n.d., n.p), pp. 16-19.

66. According to one of Sadr's cousins, the family of Sadr still hopes that the regime has spared the life of Amina al-Sadr, but the Islamic movement always refers to her as a martyr.

67. See an interview with Mahdi al-Hakim on the history of the Islamic movement in Iraq in Liwa' al-Sadr, Jan 12, 1990, 12.

68. One of the examples of how Sadr was pushed into unplanned direct confrontation against the government was when he was hospitalised in 1979, and one of the Iranian ulama asked Talib al-Rifaci to write a get-well telegram in Arabic to Sadr. However, the draft was rejected on the basis that its language was too mild and did not include a harsh statement against Saddam and the Ba'th party. Al-Rifaci refused to write such a statement because it would endanger Sadr's life.

69. An interview with Ahmad Kubba, one of the Da'wa members who initiated the first demonstration after the Friday sermon of Ayatullah Khoei in the Masjid al-Khadra in Najaf, in 1978. He said that he had no orders from the party to start the demonstration. Rather the party officials discouraged such a move. He then had supported public protests only after the success of the revolution in Iran.

70. Ayatullah Khoei advised Sadr, via the latter's representative in Kuwait, that he should not involve himself in a political struggle then because the Ba'thist government would certainly kill him at a time when the Hawza needed his services.

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